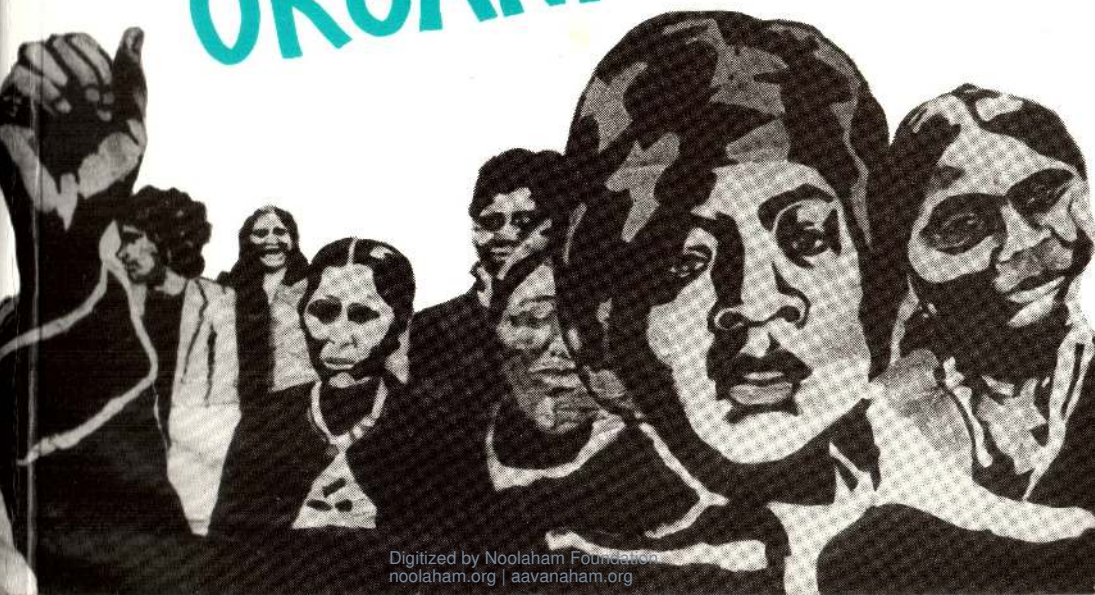


RACE & CLASS

THE AFRICAN AND THE INDIAN PRESENCE
BRITAIN: VICTIMS, THE 'URBAN JUNGLE' AND THE NEW RACISM
NAMIBIA: GERMAN ROOTS OF APARTHEID
SWAPO WOMEN'S COUNCIL • UNESCO

CHAIN REACTIONS: BLACK WOMEN ORGANISING



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BEVERLEY BRYAN, STELLA DADZIE and
SUZANNE SCAFE

Chain reactions: Black women organising*

The voices of Black women who have suffered because of racist and discriminatory practices in this country speak on every page of this book, so in this chapter we have concentrated on our *organised* responses. We have always been active in our community: we began by forming ourselves into small church, social and welfare groups, which were our spontaneous response to the isolation and alienation we faced when we first arrived in the mother country. But as our community found its feet, we organised ourselves into more formal political organisations, and worked alongside Black men to further the aims and defend the rights of our people. Later, it became necessary for some Black women to organise themselves independently, rejecting the notion that the concerns of Black women are secondary to those of our race. All three forms of organisation have survived into the 1980s with equal credibility. Although we have not always agreed on the most effective way to develop our political strategies, we have nevertheless proved our capacity to take up our own specific concerns without losing sight of our commitment and accountability to the Black community we represent ...

Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe have been active in the politics of the black community since the early 1970s.

* A shortened version of a chapter from *The Heart of the Race: Black women's lives in Britain* to be published this autumn by Virago Press, 41 William IV Street, London WC2.

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Black women organising in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s

The Britain which Black women entered in the late 1940s and 1950s was a hostile, unwelcoming environment. The British people, nurtured on notions of white superiority and steeped in racist ideology, ensured that our reception was a cold one. Women like Una Marson, who had come from Jamaica in the 1930s, felt its sting. Incidents of racialist abuse so enraged her that she wrote this angry poem in *The Keys*, journal of the League of Coloured Peoples:

They call me 'Nigger'
Those little white urchins
What makes me keep my fingers
From choking the words in their throats?

This we refrained from doing. Instead, we went on to fight in Britain's war effort, losing both life and limb in a war which was allegedly fought in defence of ideals of freedom and democracy. The British people, aided and abetted by white American servicemen, many of whom travelled here with their own uniquely American brand of racist poison, responded with petty insults, hypocrisy and a whole panoply of discriminatory practices, which would soon become known by the rather quaint name of the 'Colour Bar'.

Our earlier visions of the mother country meant that many of us were amazed and disillusioned by the treatment we received. Women from the Caribbean who served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service found themselves widely abused and insulted. Others, like Amelia King, whose family had been in this country for three generations, were refused entry to the Women's Land Army because they were Black. When the war ended many Black women came to join men who had fought for Britain, thinking that their services to the mother country would be rewarded in the form of a better future:

I was only very young at the time, but I remember the telegram coming to St Vincent just before the end of the war, saying that my father had been injured in Egypt. It was a terrible shock to the family. He was sent back to England to convalesce, and he stayed there for eighteen months recovering from his back injury. While he was here, he started reading Law and when he got out of the hospital he registered and took exams. That's when he decided to send for us. Why not? He'd fought and almost died for this country. We came over in 1948 – not on the *Empire Windrush*, which carried a lot of returning ex-servicemen, but on the *Empire Trooper*. On that boat there were a lot of families like ours who were coming over to join their menfolk – and of course at that time nearly all the West Indian men in Britain were ex-servicemen.

But even as the rewards were being shared out to those white workers

who had served in the defence of this country, Black men and women were being attacked and spat on in the streets. In 1948, on the streets of Liverpool – only a few weeks after the *Empire Windrush* had docked at Tilbury – the white community, with the support of the police, turned on its 8,000 Black residents, many of whom had so generously defended Britain against German fascism, in a show of open hostility. Black homes and clubs were raided, and pitched battles were fought in the streets between whites and Blacks, most of whom had ties with Britain which went back for centuries. Yet even though the presence of Black people was blatantly unwelcome, Britain was still desperate for our labour; and as the ‘riots’ raged in Liverpool, new workers continued to trickle in.

Discrimination in the job market and the British misconception of our skills meant that we were directed into the worst jobs. These poor conditions, long hours and back-breaking routines could have been eased with decent accommodation. But the ‘Colour Bar’ excluded us from this, and we found ourselves at the mercy of racketeers.

I was living in a small room which was draughty and cold and had one little paraffin heater. If you slept with it on, the next day your nose would be blocked and you’d feel drowsy. The bathroom – and I was lucky to have one – had no heating at all. There was no geyser and you had to heat buckets of water if you wanted a bath.

It was to alleviate these miseries that we first began to look for a collective means to make life more bearable. Women figure strongly in the initial and predominantly informal efforts we made to establish our communities and maintain ourselves. The hairdressing salon, for example, served many Black women as a meeting-place, and more often than not the ‘salon’ would be based in somebody’s front parlour, since no European hairstylist would cater for our particular needs. Going along to have your hair pressed or relaxed was a social event, an opportunity to meet and exchange stories with other women. And the woman who was the best source of information was, of course, the hairdresser, who was well-placed to give advice, support and reassurance to others. Most significantly, we organised the ‘Pardner’ system, through which we saved regularly and collectively. By withdrawing the money we pooled on a rota basis, we gave ourselves access to much-needed funds:

It was mainly women who set up the pardners. Nine out of ten of the pardners schemes had a woman in charge of them. It was done on a village or family basis. Whoever’s needs were greater, they got the deposit on a house. It was the woman who held on to the money and paid down the deposit, but still no home could be put in her name. Later people started to have selling parties. It helped to pay the mortgage, but it also provided us with somewhere to go. That’s why they started.

... In the absence of friendly building societies or sympathetic bank managers, self-reliance was a common objective and served to bind us closer together as we strove to establish our communities.

Through our embryonic churches, too, we gave the help and support to new immigrants which the British government and people had failed to offer. The churches provided Black women with one of our main sources of support and sustenance, offering some continuity with the forms of social and community organisation we had known in the Caribbean. For many of us, these churches offered the only form of recreation we had to relieve the pressures of our working lives, and to support an otherwise bleak existence. 'They organised the churches because of our exclusion from the Methodist and Baptist churches. We used to hold the services in our own front-rooms.' ... It is in the church communities, too, that the origins of some of our earliest social and welfare organisations are to be found.

Political organisation was not paramount at this time, because Britain was still regarded by most of us as a temporary home. Very soon, however, the increasing ferocity of racist attacks galvanised us into organising in a more overtly political way. The ideology of racial superiority had become more virulent at the beginning of the 1950s, forming the basis for a score of fascist organisations. The British Union of Fascists, the League of Empire Loyalists and the British National Party are just a few of the better known ones. They infected the whole climate in the areas where we lived, and were frequently known to descend on our communities in gangs, Ku Klux Klan style, shouting 'Let's get the Niggers'. Racial tensions not only limited our social lives, but ensured that we relied almost exclusively on our relations with people at work and on women and men in our immediate communities for emotional support and friendship. They also forced us to rely on our own resources to meet our social needs ...

The arrival of increasing numbers of Black men, women and children was seen not only by fascists but also by the general public and the media as a threat to the 'British way of life'. In particular, Black women became an easy target for individual attacks in the long-established communities of Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and Manchester, as well as in the areas we had recently settled ...

Verbal taunts and sporadic street clashes marked the ever-worsening relationship between Black and white people throughout the 1950s.

In those days, there was a lot of racism with the teddy boys. I used to work in Effra Road, and one day I was going to work and it was very foggy. I knew these chaps behind me were white. Then one of them came up alongside me and felt my hair. My hair was straightened at the time, and he said, 'This one's hair feels white, so leave her alone.' Then one of the others shouted, 'There's a nigger, over there.' Whoever it was, she really got some kicks – you could hear her screaming. But things like this helped us to band together. We were all West Indians! When

the teddy boys beat up a Black person from another island, some people would wait until a white person came into our area, pick up the milk bottles and beat them up. It was vicious but they were desperate times.

Finally, in August 1958, large-scale confrontations broke out on the streets of Nottingham and London. Black women and men were attacked for days on end; petrol bombs were thrown into our homes. These attacks were often preceded by a letter or a verbal warning, 'We're going to get you tonight if you don't clear out.' As a consequence, we united and fought back. Black women could be seen standing firm, machetes and bottles in hand, side by side with the men, defending ourselves in the 'riots' which were entirely of the British people's making. To us, it was not merely a question of self-defence, but the struggle for survival. As a people we had to move fast.

Black organisations began to be formed around the need to protect our emergent communities. Having witnessed the failure of the police to offer us 'impartial' protection, even the more moderate organisations pledged to devote themselves to our communities' self-defence . . .

As we began to focus on how to defend our communities here, however, we did not lose sight of what was happening 'back home'. Our struggles in Britain were mirrored by those of the movements for self-determination in our countries of origin. As we sought out ways of establishing our rights here, we also supported the independence struggles which were being waged elsewhere. Our very presence here was the result of Britain's colonial legacy, and though resident here, our ties with the families we had left behind in the Caribbean were strong and binding. The added fact that the anti-colonial movement had had such a long tradition in Britain, through overseas student associations and the presence of progressive Pan-Africanists, ensured that we looked beyond the immediate horizons to link our fate with Black people elsewhere. The West African Students Union, for example, had as its explicit aim 'to oppose race prejudice and colonialism'. Similarly the moderate and more cautious League of Coloured Peoples was pledged to improve 'the welfare of coloured peoples in all parts of the world'. 1944 had witnessed the birth of the British section of the Pan-African Congress (PAC) which, though based in Britain, agitated for independence in the colonies and maintained strong bonds with local movements in our home countries. Then, as now, the most enduring of our political platforms were those which understood the links between the two aspects of our single struggle, expressed by the PAC as a demand for 'democratic rights, civil liberties and self-determination' for all Black peoples the world over.

Black women played a positive and substantial role in these formal organisations, despite the fact that we were frequently overshadowed by the men. Stella Thomas, for example, was a founder-member of the League of Coloured Peoples, even though the tendency is to identify the

organisation with Harold Moody. Una Marson, schooled in the social, cultural and political life of Jamaica, became the organisation's secretary. She contributed regularly to its journal, and became a prominent speaker, worldwide, on the position of Black people in Britain. It was left to women like these to raise and speak out on the Black woman's perspective. At the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945, Amy Garvey had to ask why there had been so little discussion of the Black woman, whom she described as having been 'shunted into the social background, to be childbearer'.

Perhaps the woman who best epitomises the fine fighting spirit of the Black women activists of the 1950s is Claudia Jones. A little of her story is told here, because her life and beliefs demonstrate the important role that Black women like her have played in Black struggle in this country.

Claudia Jones

Claudia was born on 21 February 1915 in Trinidad. When she was 8, her family moved to Harlem, USA, where she experienced first-hand the brutal realities of American racism. Through her family's poverty, she learnt only too well of the conditions under which Black women, the unemployed and domestic and factory workers lived. It was this sharp and painful experience which led her into politics. She worked for the Young Communist League, as the editor of its newspaper, and became passionately involved in anti-racist work, such as publicising and campaigning in the Scottsboro case.* She was a strong supporter of Black women's involvement in such struggles, which she saw as a major source of our own liberation. Because of her firm and positive stand against racism, she came under attack during the McCarthy 'witch-hunts' which characterised the Cold War period. In 1951, she was arrested and charged with 'un-American activities'. She was imprisoned for a year and finally deported, despite a massive international campaign in her support.

Consequently in 1956, Claudia came to Britain. Already conditioned to the racism she had experienced in the States, she now saw it in operation in Britain – a more subtle brand maybe, but no less effective. What she saw of Black people's plight in Britain sharpened her awareness of the way racism works the world over – and of the need to fight it. She threw herself into the task, involving herself in the work of organisations and campaigns which were busy fighting British racism at every level – in particular, discrimination in housing, jobs and education, but also the very immediate issue of racial attacks. She worked closely with Amy Garvey,

* This trial, which spanned four years (1931-35), received worldwide notoriety. Nine Black men accused of raping two white women were sentenced to death, resulting in a huge and much-publicised campaign for their release. After a retrial, the charges against five of the men were dropped, but the remaining four received the equivalent of life imprisonment – despite the fact that one of the women later recanted her story.

launching the *West Indian Gazette* in 1958, as the first campaigning Black newspaper. Also in that year she assisted those arrested while defending themselves in the Notting Hill 'riots'. The *West Indian Gazette* was to become a vital source of information for Black people, serving, in Claudia's own words, as 'a catalyst, quickening the awareness, socially and politically'. It was produced with very limited resources, but received material and other support from famous radical Black patrons such as Paul Robeson, who performed at its fund-raising functions, and from prominent West Indian women like Nadia Catouse, Corrine Skinner and Pearl Prescod, who were Claudia's contemporaries.

In addition to her anti-racist work in the Black community, Claudia held a very strong and clear anti-imperialist position. In an article in *Freedomways*, a Black American journal popular during the Civil Rights era, she wrote:

The citizens of the 'Mother of Democracy' do not yet recognise that the roots of racialism in Britain were laid in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through British conquests in India, Africa and great parts of Asia, as well as the British Caribbean. All the resources of official propaganda and education, the super-structure of British imperialism, were permeated with projecting the oppressed colonial peoples as lesser breeds, as 'inferior coloured peoples', 'savages' and the like – in short, 'the white man's burden'. These rationalisations all served to build a justification for wholesale exploitation, extermination and looting of the islands by British imperialism. The great wealth of present-day British monopoly capital was built on the robbery of coloured peoples by such firms as Unilever and the East Africa Company to Tate & Lyle and Booker Bros. in the Caribbean.

In her lifetime, Claudia gained an international reputation, visiting Japan for a conference on the banning of nuclear weapons; China, for a meeting with Mao Tse Tung; and Russia, to speak with women activists there. In Britain, she joined the hunger-strikes outside the South African embassy, in the campaign to free Nelson Mandela. In solidarity with Black Americans who marched on Washington in 1963 to demand civil rights, she also led a British Freedom March to the US Embassy. In addition, she demonstrated her support for white workers in this country by addressing numerous trade union meetings and actively engaging in discussions and demonstrations in support of workers' rights. She was also ready to give support to Black people in her own community, and her politics were a source of inspiration to, and influence on, all those who knew her.

I first met Claudia in the early sixties. I had not been long in this country, and was experiencing the worst of British hospitality. I was in the launderette, and she must have noticed me sitting there alone, depressed

and on the verge of tears. She had been reading, and she put her book to one side and came over to talk to me. I told her about the problems I was having at the time over accommodation – I was living with my three very young children in one room on hardly any money. She was very sympathetic. She showed me where she was living in the next street, and I remember her telling me that all Black people throughout the world were going through the same kind of experiences. Then she helped me to claim social security, which I hadn't known how to go about. Claudia was always like that. She could talk to you in political terms and explain things very clearly, but she was also there with the practical help, too.

After that, she came to visit me quite often. She was a wealth of knowledge and she explained a lot of political matters to me. She stopped me from going around thinking that what was happening to me here was my fault. This really encouraged me to do some thinking and some reading for myself. Whereas before I had used to read a lot of fiction, I now started to read some serious books. Claudia even gave me a booklist! This was the beginning of my involvement in politics, because I became interested in what she was doing and started going along to meetings. I had even planned to work on her paper [*West Indian Gazette*] and she was going to help me to sort out the childminding. But sadly, after she came back from a visit to China at the end of 1964, she died. It was very sudden, and a great loss to us. I went to her memorial service, and saw how many there were who knew and respected her. She was a great woman – a good woman, a real fighter.

In 1964, Claudia's efforts were cut short when she died in her sleep on Christmas Day as a result of a stroke. Her funeral was a testimony to the many who knew, loved and drew strength from her. In the words of Paul Robeson, Claudia Jones 'continued in her day the heroic tradition of Harriet Tubman, of Sojourner Truth – the struggle for Negro liberation and women's rights, for human dignity and fulfilment ...'

Black woman and Black power

In many respects, the organisations which ushered in the Black Power era were a continuation of their predecessors in terms of their preoccupations and concerns. However, in their inspiration, ideology and practice, they differed radically. Racist attacks and police brutality continued to be a major concern, as was the position of Black people worldwide. There was now an even closer bond, however, as the links were made between Black people throughout the diaspora who shared the status of oppressed minorities and resisted under the revolutionary slogan 'Black Power'. These ties were strengthened by the visits from

America of those involved in the struggles there – Malcolm X, Stokeley Carmichael, and even Martin Luther King at an earlier date . . .

Among the new organisations was UCPA (United Coloured People's Association), formed in 1967. This was a particularly important organisation, for it spawned several more vibrant and radical successors in later years, some of which still exist in one form or another today. UCPA took on the rhetoric of Black Power, incorporating Black pride but extending it into a demand for social justice for all.

From UCPA came such organisations as BUFP (Black Unity and Freedom Party) and BPM (Black Power Movement), producing their respective papers, *Black Voice* and *Freedom News*. The former took a more consciously internationalist and marxist stance, but both chose to work around police brutality and the mis-education of Black children in schools. In individual campaigns against police harassment and the ESN mobilisation of parents, they proved to be very successful. Their most important effect, however, was to mobilise hundreds of young Black women who had had no former contact with political organisations, but who felt that the message of Black Power spoke to their immediate situation.

I first got involved in a Black Power organisation after being on the fringes for some time. I'd been involved in one or two cultural groups for a while, but it seemed to me that they'd been talking about 'Black is Beautiful' for too long, as if it was the only slogan we should be relating to. I wanted to take my politics a bit further than that – to make some kind of immediate contribution. Every day you'd be hearing about assaults on black people, either by the police or by the courts, and I wanted to get involved with a group that was serious about taking that on.

Thus, by the beginning of the 1970s, Black nationalism had given birth to organisations and pressure groups in Black communities up and down the country. Their common purpose – to organise and agitate for the rights we had so long been denied – was pursued with a new militancy. Demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins, pickets, study circles, supplementary schools, day conferences, campaign and support groups – all had become commonplace activities, exposing both young and old to their politicising influence.

I was still at school when I first woke up to what was going on. A lot was happening in America at the time – the Panthers were being shot, people like George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers were being put on trial . . . it was really getting heavy over there and it seemed as if we were all under threat, even here. Then the Mangrove 9* went

* The 'Mangrove 9' refers to the trial of nine Black activists on charges arising out of their participation in a demonstration in 1970 in Ladbroke Grove, London. Seven of them were acquitted of the main charges.

on trial, and we began to realise that it *was* going on here already. Everybody thought that it was a political trial. People believed they were framed because they'd helped to organise a demonstration in the Grove against police harassment of Black people who used the Mangrove Restaurant. So for me it was something to do with the times. I felt that the whole of society was going through a radical change, and I wanted to play my part in that. Even though I was only 16, I realised that there was a lot I could do.

... In some organisations, like 'the Fasimbas' in South London, whose emphasis was on culture and education, we formed more than half the membership. Our lives were taken over by political activity.

I flung myself into the work we were doing. We had street collections and we went out selling the organisation's newspaper. We also went on 'door-to-door' in the evenings, when we used to team up and work with a more experienced member of the group, talking to people in the community about what was going on locally and how we should be organising. We went on lots of demonstrations, too, like the Immigration Demo of '71, and we picketed various police stations and courts. Being active filled my life, every evening and weekend.

The attitude of the 'brothers', however, often undermined our participation. We could not realise our full organisational potential in a situation where we were constantly regarded as sexual prey. Although we worked tirelessly, the significance of our contribution to the mass mobilisation of the Black Power era was both undermined and overshadowed by the men. They both set the agenda and stole the show:

... The men certainly didn't understand anything about women's oppression. In fact, they didn't have the faintest clue about it. Nearly every one of them was a die-hard sexist. Some women were badly mistreated, but the way the leadership tried to deal with it was similar to the way they tried to get new ideas through to the membership generally. Brothers were hauled up and disciplined when what they needed was political education – to read, study and discuss the woman question and to confront their own sexism. No attempt was made to take up seriously women's issues, they just weren't considered immediately pressing.

Certain things did refer to women in a way, like the all-woman picket of the Old Bailey during the Mangrove 9 trial. But this wasn't about recognising women as a force in their own right, it was more about raising publicity for the campaign. Otherwise, even though there were quite a few sisters around who were active in the organisation, when it came to making any decisions, things were dominated by the men. We had very little say in anything, to begin with. The brothers used to be busy making all the decisions, taking all the

initiatives, and we got to take the minutes, make the coffee, that sort of thing . . . There was this romantic image of African womanhood around at the time, and although a lot of us were beginning to take on the idea that Black women were strong and had a role to play in the struggle, many of us still hadn't reached a stage where we could challenge the idea that we should walk three paces behind the men. That's why Angela Davies was such an inspiration to Black women at the time. She seemed to have liberated herself mentally and fought in her own right, showing us all a lead. Angela was a very positive development, where Black women's image was concerned, because hers was less romantic than the one which had been held up until she came on the scene.

As a result of the sexism we encountered, and because of the powerful influence of sisters like Angela Davis, Black women within such organisations were moved to begin to examine our own role in the Black struggle. Although our early, hesitant questions were firmly couched in terms which did not challenge our role as women within the family, they nevertheless represented the first efforts of Black women to speak up on our own behalf.

But changes were on the horizon which would spur us to take this analysis much further. At an organisational level, the limitations of cultural nationalism which did not take account of class were beginning to be recognised. Many organisations were moving from an obviously cultural-nationalist position to adopt a more overt class line, as shown in this extract from *Uhuru*, the journal of the Black People's Freedom Movement in Nottingham:

Black organisations, whilst rightfully standing up for the Black *man's* [our emphasis] dignity in every possible way, should nonetheless move away from Black Power concepts and see the whole issue in class terms. The race-class struggles of Black people are not antagonistic. They are one and the same thing.

This was all very well, but the dignity of Black women was meanwhile being ignored.

Many members, however, would not accept this shift away from Black Power towards class considerations. It had been the guiding force in their politics. They had joined these organisations on the tide of Black Power, and ideological developments such as these did not conform to their understanding of what Black struggle was all about. This was due in part to the failure of the (male) leadership to ensure that the membership grew with them politically. The young Black women and men who had supported them with such enthusiasm and commitment could not understand their arguments, particularly when white dockers were marching on Parliament in support of Enoch Powell's racist call for mass repatriation in his 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968. As the

organisations began to shift under the strain of their own ideological contradictions, the support of women members was consciously sought to strengthen the membership and new women members were actively encouraged to join. Black women had already begun to consider our own special situation, however, and our response was to call more loudly for our own liberation . . .

Coming together as women: the development of the Brixton Black Women's Group

The early 1970s saw the first Black women's caucuses being formed within the Black Power organisations in London. Because they were an attempt to bring more women into the political arena, their approach was to appeal directly to Black women's issues. The women's caucuses would ultimately find that they could not fulfil their function of attracting large numbers of new members, but they were extremely successful in another respect. They enabled Black women who had shared similar political backgrounds to come together, as women, for the first time ever. Here we began to discuss our common experiences of racial and sexist oppression, and as we began to forge the links, we were unknowingly laying the foundation of the Black women's movement which would emerge in the years to follow.

A lot of people think Black women began to challenge what was happening in mixed organisations because we were influenced by what was going on in the white women's movement. But I think we were influenced far more, at the time, by what was happening in the liberation movements on the African continent. There were more and more examples of Black women who were active in revolutionary struggles in places like Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Guinea-Bissau. And those sisters weren't just picking up a gun and fighting – they were making demands *as women*, letting it be known that they weren't about to make all those sacrifices just so that they could be left behind when it came to seizing power. So although we had begun to form women's caucuses and women's study groups, what Samora Machel had to say about women's emancipation made a lot more sense to us than what Germaine Greer and other middle-class white feminists were saying. It just didn't make sense for us to be talking about changing life-styles and attitudes, when we were dealing with issues of survival, like housing, education and police brutality.

We formed the Black Women's Group in 1973. We didn't even bother with a name. We were just the Black Women's Group. We came mainly out of Black organisations. Some had left and some were still there, but on the whole the organisations we came from

were in the process of disintegrating . . . Straight away we got accused of 'splitting the movement', of weakening organisations which were already on the way out. The brothers gave us a hard time over that. Some sisters felt very strongly that we should stick it out within the organisations and try to strengthen the women's position within them. But for most of us, setting up an autonomous group for Black women was really necessary at the time.

From the discussions we had, we were aware that there were issues that related to us particularly as Black women, like women's work, our economic dependence on men and childcare, which we could organise around. It was a chance to put them at the top of the agenda for the first time. We didn't want to become part of the white women's movement. We felt they had different priorities to us. At that time, for example, abortion was the number one issue, and groups like Wages for Housework were making a lot of noise, too. These were hardly burning issues for us – in fact they seemed like middle-class preoccupations. To begin with, abortion wasn't something we had any problems getting as Black women – it was the very reverse for us! And as for wages for housework, we were more interested in getting properly paid for the work we were doing outside the home as nightcleaners and in campaigning for more childcare facilities for Black women workers.

We helped set up and maintain the first Black bookshop in Brixton, and joined the Railton 4 Campaign over police harassment. We also mobilised the community in Brixton against the practice of setting up disruptive units and helped in the campaign for parental rights. As the first autonomous Black women's group of its kind, certainly in London, there were no models for us to follow, no paths laid out. We just had to work it out as we went along. We were very wary of charges that we might be 'splitting the Black struggle' or mobilising in a vacuum or imitating middle-class white women. These were the kinds of criticism Black men were making at the time. We couldn't be – in fact, we never were – anti-men, in that sense. But it was so good to be in a group which wasn't hostile and didn't fight all the time. That sense of autonomy, of woman-purpose, was something everybody felt at the time, though. The attack was that we were all just a bunch of lesbians, implying that we had just got together to discuss our sexual preferences and weren't serious about taking anything else up which had relevance to the Black community. We were determined to prove them wrong on this, because it was a label which really undermined what we had set out to do at the time. We would not have called ourselves 'feminists' by any means – we didn't go that far for many years. It took us a long time before we worked out a Black women's perspective, which took account of race, class, sex *and* sexuality.

But it wasn't just a case of making links and maintaining our credibility within our own immediate community. We also made some important contacts with organisations outside Brixton, which influenced our politics. There were groups like ASU [African Students Union] and the African women's study groups which had been formed by women from Ethiopia, Eritrea and other Third World countries. We also had links with the ZANU Women's League, so we were in close touch with what was happening to Black women within the liberation struggles on the continent. And then, of course, there was OWAAD [Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent] which we had contributed a lot to in the early days, because there was such a need for Black women to make contact with each other on a national basis. We organised joint activities and maintained links with these groups, in some cases for quite a few years. I think they all made a really positive contribution to our political perspective, as it developed.

Groups like the Brixton BWG were just one of the strands which, when woven together, helped to bind the political practice of the Black community as a whole. They were in many ways simply a continuation of the Black groups which had existed ever since our arrival after the war. Black women were just as committed to the task of fighting racism both locally and internationally, but brought the important new dimension of feminism into our struggle.

Olive Morris

One of the founder members of the BWG was Olive Morris, who in her very short lifetime made an invaluable contribution to Brixton BWG, OWAAD and the Black communities in both Brixton and Manchester. Like Claudia Jones, she represents the kind of Black women who, over the years, have thrown themselves into the struggle in this country and made an indelible, if anonymous, mark.

Olive Morris's short life was similar in most respects to the lives of the majority of West Indian women living in Britain today. She came to Britain at the age of 8 to live with her parents, and went to a secondary modern in South London where she experienced all the inequalities and injustices of the British education system. She left at 16 with no qualifications, but, undeterred, she went on to college to study 'O' and 'A' levels, while at the same time holding down a full-time job.

It was during this phase of her life, when she was only 17 years old, that Olive carried out her first conscious political act, one which was to lead her into organised political activity for the rest of her life. This was in 1969, when she went to the aid of someone who was being harassed in the street by the police. His crime was to have been driving an expensive car, which the police found suspicious enough to warrant an arrest. As a

result of her intervention, Olive herself was arrested and taken to Brixton police station, where she was made to strip and brutally assaulted. The incident did not intimidate her, however. It simply strengthened her opposition to racism and injustice.

Olive went on to join the Black Panther movement, and it was here that she began to develop the political ideology which would determine her future actions. She gave a total commitment to the organisation's work and development, and participated in nearly all of the battles which formed part of the community's everyday life in Brixton. She was in tune with the needs of the people, and always showed herself willing to take the initiative and act. This was certainly the case with the squatters movement in Brixton, when she organised with others like herself to squat because there was nowhere to live and no hope of a council flat. She became well known in the community for her willingness to help other Black people who were facing difficulties, whether with the schools, the police, housing, social security officials or the courts – whatever the issue, she was never too busy to offer support. For Olive, it was not just a case of doing things for those who couldn't do it for themselves: it was her way of involving people in the struggle, showing by her own example the will to resist and to challenge.

After the decline of the Black Panther movement, Olive worked with some other Black women in the area and with a group of brothers to set up Sabarr Bookshop, the first Black self-help community bookshop in South London. During this same period, she helped form the Brixton Black Women's Group, to which she made a lasting contribution. The political perspective she brought to the group helped it to develop a coherent political ideology, based on the needs of ordinary Black people in the community, which made clear links with other anti-imperialist struggles. She worked relentlessly to translate these ideas into practice, and most of her political work was done at grassroots level.

In 1975, she went to Manchester University to study for a social science degree. This in itself was an important step for Olive, who believed in education for the people. For her, going to university was not a status symbol, but an example to many young Black people of how to fight and win against a system which tries to push us to the bottom of the education pile and force us to compete against each other.

Unlike many students, Olive did not separate her work at the university from the struggles which were being waged in the rest of the community. In her work with the Manchester Black Women's Co-operative and the Black Women's Mutual Aid Group, which she helped to set up, she participated fully in the Black community's battles in Moss Side. Committed to furthering education rights for Black people, she campaigned with Black workers for better schooling for their children and helped to set up a supplementary school and a Black bookshop in the area. Because she was an internationalist, she also worked at the

university within the National Co-ordinating Committee of Overseas Students. She provided an essential link between international, community and women's organisation, drawing the parallels between our experiences here and in the Third World.

In 1978, Olive visited China. The trip was of great significance to her, for she saw China as one of the countries which Third World peoples could learn a lot from, and which could serve as a model for us in self-help and self-reliance. The lessons she learnt there were shared with everyone she worked with on her return. Sharing knowledge was always her practice.

Olive had always identified the relationship between the struggles of people in the Third World and those of the white working class. She recognised that it was a fight which had to be won through the contribution of both groups, and that we would need to work together if we were to bring about any meaningful changes. It was this awareness which was her greatest contribution to the political development of those she worked with.

When she returned to Brixton in 1978 after completing her studies, the work she had begun while in Manchester to launch OWAAD was taken up by other women in the Brixton Black Women's Group. It was then that she began to suffer the symptoms of the cancer which killed her within the year. In her fight against leukemia, she displayed the same courage she had shown throughout her life, and when she died on 12 July 1978, at the age of 26, she had already made her mark. She was mourned by all sections of the Black community, and by many others from outside it whose lives she had touched.

Olive and I went to the same school. Even then she had that streak in her – in school, they would have called it rebelliousness or disruptiveness, but it was really a fearlessness about challenging injustice at whatever level. This made others very wary of her, she was so obviously a fighter. I saw her once confronting a policeman – it might have been when she was evicted. She went at him like a whirlwind and cussed him to heaven. And this policeman looked really taken aback, he didn't know how to deal with someone who had no fear of him. He was meant to represent the big arm of the law. But because she was angry and she knew he was in the wrong, she didn't hesitate . . .

I remember when Olive was in Manchester, I went up to an education meeting she was organising with the Manchester Black Women's Group, and it struck me at the time how at home she was away from home. She had gone up to the university to study, but she made contact with people so easily that before you knew it she was right in there with the Black women in Moss Side, organising with them, taking things on. She could easily have found a student clique on the campus, but instead she sought out her people and just carried on

the work we'd been doing in Brixton. But then, she always was hot on personal commitment – not just showing willing, but showing determination. Her life is a kind of symbol to the people who knew her. People like Olive inspire you to resist . . .

The struggles of the 1970s

There were many Black women like Olive who emerged during the 1970s. It was a time when Black women were becoming increasingly visible and active. We were involved in tenants' and squatters' campaigns, in the struggles of our community against the abuses of the education system and in a variety of defence campaigns which arose out of our daily battles with the police:

I was on my way with another sister to a meeting when we witnessed a pregnant Black woman being bundled into a police car. My friend and I rushed over because she was shouting for someone to help her. The police grabbed her, but I took her other arm and there was a real tussle and a lot of shouting. They threatened to arrest us too but they didn't. When they drove away, we followed them down to the police station and tried to make some enquiries. The sister they had taken in had only been passing them on the street, from what we could tell, but they refused to tell us what they were charging her with. So we went off to the meeting, rounded up some of the people there, made up some placards and went back to the police station to picket it until they released the woman. That kind of response was necessary simply because they were picking Black people off the street like that all the time and we were getting fed up with the way the police got away with it.

It was not only the young Black women who were involved in the Black Power organisations and already had a taste for militancy who took part. Black women of the previous generation, many of whom had a long history of struggle against racist attacks and police brutality, were finding ways of expressing the anger they felt, too. The treatment of their children at the hands of the police, education authorities, employers and the courts spurred them on to organise in a more overtly political way, often with the encouragement and support of the children themselves:

My daughter used to come home and tell me about the meetings she was going to and the ways they were taking things up and I found myself getting more and more interested. I started going along to some of the meetings with her, and to my surprise I found that it wasn't just the young people who were turning up. My daughter really encouraged me and it began to rub off on other areas of my life.

For example, I joined the union and started getting involved in things that were happening to Black people at my workplace.

... In 1971, a new Immigration Act legitimised the notion that Black people were second-class citizens. By classifying all those who had no formal blood ties with Britain as 'non-patrials', the state took away our right to enter Britain and made it clear that we had no entitlement to equal treatment, once here. The 1971 Act was followed by a series of Immigration Rules which went almost unnoticed by the media, but which affected all Black people severely, particularly Black women. The 'sole responsibility' rule, for example, was directly aimed at preventing our children from joining us here.

People have tended to think of Immigration Laws as only affecting the Asian community, but this isn't the case. The 'sole responsibility' rule directly affects West Indian women, particularly if they're single parents. It's really difficult for a Black woman to bring her children here if she's not married. She has to prove that her children *have* to join her in Britain, that she's the only relative who is in a position to look after her own children. But parents are supposed to look after their own children, it doesn't matter whether they've got hundreds of relatives, all of them millionaires. The fact that we've been separated from our children in the first place is down to purely economic factors. We got here, the streets weren't paved with gold, we're in lousy jobs, the worst housing, and still they want to keep us apart from our kids. Just because a relative has been bringing up your child, it doesn't mean they're going to be prepared to do that for you indefinitely or even able to do it financially. When Black women left their children, it was a temporary measure. But in order to get them into the country, you have to show that contact with the child has been regularly maintained, *specifically in the form of visits*. Now, if we'd had that kind of money, we wouldn't have had to send for our children in the first place! When the adjudicators are making judgements about whether or not a Black woman has 'sole responsibility' for her child, they push the argument that in the extended family unit in the Caribbean, everybody has the responsibility for being a parent. This is how stereotypes are used against us – they just get written into the law. We really have to be on our guard.

... Many of our struggles in the 1970s were centred around ways of protecting ourselves and our communities from police violence and the racism of the courts ... Even when our children were at school, we could expect the police to be called into the playground to break up fights or to sort out minor incidents. Small Black children, too, would be brought to court for stealing a packet of sweets or a toy car, evidence of the police's contemptuous attitude towards Black parents' ability to discipline our own children. It was as a result of these experiences of a

racist police force that Black women began to organise both against specific incidents of abuse and against legislation like the 'Sus' law which legitimised police brutality.

By resorting to the use of a clause in the 1824 Vagrancy Act, an old and obsolete law which had remained dormant in the statute books for years, the police were able to stop, search and arrest anybody on the basis of a mere suspicion. Because it was our children and community who were victims of this law, Black mothers were in the forefront of campaigns like the 'Scrap Sus' initiative. This began in a Black woman's front room in Deptford and eventually swept throughout the Black community, uniting the generations in a call for the law to be scrapped . . .

Black women were also active in housing campaigns. At the hands of unscrupulous landlords or racist local councils, we faced – and still do face – the worst housing conditions in Britain. By 1978, the proportion of Black people living in homes without baths, running hot water or an inside toilet was more than twice the national average, and three times as many Black families as white were living in sub-standard privately furnished accommodation. Because of the discriminatory policies of local authorities, growing numbers of Black women were being housed in high rise blocks on 'problem' estates – particularly if they were single parents.

The consequences of these housing policies are still acutely evident today. When, in 1984, Hackney Council claimed that it had just discovered racism in its housing department, most Black people simply shrugged their shoulders and said, 'So what?' We knew that we had suffered discrimination in housing ever since our arrival in this country, and that this was only the tip of the iceberg. But then, as now, we found ways of fighting these policies of ghettoisation: with the same determination to fight back as we had shown against the police, Black women organised both individually and collectively against the housing policies of racist councils. In the early 1970s, Black women led the tenants in their fight to be transferred from their homes in ——— London. They organised rent strikes, demonstrations and an occupation of the Town Hall in their struggle to demand better housing.

We all came here as homeless families. Nearly all the tenants were Black. When I came here, as with most people, I came for six weeks to six months. The longest time we were supposed to stay was eighteen months, but a lot of the people had been there for three or four years, and no one in the council was doing anything about it. Then, in 1972, the council wrote us all a letter stating that from April that year, we would be proper council tenants. Everyone was mad because that meant we were here for keeps and they weren't planning to transfer us anywhere. Everyone was dying to get out. People were getting offers of places which were in worse condition than the ones we

were already in, and they were taking them. A lot of the flats had no electric points and no heaters, but the council had been promising for months to start the work and nothing had happened. This was what led us to organise the rent strike and to occupy the Town Hall. We took the children down and let them loose. After that, they had to sit down and talk to us . . .

Meanwhile, our housing situation and our treatment by the police were being compounded by the treatment our children were receiving in schools. Inner-city education authorities, such as the Inner London Education Authority, were setting up disruptive units and developing other ways of combating our rebellions in the classroom in their effort to contain those of our children whom they now considered 'unteachable'. Black children were being thrown into these 'sin bins' in numbers out of all proportion to our 3 per cent of the population. And this over-representation spilled into the detention centres and the prisons, into unemployment statistics and mortality rates, into computerised police criminal records.

As our community came under greater siege, Black women would play an increasingly central role in the fight to defend ourselves and our children from the onslaught. As mothers and as workers, we came into daily contact with the institutions which compounded our experience of racism. We were the ones who rushed to the police stations when members of our family got arrested. We were the ones who had to take time off work to confront teachers and the education authorities about the mis-education of our children. We were the ones who cleared up the debris when police entered our homes uninvited to harass and intimidate us. We were the ones who battled it out with the housing authorities, the social services and the DHSS, as we demanded our right to decent homes and an income above subsistence level . . .

We bore the brunt, too, of the increasingly drastic cuts in health and social services, welfare benefits, housing programmes and childcare facilities. In every area of our lives, we found ourselves on the frontline in our community's battles to confront racism and repression. It is therefore no coincidence that at the end of the 1970s, a strong, vibrant, militant movement of Black women emerged – a movement which would play a leading role in the Black struggles of the 1980s.

Organising into the 1980s

The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, or OWAAD as it came to be known, was undoubtedly one of the most decisive influences on Black women's politics in this country. As the first national network of its kind, it brought Black women together from all parts of Britain.

OWAAD's lifetime spanned only five years, from its foundation in 1978 to its demise in 1983. During this time, it captured the imagination of many Black women and succeeded in bringing a new women's dimension to the Black struggles of the 1980s. Its national conferences, held annually from 1979 to 1982, along with its day-schools, special project committees and its newsletter *FOWAAD*, served as essential points of communication for Black women, presenting us with our first opportunity to meet as women on a national scale, to exchange ideas and lend each other mutual support. Because the organisation emerged at a time when Black women generally were bursting to articulate their own experience of oppression, it was in a position to channel this energy and anger, providing a focal point for those women who were active in the community, or needed information and practical support. As a direct result of OWAAD's influence, the number of Black women's groups grew dramatically in the space of a few years, not only in London, where it was based, but also in Black communities in other parts of the country. No longer prepared to play second fiddle to the men when our communities came under attack, Black women became visible and audible as never before . . .

OWAAD was formed after a group of about fifteen of us met at Warwick University in February 1978. We'd come together to discuss how we could mobilise more sisters to take part in the African Studies Union, which we all had connections with. The women who came to that meeting represented a number of Black women's groups which were around at the time, like the ZANU Women's League, the Ethiopian Women's Study Group, the Eritrean Women's Study Group, the Black Women's Alliance of South Africa, and the Brixton Black Women's Group. When we started talking about forming a women's caucus in ASU, the African sisters just told us, 'Forget it'. They had a lot to say about what it was like to be a minority of women within an all-male organisation because most of them had already withdrawn from that set-up. By the end of the day, we came to the conclusion that we'd have to go it alone, by forming ourselves into an autonomous organisation which was independent and committed to prioritising African and Afro-Caribbean women's issues.*

. . . The first few months was a time of a lot of intense, sustained activity, a lot of learning from each other and thinking things through from scratch. We had to decide on our aims and on what we were going to prioritise. It wasn't just that easy to

* OWAAD adopted its position on Afro-Asian Unity six months later, in August 1978, and changed its name accordingly. However, its practice and composition reflected the fact that Afro-Caribbean women were in the majority, and the question of how to organise across both communities became one of OWAAD's most controversial discussion points.

bring African and Afro-Caribbean women together, because we all came from different experiences of racism. The African sisters wanted to concentrate on things like supporting the liberation struggles and publicising what was happening to the women in them. But those of us whose roots were in this country wanted to take up Black women's issues here. In the end, with more and more Afro-Caribbean women attending and arguing for that position, the African sisters drifted away and went back into the national support groups.

Over the months, as more and more women started to come to meetings, we worked out a structure and set about the task of developing a national network. Some Asian sisters had started to come along, and they argued very strongly that we should be organising jointly. That's how the name got changed. The following month, we organised the first national Black women's conference to be held in this country, which was a real high point for Black women's politics, because it was the first time we had come together as a group to talk about our own politics and start working on some strategies for dealing with them.

Three hundred Black women attended the first OWAAD conference in March 1979, and its effects were to ripple through the community for several years to come. The variety of women who participated in terms of age, background and politics ensured that the mood would be conveyed back into our communities at every level . . .

Many women were inspired to go home and set about the task of forming local Black women's groups, some of which were to outlive OWAAD by several years. Others took back the demands which had come out of the conference, and began to organise with men around issues like 'Sus' and education.

After the first OWAAD conference in March 1979, which some of the women in our group attended, we really began to tackle the education issue . . . So we called a public meeting and the Haringey Black Pressure Group on Education was formed. The pressure group involved quite a few of us, plus local parents, teachers, youths and so on. The first thing we did was to try to find out more about what was going on in our local schools, how many Black children were getting suspended, and what the suspension procedure was. We used the local press to publicise the results, and ended up being asked to a meeting with the local Education Authority, which wasn't productive at all. Their main concern was to sound us out and find out how serious we were. Then they went and issued a confidential document to local schools, urging them to set up disruptive units, or 'sin bins' as we called them, which was their way of hiding the suspension figures behind the school gates. So we spent a lot of time visiting

local parents, leafleting the community, writing to local schools to let them know our feelings about disruptive units, and generally raising it as an issue within the community. We gathered a lot of information through these activities – for example, we found out that about 80 per cent of the kids in the local maladjusted school were Black, which proved our fears about how these disruptive units would work against the interests of Black kids. To cut a long story short, we eventually won that battle, and the idea of disruptive units being attached to every secondary school in the borough was dropped. That was a really important victory for us.

Other women who attended that first conference singled out specific concerns, like the racist use of Depo-Provera which the women's movement had so far failed to pursue, or put their energies into campaigns against police brutality and immigration abuses.

There was the Shirley Graham case,* which the East London Black Women's Organisation got involved in and which we eventually won. We held public meetings and did a lot of fund-raising with other groups in the community . . .

It was not the originality of the issues which we raised, but rather the confidence we had gained in articulating them *as women* which gave rise to the intensity of activity which followed.

By the end of its second year, OWAAD had created a coordinated network of groups and individuals, representing Black women's groups, projects, campaigns and concerns from across London. Because of the practical difficulties of liaising with women outside London, the national network which was one of OWAAD's aims remained very informal, and London remained the focal point of most activities. Nevertheless, OWAAD did succeed in reaching large numbers of Black women in other parts of the country, either directly through its conferences, or indirectly through the newsletter, *FOWAAD*, and through the example of our political practice. Above all, we strove to develop an internal organisational structure which was non-hierarchical, enabling Black women to determine their own priorities and the level at which they would pitch their contribution . . .

The fact that we were active and involved was not, in itself, unprecedented. What was unprecedented was that Black women had begun to articulate demands *as an organised body*, with the assurance which could only come from a strong sense of self-knowledge and

* Shirley Graham, a Jamaican by birth, was detained for five days in August 1982 and subsequently threatened with deportation, on returning to Britain after a short trip abroad. Her family had lived and worked in Britain for over twenty years, and she herself had been resident in this country since 1974.

mutual solidarity:

Our group organises on the basis of Afro-Asian unity, and although that principle is maintained, we don't deal with it by avoiding the problems this might present, but by having on-going discussions.

When we use the term 'Black', we use it as a political term. It doesn't describe skin colour, it defines our situation here in Britain. We're here as a result of British imperialism, and our continued oppression in Britain is the result of British racism ...

The principle of Afro-Asian unity was expressed within our communities by the way we were organising together, and although the practice was more problematic than the theory, Black women proved that it could be done. While some women were organising against virginity testing at Heathrow Airport, others were campaigning against ethnic record keeping and the dangers of racist statistics and secret files. When Asian women went on strike at Futers in 1978, women from OWAAD supported them on the picket lines. When the Tories introduced their white paper on immigration and nationality in 1979, women in OWAAD campaigned to expose its inherent racism and sexism. When hundreds of Black people were injured and Blair Peach bludgeoned to death during a demonstration against the National Front in Southall in April 1979, women from OWAAD were involved in the defence campaigns of those who had been arrested. When Akhtar Ali Baig was stabbed and murdered in July 1980 by a gang of East London skinheads, and when Richard Campbell died that same month in a remand centre, women from OWAAD participated in the community's campaigns to discover the real circumstances of his death. And when state harassment reached a new peak in 1981, Asian and Afro-Caribbean women came together in their hundreds in London to demonstrate their opposition to the racist tactics of police and immigration officers. Although many of these initiatives came directly out of the bonds we had formed in OWAAD, they were not solely dependent on its existence. Black women's central role in our communities' struggles has ensured that we are always there when there are battles to be fought. OWAAD's singular achievement, however, lay in its ability to present Black women in Britain as a united front, lending our actions greater weight and a sense of common purpose which was unprecedented in the history of Black struggle in this country ...

As the Black women's movement took shape and form, the relevance of feminism to our struggles became an increasingly contentious issue. OWAAD was built on the long-standing tradition among Black women of organising together within our community. The basis of that organisation, however, was not necessarily a feminist one, and some Black women have always rejected the term outright:

We're not feminists – we reject that label because we feel that it represents a white ideology. In our culture the term is associated with an ideology and practice which is anti-men. Our group is not anti-men at all. We have what I'd describe as a 'controlled' relationship with them. When we have study sessions on Black history and culture, men come along. Other meetings, however, are exclusively women's meetings. We do prioritise women's issues and we don't confine our work to meetings – we work on those issues all the time. When we discuss, organise, campaign on that basis we are placing our oppression in the context of racism and imperialism. We're not just addressing women or Black women ... We don't alienate men because they put down Black women, because we recognise that the source of that is white imperialist culture ... The reality is that it's not a Black man's struggle or a Black woman's struggle, but a Black people's struggle ... We're working together by different routes. We want to show people sisterhood in operation, something that's a forward movement, not a divisive one. We take our responsibility to the community very seriously.

The belief that feminism is 'anti-men', and therefore divisive and counter-productive, is not the only reason why Black women have traditionally organised outside the women's movement. The failure of white feminists seriously to address women's issues which are to do with race and class has been a barrier which relatively few Black women have been prepared to cross:

I think if you're a Black woman, you've got to begin with racism. It's not a choice, it's a necessity. There are a few Black women around now, who don't want to deal with that reality and prefer sitting around talking about their sexual preferences or concentrating on strictly women's issues like male violence. But the majority of Black women would see those kinds of things as 'luxury' issues. What's the point of taking on male violence if you haven't dealt with state violence? Or rape, when you can see Black people's bodies and lands being raped every day by the system? If women want to sit around discussing who they go to bed with, that must be because it's the most important thing in their lives and that's all they want to deal with. In my mind, that's a privilege most of us don't have.

I'm not dismissing the women's movement. A lot of the gains white women have won have been very relevant to Black women. Black women do have to deal with things like rape and domestic violence, and Black men are as sexist as the next man. But it's a question of where we pitch our level. If you're talking about racism, you're talking about survival issues. Black women have to put everything in that context. Where the women's movement is concerned, there are some women trying to do that, particularly Third World and Irish women. That's because they've got a perspective on things

which women who come from a cushioned, middle-class background don't have. But on the whole, they're in the minority, and the women's movement has acquired the image of the people who are running it. That's why, if you go to their conferences, they'll skirt around the issues, or make excuses for not dealing with them. They're always asking the Black women to tell them what to do about their racism, but if they went out and got involved in things which involved them taking on racism, they'd soon learn.

The best example of this is in the women's peace movement. They've got all the openings there – the uranium mining in Namibia, the nuclear testing that's been going on on the Aborigines' land, the police powers to brutalise people on demonstrations – yet they can only see the anti-nuclear issue in terms of protecting their own backyards. It's as if they've just discovered imperialism, and they're only worried about it because it threatens their particular lifestyle. They say they don't like violence, but there are a lot of other forms of violence around which they've never bothered about before now. Seeing your child slowly starve to death is violence. Rotting in a South African jail is violence. Poverty is violence . . .

Despite such scepticism, not all Black women have chosen to reject feminism as a basis upon which to organise. Recognising how sexism and reactionary male attitudes towards women have worked to keep us down, we have set about the task of redefining the term and claiming it for ourselves. This has meant developing a way of organising which not only takes account of our race and our class, but also makes our struggles against women's oppression central to our practice:

Because we were a women's group, we had to question exactly how much of our energy should go into organising in broad-based campaigns, because if too much of our time was taken up working in this way, we ran the risk of just becoming like a community group. We wanted to hold on to the idea that we could organise as women, that's why the next issue of *Speak Out* [journal of the Brixton Black Women's Group] was largely devoted to the issue of Black feminism, and how we related that concept to ourselves. The discussion we had formed the basis of the articles. So, you see, we didn't want to divorce Black women's oppression from the work being done in our communities. We had to be clear about that, because calling yourself a feminist is not associated in our community with any serious politics. In fact, a lot of Black people use the term in a derogatory way, as a term of abuse. So we felt it was necessary to redefine the word for ourselves and for other Black women. That meant dealing with the practical issue of how we take things up in such a way as to reflect a Black woman's perspective, so that whatever the issue, we can take account of how it affects Black women specifically, we can mobilise

other Black women to get involved, and can organise ourselves politically in such a way that we have credibility. Of course, that brings up the whole question of the role women play in campaigns, and the kinds of positions we hold. But being a member of a group of other Black women gives you a measure of strength and confidence which you don't have as an individual, and because of that we felt able to take the men on on equal terms.

Although our differing positions on the relevance of feminism to our struggle were not necessarily mutually exclusive, they nevertheless had serious implications for the ways we could organise as women. It was because of the difficulties of coming to terms with these implications that the rifts in OWAAD began to emerge. They would eventually lead to OWAAD's demise. The organisation could no longer project itself as a united front, nor could it sustain its influence and credibility when Black women within it were so deeply divided. Nevertheless, OWAAD had achieved much of what it had set out to do. It brought Black women out of isolation and turned us into a force to be reckoned with in our own right. It became a forum for us to discuss and articulate our demands. And it represented a period of intense growth and learning for all Black women in this country, the repercussions of which can still be felt today.

When Black political struggles took a new turn in the aftermath of the 1981 uprisings, we concentrated once again on the task of defending our communities under siege. Black men and women had been in the frontline during the nationwide confrontations between the police and working-class communities which had swept across the country that summer. Their effect was to send a shock-wave of anger through our communities, and the need to channel that anger and disaffection into an organised response had never been more apparent . . .

The state, however, found a more insidious way of responding to our disaffection. Having witnessed the dire consequences of direct confrontation on the streets of nearly every inner-city in the country, the politicians were anxious to find a more subtle approach to deal with our rebellion. Lord Scarman's much-publicised report on the causes behind the Brixton 'disorders' called for a mass injection of state funds into the deprived areas where Black people were living. Almost overnight, a spate of new ethnic welfare projects, self-help groups, Black women's centres and police monitoring committees appeared on the scene, and because they were often the very provisions we had been demanding for years, our immediate response was to welcome them. Many Black women threw themselves into the task of establishing and maintaining these provisions, and they brought with them the organising skills and political awareness for which Black women are by now well known. But despite the level of our commitment to the work we were now being paid to do, our efforts were often frustrated. Increasingly, the effect of state

funds on our community has been to neutralise its militancy; political mobilisation has come to be seen as a salaried activity. A whole generation of 'ethnic' workers and race relations experts has been born who are accountable not to the Black community but to the state which pays them. Their brief, however unwitting, is to keep the lid on the cauldron, and their existence is seen as proof of the government's 'concern' to soften the effects of its own institutionalised racism.

Today we are still assessing the effects of these policies of 'subsidised revolution'. Drastic cuts in local government spending and the government's moves towards rate-capping in areas where councils can least afford to deprive people of much-needed resources have accelerated this process. As always, our communities have felt the pinch first. Despite our growing awareness of the dangers of state-controlled funding, we have nevertheless had to defend our right to these resources – and to intensify our argument that we have a right to control them ourselves:

At present we have two paid workers and a grant from the Greater London Council which we have to reapply for every year. The money we receive is ours. It's our taxes and the gains and profits from our labour. We want to control the way the money's spent on our community ourselves. The problem really is how to handle the bureaucrats, to negotiate with local authorities so that we get the money in the first place. They give it to us because they want votes – but we don't have any obligation to them, because the money is our right. In Newham particularly, there's a mafia of white voluntary sector organisations who've traditionally got the grants. They're usually right-wing or church-based groups which originated in Victorian times and which were set up to correct the morals of London's 'degenerate' poor. Few Black groups have ever received money, so in fact we're owed a lot more! . . .

As we move through the 1980s, taking stock of our experiences as women and continually seeking our ways of confronting the race, sex and class oppression we face, it is clear that the task ahead is not going to get any easier for us. There are growing pressures for change, both from within and outside our community, and the ways we choose to effect these changes will be largely determined by our ability to consolidate the gains of the past four decades of struggle. Black women are well placed to take a lead in this process, for we have learnt some important lessons over the years. We have learnt that our strongest and most secure political traditions are those which have been grounded in the aspirations of our community. We also know our own political capacity as women, and understand the importance of our mobilising role. But, above all, we now have the self-assurance to translate our abilities into positive action, secure in the knowledge that whatever the future holds, Black women cannot and will not be intimidated.

The African and the Indian presence: some aspects of historical distortion

Rome has many arches of triumph
Who built them?
Who built the Seven Towers of Thebes?
Atlantis of the legend
The evening when the sea came in
Were not the masters bellowing for their slaves?

Bertolt Brecht

I had my first lesson in how subjective and biased European Imperial historians could be when I was 12 years old and a student in the Upper fourth form at Berbice High School, in British Guiana. BHS was a Canadian mission school, established to convert the sons and daughters of Hindu and Muslim landowners, canecutters, peasants, ranchers and small shopkeepers to a peculiarly manicheistic and fervent brand of Scottish Presbyterianism. Being neither Hindu nor Muslim, I was nevertheless allowed, along with a minority of creole students, to attend BHS.

Ben O. Ysidas, my history master at BHS, had, in fact, no formal qualifications to teach history. He had come to take over as principal, armed with a BSc degree in chemistry and a teacher's certificate from McGill University in Canada. But he turned out to be the best history teacher I was ever to come across. The Reverend James Dunne, supervisor of the Canadian missions in Guyana, and administrative head of BHS,

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had assigned Ysidas, not without a certain derisory and contemptuous intent, to prepare us for the University of Cambridge Senior School Certificate exam in the history of the British Empire. But Ysidas was able to have the last laugh when he exposed us to two contradictory versions of the same history. We nicknamed him 'Eagle-man' because, as he paced up and down in front of our class delivering his inspired lectures, his fierce Gujarati eyes would flash like obsidian knives, and his beaked nose seemed to follow the words pouring out of his mouth, like an eagle homing in on its prey. Somehow, he brought to life once more the voyages of Martin Frobisher, John Hawkins, Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh. But before we could identify with these British heroes too completely, he provided us with accounts by Spanish historians covering the same period. In the Spanish history, the English heroes were invariably depicted as villains, pirates and anti-Christ; and Elizabeth I, the 'good Queen Bess', was portrayed as an unreliable, mendacious, crotchety and unattractive woman. Having given us the Spanish history to read, Ysidas made no effort to help us out of our bewilderment and confusion. This was our first encounter with the contradictory nature of European national chauvinism, and he wanted the lesson to sink home.

At the time, James Dunne and Ysidas were both in their mid-thirties and both had studied at McGill University. The latter had been a brilliant student, whereas the former had been only an average one. Under the colonial system, however, Ysidas, a Hindu from British Guiana (now Guyana), could never hope to aspire to the salary and privileges that Dunne, a white Canadian, enjoyed. Sun and strong drink had made Dunne's face as red as flame flowers and his green eyes, with their network of veins, looked like a map of the many rivers of Guyana.

Once, when James Dunne was in his cups, I overheard him say that British Guiana should really have been called 'British Gehenna', and I was later to discover that his whole attitude to the tropical world was a love-hate one that was not unlike that of those early Spanish settlers who had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage. For they, too, had complained bitterly about the heat and the strangeness of the new land and its inhabitants; and, astonished by the extent of their own incomprehension, they had resorted to condemning bitterly that which they could not understand. They enclosed themselves in a cocoon of Hispanic fantasies about a homeland they had only a short while ago been eager to abandon. I felt somehow personally affronted by Dunne's dislike of my country, but, as a young Guyanese, I had always assumed that since white expatriates enjoyed so many more privileges than the local person, they would have had to be dragged kicking and screaming back to their own countries. In the case of James Dunne, this was obviously a false assumption. Therefore, I, too, was guilty of my own backhanded brand of chauvinism.

The Spanish settlers who had come to Hispanola with Columbus in 1493 had arrived in seventeen ships with large quantities of stores and

equipment. After the triumphant first voyage, and the honours heaped upon Columbus and his sailors by the Sovereigns of Castile, Spaniards from all walks of life and of all ages flocked to join the second enterprise to the Indies. But once they had arrived in Hispanola, and found that they could only survive by the sweat of their brows, the hidalgos and gentlemen adventurers balked and became restless, contentious and incorrigible, and many who survived returned to Spain broken and disillusioned.

Dunne, too, had come to Guyana with pristine dreams of converting noble and ignoble savages alike to christianity, and of winning high esteem and wealth in the Presbyterian hierarchy. But the reality of Guiana's wild equatorial coast with its polyglot peoples and cultures, its poverty and disease, its villagers and townspeople with their apparently sly and secretive ways and their stubborn and cunning resistance to his ethnocentric fantasy that he was a superior being bringing the benefits of a christian civilisation to lesser breeds, had defeated him.

After we had matriculated, Ysidra invited a group of us to his house and dictated a final message to us. Speaking in slow and measured tones, our Eagle-man seemed to transfix us with his piercing eyes as he said:

I couldn't talk to you like this before your examinations for obvious reasons. Some of you will forget what I am about to say to you this afternoon, but, undoubtedly, a few of you will remember: you must never forget the innocent millions who were the victims of the great empire building enterprises we studied, because we are the heirs of those victims and the inheritors of their dreams. We cannot resurrect the dead but we can keep the finest and the best of their dreams and aspirations alive. We, alone, can write the true history of those voiceless millions. You must never be afraid of the ridicule of those who cannot face up to our truth. When enough of us, through struggle, arrive at that righteous truth and record it with all the eloquence, passion and intelligence of which we are capable, then we will change the world and make it a better place for everyone to live in.

I wrote this message in an exercisebook fifty years ago. Ysidra drank himself to death fifteen years after I had matriculated, but his words still echo in my brain.

The word game

One of the most insidious and pervasive means the Spanish and other European colonisers used in order to enshrine the myth of their 'superiority', and of the 'inferiority' of the colonised, was through the naming game.

After Columbus and his motley band of sailors were discovered by the Arawakian Lucayos on the beach of their island of Guanahani, on the morning of 12 October 1492, a new era came into being, one of coloniser and colonised, master and slave; one in which the ideology of skin

colour would play a role out of all proportion to what it had done in the ancient world. The accidental encounter between the Lucayos and Columbus was within forty years to spell doom for the millions of native peoples who lived in the Bahamas and the islands of the Caribbean archipelago. Against this hideous backdrop of one of the most appalling and uncalled for acts of ethnocide in recorded history, the first European images of the Americas were created almost casually as part of a literary exercise.

Columbus, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and his Italian countryman, Vespucci, through their writings, invented a New World which bore little real resemblance to the Siamese twin continents and the island archipelago they tried to portray for their powerful sponsors, and inadvertently for posterity.

The inimitable Columbus, with the absolute myopic assurance that only someone who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is prone to, after his initial brief encounter with the Arawakian peoples, wrote confidently and unabashedly about their lifestyles, their religious values and their property customs. On his first voyage, however, the only translator he had taken with him was a converted Jew who was reputed to be versed in the Persian language. So when the Admiral was confronted with Arawakian and Carib languages, it was a case of the blind leading the blind. Columbus himself had doubtful linguistic qualifications in his own tongue. He had left his native Genoa as a grown person and yet all his life he could not write in Italian. With Spanish and the smattering of Portuguese and Latin he had later acquired, he was hardly qualified to master the complexities of native American languages in a matter of months. But in his widely published letter of 1493, he wrote as an aside about *Los Indios*, the Indians, and 'from the Spanish term came eventually the French *Indien*, the German *Indianer*, the English *Indian*, and similar words in other European languages for the New World inhabitant'.¹ Later, in 1646, an indignant native had asked the Massachusetts missionary John Eliot: 'Why do you call us Indians?'² But, as Berkhofer shrewdly suggests, 'regardless of whether Columbus thought he had landed among the East Indies or among islands near Japan or even elsewhere near the Asian continent, he would probably have used the same all-embracing term for the natives, because *India* stood as a synonym for all of Asia east of the river Indus at the time and *Indies* was the broadest designation available for all of the area he claimed under royal patent'.³

In that famous 1493 letter, that has miraculously survived in its original form, Columbus had stated confidently:

The people of this island and of all the other islands which I have found and of which I have information . . . have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they fitted to use them. This is not because they are not well built and of handsome stature, but because they are very marvellously timorous . . . They refuse nothing they possess, if it be asked of them;

on the contrary, they invite anyone to share it and display as much love as if they would give their hearts . . . They do not hold any creed nor are they idolators; but they all believe that power and good are in the heavens . . . they are . . . of a very acute intelligence and they are men who navigate all those seas, so that it is amazing how good an account they give of everything . . . In all these islands I saw no great diversity in the appearance of the people or in their manners and language. . .⁴

Manners and language? Here Columbus is touching on the periphery of ontological systems that he is hardly qualified to deal with, yet he is touchingly certain as he provides us with the first images of native America as seen through European eyes. What is astonishing about this almost derisory conceit on Columbus' part, is that the images he invented, along with those that his fellow Italian, Vespucci, later reinforced, would cling like limpets to our imaginations for five centuries, creating distortions that we have never corrected and brought into true focus.

Along with the 'good' Indian, Columbus invented the 'bad' one: the Carib. And, in the wake of his Carib myth, came the monstrous Carib, cannibal, Caliban image. In contrast to the 'good' Indian, Columbus, on the basis of hearsay and after improvising interpretations to languages he did not understand, wrote:

In these islands I have so far found no human monstrosities, as many expected, but on the contrary the whole population is very well formed . . . Thus I have found no monsters, nor had a report of any, except in an island 'Carib' . . . a people who are regarded in all the islands as very fierce and who eat human flesh. They have many canoes which they range through all the islands of India and pillage and take whatever they can. They are no more malformed than are the others, except that they have the custom of wearing their hair long like women, and they use bows and arrows . . . They are ferocious among these people who are cowardly to an excessive degree. . .⁵

The early conception and imagery of the Indian was even more indelibly etched upon the palimpsest of the European mind by the oft-quoted tract of Vespucci, his *Mundus Novus*. Through this fictionalised account of voyages he never embarked upon and adventures he borrowed from others, he achieved the distinction of having the Americas named after him. This dilettante, plagiarist and Florentine merchant, unlike Columbus, hedged his bets and sailed for both Spain and Portugal, and was thus able to upstage his countryman. Whereas Columbus was handsome, charismatic, enormously persuasive and singleminded to the point of fanaticism, Vespucci was pudgy, pampered, ordinary looking and a man who was incapable of any kind of strenuous physical effort. If Columbus had all the qualities of an archetypal hero, Vespucci, on his part, had those of an anti-hero. But Vespucci was a living example of the 'pen

is mightier than the sword' because his *Mundus Novus*, published during 1504 and 1505, became one of the first bestsellers in modern times. In short, Vespucci was a better writer than Columbus. Unlike the latter, he did not pen his works in the white heat of his voyages, but instead returned with his notes and composed elegant, retrospective and very persuasive stories of real and imagined adventures; and he was never averse to plagiarism if the accounts of other people's voyages could enhance his own. Vespucci, more than Columbus, therefore, invented a coloniser's America.

Since the impact of his writings was so great, it becomes essential to quote extensively from his fantastic and vivid account which has left lasting marks upon the European imagination. Writing about the Tupinamba or Guarani of Brazil (his fictionalised stories make an accurate identification difficult, and both he and Columbus never seemed to bother about what the native Americans called themselves), he stated:

We found in these parts such a multitude of people as nobody could enumerate (as we read in the Apocalypse), a race I say gentle and amenable. All of both sexes go about naked, covering no part of their bodies; and just as they spring from their mothers' wombs so they go until death. They have indeed large square bodies, well formed and proportioned, and coloured by the sun. They have, too, hair plentiful and black. In their gait and when playing their games they are agile and dignified. They are comely, too, of countenance . . . They have other customs, too, very shameful and beyond all human belief. For their women, being very lustful, cause the private parts of their husbands to swell up to such a huge size that they appear deformed and disgusting; and this is accomplished by a certain device of theirs, the biting of certain poisonous animals . . . They live together without king, without government, and each is his own master. They marry as many wives as they please; and son cohabits with mother, brother with sister, male cousin with female and any man with the first woman he meets. They dissolve their marriages as often as they please, and observe no sort of law with respect to them. Beyond the fact that they have no church, no religion and are no idolators, what more can I say? They live according to nature, and may be called Epicureans rather than Stoics. There are no merchants among their number nor is there barter. The nations wage war upon one another without art or order. The elders by means of certain harangues of theirs bend the youths to their will and inflame them to wars in which they cruelly kill one another, and those whom they bring home captives from war they preserve not to spare their lives, but that they may be slain for food; for they eat one another, the victors, the vanquished, and among other kinds of meat human flesh is a common article of diet with them. Nay be more assured of this fact because the father has already been seen to eat children and wife, and

I knew a man whom I also spoke to who was reputed to have eaten more than three hundred human bodies . . . I saw human flesh suspended from the beams between the houses, just as with us it is the custom to hang bacon and pork . . . they themselves wonder why we do not eat our enemies . . . Their weapons are bows and arrows . . . The women as I have said go about naked and are very libidinous; they have bodies which are tolerable beautiful and cleanly. Nor are they so unsightly as one perchance might imagine; for, inasmuch as they are plump, their ugliness is the less apparent, which indeed is for the most part concealed by the excellence of their bodily structure. It was to us a matter of astonishment that none was to be seen among them who had a flabby breast, and those who had borne children were not distinguished from virgins by the shape and shrinking of the womb; and in other parts of the body similar things were seen of which in the interest of modesty I make no mention. When they had the opportunity of copulating with Christians, urged by excessive lust, they defiled and prostituted themselves. They live one hundred and fifty years, and rarely fall ill, and if they do fall victims to any disease, they cure themselves with certain roots and herbs. These are the most noteworthy things I know about them.⁶

Vespucci's fictitious accounts could slide very easily into the pages of a modern pornographic magazine. Their effects on the sexually repressed imaginations of Europeans who, with the advent of the Renaissance, were leaving the superstitious miasma of the Middle Ages behind them, could well be imagined.

Alberico Vespucci, and I deliberately use his real christian name, corrected Columbus' error that he had stumbled upon islands off the Bay of Bengal, by affirming that they had, in fact, touched upon the shores of a New World. The two remained on close and friendly terms, and were possibly co-conspirators right up to the former's death in 1506. There is enough evidence to suggest that the two might have been involved in secret intrigues, playing the Portuguese Royal House against that of Spain. Did King Ferdinand, with his cynical Machiavellian mind, suspect Columbus of treachery after the latter's sojourn in Portugal and his warm reception by King Don Juan and his Queen on his way back from his first voyage? Did Columbus advise Don Juan that the Papal Bull should be drawn up to exclude Brazil from the Spanish domains? Columbus was a colossal liar when it came to disguising the facts about his humble origins or what he did not want us to know about his many voyages, but his brilliance as a navigator bordered on genius.

In 1498, on his third voyage, while he was anchored off the South American mainland close to the mouth of the mighty Orinocco river, he wrote in his journal, and las Casas assures us that these were 'his very words':

I believe that this is a very great continent, until today unknown. And reason aids me greatly because of that so great a river and fresh-water sea . . . And if this be a continent, it is a marvellous thing . . . since so great a river flows that it makes a fresh-water sea of forty-eight leagues.⁷

Before Vespucci had coined the term *mundus novus*, Columbus had described the continent he sighted as an Other World (*otro mundo*). A couple of days later, wracked by arthritic pains and extreme fatigue, he had abandoned himself to flights of fantasy and written in his journal that this newly discovered continent was the Terrestrial Paradise, the Garden of Eden. It is noteworthy that he never entered it or allowed the son who had accompanied him to do so. He therefore knew that the continent existed and could well have whispered advice to the young and eager King John which resulted in this monarch claiming Brazil as a consolation prize.

* * *

Robbing peoples and countries of their rightful names was one of the cruel games that colonisers played with the colonised. Names are like magic markers in the long and labyrinthine streams of racial memory, for racial memories are rivers leading to the sea where the memory of mankind is stored. To rob people or countries of their name is to set in motion a psychic disturbance which can, in turn, create a permanent crisis of identity. As if to underline this fact, the theft of an important placename from the heartland of the Americas and the claim that it was a dilettante's christian name, robs the original name of its elemental meaning.

There is a mountain range in Nicaragua called the *Sierra Amerrique*, and a group of Indians called *Los Amerriques*. These mountains stretch between Juigalpa and Libertad in the province of Chontales, and they separate Nicaragua from the Mosquito Coast. The Amerriques had, since pre-Columbian times, always been in contact with the area around Cape Garcia a Dios, and the whole length of the Mosquito Coast.⁸ In 1502, Columbus visited this coast at Carrai and Carambaru. In 1497, Vespucci landed at Cape Garcia a Dios, and, in 1505, also sailed along the Mosquito Coast. Both navigators must certainly have heard the word 'Amerrique' from the Indians over and over again during those voyages.

After the initial greetings and the limping exchanges of pleasantries, it was a tradition with explorers like Columbus and Vespucci to ask their hosts where gold could be found. The alluvial gravels of the Sierra Amerrique had yielded gold for the Indians from time immemorial. They used gold, the sun's sweat, to create objects of surpassing beauty. In their eyes, it had little value in itself until it was touched by man's creative genius; therefore, they saw it as a good metal for sculpture. By capturing light on its burnished surfaces, gold could link human beings to the sun, and both

the sculptor's act of creative labour and the object created could become touched by magic, mystery and beauty. Sometimes they indented chunks of raw gold and, putting them in a sack full of sand, allowed the sea or a running stream to sculpt and polish them, and through this process the object, man, nature and the gods could become one.

For the colonisers, on the other hand, gold meant money, personal and national aggrandisement, and power over others. In their burgeoning mercantilist system, gold could buy a place in the very throne room of the Kingdom of Heaven for the most despicable sinner. And, in particular, once this sinner made the right propitiatory noises to the Almighty and gave generously to the Church, he could be assured of absolution from any crime committed against the colonised. Cortez had declared that he came for gold, not to till the land. He was noted for his occasional outbursts of brutal frankness about himself and his countrymen. Their lust for gold was such that the Indians declared that the coloniser would even rape the sun to rob it of its miraculous sweat. Cortez had also confessed to a Mexican nobleman in Montezuma's court that Spaniards tended to suffer from a disease that only gold could cure.

For Columbus and Vespucci, therefore, the words 'Amerrique' and 'gold' would have become synonymous. After his visits to the Mosquito Coast (he made the last one in 1505), Vespucci changed his christian name from *Alberico* to *Amerigo*. In the archives of Toledo, a letter from Vespucci to the Cardinal, dated 9 December 1508, is signed *Amerrigo* with the double 'r', as in the Indian *Amerrique*.⁹ And between 1508 and 1512, the year in which Vespucci died, at least two other signatures with the christian name *Amerrigo* were recorded. Dr A. Le Plongeon, a nineteenth century scholar from Merida (Yucatan), in a letter to the French Professor Jules Marcou dated 10 December 1881, wrote:

The name *America* or *Amerrique* in the Mayan language means a country of perpetually strong wind, or the Land of the Wind, and sometimes the suffix 'que', 'ik' and 'ika' can mean not only wind or air but also a spirit that breathes, life itself...¹⁰

We must, therefore, reclaim the name of our America and restore it once again to its primordial and evocative meaning: Land of Wind, the fountainhead of life and movement.

In the Mayan genesis myth, the *Popul Vuh*, wind, stands at the centre of creation. As the story unfolds, we are told that it was manifested to the gods:

That at dawn man should appear. So they decided on the creation and the growth of trees and bees and the birth of life and the creation of man. This was resolved in the darkness and in the night by the Heart of Heaven called Hurricane.¹¹

On the rocky eastern slopes of the Sierra Amerrique, the wind continues

to pound insistently like giant fists upon the gates of time, demanding to be recognised.

African and Indian: unity and resistance

The eurocentric, ethnocentric and racist distortions which began to manifest themselves in writings about the Indian, from the beginning of the Columbian era, grew even more virulent when Africans were forcibly introduced into the New World arena. The African inherited all of the racial slanders that were heaped upon the Indian by the European coloniser and, century after century, more were added. It is on the heads of the uprooted, enslaved and ruthlessly exploited African that racism was institutionalised. Through pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo, religious falsehood and the manipulation of history to fit fraudulent theories of racial superiority, an avalanche of propaganda has blurred the essentially symbiotic relationships between race and class, and the need to find ideological and racial justifications for slavery. The African, Indian and the European working class did share a common heritage of suffering and exploitation, and while I do not intend to develop a racist theory in reverse, it is, however, true that so little has been written about the fusion of African and Indian cultures that there is an overriding need to concentrate on this specific area of study.

Of all the major races that came to the Americas during the Columbian era, the African more than any other understood the profound need to create a fusion of his culture with that of his Indian host through a mutual understanding and not by aggression.

The African brought with him, regardless of the mosaic of cultural groups from which he derived, a built-in ethic which bound him first as a stranger in a strange land to study, respect and borrow the best from the host culture before essential elements of his own were allowed to take root. This equipped the sons and daughters of the African diaspora with the means of surviving anywhere in the human world without resorting to force and coercion. When the African arrived in the New World, he knew that the coloniser who had brought him there was a usurper who had seized the land of the Indians, desecrated the graves and the altars of their ancestors, and sent countless of the ones who had either welcomed or resisted them to the Forest of the Long Night. It was clear to the slaves from Africa that, in order to escape the terrible retribution that was certain to overtake their masters, they had to make peace with both the Indians and the spirits of their dead ancestors in this new land . . . The African had to recreate his own vision of himself and his people in the universe after being violently uprooted . . . to have seen himself only through his master's eyes and to have even appeared to be an accomplice in his obnoxious deeds, would

have left him with a permanent heritage of self-hatred, distorted self-images and guilt. In order to reconstruct his ontological system, the African was compelled, by the logic of his cultural past, to establish a cultural symbiosis with his Indian host independent of the white man. There was, in addition, the fact that if the slave wanted to escape, the hinterlands to which the Indian was also being driven were often the safest place to find sanctuary. It was also a matter of profound significance that Africans had come to the Americas in pre-Columbian times, not as slaves, but as culture bringers, traders, medicine men and settlers.¹²

The slave-owners knew that whenever escaped slaves and Indians joined forces they could present serious threats to the slave system. Elaborate rules and regulations and numerous statutes were therefore designed to prevent this eventuality taking place. In spite of these, Indian-African alliances did take place, notably in the Palmares Republic in Brazil's north-east, in the Dutch colony of Surinam and in the Florida peninsula. Because accounts of the heroic resistance that the Indians of Florida mounted against the coloniser are so sparse, and their alliance with armed groups of Africans (one that lasted for over a century) so significant, it might be well to look again at the history of this former Spanish colony.

Tiho Narva, in his 'The Rape of the Sun Peoples', wrote:

The conquest and colonisation of Florida was perhaps the costliest in men and equipment that the Spanish were to experience in the first two centuries of the Columbian era. The Ponce de Leon, the Pamphilo de Narvaez, the Miruelo, the Luca Vazquez de Ayllon, the formidable de Soto expeditions all came to nought because of fierce Indian resistance. But since it is popular for colonial historians to record and embellish stories of their successes, and not to leave us chronicles of their failure and defeat, the early history of the troubled peninsula is noted for its omissions.¹³

Historians and propagandists of the coloniser would have us believe that modern American civilisation established itself upon a cultural *tabula rasa*, and that this new civilisation was transplanted almost in its entirety from Europe. At the top of this transplanted cultural pyramid is the 'superior' Anglo-Saxon offering. Below this, in successive tiers, are other European cultural contributions; and towards the bottom of the pyramid is the essentially trifling exotica representing Indian and African offerings. But these are not 'pure', since whatever cultural authenticity they possess is due to borrowings from Europe. The truth is that new civilisations cannot create themselves in a vacuum. The new civilisation of the Americas, therefore, has been built on Indian and African foundations, since the many strands of the two plaited themselves into a natural organic whole before the European strands, violent, aggressive and powerful, fused with the Afro-Amerindian ones. Tiho Narva, looking at the cultural nexus of

Florida, examines this phenomenon and throws new light on the subject when he writes:

In the beginning, when Spaniards and Indians encountered one another in Florida, it was not so much a meeting of strangers as it was a confrontation – Spanish ruthlessness and greed pitted against implacable Indian pride and resistance. The African and the Indian, on the other hand, met as human beings, both of whom were being threatened by white settlers with slavery, subjugation and possible extinction. It was obvious to the Indian that the African had not come to dispossess him of his land or to relegate him to the status of a wild beast. The African, who was also a sufferer, was willing, with the infinite patience of his race, to learn the languages of the Indians and to listen to the tales of his people. And, when he was invited to do so, to tell the stories of his uprootment from the land of his ancestors . . . ¹⁴

The Indian provided the coloniser with what seemed to him, quite erroneously, to be an unlimited reservoir of labour for exploiting the riches of the Americas. Because of greed, mindless cruelty and a bloodlust born of fighting against Moors for seven centuries, it only took four decades to empty this reservoir in the Caribbean, and then Africans were brought in to fill the labour vacuum.

As soon as the African was introduced into the coloniser's circus of civilisation, the twin caps – one labelled 'savage', the other 'cannibal' – which had been forced upon Indian heads, were transferred to his. However, a number of complex factors that place the African presence in the Americas in a more objective light are more often than not ignored.

The first Africans who came to the Americas in the Columbian era did so via Spain, a fact that should hardly surprise us, since the Moors had conquered Spain for 700 years, and Granada, the last Moorish stronghold on the Iberian peninsula, only fell on 2 January 1492, eight months before Columbus set sail for the New World. Moorish-Africans, therefore, would have been occupying positions ranging from slaves to members of the ruling elite in Morocco and in its overseas territories. The Tuaregs, a Black Saharan people, were over-represented in the senior ranks of the military, the religious hierarchy and the top administration. As relatively new converts to Islam, they were among the most ardent believers.

Peter Martyr, the first major historian of the Columbian era, mentions in passing that Martin Alonso Pinzon, Columbus' chief pilot and partner in his *Enterprise of the Indies*, and his brothers, Francisco Martin Pinzon and Vincente Yanez Pinzon, were known everywhere in the Mediterranean world as the Negro Pinzons. The three brothers would have been Afro-Spanish. Charles Duff, who excavated unique material from primary sources that other scholars had neglected to examine or were ignorant of, wrote:

In a lawsuit which took place many years after his death, evidence was submitted by fellow pilots and by sailors who had navigated with him that he [Martin Alonso Pinzon] was: 'One of the most knowing men of his epoch in all matters pertaining to the sea, a courageous pilot and a great captain . . . there was on earth in his day no braver man in war'. His two brothers, Vincente Yanez and Francisco Martin, though not of the same calibre, were first-rate navigators and brave seamen . . .¹⁵

In addition to the three Pinzon brothers, another of Columbus' pilots, Pedro Alonzo Nino, was recorded as having been a man of colour. After Columbus' first voyage, the chronicle of the Black presence takes on new dimensions; in 1513, thirty Negroes helped Balboa hack his way through the tropical undergrowth to reach the Pacific Ocean. There were Black soldiers of fortune with Ponce de Leon, when he set out to find the Fountain of Youth and accidentally touched on the Florida coast. Langston Hughes, in his *Famous Negro Heroes of America*, wrote: 'By 1523 there were so many Negroes in Mexico that it was decided to limit their entrance since it was thought they might try to seize the ruling powers from the Spaniards – as indeed some in 1537 were accused of plotting to do.'¹⁶

There was, therefore, no monolithic and docile African slave presence in the Americas, as historians of the coloniser would have us believe. It was a restless presence, a troublesome one and one that was seen from a blinkered perspective for too long. Herrera, who, unlike Martyr, actually travelled extensively in the Americas in the early Columbian era, left us a chronicle of events that further underlines the complexity of the neglected issues of the early African presence and relations between Africans and Indians. Herrera, I might add, was no friend of Africans or of Indians. Nevertheless, he wrote:

- 1532 The king (of Spain) had sent the force of two ships to make war on the Caribs . . . It is the general opinion that the troubles of this island (Puerto Rico) were caused by Negro slaves, Wolofs and Berbereci, and the king was asked not to send any more.
- 1533 The Wolofs of San Juan were declared to be haughty, disobedient, rebellious and incorrigible, and could not be taken to any part of the Indies without express permission.
- 1540 In Quivira, Mexico, there was a Negro who had taken holy ecclesiastic orders.
- 1542 There was established at Guamanga, three Brotherhoods of the True Cross of Spaniards, one for the Indians, and one for Negroes.
- 1548 An uprising of Negroes took place in San Pedro of Honduras.¹⁷

The true story of Indian and African unity and resistance remains largely untold. One of the most insidious of myths, for example, is that Afro-Americans never fought a sustained maroon war against slavery. But even

after slavery was abolished, it was necessary for the coloniser to sustain the myth of docile, quiescent and happy Blacks in order to justify the continued exploitation of the descendants of slaves.

The so-called Seminole Wars or Indian Wars of Florida offer a classic example of how half-truths and deliberate omissions can alter historical reality. The truth is that Afro-Americans, allying themselves with Indians, had fought successfully against Spanish, English and American colonisers for over 150 years, first in Spanish Florida, and when Florida became a part of the United States, they continued the struggle well into the 1850s.

The term 'Seminole', a Creek word meaning 'a wild man', in the same way that '*sauvage*' did in French, had originally been used as a label for Black runaways who had escaped from the Carolinas across Georgia and into Florida. Gradually, the word also began to refer to breakaway elements from the Creek Confederation. After General Andrew Jackson shattered the Confederation at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, Sacafaca, an indomitable Creek leader, refused to accept defeat and led over 1,000 warriors and their families across the border into Florida. These refugees, and the Creek remnants with whom they linked up, were then called Seminoles, and the word came to refer exclusively to them. Among these refugees was the young Osceola, who was to grow up to become one of the great leaders in the Black/Seminole alliance. By the mid-1850s, the Seminole War had become a major one in which two-thirds of the US armed forces was involved. The official aim behind this shabby and unjust war, which was so costly in lives, money and material, was to break up the Black/Indian alliance and to kill or recapture those who had so heroically abolished their slavery. General Jessup had stated that as long as these Black insurgents remained free, their freedom was a threat to the entire slave system. In the early 1800s, Governor Mitchell of Georgia had twice sent armies to crush the Black/Seminole insurgents. On both occasions these armies were defeated. Henrietta Buckmaster, writing about these events, stated:

Some of the Georgians brought back tales of extraordinary courage, of Indians and Negroes fighting together, the Indians under the leadership of Indians, the Negroes under the leadership of Negroes – and of the great devotion between the two groups.

All this time fugitives were escaping over the border into the swamps, and Indians and Negroes were slipping back to spread the news that there was plenty of room for all ... But however many asterisks the editors of the Savannah and Charleston journals inserted into the reports ... for reasons of ... security ... an incontestable fact had been established: ... Negroes, organised in bands, well armed, had successfully fought (and defeated) a regiment of American soldiers.¹⁸

Buckmaster had to rely on letters that soldiers who had fought against the Black-Seminole allies had written home, in order to authenticate her

research. The accounts in the papers were censored, and the records in the War Department simply doctored to remove any mention of Black insurgents. Yet, by the mid-nineteenth century, two-thirds of the US armed forces were going to be involved in what was described officially as 'Indian Wars'.

The United States, of course, is not alone in playing this game of half truths and omissions; all of the nations that sanctioned, profited from and tried to legitimise slavery are equally guilty. One of the positive achievements of the Seminole Wars was this: several of the generals and senior officers who were posted to Florida to crush the insurgence and to re-enslave the Blacks, ended up by admiring those they were fighting against, and detesting the shameful role they were ordered to play. A few of them even helped the Blacks who were threatened with re-enslavement to escape to Oklahoma.

There are slaves who have abolished their slavery in the United States, and that history is still to be written. Florida provides us with many epic tales of human resistance. We must excavate and record those tales. When we do, then new generations will be able to see De Soto, not just as the discoverer of the Mississippi, but as the conquistador who was defeated by heroic Indians while he was leading the most formidable military operation that the Spanish had ever mounted in the Americas, up to that time. An Indian Cacique had told De Soto, contemptuously, that he should have been fighting for the freedom of all mankind, and not trying to enslave others in the name of a distant king.

I began with the story of my late history teacher who tried to train us in the art, not only of studying history, but of reinterpreting it. He taught me the dialectic of learning – that if there was schooling, there could also be de-schooling. Caught up in the throes of de-schooling, I learnt that there were three essential versions of the history of the British Empire – the British one, that of their European rivals and, finally, the true and largely unwritten history of the dispossessed.

A Malian griot, Mamadou Kouyate, had once boasted, 'History holds no mystery for us; we teach the vulgar just as much as we want to teach them . . .'¹⁹ And at my high school I had been relegated by the coloniser to the ranks of the vulgar. Because of this inexorable designation, I should not have followed the disturbing intellectual path that I did, but Ysidas had cleverly set me on that path; and once I had followed it for a short while, I could not leave it; the intellectual challenges it offered were too rewarding. It is because of this that I could re-examine the history of the early Columbian era. A young Egyptologist in Atlanta told me recently, 'It is our duty to rewrite the history of our people. It is a task that could very well last two and a half centuries.'²⁰

I have thrown my hat into the ring and am unreservedly committed to taking part in that long and arduous process.

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Victims, the 'urban jungle' and the new racism

Monetarism as an economic project fosters deeper divisions in society by attacking general, public welfare in order to create new sources of private profit. Politically, it depends on providing a sense of certainty and security for at least a plurality of the population and forging an identity between them and state institutions of discipline and control. The contradiction of monetarism lies in the need for certainty and security, on the one hand, and the economic and social divisions it leaves in its wake, on the other. To bridge this gap, an ideological appeal is made to what are seen as fundamental, instinctive values, such as that of nation as represented by true government. In this context, crime is one of the most potent ideological symbols available to monetarism, especially when it is linked to notions of race and ethnic and national identity.* Not only do the economic and social effects of monetarism produce an inevitable increase in crime, thereby providing an objective, materialist basis for populist appeals on this issue, but the fear of crime can be exploited further to divide citizen against citizen, neighbourhood against neighbourhood, and social group against social

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* '... the Tories need a mechanism to persuade people to return to tradition, to instinct, to loyalties; to create an unmediated relation between individual and nation state ... Race, law and order, and scroungers are to be what we may call "leading issues", in particular when the going is hard in other sectors ...'

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group, creating an even greater sense of dependence on the state for basic physical protection and security. And if the devastations of monetarism are allowed to strike deep enough into the fabric of society, this process can lead ultimately to a wholly negative identification with the state based on a group or national sense of deprivation and victimisation – from the stuff of which fascism itself has historically been constructed.

In Britain, the criminalisation of the black community has been an important feature of ‘law and order’ ideology since the late 1960s, with the Afro-Caribbean population increasingly being seen as instinctively ‘anti-authority’ and their youth as responsible for a growing incidence of street crime, whilst the Asian community fell under a general suspicion of harbouring large numbers of ‘illegal immigrants’.* Recently, a major new ‘law and order’ theme has emerged, not so much displacing criminalisation as operating in parallel with it, as an additional means by which to divide the community on racial and ethnic lines. This is the increased attention focussed on the victims of crime in the media, in official government reports and the statements of political leaders, and among academic researchers. In the process, people’s natural sympathies with those who suffer from crime are being transposed, on the one hand, into a theory of victimisation that traces its causes to the victims’ own failings, coupled with a more general breakdown in human relations within urban society, and, on the other, into an ideology in which the fact of victimisation is used to mobilise popular support (on both the right and left) in order to justify new programmes of state intervention and control.

Indeed, the significance of the new ideology of victimisation lies precisely in its utility to a variety of political positions and programmes that have developed in Britain in the wake of the urban rebellions of 1981. Thus, it has operated, alongside notions of ‘ethnicity’ and programmes such as Racism Awareness Training, as a mechanism for diverting protest over institutional racism.⁴ It has also formed one plank on which the police in Britain have attempted to rebuild their own legitimacy since 1981 through programmes of ‘corporate’ or ‘multi-agency’ policing. At the same time, Labour politicians and Labour local authorities, confronted in the aftermath of 1981 with their own inability

* It is important to note that these distinctive stereotypes developed in line with special policing measures directed at the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities respectively, such as the widescale use of the ‘sus’ laws and mass stop-and-search operations against Afro-Caribbean communities and frequent raids on Asian homes and workplaces under the immigration laws.² Also, far from merely reflecting popular prejudices or being a creation of the media in general, these racist images were specifically fostered by state propaganda throughout the 1970s, in the form of special crime statistics compiled to ‘prove’ disproportionate West Indian involvement in ‘muggings’ and official and semi-official statements and reports indicating widespread abuse of immigration controls by Asians.³

to mount effective opposition either to general monetarist policies or to the growth of police powers and influence, have sought refuge in the issue of crime victimisation among urban working-class communities as a means of countering, at least electorally, the traditional Tory appeal on 'law and order'. Most disturbing of all, the current emphasis on victimisation reinforces New Right conceptions of the city as an 'urban jungle' riddled with inter-racial and inter-ethnic conflict and disorder, as well as feeding proto-fascist notions of the white working class as 'victims' of a black presence in Britain.

The origins of 'victimisation'

Some of the most conservative and reactionary elements in current thinking around victimisation can be traced back to the (pseudo) science of victimology which originated particularly amongst Jewish criminologists in the immediate post-Second World War period. The fundamental premise of victimology is that the study of crime should encompass both sides of the 'crimogen complex' – the criminal and the victim – the two together constituting the 'penal couple' or 'duet-frame' of crime.⁵ From this starting point, victimology focuses on the bio-psycho-social characteristics of victims (as opposed to the economic and social structural determinants of their position) in an effort to ascertain how they may contribute to their own victimisation. Von Hentig, writing in 1948,⁶ for example, found immigrants, because of their lack of integration in society and their helplessness and insecurity within an alien culture, particularly prone to victimisation and went on to single out one element of the immigrant population – its criminals – as prone to exploiting that sense of victimisation in their own community. Von Hentig also argued that women occupy a biologically determined status in sexual crimes, while Menachem Amir, in a pioneering study of patterns of forcible rape in Philadelphia between 1958 and 1968,⁷ suggested that women frequently contribute to their own victimisation in such offences.

Current practitioners of victimisation studies are certainly not entirely shorn of the conservative implications of victimology. For example, two leading advocates of victim-oriented crime surveys in Britain, Jock Young and John Lea, have gained notoriety for their theories of a sub-culture of crime among second-generation West Indian youth who prey on more vulnerable sectors of the black community⁸ – a formulation which, although differing in detail from von Hentig's original view of immigrant communities, nonetheless displays the same tendency towards stereotyping on the basis of bio-socio-cultural categories.* On

* The essential difference lies in the fact that, whereas von Hentig stressed immigrants' lack of integration and therefore their vulnerability in an alien environment, Young and

the other hand, the new proponents of victimisation studies owe much, both intellectually and in terms of their personal career development, to the sociology of deviance that emerged in the 1960s as a response, within academic criminology, to the radical political and social movements of that period. The sociologists of deviance also sought, like earlier victimologists, to break out of traditional criminology's narrow focus on the criminal and criminal behaviour. Instead, they proposed to adopt the standpoint of those involved in various forms of deviant activity and analyse how society reacted to such deviance by labelling and treating it as criminal – for example in the 'moral panics' whipped up in the press which developed from time to time around specific 'law and order' issues.

But, as Alvin Gouldner has noted, there were crucial limitations in the sociology of deviance's self-proclaimed critical stance on society. These stemmed from its view of crime and deviance which, although portrayed partly as a product of wider social forces, were not seen 'as deriving from specified master institutions of [the] larger society, or as expressing active opposition to it'.¹⁰ On the contrary, the sociology of deviance, precisely by focussing its criticisms on local agencies of social control and the local media (for their maltreatment and sensational reporting, respectively, of various deviant social groups), actually served to 'legitimate the claims of the higher administrative classes' in society and to 'give them an entering wedge on the local level'.¹¹ This occurred at a time when, first in America in the 1960s and subsequently in Britain, there was a shift in a whole range of social programmes towards a philosophy of 'urban managerialism' and 'corporate planning', an important aspect of which was the greater intervention of central governments in the physical, social and political management of urban areas and populations, not least their dissident and 'deviant' elements.¹²

The new thinking on victimisation represents a retreat even from the limited critical stance on society of the sociology of deviance to a narrow focus on the 'penal couple' of criminal and victim. But this retreat is not unrelated to a further change both in state strategies of control and in policing policies towards the inner city. Indeed, the rebirth of a victim perspective on crime came in the United States under the Nixon administration and in the wake of the Vietnam war and the American

Lea see the second generation's supposed acculturation to British values, combined with their 'relative deprivation' and social and political 'marginalisation', as producing an alienated sub-culture of crime among them. But this difference does not prevent Young and Lea from making such stereotypical assertions as that 'crime abounds' in the West Indian community or that a 'whole section of the [West Indian] community – young people' – are involved in crime.⁹

urban riots, when the whole emphasis of federal government intervention shifted towards the re-equipment and training of local police forces and the improvement of the operational efficiency of the criminal justice system as a whole, even as many of the liberal environmental and social programmes of the 1960s were being dismantled. Similarly, in Britain the upsurge in victim-oriented research has taken place following the 1981 urban rebellions and in line with Tory government efforts to re-arm and re-train the police and to extend their powers and their influence over the community – through, among other things, encouraging local government and local inhabitants to join in various collaborative programmes of ‘multi-agency’ crime prevention and ‘community policing’.* This would suggest that, leading on from Gouldner’s earlier analysis, it is when the central state is not so much concerned with ‘reforming’ local agencies towards improved social management,** as with binding them even more closely into a new partnership of social control led by the police, that the critical stance of the sociology of deviance is finally abandoned and the victim resurrected as the source of legitimation for such policies.

Redefining racism: ethnic stereotypes, inter-racial crime and ‘corporate’ policing

To understand fully the current use of victimisation in Britain, it is necessary to locate it in the context of the developments that have taken place since 1981 in terms of both general ethnic programmes for ‘ethnic needs’ and of policing strategies towards the inner city. Initially, the task of re-evaluating policies in these areas was assigned to the Scarman Inquiry, set up after the Brixton rebellion in April 1981, and to a Home Office departmental investigation into racial violence, which had been established earlier in the same year in an attempt to quell the mounting protests of the Asian community over physical attacks on their homes

* The concept of ‘multi-agency’ policing is based on the nominally liberal notion that the problem of crime cannot be resolved by the police alone through law enforcement but requires closer cooperation between the police and other agencies, such as local government, particularly in respect of physical and social measures of crime prevention and programmes of information exchange. Part of the objection to such schemes is that they give the police greater influence over a range of social programmes, thereby aligning such programmes more closely with the coercive powers of the police, without the police themselves being democratically accountable. Such objections gain strength from the fact that since 1981 the police in Britain have greatly extended their role in controlling public order, and in this context have come to rely heavily on the widescale gathering of intelligence on all aspects of community life in ‘sensitive’ inner-city areas.

** On the contrary, the restraints of monetarism actively deny them the means of such positive intervention.

and persons. In effect, the Scarman Report was seen to rationalise existing policing policies in areas such as Brixton by marrying up earlier stereotypes of the West Indian community (as socially and culturally disorganised and prone to disorder and crime) with liberal concerns about racial discrimination and social deprivation. As analysed elsewhere,¹³ this formula enabled Scarman to deny the existence of institutional racism and put down racial tension instead to individual white prejudices, on the one hand, and to historical processes of 'racial disadvantage', on the other. These had left the West Indian community with seemingly intractable social and cultural disabilities and a perception of grievances and hostility towards white society, especially the police. In short, West Indians were portrayed as the almost hopeless victims of social circumstances, but no less violently and criminally inclined for all that. Former police practices towards the community were thus deemed to be justified, although some reforms to police recruitment and training and the introduction of police-community consultative committees were seen as necessary to meet West Indians' particular 'sensitivities' on policing issues.

The picture of the Asian community that emerged from the Scarman Report and the Home Office report on racial attacks, published a few weeks later, was of a basically passive population open to direct physical attack and political manipulation. Although Scarman acknowledged in passing the growing confrontation between the police and Asian youth, he argued that the Asian community's primary concern was not, like the West Indians', police harassment, but rather their 'belief' in the failure of the police to provide sufficient protection against racial attacks.¹⁴ The Home Office report also addressed the problem of Asian sensitivity on the issue of racial attacks and their 'perceptions' of police inaction, which it attributed in part to their 'lack of understanding of the practical and legal limitations on action by the police'.¹⁵ According to both reports, Asians were not only the victims of racial violence but of political manipulation by 'extreme political groups, of both right and left-wing persuasions' which sought 'to exploit the issue of race for their own ends', fostering mistrust of the police in the process.¹⁶ The Home Office report went on to suggest that some ethnic minorities had gone so far as to 'create their own groups and associations' and that 'such groups have a tendency to stoke up the temperature in order to justify their own existence', with an 'unfortunate effect on relations between the police and the ethnic minority community'.¹⁷

Of course, neither report made mention of the police's draconian enforcement of the immigration laws over the previous decade, through

* This contrasts with Scarman's identification, echoed by writers such as Young and Lea, of the lack of political participation among West Indians and their supposed political 'marginalisation' as a further source of their disadvantage.

frequent mass raids and arbitrary arrests, which would have placed the Asian community's suspicions of the police in a different light, as well as undermining any notion of the police being constrained by 'practical and legal limitations' on their actions. And, although the statistics compiled for the Home Office report showed a high level of racial violence against West Indians as well as Asians, this fact merited little or no discussion in the report's general commentary, or in Scarman's catalogue of the 'disadvantages' facing the West Indian community. For to have done so would have undermined the ethnic stereotyping of the West Indian as a violently-inclined predator and the Asian as a misguided and politically manipulable victim. Indeed, in presenting its statistics, the Home Office report ranked racial attacks alongside other 'inter-racial' incidents where offences were allegedly committed by blacks on whites. In doing so, it lent official endorsement to the tendency among 'the police and local authorities to regard ... attacks experienced by the Asian communities ... in some sense to be offset by the alleged anti-social activities of young West Indians'.¹⁸

The rationalisations and ethnic stereotypes of the Scarman and Home Office reports were rapidly taken up and applied by the government, police and the media. The Scarman report almost immediately came under attack from the forces of law and order, more for its liberal pretensions than for any substantive reforms it proposed to policing. A major press campaign was specifically initiated by the Metropolitan Police in London through the release of a new set of racialised crime statistics which indicted West Indian youth as responsible for the majority of the capital's 'muggings'. The campaign was used to legitimate various new anti-riot measures instituted even as the Scarman Inquiry was sitting, including the use of CS gas and water cannons and the setting up of squads in each of London's police districts for rapid deployment to public order disturbances. The campaign was also used to support demands for extensive new legal powers for the police (subsequently implemented in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984).¹⁹

Over the following months, the press gave special prominence to reports of 'street' crime involving West Indians as offenders, with Asians frequently portrayed as the victims (they joined the elderly white lady as stereotypical victims of 'muggings'). At the same time, the police, following on from the recommendations and methodology of the Home Office report, introduced 'racial incident sheets', supposedly for measuring levels of racial violence. In practice, this amounted to no more than a further gloss on the same crime statistics, so long employed to criminalise black youth, but now used as a basis for accumulating data on all incidents reported by or to the police involving persons of different ethnic origin. For example, in one instance an 'assault' on two police officers by a West Indian youth was ranked, alongside physical attacks by gangs of white youth on blacks, as a 'racial incident'. Not

surprisingly, it was only a short time before the police commander in Brixton could announce to his newly-formed consultative committee that it was whites and not blacks who were most likely to be the victims of such incidents. And in two prominent trials, of the Bradford 12 in 1982 and the Newham 8 in 1983, where youth had defended themselves against racist attacks and been subsequently charged themselves, efforts were made by the state to portray such actions as no more than gang warfare, involving at best misguided and at worst politically-motivated young Asians.

In these ways the issue of racist attacks was being re-defined not as symptomatic of a racist society, but as an aspect of 'inter-racial' crime, where different ethnic groups had different victimisation rates. At the same time, those involved in self-defence were being equated with the perpetrators of such violence. As indicated previously, this fitted in well with the whole thrust of post-Scarman policy to reduce issues of racism to questions of individual and group psychology and to promote ethnic identity and competition in various fields. Indeed, in a piece of psychological reductionism of which the most conservative victimologist would have been proud, an Asian youth, Satvinder Sondh, who was attacked by skinheads and had swastikas carved into his stomach, was accused of wasting police time on the grounds that he had carved them himself in order to avoid sitting school exams. Two years later, in 1983, precisely the same story of self-infliction, again due to pressure of exams, was put forward by the police in the case of another Asian, Dipak Amin, who had NF carved on his wrist. In both these instances, the Asian victims were seen as being disturbed and insecure but also ambitious and somewhat crafty in blaming white racism for their own failings, less in need of police protection than of social psychological treatment and support. For its part, the government was to give further official support to the downplaying of racist attacks in favour of inter-racial crime when, in 1984, the Home Office published a report, based on Metropolitan Police statistics, suggesting both that West Indians were disproportionately involved in 'muggings' and assaults in London and that Asians were most frequently the victims of such offences.²⁰ The implication of the report and of the sensational press coverage it received was that Asians had less to fear from white racists than from 'black' criminals.

Nor did the police escape the post-Scarman upsurge in official activity, especially among inner-city local authorities, in promoting 'ethnic identity' and catering for 'ethnic needs'.* Both the Scarman and Home

* The Tory government's willingness to go along with such initiatives has been dependent on their being confined largely to the public sector where monetarist policies have brought about a sharp deterioration in levels and quality of services. At the same time, the government has been anxious to protect private capital from such policies, leaving it

Office reports had placed great stress on the need for special measures, in terms of ethnic recruitment and new training programmes, to increase police awareness of ethnic problems and their understanding of ethnic cultures and sensitivities. The object of these initiatives was not merely to give the police a better image. Rather, they have formed part of a more general policing strategy²² which, whilst retaining and strengthening previous hardline methods against black and inner-city communities, was directed towards a more comprehensive social control of the population at large. Previous policies had had the effect of setting the police as an increasingly remote and militaristic force against whole sections of the population, frequently differentiated on racial lines, and in the process uniting the black community – both Afro-Caribbean and Asian – in their opposition to police repression and harassment. But the new 'corporate' approach to policing (ushered in after the Scarman Report and the subsequent appointment of Sir Kenneth Newman as Metropolitan Commissioner of Police) is based on the police segmenting and penetrating the community more thoroughly, in order to gather wider intelligence* and identify and isolate criminal and activist elements who can then be specifically 'targeted' in police operations. This form of policing implies, in particular, efforts to recruit a variety of non-police agencies, such as community and tenants' groups, housing departments and local churches, into collaborative schemes of multi-agency crime prevention and community policing. 'Ethnic understanding', in such circumstances, can be an important tool in police attempts at community penetration, especially when combined with the division of inner-city populations into 'criminals' and 'victims' – a division made along racial, sexual and generational lines. The 'criminals' will require constant police surveillance and control, while the 'victims' will be the object of new police-led programmes of social support and intervention in the community.

unfettered in the task of economic restructuring, as evidenced by recent proposals to pass legislation outlawing the imposing of equal opportunities compliance conditions in local authority contracts.²¹

* A perfect example of how current policing strategies combine coercive and collaborative/intelligence-gathering elements has arisen with the announcement by the Home Secretary of plans to provide the police with a much wider set of legal sanctions to control and ban demonstrations. This has been followed by press reports that a Central Intelligence Unit has been set up in Scotland Yard 'with a district network of officers and informants to gather information on political protest and tension in the community', including 'industrial disputes, marches' and 'tension indicators' such as 'complaints about police or hostility towards police activity, as well as political struggles between local groups'. The Unit is said to rely on officers working 'at street level, picking up low-level intelligence – scraps of conversation, local gossip, unusual incidents'. No doubt, much of this information will arise out of contacts between the police and local statutory and voluntary bodies under the aegis of programmes of 'multi-agency' policing.²³

The uses of 'victimisation'

It has been in the process of implementing 'corporate' policing initiatives that victimisation theory has found its most immediate applications in Britain during the past few years. In 1982, the government published the British Crime Survey,²⁴ the first national study of crime victimisation among the general population. Its conclusion that a large body of crime went unreported was seized upon in a subsequent Home Office circular²⁵ and by senior police spokesmen as demonstrating the need for greater local authority and public involvement in schemes of crime prevention and community policing. Meanwhile, the announcement by Sir Kenneth Newman of his corporate policing plan for London in 1983 led to a spate of surveys of victims conducted by the police. These, usually carried out on the basis of hastily and crudely drawn questionnaires, were apparently to be the first step in formulating district and neighbourhood policing strategies for the whole of the city. At the same time, surveys of victims were being promoted among inner-city local authorities by criminologists such as Jock Young and John Lea as part of the new 'realism' about 'law and order' that had emerged on the political left in Britain in the post-1981 period.

Critics of such surveys have argued that, even if carefully constructed and executed, they inevitably tend to exaggerate and distort the incidence of crime and its social significance.²⁶ For one thing, they usually start from a focus on vandalism, burglary and 'street' crime, and only belatedly, if at all, enquire into other types of crime (e.g., corporate or bureaucratic crime, police harassment or brutality) or look into the wider social problems that have had an even more damaging impact on the community. Respondents, having had their perceptions directed in this manner, tend to over-report crimes of these types – for example, by conflating the time period in which they occurred. Thus, while carried out under the guise of providing 'objective' information about levels of crime in the community, the result of these surveys – especially when reported under such headlines as 'London - A City Afraid of the Dark' – is frequently to fuel fears and anxieties about crime among local people.²⁷ And, given the effects of previous campaigns of criminalisation, these fears tend to be focused largely on the black community.*

Victim surveys are useful to the police, not only in planning but, even more, with legitimating their operations against 'high crime' areas and particular sections of the population. Moreover, they provide a type of

* Given the context in which crime victim surveys have been revived, both in the United States and Britain, the term frequently used to describe the large body of unreported crime revealed by these surveys – the 'dark figure of crime' – has obvious racist connotations.

market research for collaborative policing initiatives. In London, certainly, a survey has frequently been the prelude to the introduction of victim support groups and neighbourhood watch schemes. Victim support groups have, in fact, operated on a voluntary level for many years, but it is only recently that efforts have been made to expand them and to align them more closely with local police planning and operations – not least, through police membership of management committees. Similarly, neighbourhood watch schemes have been initiated on a wide scale throughout London and elsewhere as a means of increasing the flow of information on local areas and populations. By the police's own admission, neighbourhood watch has been most successful in prosperous, predominantly white areas, but has met considerable hostility amongst black and inner-city populations. They have continued to bear the brunt of the more militaristic aspects of 'corporate' policing, such as the operations of the new local riot squads and surveillance units set up to 'target' specific localities and groups. Indeed, in such areas the police have become increasingly open in their attacks on independent community associations and groups which have been active in monitoring local police operations and their effectiveness in dealing with such problems as racist attacks.

One recent innovation in policing – the setting up of Racial Harassment Incidence Panels in several areas of London – portrays, more than any other, the connections between 'corporate' or multi-agency policing, victimisation, and current notions of 'ethnicity'. These panels have been set up by the police in response to the sharp increase in levels of racist activity and violence and the growing confrontation between the police and Asian community groups and youth over this. Their membership, which reflects the multi-agency approach, is drawn from MPs, local councillors and representatives from local authority social services and housing departments – the very agencies that have been criticised for their complacency over and, in some instances, suspected collaboration in, racial violence. * The official aim of these panels is to provide a better coordinated response to the victims of such incidents. The notion of such panels, specifically on racial attacks, had, in fact, been mooted by the Home Office in its report, which couched its recommendation in the following terms: 'Representative organisations should . . . assist the police to explain to community leaders the limitations on police powers and the extent of the law' in dealing with racist attacks.²⁸ In other words, these panels are likely to serve, in common

* For example, in a number of cases where black families have been allocated public housing, the properties in question have been vandalised and daubed with racist slogans before the families could take up occupation. This suggests that white tenants and/or racist groups have been 'tipped off', in advance, to a black family moving in, by officials with access to confidential information inside the local authority.

with previous police-community liaison structures, as bodies on to which criticisms of the police can be deflected. At the same time, they will have no real influence to improve police protection for the black community or to affect the practices of other agencies involved. What is more likely – especially given the victim stereotype that has been promulgated by the Home Office, the police and the press – is that the panels will adopt an individual ‘problem solving’ approach to the victims of racial violence, concentrating on providing them with social and medico-psychological support and treatment.

The involvement of some Labour-controlled local councils in Racial Harassment Incidence Panels and their sponsorship of surveys of crime victims are aspects of a gradual accommodation by the left with the police and their new ‘corporate’ policing strategy. Many of these councils were elected in 1981 on specific pledges to campaign for greater democratic control of the police and, in particular, an end to their harassment of the black community. In the period following the 1981 rebellions, a number of inner-city local authorities refused to cooperate with such initiatives as the setting up (along lines laid down by the Home Office) of local police-community consultative committees, which they saw as undemocratic, and with no real influence over police operations. At the same time, the Labour party generally took a public stance against government plans to extend police powers. Yet, partly as a result of the failure of the Labour party and Labour councils to align their constitutional opposition on these matters more closely with the popular protests of the black community, the government has secured massive new legal powers for the police. And many of their authoritarian practices have become yet more entrenched and are accepted, even on the left, as an almost inevitable part of urban policing. For example, only a few years ago, following the murder of an anti-racist teacher, Blair Peach, during a police Special Patrol Group operation to break-up a demonstration in Southall in London against the National Front,²⁹ the left was united in its demand for the abolition of such specialist police units. Now, following on from the Scarman Report, not only have Special Patrol Groups been retained but the police’s public order capabilities have been greatly extended through widescale riot training and the establishment of additional, locally-based, riot squads. These are now increasingly used in the everyday policing of black and inner city communities. In a similar fashion, although the ‘sus’ laws, used during the late 1960s and 1970s on a wide scale to criminalise Afro-Caribbean youth, have now nominally been repealed, the discriminatory policing practices that lay behind their enforcement have been re-incorporated into the work of new police surveillance units and their ‘targetting’ of black communities.

In the face of such political failure, some Labour-controlled local councils have retreated significantly from their principled demand for

full democratic control over the police and from their anti-racist stand against oppressive policing of the black community. They are moving instead towards accepting more restricted forms of police accountability and consultation which involve, at best, limited bargaining with the police over *their* priorities in policing local areas. In this process, the victimisation of urban working-class communities in the face of rising crime (itself inevitable in the wake of monetarist policies) has provided a rationale for the political compromise that Labour politicians and councils have made over policing. For instance, Jock Young and Richard Kinsey, commenting on a recent victim survey carried out for the Labour-controlled Merseyside Police Committee in Liverpool, have argued that a shift in police priorities away from public order operations and computer-based intelligence-gathering towards more traditional crime prevention functions would directly benefit the working-class victims of crime.³⁰ And a political member of the Committee has even suggested that building up popular support over whether police are effective in controlling crime in working-class areas will not only help to restore Labour's electoral credibility but also to revive the campaign for local accountability of the police.³¹ What is left out of this left 'realism' about 'law and order', however, is any accurate evaluation either of the realities of central state power in Britain or of the ability of local authorities – given the vastly increased powers and autonomy granted to the police in recent years – actually to influence policing in their areas. But without such influence, the sponsorship by local authorities of victimisation theory and victim studies will only result in the hardline policing of the inner city gaining even greater political legitimacy – even as the Labour party and Labour councils are further compromised by their growing involvement in collaborative policing initiatives.

Victims and the new racism

But if the police have gained the most immediate political benefit from the current emphasis on victimisation, perhaps more significant in the long run is the link between this new ideology and the notions, increasingly evident on both the right and the left in Britain, of a disintegration of urban social and cultural life, one element of which is the seemingly inevitable conflict between groups separated by racial and national differences. Peregrine Worsthorne has neatly captured the New Right vision of the 'urban jungle' in need of constant state vigilance and control: 'In many ways the jungle conditions in many of our inner cities require much the same qualities of policing that were demanded by colonial rule – coolness, self-confidence, courage, firmness and the capacity to overcome by personality rather than brute force.'³² Certainly, this attitude can be seen as underpinning current policing policies,

with their combination of sophisticated public order control, careful news management and programmes of 'multi-agency' policing. It has also been reflected in much press reporting on the inner city since the 1981 rebellions, with its emphasis on the breakdown of community life, endemic crime and the victimisation (and even terrorisation) of the old, women and ordinary 'law-abiding' citizens. Indeed, such views have been used by social analysts on the right to support an environmentalism in reverse, in which crime and disorder, far from being seen as the products of monetarist-imposed economic decline and physical decay, come to be identified as the cause of such conditions.

But, in addition to the support it has had from the police, the press and monetarist sycophants, the idea of the urban jungle has also gained currency through the new sociology of victimisation and the 'social realists' of the left, whose work is nominally written out of sympathy for the working-class and poor residents of the inner city. A good example of this is to be found in Paul Harrison's book, *Inside the inner city: life under the cutting edge*,³³ based on Hackney in London. Harrison masks his views of the inner city behind a mass of data and personal testimonies; indeed, in this, his book recalls what Gouldner referred to as the 'collector's aesthetic' of the sociology of deviance and its expression of 'the satisfaction of the Great White Hunter who has bravely risked the perils of the urban jungle to bring back an exotic specimen . . . And like the zookeeper, he wishes to protect his collection: he does not want spectators to throw rocks at the animals behind bars. But neither is he eager to tear down the bars and let the animals go.'³⁴

But whereas Gouldner could accuse the deviancy sociologists of romanticism in their portrayal of working-class and deviant sub-cultures, Harrison is anti-romantic in his view of urban life, which he sees as 'nasty, brutish and short', a 'microcosm of deprivation' dominated by a dog-eat-dog ethos where racialism (but not institutional racism) and clan rule abound and the streets become a 'theatre of violence'. Interviews with the unemployed and poor are used to demonstrate the disintegration of working-class culture, while racist statements by white working-class women are equated with those of black women expressing mistrust of whites, to signify the racial conflict inherent in inner-city life. Harrison also replicates the now familiar stereotype of black youth who, with their flash cars and elaborate lifestyles, are seen as displaying an envy of capitalist values which, impossible of pursuit by normal means, are distorted into a life of crime.

There is no place for community resistance in Harrison's portrayal of the inner city. Indeed, to sustain his picture of social and political disorganisation, protests on issues such as policing must be explained away – and Harrison does this by blaming the community for their own brutalisation at the hands of the police. Thus, in a similar vein to the Scarman Report, we are told that a complex mythology about police

brutality has built up in areas such as Hackney, based on rumours and gossip – which of course means that the police are not only forced to arrive at incidents in greater numbers but have to use force to defend themselves — because black people, fearing something unpleasant is going to happen, resist police intervention. This dismissive view of institutional police racism and of black community resistance to it is also to be found in the work of the left 'realists' on 'law and order'. Jock Young and John Lea have written of autonomous black politics in Britain as a 'reflection of marginality and impotence rather than its overcoming',³⁵ while Young and Richard Kinsey have argued that police racism, far from being institutionalised in hardline policing practices towards the black community, is merely a 'cultural' phenomenon based on the traditional disdain of the 'respectable' working class, from which the police are drawn, toward the lumpen-proletariat.³⁶ In this way, police racism itself comes to be seen as merely another aspect of intra-class and inter-group cultural differences.

Certainly, in their ideological effects, there is a close parallel between these views and the new racism promulgated by the Tory right in Britain over recent years, in which explicit notions of racial superiority are set aside in favour of a 'common sense' theory of the 'naturalness' of ethnic exclusiveness based on immutable social and cultural differences between groups. And it is this which explains the 'genuine fears' of the host community, not least its working-class elements, when it perceives itself threatened by the presence of another ethnic group – and when that group refuses to integrate, then their rejection by the host community and the hostility that it engenders is seen as inevitable.³⁷ In the period since the 1981 rebellions, these notions, so long evident among theoreticians of the New Right and the anti-immigration lobby in Britain, have come to form the basis of a 'white backlash' in debates on policy in such fields as education, housing and 'law and order'. For example, Ray Honeyford, headmaster of an inner-city school in Bradford, has written in the right-wing journal *Salisbury Review*³⁸ of the perversion of the term 'racism' by a powerful race relations lobby, which applies it to obscure the fact that it is the 'dispossessed' whites of the inner city who, in the face of local authority policies on multi-culturalism, are the real victims of discrimination. In analysing the sources of white deprivation in education, Honeyford directs his wrath primarily at the Asian community, who attempt to impose 'a purdah mentality on school' and to exact advantages not afforded to 'black and white' children by asserting 'the values and attitudes of the Indian subcontinent within the framework of British school life and political privilege'. And, lest Honeyford be seen as holding favourable views about the West Indian community, he replicates Scarman's stereotypical assumption that the 'roots of black educational failure, are, in reality located in the West Indian family structure and values, and the work of misguided radical

teachers whose motives are basically political'. Indeed, ideas of black political solidarity across ethnic lines – itself evident in community protest over Honeyford's continued employment as the head of a majority Asian school – are seen by him as based on a 'gross and offensive dichotomy [that] has an obvious purpose – the creation of an atmosphere of anti-white solidarity'.

Implicit in the whole of this new racist ideology is a (perverted) concept of victimisation, with the racist seen as the victim of the mere presence of black people and of their legitimate struggles against racism. And it is under just such a banner that fascist groups in many of Britain's inner cities have recently been successful in organising the white working class. In a recent national television programme, a white family, the first to be evicted by a local council for actively harassing Asian tenants in neighbouring flats, was portrayed almost as a prototypical white working class victim, while another group of white tenants organising a petition against having an Asian family moved on to their estate were specifically brought together to air their views to the camera. Even the programme's title – 'Racial Outlaws'³⁹ – seemed designed to conjure up romantic notions, again reminiscent of 'underdog sociology', of rebels against the oppressive use of state power. A TV Eye programme on 'The Honeyford Affair' in fact ends with a shot of Honeyford, the mountaineer (like Bonnington at 50 on Everest or like Lear facing both the ingratitude of his daughters and the elements), framed in climbing gear against a cliff somewhere in England's green and pleasant land.⁴⁰

As much as advocates of victim-oriented social programmes and research might shrink from the portrayal of racists as victims, there can be little doubt about the legitimisation given to the police and their 'corporate' policing programmes by the view of the inner city as an urban jungle of crime and victimisation, of constant ethnic conflict and a breakdown in human values. In such a situation, the police can assume the role of the new 'caretaker' class, supplanting local political leadership and services, which in any event have been deprived of the resources for positive intervention, as the only 'civilising force' available to stand between the warring factions and to impose a new social order. This is not to deny the claim of the left 'realists' that crime and victimisation are genuine problems for the working class, but so are mass unemployment, urban decay, institutional racism and a myriad of other degradations inflicted on the class by Thatcherite monetarism. To separate out any of these issues in order to court electoral support or to form the basis for a political programme, let alone of a whole philosophy of the disintegration of urban working-class culture – and, even worse, to isolate these issues from the overall economic restructuring of capitalism presently underway and its increased dependence on central state power and the use of the police for political and social

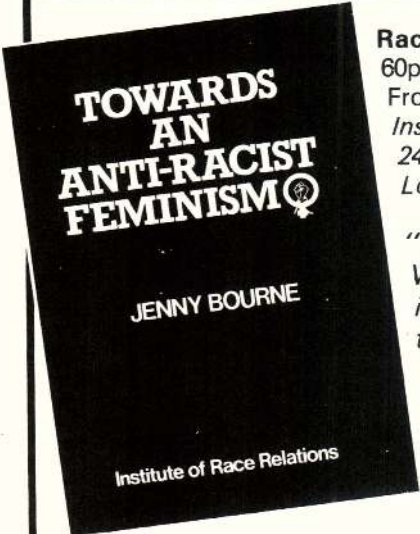
control over the working class – is neither socialist nor realistic. If the left hopes to challenge the new social order being created out of monetarist policies, it will require more than an appeal to factions of the working class on the basis of their victimisation – or, for that matter, their ethnic identity and needs.⁴¹ And, in any event, such an appeal serves only to entrench more deeply the class, racial and sexual divisions in society while giving a fillip to both the new racism of the Tory right and the recruiting efforts of the fascists among the white working class of the inner cities.

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"The extent to which the Women's Movement has failed its own principles, is the extent to which it is racist."

Namibia: the German roots of Apartheid

Largely because of geographical and climatic features, it was only when the 'scramble for Africa' reached its final stage, that Namibia¹ became a territory that was of interest to adventurers and colonial enthusiasts. Then, in the name of European 'civilisation', they invaded the country's interior. The Namib desert along the Atlantic coast, hitherto an effective natural barrier, was no longer to provide protection for the inland areas and their peoples.

After the first concerted efforts of Europeans to settle on a permanent basis, the character and organisation of the economic and social structures within the country underwent basic changes, which corresponded to the establishment of a colonial-capitalist settler society. Henceforth, Namibia became organised as a white man's country. Although the roots of this development are to be found in the early stages of Namibian colonial history – more than a hundred years ago – its consequences are of more than historic interest; they are still relevant for an analysis and understanding of the situation today, the organisation of the still existing (though modified) colonial system, and the national liberation struggle against this system. The colonialism of the past had much in common with the present South African version and laid the cornerstone of Apartheid. It prepared the foundation upon which South Africa built its rigid uncompromising rule.

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Indirect colonialism

The various social structures of pre-colonial Namibia were such that the relations between them would, without the destructive influence of foreign interests, have developed further – although great differences existed in the development of the productive forces, socio-cultural institutions, and the political and social degree of organisation. Pre-colonial Namibia demonstrates clearly the dialectical relationship of different types of social organisation to the mode of production, which in turn was largely determined by the natural environment. Climatic and geographical features and conditions explain the regional differences to a certain extent: in the southern and central parts of the territory, with their vast areas of sparse vegetation and limited rainfall, the Nama (Khoi-khoi) and Herero lived with their herds as nomadic cattle-breeders. In the more fertile north, with its higher rainfall, the Ambo groups, with their more sophisticated agrarian society, based mainly on agricultural cultivation and limited livestock, had settled on a permanent basis. Dama and San – nomadic gatherers and hunters at a comparatively low level of economic development – lived partly in dependence on the other economic forms, partly in their interstices.

The development of class structures – while still in an embryonic stage throughout the territory – had progressed further among the Ovambo in the north than among the Khoi-khoi and Herero in the south. In Ovamboland, early features of ‘proto-feudalist’ rule were beginning to emerge. Among the Herero, differences in cattle wealth had already produced a rich elite, which operated on the periphery of the traditional institutions. Further development of class differentiation, however, was hampered, as land was still used collectively and no private property in natural resources existed. Within the Khoi-khoi societies, class division and separation between production and possession was hardly discernible, although some indications point to unequal power structures above the unit of family and kinship. Considering Namibia as a whole, it might be argued that subordinate ‘classes’, defined along communal lines, had already developed (e.g., the use of Dama as servants).

The level of internal trade in the north also showed a more progressive division of labour, including specialised artisans and traders. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Namibian peoples already had continuous contact with each other. Ambo traders exchanged goods for cattle, mainly with the Herero, and the Namibian communities were connected by a trade network to the north. By the middle of the nineteenth century, cattle from Namibia supplied the beef market at the Cape and even the British garrison guarding Napoleon at St Helena island.

A completely new factor in the internal development of the southern

and central parts of the country was introduced by the immigration of the Orlam, initially part of the Khoi-khoi communities living at the Cape. The Orlam, who crossed the Orange river early in the nineteenth century on their way to southern Namibia, had already been affected by the colonial virus. Robbed of their land by invading Dutch colonisers, they tried to escape bondage by moving further north. Many of them had already experienced wage labour on European farms or had lived at missionary stations. In general, they spoke Dutch, had converted to the Christian faith and knew how to make use of their guns and the mobility provided by horses.² At the time of their arrival in Namibia, the Orlam communities, organised in a quasi-military fashion, possessed a higher degree of social and political centralisation than the resident Nama and were superior to them in terms of combat skills.

The immigration of the Orlam at the beginning of the nineteenth century increased competition for use and control of land and water resources, a competition made more fierce by a severe drought in 1829-30. Ultimately, this conflict led to a greater military confrontation between the different peoples of the southern and central region of Namibia (nomadic cattle-breeders, who continually needed more land and water). The clash between the Khoi-khoi and the Herero for dominance over this part of Namibia was a struggle for survival in the face of increasingly scarce resources. Indirectly, it also demonstrated the effects of European colonisation and settlement of the Cape.

This period – of struggle for survival, and for the maintenance of traditional ways of living – also witnessed the first attempts to transcend the local forms of organisation and to establish larger, intercommunal power structures. Indeed, in a limited way, it is possible to discern the sketchy beginnings of more centralised power structures in the military domination of the Orlam over hitherto independent social entities – though it is doubtful whether the militarily superior Orlam communities, whose economy was based on extensive robbery, could be considered to be more advanced economically. Indeed, the supremacy of the Orlam, in its consequences for the development of a more centralised authority, contained a destructive and regressive element – the acquisition of wealth depended on the expropriation of militarily weaker communities, and was mainly spent on maintaining the Orlam's military superiority, through buying arms and ammunition, and other goods from European traders.

The establishment of Orlam dominance (in alliance with a few Herero groups) therefore, on the one hand, contributed to the consolidation of new, larger structures of power, tending to unity on a regional basis, while, on the other hand, it decisively weakened the existing local structures.³ As a result, the subsequent colonisation of the territory and its people was made easier.

Missionaries, traders and representatives of mining companies were

the early agents of an informal colonialism, and became active in the territory from the beginning of the nineteenth century. At first, their ideological and economic influence remained sporadic, and although they had some catalysing effect, they did not manage to control the internal social process.⁴ This situation changed in the 1850s; from then on, the increasing influence, especially of the Rhenish Mission, proved to be of considerable political, economic and social importance.

As long as the various local communities were still intact and functioning, the sporadic and uncoordinated activities of individual Europeans could not threaten their economic and social structure. The Herero, able to reproduce themselves economically by their immense wealth of cattle independently of outside influences, were correspondingly immune to foreign economic dependency and its cultural and ideological impact. The Ambo of the north had very little direct contact with Europeans. Rooted within the land they cultivated, their social organisation was a challenge the Rhenish Mission only dared to accept late in the nineteenth century (and then at first with little success). But the social units of the Orlam – already undermined and deformed by the colonial influences experienced in South Africa – were in a process of disintegration. Thus, foreign ideologies penetrated more quickly and had greater impact. Nevertheless, even in the south of Namibia, the mutual relations between missionaries and local leaders were never a one-dimensional or unilateral affair. The Africans always sought to make use of the missionaries for their own interests.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the Rhenish Mission had embarked upon a strategy which proved more successful than direct proselytising. Through extensive trading activities, the missionaries managed to influence the social and political development in the territory south of Ovamboland. How much political influence the mission wielded, moreover, did not depend on the personal intentions of the missionaries; rather, it was the existing local structures which influenced the political power of the mission. From the 1860s, the Rhenish Mission started to concentrate increasingly on the Herero communities and lend them their support, deliberately stimulating the challenge to the existing Orlam-Nama dominance. This political objective also determined the participation of the mission in the conflict between Nama and Herero. The mission enjoyed a near-monopoly over access to manufactured goods, including arms and ammunition, which it used to give selective support to certain local leaders. Thus, it fostered particularistic forces in opposition to the established centralised power structures. The material assistance which it provided also made the mission more attractive to local groups striving for greater influence, and helped put military conflict on a permanent basis.

The death of the two leading personalities of the Orlam-Nama hegemony, Jonker Afrikaner and his Herero ally, Tjamuaha, resulted in

the decline of the Orlam-Nama and greater fragmentation among the different communities, which benefited the Rhenish Mission's ambitions to expand its control over the territory. The Mission's activities then shifted from indirect military-strategic involvement to a concentration on economic and ideological priorities. Through its activities, it created a host of new wants and a wide range of new skills marketable only in a capitalist economy, a rudimentary understanding of which now gained ground. And, of course, the values introduced by the missionaries represented their own eurocentric and culture-bound perspectives and perceptions.

Influential as the Mission's role was during the second half of the nineteenth century, its activities were far from completely systematic. Yet, through them, not only were the first steps towards a more centralised power structure and inter-communal institutions undermined and reversed, but also the ability to resist foreign influence and invaders was considerably weakened. The situation that resulted provided the right conditions for the systematic colonisation of the territory.

The establishment of formal colonial rule

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British had established a station at Walvis Bay to buy cattle from the local Namibian population, mainly to supply St Helena Island, especially during the time of Napoleon's imprisonment there. In 1861, a political station for control of the guano trade was added to the post. Finally, in 1878, Walvis Bay was declared British territory, mainly to protect the few, small-scale economic activities of British individuals there. But these operations remained limited, as did British interest in the territory generally – thus offering the German empire the chance to acquire Namibia as a 'protectorate'.

Germany had been a latecomer to the 'scramble for Africa' – impelled more by its internal political and social situation than by the economic interests of imperialism. The subjugation of foreign peoples and their cultures was seen as a means of diverting Germany's own people from the social issues arising out of the industrial revolution. Profound social injustice and impoverishment as well as material and psychological deprivation had followed the establishment of a 'modern' capitalist system within Germany itself. The new colonial possessions, and the promise they offered of a better future, were seen as a means of appeasing growing dissatisfaction among large sections of the population and channelling their aspirations. At the same time, a small proportion of capitalists (mainly from the heavy industries), who controlled the institutions of state power, industrial production and trade, combined such arguments for the establishment of colonies with a pretended humanitarianism for the colonial peoples. Primarily, therefore, two

arguments were used for the public justification of the violent acquisition of colonies and the subjugation of millions – that such an initiative would serve not only the well-being and self-interest of all Germans, but also those of the indigenous populations. ‘European culture’ was exalted as the only valid criterion. Non-European or even non-German cultures were regarded as barbarous and, thereby, legitimate objects of violent conquest. The establishment of foreign institutions of dominance followed.

The ‘cultural task’ of the colonial invasion was a central aspect of the prevailing ideology. The spreading of ‘German civilisation’ in the early days of German imperialism has been described in typical fashion by a popular author of the period, who emphasised the ‘human obligation’ of German colonialism. ‘German diligence and German energy have gained an important field of activity. Now it is their task to make these countries accessible, to lead those, who are descended into barbarism, upward towards brighter heights of morality.’⁵ Typical also, and virtually undisputed, was the view expressed by a German woman settler early this century: ‘What do we know about the past of this country? Thousands of years of deepest ignorance passed over it. People, living until the present day like animals, dwelt in the grasslands and mountain nooks. They lived and perished without realising any sense of life.’⁶ From such a perspective it became possible to justify the destruction or even physical eradication of pre-colonial societies without remorse.

On 5 September 1884, then, the German empire formally declared the southwestern coastal strip of Africa as under her flag, from Kunene river in the north to Orange river in the south and to the sandy desert of the Kalahari in the east. This formal declaration of colonial responsibility was followed by a period in which a representative of the German empire tried to conclude ‘protection treaties’ with the local leaders – treaties designed to prevent the establishment of any hegemonial structure in the southern and central parts of the territory. The formal declaration of a colonial status did not, as yet, have any meaningful consequences for the Ambo communities in the north, who continued to live as before, without direct German interference. German policy was based on the antagonisms produced by the decline of the former Orlam-Nama hegemony and the growing strength of other social forces with their own particular interests. It was directed towards the establishment of a ‘balance of power’ among the African communities which would allow further colonial penetration without coordinated resistance from the African side.

At this time, the German empire was mainly preoccupied with building up its internal capitalist system. It was not yet in a position to take systematic advantage of its colonial prey. Economic interests within Namibia were mainly represented by a number of private ‘concessionary companies’, which mainly existed for speculative purposes

only. Designed to make short-term profits, they were not interested in making capital investment, or in the development of a field of economic activity – ample investment opportunities still existed at home. Economically and politically, the colony was attractive initially only as a potential settler colony.

The German authorities at this stage were not much interested in establishing functioning administrative structures, and left the management of the territory to the concessionary companies. They, in turn, were only interested in adding more land to their possessions and acquiring more mining rights. Consequently, the territory turned out to be a financial loss for the German government. Faced with this situation, the German government formally took over the colonial administration and full responsibility for the further development of the territory in 1890. The official German administration was established in 1893. Only from that time on did a colonial power structure and administrative apparatus come into being, which in its aims and effects was soon to threaten the way of life and very existence of the Namibian population.

In the years following 1890, the German colonial power began to integrate the existing local power structures into the administrative system and tried to make use of them as part of its concept of rule. It was during this period – between 1890 and 1905 – that the basic direction of Namibia's future political and socio-economic development was set. Specifically, it was oriented towards racial segregation and its ultimate expression, 'Apartheid'.

The policy of the German colonial administration aimed at the domestication of the African population by tying the local communities to German rule through new agreements with their leaders. The strategy of 'divide and rule' emerged on a more sophisticated basis and found its expression in the 'system Leutwein', named after the first governor of 'German South West Africa', who, between 1894 and 1904, was the highest colonial official in the territory. As Leutwein put it, in his memoirs:

The final aim of each and every colonisation is – stripped of all its idealistic and humanitarian accessories – finally just a simple business. The colonising race does not intend to bring the possibly expected fortune to the indigenous population of the country to be colonised. Instead it is in the first instance looking for its own advantage . . . With respect to the way of colonisation there is consequently basically only one guiding principle, namely the one which leads most safely towards the aspired business.⁷

During this time, the ambivalent character of the traditional African leadership became apparent in all its variations: while some local leaders allowed themselves to be bribed by the colonial authorities,

others actively led anti-colonial struggles. Leaders who were prepared to serve as instruments of the colonial administration were rewarded with pensions of up to 2,000 German Marks annually. Communities (tribally defined) were moved to fixed areas in order to restrict their mobility and to improve colonial administrative control. Reserves were established, which later, under the doctrine of Apartheid, were to be labelled 'traditional homelands'.

Although the 'system Leutwein' preferred peaceful solutions to the application of military violence, the implementation of this policy, when necessary, also included violent repression against leaders who did not cooperate. Some of them were liquidated; others were put under extreme pressure and finally forced into pacts with the administration. By the mid-1890s, Leutwein had managed to establish a sort of alliance, using his military superiority directly only in situations where the chiefs would not 'voluntarily' compromise.

For the first time, the German colonial authority thus gained a loose supremacy and overlordship within the territory. A decisive factor in the success of this policy was when Leutwein won control over the two most influential leaders of the southern and central parts of Namibia, Hendrik Witbooi of the Nama alliance, and Samuel Maharero, who, as a reward, was made the 'paramount chief' of the Herero – a position hitherto unknown among the various Herero communities, which had lacked such a structured hierarchy. Maharero cooperated with the Germans in return for the support they offered him in the stabilisation of his powerful position among the various Herero communities. Hendrik Witbooi, at this time ambitious to reconstruct a new Nama hegemony (he had already been at war with the Herero for years), rejected outright any foreign 'protection'. He was only forced into a treaty by his defeat by the German troops.⁸

The Leutwein policy of allowing limited authority to accepted leaders, while at the same time restricting their activities to a defined area, in certain respects followed the British practices of indirect rule. It sought to use the local hierarchies for its own purposes – or even created such hierarchies where they did not already exist, as the example of Maharero showed. The manipulation of groups (defined tribally) in this way enabled the colonisers to keep the African peoples separated and isolated, and so prevent their collective action. They were thus kept at bay; but complementary measures, to integrate the African people into the developing structures of the colonial settler society, were not taken.⁹ There were no opportunities for Africans at all within the colonial administration, or any aspect of settler society. The infrastructure that was established was oriented solely towards the white immigrants – it did not even pretend to aim at social progress for all. Education – essential if adaptation to social change and the values of colonial capitalism were to be brought about – remained the complete and

private responsibility of the missions (though later it was modestly subsidised by the colonial authority). The missions' training mainly concentrated on the basic skills and qualifications needed for the bottom of the social hierarchy and production processes of the colonial economy. Attempts to train Africans as artisans and petty officials in the colonial administration failed – not for lack of interest by Namibians, but because the rigidity of the settler society excluded – almost without exception – the colonised majority from participation in the system above the level of simple manual work.* Cheap labour was all that was needed – as domestic servants, farm workers, construction workers and, later, in the mines.

The limitations of this system became more and more obvious as the European settlement increased. Initially, the only real economic opportunity for the white immigrants was large-scale farming – more precisely, ranching. Thus, their main interest lay in the brutal and systematic expansion of their holdings of land and cattle – in other words, in the further expropriation of the African population – without even offering in return opportunities of employment within the capitalist sector of the colonial economy. The settlers were only concerned with appropriating land and cattle by means of violent or fraudulent practices, and in obtaining 'legal' backing for these methods by the colonial administration. Leutwein's original concept of colonial administrative rule had favoured the creation of opportunities that would allow the African population to adapt to the emerging new structures and social relations, but under increasing pressure from the settler community, the administration extended greater and greater support to the violent and brutal methods of expropriation practised by the white settlers. For Leutwein, not to have continually passed legislation directed against African interests would have meant risking confrontation with the settler community – he would have been accused of not only undermining the settlement of Germans in the territory, but of also ignoring the interests of the German empire as well. Nothing was offered, by way of compensation or economic incentive, that would have allowed even the most limited integration of the colonised into the new colonial society. There was no 'appeasement policy'.

Yet, for the first half of the 1890s, despite the establishment of a colonial administration which was to develop on these lines, and despite the first influx of German settlers, the Herero remained the strongest economic group. They still possessed an immense wealth of cattle and occupied the best grazing lands. And although they did not regularly participate in the colonial trade network, they dominated the market by

* 'Educated kaffirs' remained unemployed; they were perceived as a typical product of 'liberal' British-style economism, and were rejected. It was not until the 1950s that the first few Namibians were able to matriculate in their own country.

sales of cattle. Their economic dominance was only destroyed by a cattle epidemic in 1897, which decisively weakened their social and economic position. The immense loss of cattle made the Herero more dependent on European goods; as they could no longer trade in cattle, the possession and sale of land started to become the subject of business. For the first time, impoverished Herero started to earn their living as wage labourers in sizeable numbers, and white settlers began to enter Hereroland to settle on a permanent basis. The Namibian economy had begun to develop on European lines.

German capital now began to participate in the long-term planning of economic development within the economy. It pressed for the construction of a railway network and other infrastructural investments for the development of the country's resources. All these measures were of strategic military value, and at the same time facilitated the exploitation and export of Namibian resources. The 'labour question' now came to the fore as the most burning issue: as the need for African workers increased, the labour supply became the main economic problem. There was a chronic shortage. To increase the supply of badly needed labourers, colonial authorities made use of increasingly violent methods. Settlers and colonial officials alike failed to realise that the most brutal methods were not necessarily the most profitable ones. Labourers for white farms, mines and railway construction now became sought after. The uncompromisingly violent character of the German colonial regime became even more obvious, as a strategy of unmitigated force was employed to force the black population into the colonial-capitalist economic system.

Leutwein's original ambitions, to integrate the African masses into the economic and social system of the colony with as little use of physical violence as possible, met the unanimous and uncompromising opposition of the settler community and even the majority of his officials within the administrative structure of the colony. These settlers and officials supported terrorist methods, aimed at the complete subjugation of the African population – even at the risk of genocide.

Under these conditions, resistance became for the Africans an existential necessity – a struggle for very survival. At the turn of the century, a series of local rebellions took place. Restricted to regional and uncoordinated actions, they necessarily ended in military defeat and further restrictions. The suppression of these isolated armed risings was used by the colonial authorities further to expand the policy of creating reserves. Through the 'peace treaties' it laid down, the colonial regime improved its system of control and dictated limited areas for settlement to the defeated communities. Rebellious leaders were executed, land confiscated, the people disarmed and deported for forced labour – especially to the railway under construction. The antagonisms inevitably increased. In 1904, the Africans rose in arms against the

violence of the settlers and their colonial regime. The 'German-Namibian War', which lasted three years until 1907, was an act of self-defence.¹⁰

Politically, this war resulted in the final collapse of the 'system Leutwein'. Leutwein had been criticised from the beginning for his 'liberal' and 'kaffir-friendly' approach – though this only appeared to be a matter of tactics and did not represent any fundamental disagreement concerning the basic aims of colonial rule – and in the opening months of the war, he was finally forced to retire.

His successor embodied the rabidly racist mood that prevailed among the settler community and the colonial-nationalist circles within the German empire. According to von Trotha, who in June 1904 received orders to direct the military operations of the colonial troops in Namibia, the genocide of the African population had by now become a necessary task and even a historic cultural necessity.¹¹ Von Trotha's perverse philosophy culminated in the issuing of an extermination order against the whole Herero people – at a time when they were already decisively beaten. Of an originally estimated 80,000 Herero, after the war only about 16,000 were believed to be still alive. Their leader, Samuel Maharero, who had cooperated with the German authorities for the sake of his own privileges for nearly twenty years, managed to escape with a few followers through the waterless Kalahari into Bechuanaland.

The Herero's military struggle for survival triggered off hysterical reactions among the settler community and resulted in a campaign against all Africans. Race hostility of the most intense and virulent kind reached a paroxysm, resulting in the most violent repression all over the country. Finally, the Nama leader (for ten years a solid ally of Leutwein and the colonial administration) led his people into battle, but not till after the Herero had already been virtually destroyed. The Nama in the south conducted efficient small-scale guerrilla war; the most effective military forces were led by Hendrik Witbooi personally and Jacob Marengo (often incorrectly referred to as Morenga). Ethnic origin played no important role among the combatants in these small battle-units. In fact, the guerrillas fighting in the south could be seen as the first nucleus of the emerging Namibian nation in its anti-colonial struggle. Hendrik Witbooi – over 70 years old – died from a battle injury; Jacob Marengo fought on for several years, and was only defeated with the support of the British colonial authorities in neighbouring Cape Province. Witbooi and Marengo are to the present day symbols of resistance to the Namibian people. Once more, the price of resistance proved to be bloody: it is estimated that less than half of the 20,000 members of the Nama communities survived the battles or the imprisonment and forced labour that followed their defeat.

The developed colonial economy: consolidation of Apartheid

By 1907, with the total and final defeat of the Africans fighting in the central and southern parts of Namibia, the German colonial power gained complete de facto control of and power in the territory. From then onwards, Namibia, right up to the Ambo settlement area of the north, was converted into a settler colony dominated by Europeans to an even greater extent than in contemporary South Africa. The surviving Nama and Herero were initially put into concentration camps. Subsequently, almost everyone was forced to the status of slave labour in the service of the colonial economy. By 1914, only about 200 men of the two tribes were reported not to be in employment.¹²

The consequences of the insane philosophy of General von Trotha (who, in fact, only represented and articulated the extremist ideology of the Europeans at that time) became obvious with the even greater shortage of labour. Though calculated for in military terms, the complete destruction of the tribal societies, culminating in genocide, ran counter to the economic logic of the capitalist interest.

The white settler community, faced again with the chronic labour shortage, once more relied upon the intensification of non-economic violence. The colonial administration combined this approach with regulations which would prevent further organised resistance of the African majority once and for all. The greater portion of the new regulations were intended to force the Africans into employment in the colonial-capitalist sector, while at the same time they attempted to destroy the last ties between the African communities. In 1906, all non-Ovambo were prohibited from entering the northern part of Namibia. In the same year, the authorities decided to expropriate almost all Namibians south of Ovamboland of their communal land and cattle. This step destroyed the last opportunity for Africans to continue, at least on a modest basis, with their traditional methods of production and social organisation.

And, of course, the gulf between black and white had already been unbridgeably fixed. In 1905, a law had been issued prohibiting mixed marriages. Thus, the social separation according to racial categories which already existed was legally cemented. Racial differences were the basis for colonial class antagonisms and were the criteria for strict social segregation. Strict social segregation according to racial differences was based on 'science' of 'race superiority'. Paul Rohrbach, formerly commissioner of settlement issues in Namibia and a typical representative of colonialism, based his programme and policy on the premise that Africans had a biologically determined limit to their development, and would always be incapable of reaching the level of the whites. Miscegenation would pose a threat of basic degeneration to the whites, with the consequent gradual loss of their racial superiority.

Racial superiority was to be the guiding principle for any interaction, based on the master-servant relationship.¹³

European domination was now deeply entrenched in every sphere and, from this time onwards, serious alternatives to the newly established system were no longer even mooted. The prime necessity was cheap African labour, and Ordinance no 82 of 1907 regulated anew the control of the African population, defined contracts for service and employment, and made it obligatory for Africans to carry a pass. It also called for the prohibition of cattle-breeding and land purchase by Africans, and the introduction of organised contract labour. With the discovery of diamonds in 1908, and the development of a labour-intensive diamond industry, the demand for labour became even more urgent.

Before this period, the settlement of the Ambo groups had, as was mentioned earlier, been influenced only indirectly by the German colonial administration. Of no real interest to the white settlers hitherto, the Germans had not included the northern area in their immediate and direct sphere of control. Instead, they had established a moderate degree of influence, largely based on the cooperation of the Ambo leadership. But now, it became increasingly attractive as a potential reservoir of black labour to be used in the colonial economy. After the discovery of diamonds in 1908, Ovamboland became the supply-base for migrant labour in the mines and was thus effectively integrated with the capitalist sector of the colonial society.¹⁴ This policy was given further impetus by the effects of a severe drought in the northern parts of Namibia during 1912 to 1914, which finally forced many Ovambos to earn their living within the settler-dominated money-economy. (In 1911, the first governmental labour management institution for contract workers had been installed at the border of Ovamboland. By the end of 1912, recruiting agents for migrant workers had been appointed in the northern areas.)¹⁵

With this economic penetration of the Ambo societies, the military invasion and subjugation of this area became unnecessary. The expansion of the colonial economy had undermined the mode of production and social structures of the Ovambo much more effectively and profitably. Up to today, the migrant workers from the northern parts of Namibia represent the most deprived category of Namibians. As a consequence, they formed the social basis for the rise of SWAPO half a century later.

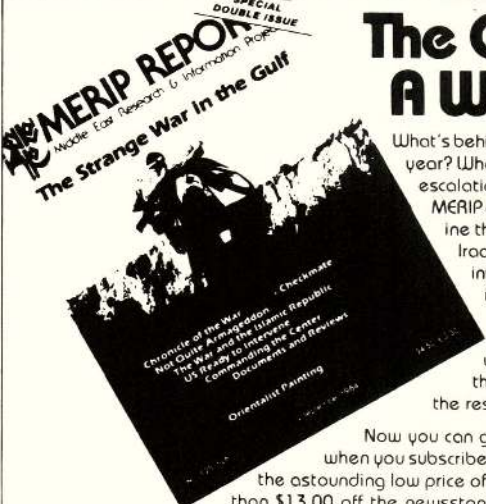
Geographical separation according to racial and ethnic categories; reserves, in which the African population was condemned to live; pass-laws; a rigid legal superstructure, which made race a criterion for class positions – all these are phenomena of a racist class society, as it already existed in Namibia under German colonial rule. When South African troops occupied Namibia in 1914-15, German colonialism had

prepared and created the structures of Apartheid, which afterwards were perfected by the South African regime and supplied with a specific ideology and doctrine of racial rule. The model, however, bore a German trade-mark.

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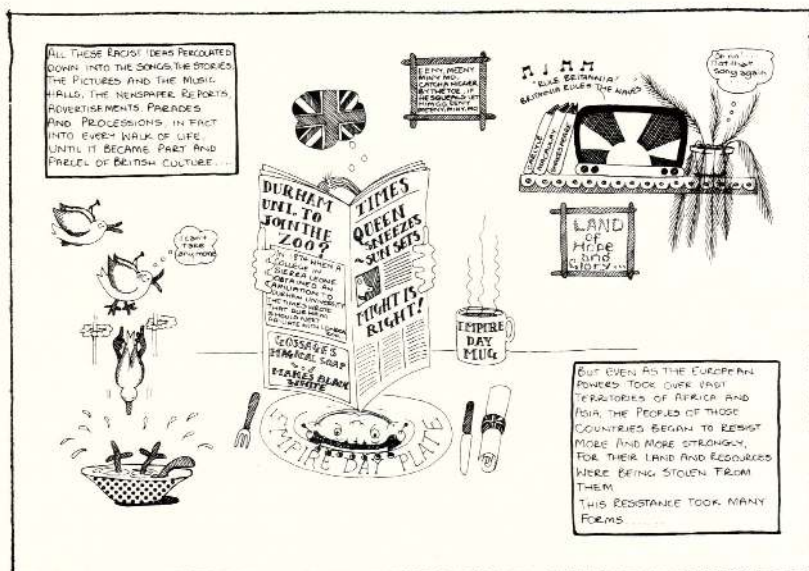
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Notes and documents

Namibia: an interview with Ellen Musialela*

Q: How do you see the prospect for independence now and what do you think about recent South African moves to install another so-called internal government?

A: I won't say that independence will come today or tomorrow – it might wait 200 years because sometimes these things become like a mirage. You might say that it is still far away or near, but what I can say is that independence for Namibia today lies in ourselves, in Namibians. We try to mobilise ourselves and all women and men to join us and to intensify the liberation struggle. This is the armed struggle because I believe this is the only way which will make South Africa understand that the people of Namibia are serious.

There are liberated zones where the South African army dare not go. The whole of the north is a war zone, and at the same time I would call it a semi-liberated zone because – although the South African forces have their bases there – there are some areas they dare not go into. Our fighters have the support of the people, and since the majority of Namibians live in the north, so South Africa finds it very difficult to know who is a SWAPO freedom-fighter or their sympathisers and who sympathises with South Africa.

The women in the villages are playing the largest role giving freedom-fighters food, shelter and water, and they also guide them away from

* Ellen Musialela is a representative of the SWAPO Women's Council, based in Angola. She was interviewed, in March 1985, by the SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign, and *Race & Class*.

where the South African soldiers are based. They are doing so as mothers, fed up seeing their children killed – so they have taken this serious stand. Many have been arrested because of their call. But they now stand up in the open and support their children – they are not hiding from the racist regime of South Africa.

As you know, South Africa has been trying to cheat the world by saying that they are interested in giving independence to Namibia, which is not true. They want a government which will be sympathetic to them and they've been trying by all means to secure that. They install this internal settlement whose participants will not be a threat to the racist regime. This should be a warning to our friends that so long as you continue to give us solidarity and diplomatic and material aid, our liberation struggle will be strengthened.

Q: With particular reference to the war situation, has the enforced compulsory registration meant that there are a lot more refugees coming out from Namibia? And how does the economic situation affect women's lives in Namibia?

A: The South African government admits that the strength of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) has increased and, as a result, it has now tried to recruit all those young men from the ages of 17 to 55 to join the army and this has alerted everyone inside the country. Some of them, of course, we know are politically aware, but others, when told to join the army and go to kill their own brothers, then they really start to think. Hundreds of them have been coming out, and not only men but women too. Some of them are, of course, forced to leave because their husbands are leaving them behind and to remain alone inside the country is difficult. Women have to live alone in the so-called homelands and try to till barren land so they can produce food. So when the husband comes out, they follow also, in their hundreds. For those working, in the fish-canning factories, etc., the economic situation is not good. Some factories have closed down, so workers have been laid off because the South African regime can no longer afford to pay them. These people are also forced out of the country. The whole country has been ravaged – no longer only the north where the war is very intense, but it has spread to other areas like Windhoek. Hundreds come every day to the camps in Angola, crossing the borders to come. I don't think the situation will change until Namibia is free.

Q: Do you think that the South African government is preparing another invasion of Angola? They've recently held a huge military exercise on the northern Namibian border and also warned they might make incursions across the border to attack SWAPO bases.

A: Well, we've been expecting this to happen because they have said they want to weaken SWAPO and to break the backbone of SWAPO.

This should not come as a surprise to our friends. We are prepared if ever they come, both we of SWAPO and our Angolan comrades. We have already promised to wage, from trench to trench, the liberation struggle with them. Whether South Africa invades or not – we are ready for them – this is not going to deter us.

South Africa has been trying to force all frontline states to sign a similar accord [to Nkomati] and expel ANC fighters. We are fortunate, because they haven't managed to make Angola say we have to leave and lay down our arms. Angola and South Africa have signed an agreement that South Africa will withdraw its troops from the soil of Angola. Later, the Angolans realised that the signing was aimed at stopping the movements of SWAPO, although this was not in the agreement. And, in any case, SWAPO does not fight on the Angolan side, it fights in Namibia, so why should Angola stop them? South Africa hasn't removed all its troops from Angola because their aim was that Angola would stop SWAPO movements. But the Angolan government has said it is not in a position to stop SWAPO and this has meant the racist troops still occupy parts of Angola, and we don't know how long this will continue.

Q: What is the situation in the refugee settlements now? What are the shortages and what are the most urgent needs that solidarity groups here can campaign around? We've also heard that people have started building more permanent housing. What is the implication of that?

A: About the buildings – when you are waging a struggle, you don't know when it will end, and we feel that when we are putting up buildings, it's not that we want to stay permanently in another country – most of our buildings are prefabricated and can be removed when Namibia becomes independent. When it comes to shortages – well, refugees need everything, especially the women and children. We have problems in the area of health. Just recently, there has been an outbreak of meningitis and typhoid fever, and malaria is a huge problem, of course. We already have a shortage of drugs and with so many people coming from home, I can't even say that we have 60,000 or 70,000 people and we need so many medical supplies because these numbers may increase tomorrow. As you know, the women need sanitary towels, there is always a shortage of these; underwear is also in short supply. In Angola, we cannot buy soap because, due to the struggle against internal enemies, UNITA, etc., there is not enough even for the Angolan people, and soap is essential for good health care. We also have a lot of children and for them the problem of malnutrition is dangerous. To combat this, we need high protein foods, but we also need people who are trained to prepare them. When friends want to help us, they need to think carefully about training people also.

Q: Can you tell us something about the work and priorities of the SWAPO Women's Council?

A: Our priorities are first of all to mobilise the women. As you know, in the country itself it is very hard to come together as one because of the South Africans. So we try to conscientise our people and, through political classes, make them aware of what we are fighting for as women and as a nation. We have to make sure that the struggle we are waging is not to fight amongst ourselves as men and women but to fight the regime, to wipe it out, because apartheid itself is a government that separates people by race and sex. During this time, when we are still in the struggle, we have to explain to them that they should not feel inferior but use their talents as women. There is nothing wrong with a woman being a medical doctor or an engineer. So we have to make sure that we encourage our women to take these challenging jobs – and, for sure, the majority are doing so. We now have women doctors who have completed their training, whereas in South Africa, or before they came out, it was really like a myth to hear that a black woman had become a doctor or an engineer and so on. The racist regime of South Africa failed to train even one African doctor, whereas now SWAPO has managed to train four or five. They are now running our hospitals in Angola and Zambia. Women are also involved in kindergarten work. We have the biggest kindergarten in Angola, which houses about 700 children. The head of that kindergarten is a woman doctor.

We also explain to those who have not had the privilege of higher school that they should not feel inferior. We created small projects so they can come forward and use their skills, producing clothes for themselves and their children, and also producing food. Since 1980, for example, our weaving project has expanded and now we are not only able to supply our people in the camps with clothes and blankets, but also to sell some to our friends in Angola. We have recently got funds from a friendly organisation to build a factory which will be divided in two – production and training. In the free Namibia, these women with training will be able to do more than just sit in their houses. They will be able to form cooperatives. I'm now talking about middle-aged and elderly women who did not have the opportunity to go to school.

In Zambia, we also have a chicken project which is doing fine – and we are now selling some of the eggs and meat to the Zambian authorities. We have also been involved in a literacy campaign, sending men and women to Zimbabwe to be trained in literacy teaching – we pick them according to their languages. We are now producing some books in the local languages which are used in the camps.

Q: This year marks the end of the United Nations Decade of Women and there is a conference in Nairobi in July this year to review the Decade. What has this Decade meant for Namibian women and what is

the SWAPO Women's Committee view of the Decade and the Nairobi conference – will SWC be represented?

A: To us of SWAPO Women's Committee (SWC), this Decade has awakened a lot of consciousness amongst us. It came at the right time, from 1975 on, when we had a lot of women coming out of the country. At that time, we were a body almost without leadership, but we have tried within this time to organise ourselves to face the challenges ahead of us. When the Decade was halfway through, we organised a congress of women where the leadership of SWC was elected. We made a point of looking at our aims and objectives and forming a constitution which incorporated the steps laid down in the Decade to improve the condition of women and children. In so doing, we initiated all the projects we now have in the camps. And it is within this Decade that we have seen our women take up the challenge and succeed, as medical doctors and engineers and in many other fields – not only in the camps, but also working with other governments in Southern Africa. There are those who cannot make their contribution within SWAPO at this time, so we assign them to other governments, where they won't forget their training and will gain practical experience.

The UN itself funded a lot of programmes for our women, including upgrading courses and providing reasearch opportunities. The Decade has also provided challenging programmes which have motivated us. The literacy campaign, which is going so well, has been part of this. But apart from the women's studies, it has raised our consciousness and helped us to express solidarity with the women's movements in the West, the East and Africa itself. So the Decade has made us work very hard, challenging ourselves and challenging our men to see that even women are capable of achieving things. Also, during this Decade, the number of our women in the leadership of SWAPO and of PLAN has gone up.

Q: So there will be a delegation to Nairobi? What do you expect to happen at the conference?

A: Definitely, we are trying to send a very strong delegation to Nairobi, hopefully of twenty women, but this depends on finding money for the tickets. We are trying to send such a strong delegation because the Americans and their allies are trying to silence the aims and objectives of the Decade and win everything for themselves. For example, you know that the slogan of the Decade is 'Equality, Development and Peace', well, the Americans don't want us to talk about equality or peace, only about development. But without peace, you can't have development, and without equality and development, there is no peace as such. But the US government – not the US women's organisations, with whom we have had good contacts – is sending a huge delegation to Nairobi, led by President Reagan's daughter, in order to veto all the resolutions which will be put forward in favour of our liberation

movement. That's why I'm calling on all progressive women's organisations to go to Nairobi as a united front. The situation is not in our favour and we need our friends from the West and the East to help us fight hard so that the resolutions in favour of the liberation movements get passed. As long as we are not united as women, we will not have peace. And as women, we are the people mostly affected, our children are the ones who have to go and fight or are the ones to be killed – all the pain comes to us women. So while we are separated into small groups, we can be defeated. It is time to stand together as women and fight back.

UNESCO: the struggle for survival

The United States announced in December 1983 that it would leave the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at the end of 1984 unless changes were made. It has now withdrawn. Britain has also informed UNESCO that it will follow the US in withdrawing from the organisation unless 'significant signs' of change appear by the end of 1985.

UNESCO is in the deepest crisis ever faced by any UN organisation. Ever since it sponsored the San Jose inter-governmental conference on communications policies in Latin America and the Caribbean in July 1976, the public debate on the actual role of UNESCO, the question of press freedom and the information communication needs of the developing countries has assumed a surrealist quality. In what appears to be a no-holds-barred brawl, the adversaries – championing either the 'free' or the 'balanced' flow of information – seem to be railing at, rather than talking to, each other, and often on different levels. They have made the issues involved appear incompatible and irreconcilable.

The objects of UNESCO are 'to contribute to peace and security by promoting cooperation among nations through education, science and culture, in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations'. In practice, the organisation's main work has been to give aid and advice to less developed countries striving to build up their educational systems.

There are two main issues bedevilling UNESCO. One concerns US accusations of UNESCO's 'anti-western bias', 'high handedness', 'misuse of funds', 'inefficiency' and 'nepotism'. The second issue – which this paper will concentrate on – is that of communications policy, particularly with regard to the mass media. In both cases, the US

and other western countries have charged UNESCO with politicising the aims and objects of the organisation.

It would be unrealistic to expect the total exclusion of politics from UNESCO's activities. The UN and its agencies are, after all, a global political forum, intended to transmute potentially serious disputes between countries into quasi-technical disagreements which can be resolved, at least in part, by multilateral debate and negotiation. Furthermore, education and communications have a greater inherent element of ideology than such areas as health or agriculture.

An analysis, particularly of social phenomena, presupposes a theoretical framework, and this is particularly true of the current debate on communications policy within UNESCO. Even to conceptualise the problem in terms of an international order – old or new – is already to have accepted a certain theoretical position. The theoretical framework within which UNESCO's communications policy has been formulated is largely the product of a particular approach to development issues which had been evolved through the late 1950s and 1960s. It owes a great deal to the pioneering works of Paul Baran¹ and Paul Sweezy² of North America and Andre Gunder Frank³ of Latin America. Their primary contribution to the development debate was to demonstrate that:

1 Underdevelopment and poverty are primarily (not entirely) the function of the accumulation and expansion of capital in and from the western industrial societies (the North) to the colonies (the South) – the movement of capital from the centre to the periphery and the reverse flow of surplus value from the South to the North to strengthen further accumulation and expansion in and from the North.

2 The two-way movement of capital and surplus value renders it impossible to even understand, much less resolve, the development problems of the South except in terms of their integration into the world economic system dominated by western capital. Poverty and affluence are in a symbiotic relationship – neither can be understood except in relation to the other because they are interdependent.

3 The domination of the world economic system by western monopoly capital explains not only the phenomenon of underdevelopment in the South, but also the values, culture and consciousness imposed. Capital transmits not merely economic and political subservence, but cultural degradation as well.

This was the theoretical basis underlying the fight for political emancipation of the South in the 1950s and 1960s. Opposed to this paradigm was that propounded by the theoreticians of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, principally Walter Rostow,⁴ who saw the problem of development in the countries of the South primarily in terms of the need for a larger flow of capital from the North to the South, and also in terms of the internal dynamics of the societies of the South themselves.

In the 1960s, the theoretical framework propounded by Paul Baran et al was applied to the analysis of international trade by Raul Prebisch, another Latin American and the first Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In the 1970s, the same theoretical framework came to be used for the first time to analyse communications and information phenomena, primarily through the work of Herbert Schiller of San Diego, California.⁵ He was followed by Karrle Norduestrong, Cees Hamelink, Juan Somavia and Armand Mattelart in the latter half of the 1970s. Up to the time that Schiller entered the debate, theoretical thinking in communications and information had been dominated by Daniel Lerne,⁶ Wilbur Schramm⁷ and Everett Rogers⁸ of Stanford. They saw communications in the Third World both as a means to and as a function of modernisation. It was the adoption of this paradigm by many Third World countries in the late 1950s and 1960s and its disintegration and collapse in the 1970s that created the theoretical vacuum into which Schiller et al have moved. And, using the theoretical tools of the Baran-Schiller school, it is easy to lay bare the constituent elements of the world information order current today.

These theories have been noted here in order to apply them to the concrete problems being experienced by Third World countries in the field of mass media development. The questions are: Is the Third World demand that news disseminated internationally by the transnational wire services should reflect the realities, true concerns and views of the developing countries, irreconcilable with the right of the media to collect and disseminate news without government intervention? Does the developing countries' pressing need to use communications media for furthering social and economic development automatically dictate government control of national news media? Or does the developing countries' objective of setting up national news agencies represent a sinister threat to free flows of news? Is the fundamental principle of freedom of the press really in conflict with the developing countries' demand for a better share in the world news flow, both quantitatively and qualitatively? Finally, why should developing countries rely exclusively on foreign news sources, which represent powerful economic interests, to hear about their own neighbours?

These questions and other related matters have been the concern of UNESCO for the past decade. This period has witnessed the emergence of a highly controversial debate on the desirability of a new international information order. For some years, many international forces have devoted serious attention to the question of how far the present international information system could or should be transformed. Most decisive in this debate has been the contribution from the movement of non-aligned countries. It has coupled a clear endeavour to obtain a new international economic order with the necessity for a new

international information order. In 1973, the heads of state of non-aligned countries, meeting in Algiers, determined that 'developing countries should take concerted action to reorganise existing communication channels which are a legacy from the colonial past'.⁹

Three years later, in March 1976, this was elaborated on during a symposium of non-aligned countries devoted to the information media. The final report of this symposium was given the title, *The emancipation of the mass media in non-aligned countries*. This emancipation 'reflects the fundamental interest ... in their economic and political liberation and is a basic factor in these countries which fight for independence, equality, prosperity, peace and co-operation'.¹⁰

On 25 October 1981, a 'consensus' resolution on the new international information order was adopted by 154 governments at the twenty-first General Conference of UNESCO (held in Belgrade). The document, which called for a new world information and communications order, followed a two-year UNESCO study of communications problems. The results of this study (the MacBride Report) were published under the title *Many Voices, One World*. Essentially, the report accepted that the concentration of news agencies, telecommunications facilities, mass media, data resources and manufacturers of communications equipment in a small number of highly developed countries precluded any chance of a free flow between equals, quite apart from the fact that news flows were already neither free nor balanced.

Ever since the MacBride Report was published, there has been a political tussle, with western industrial nations opposing a loose alliance between the Eastern bloc and some Third World countries which favours close control of the mass media by governments. The less developed countries object to the domination, as they see it, of international information links by the industrial nations through their news agencies and broadcasting networks. Indeed, the current situation is characterised by the one-way traffic of information due to the imbalance of resources and technologies between a few dominant western powers and most of the nations of the Third World.

The Third World's complaint against the international news media is twofold. First, only a quarter of the news that goes on the wires of the four western news agencies emanates from, or deals with, developing countries, although they make up nearly two-thirds of humanity. Second, most of the Third World news is negative and deals with such subjects as shortages, famines, natural disasters and political and military intrigues.

Because the content of information is largely produced by the main developed countries, the image of the developing countries is frequently false and distorted. More serious still, the news disseminated by the

four transnational news agencies is meant primarily for users in developed countries and has a very strong northern orientation. Paul Hartmann, an English media sociologist, points out that the 'big four' – Reuters, UPI, AP, and AF – provide 90 per cent of foreign news printed by the world's newspapers. 'They are based in the west and set up to serve the news needs of western media, the main market for their services is in the advanced industrialised countries, and hence the kind of information they disseminate is likely to be of interest mainly to these countries.'¹¹

Thus, what the developing countries want is world news by Third World journalists.¹² There is a genuine need for creating a channel through which developing countries can get news about each other, and the industrialised world, from their own perspective.

So the developing countries' criticism of the western media is soundly based. However, when Third World countries criticise the western press for biased and distorted reporting, they are not, generally speaking, questioning the factual accuracy of western news agencies, or the honesty of their correspondents. Distortion does not necessarily mean a false representation of events, but rather an arbitrary selection and a biased evaluation of reality. The alleged objectivity of news presentation is belied by a slanted use of language, overemphasis on events of no real importance, and the general practice of making news by presenting isolated facts as if they were the whole.

Despite these criticisms, western countries continue to see the new world information order as a threat to press freedom. The *Financial Times* of London labelled the MacBride Report 'gobbledygook' and 'nonsense'. Rosemary Righter, writing in *The Times*, described the 'new world information order' as developing in a way which was incompatible with the free flow of information. 'Its empire-building in the communications field has been largely at the expense of its constitutional duty to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image.'¹³ And Jean Gerard, the US ambassador to UNESCO, has described the communications policy as legitimising programmes which promote the idea of state control. 'It is so skewed, so distorted, so far from its basic purposes, that I do not feel we have the right to stay, to be an accomplice.'¹⁴

Gerard's views about UNESCO clearly show how the Reagan administration is bent on crippling the organisation's capacity to serve as a focus for Third World discontent over the rich nations' dominance of the international news media. UNESCO's aim is to safeguard and extend the freedom of the press, by making the exercise of it a practical reality for Third World countries which lack the capacity to participate in the international exchange of information and feel that their news is carried in the western press only when it is of natural disasters and political corruptions.

Developing countries, which constitute a majority in UNESCO, see the western concept of the free flow of information as a fraud, and have seen no way of rectifying this except by seeking for a new world information and communications order. Since communication involves power, it is of the utmost importance that this power be exercised in a framework of participation and exchanges based on equality among individuals and nations, recognition of the right to cultural differentiation, recognition of the integrity and dignity of all cultures and respect for the identity of individuals and peoples.

It is wrong for the US, and Britain, to expect developing countries which are trying to gather together their resources and mobilise their populations for a great transitional effort to develop the same kind of 'free' and often confusing communications system which has developed in the West. It is equally wrong for the US and Britain to view the question of information and press freedom in UNESCO in terms of the East/West ideological divide.

The departure of the US from UNESCO must be seen against the background of its intense scepticism about all UN agencies. In 1977, the US had a similar tussle with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), but it fell short of a withdrawal from that body. In 1974, the US withheld contributions to the UNESCO budget after the Arab countries had succeeded in virtually manoeuvring Israel out of UNESCO, ostensibly because of Israel's alleged infringement of UN principles through its archaeological and other activities in Jerusalem. (The matter was temporarily resolved in 1976.) UNCTAD, the main forum for the North-South debate, has also come under fire from the Reagan administration, which chastised it for being too political in its deliberations.

The summit meeting of non-aligned countries held in Algiers in 1973 observed: 'It is an established fact that the activities of imperialism, are not confined solely to the political and economic fields, but also cover the cultural and social fields, thus imposing an alien ideological domination over the peoples of the developing world.'¹⁵ Similarly, the 1976 ministerial conference of the non-aligned countries on the press agencies pool noted: 'Just as political and economic dependence are legacies of the era of colonialism, so is the case of dependence in the field of information which in turn retards the achievements of political and economic growth ... The conference reaffirmed ... that the establishment of a New International Order for Information is as necessary as the New International Economic Order.'¹⁶

To conclude, what are the consequences of the withdrawal of the US from UNESCO? The loss of the US contribution will deprive UNESCO of about \$50m, or one-fourth of its operating budget, and may force it to borrow from the world market. The cut in US aid could cripple programmes such as the campaign to fight illiteracy, scientific

projects to improve development technology and efforts to preserve world cultural heritage sites.

Yet, the departure of the US from UNESCO could prove a blessing in disguise. The US, Britain or any other member state should not be allowed to have the power of veto over how funds are spent or what issues ought or ought not to be discussed. The less money UNESCO has, the more efficient the organisation must be. Freed from the bullying tactics of the US, UNESCO can now, perhaps, achieve greater cultural, educational, scientific and technical effectiveness.

AUSTIN M. CHAKAODZA

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Book reviews

Zionism in the Age of the Dictators: a reappraisal

By LENNI BRENNER (London, Croom Helm, 1983). 278 pp. £11.95

The Iron Wall

By LENNI BRENNER (London, Zed Press, 1984). 220 pp. £5.95

The complex inter-relatedness between Zionist political philosophy and practice and modern secular anti-Semitism has been extensively reviewed in post-Second World War political science, history and philosophy – Zionist as well as anti-Zionist. Hannah Arendt's *Anti-Semitism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* are now recognised as classical works.

Anti-Semitism is an inadequate concept in this context. Jewish communities are not the only Semite collectivities against whom western secular political racism is directed, nor were they in the past or are they at present, its sole victims. Nazism has manufactured a murderous holocaust against Gypsy communities in Europe with the same methodical criminality which led to the annihilation of six million Jewish people during the twelve years of the reign of the Third Reich. And in post-Second World War western Europe and North America, anti-Arab racism has become much more virulent and destructive to Arab communities and individuals than anti-Jewish racism.

Lenni Brenner's two recent books, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (hereafter *Dictators*) and *The Iron Wall* (hereafter *Wall*), are devoted to the documentation of aspects of the interrelatedness of modern political Zionism and anti-Semitism. In this review, however, the term 'anti-Semitism' will be replaced with the term 'anti-Jewish

racism' for the sake of accuracy.

The practical convergence of political Zionism and anti-Jewish racism is not coincidental, nor adjacent or opportunistic. Both share a common statement about the existential status of Jews as minority communities in non-Jewish (Gentile) societies. Both the political Zionist and the anti-Jewish racist profoundly believe that given the primordial blood incompatibility of non-Jewish versus Jewish racial nature, the Jew, by definition of this incompatibility, can neither be, or be expected to be, an equal citizen and a free individual inside a non-Jewish polity and society. Note, for instance, Brenner's quote from Martin Buber (in *Dictators*). The quote will come as little surprise to those familiar with Buber's work, but may be a nasty shock for those who are only familiar with his manufactured and cultivated public relations image. In his *Drei Reden uber das Judentum* (1911), Buber spoke of the youth who

senses in this immortality of the generations a community of blood, which he feels to be the antecedents of his I, its perseverance in the infinite past. To that is added the discovery, promoted by this awareness, that blood is a deep rooted nurturing force within individual man; that the deepest layers of our being are determined by blood; that our innermost thinking and our will are colored by it. Now he finds that the world around him is the world of imprints and influences, whereas blood is the realm of a substance capable of being imprinted and influenced, a substance absorbing and assimilating all into its own form . . . Whoever, faced with the choice between environment and substance, decides for substance will henceforth have to be a Jew truly from within, to live as a Jew with all the contradiction, all the tragedy, and all the future promise of his blood.

And a quarter of a century later, Jacob Klatzkin, another leading member of the German Zionist movement, presented the argument in the following terms:

If we do not admit the rightfulness of antisemitism, we deny the rightfulness of our own nationalism. If our people is deserving and willing to live its own national life, then it is an alien body thrust into the nations among whom it lives, an alien body that insists on its own distinctive identity, reducing the domain of their life. It is right, therefore, that they should fight against us for their national integrity . . . Instead of establishing societies for defense against the antisemites, who want to reduce our rights, we should establish societies for defense against our friends who desire to defend our rights. (*Dictators*)

Both the anti-Jewish racist and the political Zionist conclude that the

welfare of Gentile society and Jewish community require that the body of Gentile society be made *Judenrein* (free of Jewish presence). For the anti-Jewish racist, it therefore follows that Jewish society must be segregated outside the body of Gentile society – hence evacuation, and, in the extreme, annihilation. For the political Zionist, it follows that Jewish society must be segregated outside the body of Gentile society in Palestine, redefined and reified in political Zionist ideology as the Land of Israel: the locus of concentration (‘ingathering’) of Jewish evacuees. The political Zionist will, of course, denounce and condemn the murderous articulations of anti-Jewish racism. The anti-Jewish racist is, therefore, the moral, ideological and practical ally of the political Zionist so long as anti-Jewish racism does not take the form of murder, pogrom and mass annihilation. This latter statement, however, must be qualified, in that, as Brenner documents, given the moral and ideological convergence of anti-Jewish racism and political Zionism, in practice the Zionist movement, as represented in the official institutions of the World Zionist Organisation, in critical junctures has opted for collaboration with (rather than war against) the anti-Jewish racists – even when their racism took on the murderous forms of anti-Jewish pogroms and genocide.

Political Zionism was founded and directed by Theodor Herzl, and the basic insights which propelled Herzl towards his political odyssey as the founder of the World Zionist Organisation (1897) are formulated in what has become the classical treatise of political Zionism, *The Jewish State: an attempt at a modern solution of the Jewish question* (1896). Both in his formal presentations and in his *Diaries*, Herzl outlines his conception of the inter-relatedness between political Zionism and anti-Jewish racism in clear and unambiguous terms: ‘In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to “combat” anti-Semitism.’ (*Dictators*)

By the 1930s, as Brenner shows, Labour Zionism had achieved hegemony inside the World Zionist Organisation and, therefore, the major part of *Dictators* documents Zionist attitudes and policies under Labour Zionist leadership. Key issues are examined in detail – for example, the question of boycotting trade with Nazi Germany (the World Zionist Organisation did not support the boycott and established a Nazi-Zionist trading company, *Ha-Avarah* (Transfer), to promote Jewish emigration and the transfer of Jewish wealth from the Third Reich to Palestine) and the question of Zionist immigration and selection policies as implemented against the backdrop of the intensified persecution of Jews in Europe. Brenner tellingly quotes Enzo Sereni, Labour Zionist emissary in Germany: ‘This may seem cruel ... we would still say: Let the young people go, for even if they suffer less than the older ones they are better fitted for the task in Palestine. Children

can later bring their parents, but not the other way round.' Also examined is the question of the rescue of Jews from Nazi extermination (as distinct from the rescue of Zionists and Jewish immigrants to Palestine from Nazi extermination). Thus, Ben Gurion, in 1938 before the Zionist Executive, on the question of rescue:

If Jews will have to choose between the refugees, saving Jews from concentration camps, and assisting a national museum in Palestine, mercy will have the upper hand and the whole energy of the people will be channelled into saving Jews from various countries. Zionism will be struck off the agenda not only in world public opinion, in Britain and the United States, but elsewhere in Jewish public opinion. If we allow a separation between the refugee problem and the Palestinian problem, we are risking the existence of Zionism.

Nor was it necessarily considered politic to publish the extent of the systematic Nazi annihilation of European Jewry, as Dov Joseph, of the Jewish Agency Political Department, made clear: 'for if we announce that millions of Jews have been slaughtered by the Nazis, we will justifiably be asked where the millions of Jews are, for whom we claim that we shall need to provide a home in Eretz Israel after the war ends'. As for allocating Zionist funds for the rescue of Jews outside the framework of Zionist immigration to Palestine, the Head of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee had this to say:

And this time in Eretz Yisrael, there are comments: 'Don't put Eretz Yisrael in priority in this difficult time, in the time of destruction of European Jewry.' I do not accept such a saying. And when some asked me: 'Can't you give money from the Keren Hayesod to save Jews in the Diaspora?', I said: no! ... I think we have to stand before this wave that is putting Zionist activity into the second row ... And because of this, people called me an anti-Semite, and concluded that I am guilty, because we do not give priority to rescue actions.

The betrayal of Hungarian Jewry by the Labour Zionist leadership through Zionist-Nazi collaboration, which led to the abandonment of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews for transport to Nazi concentration camps and annihilation in return for the evacuation of a Zionist train with some 1,700 passengers to Switzerland (the Kastner affair), has been previously documented in detail by Revisionist Zionist sympathiser Ben Hecht in *Perfidy* (1961). Brenner reviews the published material and rightly concludes that by far the most important aspect of the Kastner affair was 'its full exposure of the working philosophy of the World Zionist Organisation throughout the entire Nazi era: the sanctification of the betrayal of the many in the interest of a selected immigration to Palestine'.

The last chapter of *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* documents

the attempts by the *Lehi* (Hebrew acronym for Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) organisation, of which the former prime minister and present prime minister alternate Yitzhaq Shamir was a prominent leader, to negotiate an anti-British alliance in 1941 with Nazi Germany that would lead to 'the establishment of the historical Jewish state on a national and totalitarian basis, and bound by a treaty with the German Reich'. Revisionist Zionism has been in opposition to Labour Zionist hegemony in the World Zionist Organisation since the mid-1920s. It removed Labour Zionist predominance inside the Zionist movement following the July 1977 elections in Israel and the formation of a Revisionist Zionist (Likkud)-led government coalition under the leadership of Menachem Begin.

In *The Iron Wall*, Lenni Brenner traces Revisionist Zionist history through the political biographies of its three leading exponents and successive leaders: Vladimir Jabotinsky, Menachem Begin and Yitzhaq Shamir. The history of Revisionist Zionism is particularly illuminating, since it took the logic of collaboration with anti-Semites to promote Zionist objectives to its ultimate conclusion, making it an officially declared and publicly defended policy in terms which Labour Zionism never openly admitted. Brenner documents Jabotinsky's pact in 1921 with Simon Petliura, the arch anti-Semite and architect of the mass murder of Ukrainian Jewry between 1917 and 1920. He examines in detail Jabotinsky's pro-fascist diplomacy in Poland (which resulted in the establishment of a Revisionist Zionist military training facility Zakopane) and in Italy (which provided for the Revisionist movement military training facilities in Civitavecchia).

The book also covers the anti-Arab and anti-British terror operations of the Revisionist Zionist underground military arm, the *Irgun*, since the appointment of Menachem Begin as its commander-in-chief in 1943. These culminated in the Deir Yasin massacre (April 1948). It includes, too, extensive and useful translations from the classical Revisionist Zionist political tract, 'The Iron Wall' (which lends its name to the book), and the 'Fundamental Features of the Proposal of the National Military Organisation In Palestine (Irgun Zevai Leumi). Concerning the Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe and the Participation of the NMO in the War on the Side of Germany' (11 January 1941).

Although Brenner's work provides valuable information and documentation on the subject of Zionism and Israel, the two books reviewed here are not of even quality. *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* is a documentary work informed by the moral and the political insight of the author as an anti-Zionist scholar. As such, it is factually as well as politically credible. This cannot be said of *The Iron Wall*, which, though impeccably documented, is weakened by the author's attempts to supplement political analysis with pseudo-Freudian causal explanations. His political credibility is further weakened by repeated

irresponsible political statements verging on the nonsensical. Thus we read that 'there is nothing ambiguous about Jabotinsky's oral fixation'; that 'a son, Eri, was born on 13 December 1910 with a hare lip and a cleft palate ... it is reasonable to believe that the disaster had a chilling effect on his parents' sex life'. We further read that 'everyone understood that the tiny Zionist *yishuv* would have been driven into the Mediterranean by the Palestinians and the millions of Arabs in the surrounding countries, but for the presence of the protecting British troops'; and again, 'without the British army, a *Haganah* based on a tiny Zionist *yishuv* would have been driven into the sea'; and yet again, 'without the patronage of the British ... Zionism would have been driven into the sea by the overwhelming Arab population'.

Such statements are a political outrage. Without British Mandate patronage, military as well as political, the Zionist enterprise would not have been successfully introduced into Palestine. Had the British Empire at any time prior to 1948 withdrawn its patronage with the view of abandoning its 'small Jewish Ulster', the Zionist endeavour would have been defeated – but it is doubtful, except in Zionist propaganda, Arab chauvinist propaganda, and Lenni Brenner's peculiar version of revolutionary analysis, that any individual Zionist or any Zionist institution would have been 'thrown into the sea'.

Brenner's analysis of the PLO and Arab politics in *The Iron Wall* is also suspect as it abounds in sweeping statements such as 'the Egyptian capitulation was in a sense long overdue'; 'Beyond doubt, the Israelis would have hesitated to attack [the Lebanon in 1982] if they knew that they would have to face an armed people, or if they did attack, they would have suffered far greater casualties, but that severe omission was but one aspect of the PLO leadership's inadequacies in the pre-war period'. Nor is his political credibility greatly helped by statements such as 'the intellectual value of his [Begin's] primary education will best be appreciated if it is understood that the *Mizrachi* [Zionist religious movement] has yet to have produced a single ideological leader of the first rank even in Zionist terms'; and that 'Zionism most definitely made the desert bloom'.

There is no doubt that through his work Brenner has made an important and lasting contribution to anti-Zionist scholarship and to the elucidation and illumination of important aspects of Zionist history. It is regrettable, however, that the publishers of *The Iron Wall* did not exercise their editorial control more firmly and rigorously.

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URI DAVIS

Many Struggles: West Indian workers and service personnel in Britain (1939-45)

By MARIKA SHERWOOD (London, Karia Press, 1985). 137 pp.

Telling the Truth: the life and times of the British Honduran Forestry Unit in Scotland (1941-44)

By AMOS A. FORD (London, Karia Press, 1985). 96pp.

'I Think of My Mother': notes on the life and times of Claudia Jones

By BUZZ JOHNSON (London, Karia Press, 1985). 194pp.

We do not often in Britain have the opportunity of welcoming a new independent black press. Rarer still is the advent of a press which is intent on reclaiming black history, not only to make audible the muffled voices of the past, but to allow those voices to speak to ongoing struggles. Karia Press, set up with considerable sacrifice during the last year, has had as its point of departure the spirit of self-reliance and commitment which flourished in the black community in the 1960s. That spirit has become something of an oddity in today's climate of hand-outs and dependence. For this reason alone, Karia's publications are both timely and important, making up in integrity what they may lack in polish.

Marika Sherwood's *Many Struggles* documents the 'racism meted out to black people by the British State' during the war years. As Sherwood demonstrates, the British government saw nothing hypocritical in maintaining a colour bar in military service (it was not dropped until 1948) while fighting a supposedly anti-racist war. Nor did it treat the West Indian munitions and forestry workers it reluctantly recruited during a time of chronic labour shortage with anything approaching justice and equality. And so entrenched were racist attitudes within unions and industry that many West Indians who answered the call for labour found it difficult to get jobs unless they had been arranged in advance. The humiliations they endured while helping Britain's 'war effort' are concisely detailed here, as is the government's response when their 'usefulness' had come to an end: repatriation, as swift as possible.

Marika Sherwood devotes a chapter to the British Honduran Forestry Unit in Scotland, which is written about from a more intimate perspective by Amos Ford in *Telling the Truth*. Ford has lived his subject, and describes vividly what it was like to be brought from Belize (formerly British Honduras) to work in the logging camps of Scotland. His testimony is a valuable contribution to people's history, far removed from the official exchanges and nostrums resting in library archives. The story he tells is of more than 800 skilled workers from the West Indies being treated as unskilled menials, being given poor clothing and meagre food and no serious medical attention. He tells of friendships made in local villages, and of the ostracism of families who extended

their friendship to the lonely forest workers. And finally, the bitter end: the Honduran unit was summarily disbanded when it was deemed that contingents from Australia, Canada and New Zealand would cause fewer social problems. In 1943 the Honduran workers were deported from Britain. On their return, many were imprisoned at Ellis Island, New York, for months since the British government had not bothered to get their papers in order. They finally arrived home to impoverishment and unemployment, with no arrangements having been made for their re-settlement.

Claudia Jones made that journey in reverse – from the Caribbean (she was born in Trinidad and Tobago in 1915) to America and imprisonment, and then, in the last decade of her life, to Britain to carry on the fight against racism and injustice. Buzz Johnson has written a pathbreaking work about one of the great women fighters of our century, about whom astonishingly little has been publicly known. After an impoverished upbringing in New York's Harlem (her mother, a garment worker, literally died at her machine when Claudia was 12 years old), she joined the Communist Party at the age of 18, and began a lifetime of dedicated activism – editing a newspaper, organising against Jim Crow and colonialism, speaking and writing about the triple oppression endured by black women, and the cause of socialism and world peace. After the Second World War she became, like so many Communists and their sympathisers, the target of a government witch hunt. She endured a series of arrests and trials, and was finally imprisoned under the notorious Smith Act for allegedly working for the 'overthrow of the US government'. At the end of 1955 she was deported as an 'undesirable alien'.

And so Claudia Jones came to Britain. Although ill with a heart condition and the effects of TB contracted as a child, she immediately began to organise in Notting Hill. By early 1958, she had helped found the *West Indian Gazette*, an important weapon in the defence of the community during the race riots of that year. For the next six years Claudia was involved in anti-racist and anti-imperialist campaigns. After her death in 1964, she was buried next to Marx in Highgate cemetery.

As well as sketching her life, Buzz Johnson has included an anthology of some of her writings, and tributes paid to her at her death. The volume also features photographs of Claudia and other black activists. It is by no means the last word on her life and work – the book is too hurriedly put together for that. But if only for that very reason, it should serve as an encouragement to others to look in more depth at this indefatigable fighter who, in Paul Robeson's words, 'continued in our day the heroic tradition of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth –

the struggle for Negro (Black) liberation, for women's rights, for human dignity and fulfillment'.

London

NANCY MURRAY

Accumulation Crisis

By JAMES O'CONNOR (New York, Basil Blackwell, 1984). 262p.
£17.50.

O'Connor's *Fiscal Crisis of the State* (1973) broke new ground in several ways. It was the first intensive study of US fiscal (that is, governmental spending, taxing and debt) processes by a marxian economist – as such, it was, and remains, unique in integrating fiscal with broader economic, political and social processes and relationships. Also, among other contributions, it prepared its readers to understand the ensuing decade – no small achievement. But, in my view, *Accumulation Crisis* is more important (as, for marxists, its title suggests).

However turbulent the 1960s may have been, that decade stands as the most buoyant in world capitalism's history – it was a period of unparalleled worldwide capital accumulation. Enabling that process, and enhanced by it, was a cluster of tightly related and mutually interdependent socio-economic developments: the triumph of neo-colonialism (both despite and because of resistance and revolution in the Third World), the spreading and deepening of dazzling new technologies, the emergence and solidification of consumerism as a way (even the meaning) of life in at least all the industrial countries, astronomic levels of military spending in strategic nations of all 'three worlds', the perfection of the techniques of mind management for commercial and political purposes and, making all this necessary and possible and giving direction to it, the ever more closely-intertwined and dominating activities of the world's super-corporations and super-states. In short, world society underwent a sea change in that decade.

It is vital to note that this complex of developments would have been quite impossible had it not been for still another development, namely, the state's undergirding of an unprecedented process of debt accumulation, viewed either quantitatively or qualitatively. Indebtedness – of individuals, of companies, of governments, within and between nations – financed all forms of spending, which in turn allowed higher levels of production and development, jobs, incomes and taxation – and thus of more borrowing and more spending. *Fiscal Crisis* showed why and how that merry-go-round would inexorably end in motion sickness. O'Connor, in illuminating the fiscal crisis – that is the inability of then current levels and kinds of taxing and spending to continue – also foresaw looming political conflict between groups and classes that had been at

relative peace with each other. Without predicting the outcome, he made it clear that the stage was being set for a substantial move either to the Right or the Left.

Of course, the move was to the Right, in the US and elsewhere, and it continues. Its whys and wherefores and its limitations are explained in *Accumulation Crisis*, as is much else.

Given the propelling energy of an increasingly deep-seated crisis – recent ‘recoveries’ to the contrary notwithstanding – the key role in this shift has been provided by a well-fuelled resurgence of raw capitalist ideology, which O’Connor calls ‘neo-individualism’. But the nurturing role of this ideological triumph by and for capitalist rule serves also as a major element in the ongoing crisis. It is this argument that O’Connor pursues in *Accumulation Crisis*. The closest thing to a summary statement runs as follows:

Strong threads of continuity through change ... are woven into the history of capitalist crises. More specifically, ‘solutions’ to past crises became ‘problems’ during succeeding ones. In *economic* terms, the thesis of the present work is that the ‘solution’ adopted by capital and the state in postwar USA to historical crises of overproduction of capital slowly but inexorably created a crisis of underproduction of capital defined in terms of insufficient amounts of surplus value produced and unproductive utilization of the surplus value which was produced. In *sociological* terms, the argument is that the working class and salariat, large-scale capital and new forms of capitalist competition, and the state, i.e., the structure of modern US society, increasingly, albeit blindly, became social barriers to capitalist accumulation (emphasis added).

I have emphasised ‘economic’ and ‘sociological’ to make two points. The lesser of these, but still important, is that for those unfamiliar with *Capital*, the ‘economic terms’ will be heavy sledding indeed. However, the ‘sociological’ analysis, which moves along with the former and reflects back on it, makes the entire analysis understandable for any serious reader (even if untrained in economic analysis).

The economic terms constitute a careful, ingenious and successful adaptation and transformation of classical marxian economic theory to fit US capitalism in the late twentieth century – and thus begin to meet not only our analytical but also our political needs. The heart of the book is in the four chapters in which O’Connor analyses and clarifies ‘the money and commodity circuits of capital and the modern economic struggle’, ‘the productive circuit of capital’, ‘the process of consumption’ and ‘economic and social reproduction and the capitalist state’. The analytical plane of these chapters is high, and made intelligible by an astute and solid reference to contemporary reality. By any reasonable standard, these chapters alone are a *tour de force*.

Among those who are at home with marxian theory, many will find room for argument with O'Connor, and some will be enraged. The latter, all too numerous, are those who object to *any* modification of classical marxian theory, let alone extension of that theory into the 'sociological' realm. O'Connor will be called many names, therefore. The name he deserves, for this and his earlier work, is one that fits a scholar who has struggled long and well to apply his considerable analytical and observational powers to the needs of ordinary people. The manner in which O'Connor has done so, and this is also very important, has helped to keep marxism alive and dynamic, to make marxism, always necessary and always insufficient, clearly more necessary and significantly less insufficient.

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DOUGLAS DOWD

Pau Hana: plantation life and labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920

By RONALD TAKAKI (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1983). 213 pp.

Ganbatte: sixty-year struggle of a Kibei worker

By KARL YONEDA (Los Angeles, Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983). 244 pp. \$8.95.

Britain and the rest of the western Europe have become multi-racial societies in the period since the Second World War, when European capitalism required cheap labour to fill jobs and to limit the bargaining power of indigenous workers. A history of imperialism, unequal development and racism provided the necessary preconditions for the importation of Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, North Africans, Senegalese, southern Italians and Turks to perform these roles. Racism has achieved a new lease of life, initially to facilitate the exploitation of these new workers and more recently to scapegoat them for the economic crisis and the assault on the welfare state. It is instructive to see how such societies have been created in the past, how sojourners have become settlers, how racism becomes institutionalised and gives rise to the creation of multi-racial working-class consciousness and movements.

Both books address these questions. Takaki tells the story of the plantation labourers – 'Hawaiians, Chinese, Norwegians, Germans, Portuguese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos' – in the Hawaiian Islands. Yoneda tells the story of his sixty-year involvement in anti-racist, working-class politics in Japan and in the United States. The issues they deal with interconnect, as do the people. Yoneda's father worked on a Hawaiian sugar plantation for over ten years before migrating to the US – and the little Yoneda says of his father's experiences parallels exactly

Takaki's description of the life and work of the immigrant plantation workers. The theme running through both of these books is the creation and maintenance of a racially divided working class by capital and the state and of the struggles towards a common consciousness and resistance by those workers.

Takaki describes the creation of a multi-racial plantation society based upon the destruction of the indigenous Hawaiian society. He documents the planning and forethought which went into both parts of the enterprise. One of the founders of this new society, who established one of the first sugar plantations, William Hooper, recalled in his diaries the meaning of his labours: 'The tract of land in Koloa was [developed] after much pain ... for the purpose of breaking up the system aforesaid or in other words to serve as an entering wedge ... [to] upset the whole system.' Unfortunately for Hooper, the natives, whom he thought 'undependable ... children ... dull asses ... Indians', proved too resistant to the new discipline. As early as the 1850s, therefore, Chinese labour had to be imported to play off against indigenous labour. For, as George H. Fairfield, manager of the Makee Sugar Company, advised: 'Keep a variety of labourers, that is different nationalities, and thus prevent any concerted action in case of strikes, for there are few, if any, cases of Japs, Chinese, and Portugese entering into a strike as a unit.' The smaller number of European labourers disproportionately became overseers – *lunas* – and white Americans were, not surprisingly, the managers. In a very graphic description of such a society, Takaki says that the physical layout of the plantation reflected these power relationships.

Takaki discusses the type and patterns of resistance developed by the plantation workers and notes the similarities with the situation on the ante-bellum slave plantations in the south of the US. He traces the development of this resistance from largely individual tactics to more collective resistance – with a series of strikes culminating in the Great Strike of 1909, which was organised by Japanese workers, and the 1920 strike which went beyond 'blood unionism' to cooperation between Filipino and Japanese unions. The leaders of the Japanese Federation of Labor learned important lessons from this history and created an interracial union, the Hawaiian Laborers' Association, based on the views expressed by Takashi Tsutsumi, one of its leaders, who explained that the fact that the 'capitalists were haoles [whites] and the laborers Japanese and Filipinos was a mere coincidence and that Japanese and Filipinos had acted as laborers in a solid body aware of capitalistic tyranny over industry, the general awakening of labor throughout the world'. Although it was not until 1945 that Hawaiian workers organised into the International Longshoreman's and Warehousemen's Union (a left-dominated union) and successfully struck for collective bargaining and higher wages, that success was based on these earlier struggles and

on the lessons learned from them.

Karl Yoneda was one of the first American-born Japanese in the continental US. Born in California in 1906, he returned with his parents to Japan in 1913 and spent thirteen years there – hence the subtitle of his book (a Kibei was a Nisei raised or educated, partially or wholly in Japan). He became a member of the Japanese Workers Association and of the Communist Party; was an organiser with the Japanese Agricultural Workers Organising Committee of Southern California and of the Trade Union Unity League Agricultural Workers Industrial League; was editor of *Rodo Shimbun*, the official organ of the Japanese section of the American Communist Party; organised Alaskan cannery workers and was an active member of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (which later organised Hawaiian workers). He was a militant anti-fascist and was the first Nisei to volunteer for Military Intelligence after Pearl Harbour and served in the China-Burma-India Theatre. He is still active in community affairs and is still a member of the American Communist Party.

This book is an account of his involvement in sixty years of struggle. It is an important record of left and Communist Party activities, of anti-racist and anti-fascist activity, of the nature and level of police violence and repression, and of the centrality of racism in the capitalist system and of anti-racism in any progressive politics. The Communist Party's opposition to racism was of great importance and Yoneda writes: 'In discussions Japanese Comrades all agreed that racial discrimination against Japanese in this country would not end without the support of the Negro, other minorities and white workers. The Scottsboro Case, an example of the vicious character of anti-Negro racism, had been an eye opener for Japanese CPers, including me.'

He writes tellingly about racism in the AFL unions and of his and his comrades' struggles against that racism. He describes Nisei, Kibei and Issei radicals supporting the 1934 Pacific Coast Maritime Strike, even though there were no stevedores of Japanese descent on the Pacific Coast at that time. 'We felt strongly that their fight was ours. Extending solidarity would bring about, we believed, a closer relationship and better understanding of the plight of Japanese workers who had been excluded from the mainstream of the labor movement in this country.'

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LOUIS KUSHNICK

White Man's Country: racism in British politics

By ROBERT MILES and ANNIE PHIZACKLEA (London, Pluto Press, 1984). 184pp. £4.95

The Politics of Race in Britain

By ZIG LAYTON-HENRY (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1984). 191pp. £6.95

Since 1981 the race relations industry has been massively regenerated and a whole new market has opened up for basic texts and books dealing with the background to the urban rebellions of that year. As part of the publishers' response to this market, these two books cover remarkably similar ground. Following brief introductory chapters dealing with such matters as Britain's imperial past and the nature of racism as ideology, both launch into a detailed account of the development of black immigration to Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s and the political response to it among the established political parties. We are taken through the familiar territory of Labour's early racist concerns over Commonwealth immigration, of Tory complacency over the conditions of black migrants in Britain, of the eventual introduction of immigration control on barely-veiled racist lines in the early 1960s and the Labour Party's later 'retreat from principle' on this issue whilst in government, all leading to the full institutionalisation of racism in state policies in the 1971 Immigration Act. Both books follow this up with sections dealing with the growth of fascist parties in the 1970s and subsequent increases in the level of racist attacks.

What distinguishes these two books are the very different political and intellectual perspectives of their respective authors. Layton-Henry reads like a relic of 1960s' political science, with his concern for maintaining the legitimacy of constitutional political structures and the need properly to integrate (and contain) black politics within the established political system. His is certainly the more detailed, carefully-researched (although largely from conventional sources, with a very heavy dependence on the output of government reports and other official publications), indeed cautious book. But when he occasionally chances his arm, the conservative bias of his academic training shows through unambiguously. Take, for example, his conclusions regarding racist attacks:

The incidence of racist attacks is of major concern not only because it is morally repugnant but also because of its political implications. It is crucially important for black and brown citizens to feel that they do receive equal protection under the law; otherwise their confidence in, and respect for, the law itself will be undermined. The rule of law

and its enforcers, the police, are important symbols of the state's authority and its legitimacy. The police are visible mediators between the citizen and the wider structure of authority, and if the police lose the confidence of part of the community then the authority and legitimacy of the state is eroded as well.

The trouble with this perspective is not just that it is old-fashioned and establishment-oriented but that it is plainly wrong, as events since 1981 relating to the policing of the black community and, more recently, the miners' strike have demonstrated. The police can be deliberately set against sections of the community without imperilling the 'authority and legitimacy of the state', precisely because the state can rely for its legitimacy on the mobilisation of popular opinion against blacks and strikers through such extra-parliamentary mechanisms as the media.

Indeed, the basic underlying theme of Miles and Phizacklea's book is how racism as ideology and as 'common sense' has been mobilised to shape state policies on immigration throughout the post-war period, albeit within the basic economic parameters determined by capitalism's shifting need for migrant labour, and the conditions under which such mobilisation might in future lead to full-scale repatriation. Theirs is nominally a marxist perspective and their tone is accordingly more strident, not least in their attacks on Labour. Yet, presumably the book was intended to inform what they identify as the more radical approach to issues of racism within the Labour Party since 1976, an approach which emerged at first as a reaction to the electoral challenge of the National Front and later in response to the 1981 rebellions. If so, the usefulness of the book is crucially weakened by its almost single-minded emphasis on immigration control and possible repatriation as the seat of institutional racism to the exclusion of other key areas of state race policies. In particular, Miles and Phizacklea virtually ignore the role race relations legislation and institutions and government programmes of social intervention in the black community have played in managing racism and undermining black resistance.

At a point when Labour politicians and local councils, in their sudden desire to do 'something' about racism, are adopting just those official solutions of 'positive action' and 'ethnicity' bequeathed to them by the state, it would have been far better to provide them with a careful analysis of the effects of such policies in dividing the black community and the working class than to repeat again the story of Labour's past complicity in racist immigration controls.

Institute of Race Relations

LEE BRIDGES

The Great Betrayal: the untold story of Kim Philby's biggest coup

By NICHOLAS BETHELL (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1984).
208pp. £9.95.

In a morale-raising speech to supporters in early 1985, CIA Director William Casey pointed to what he saw as a major shift in the pattern of world conflict and, in particular, that between the US and the USSR. Whereas a decade ago, it was the US which had been on the receiving end of guerrilla harassment, in Vietnam, Central America and elsewhere, now it was the USSR's turn to be bled: the Soviet army in Afghanistan, and Soviet allies in Cambodia, Angola, Ethiopia and Nicaragua were all subject to guerrilla attack, in which the US and its allies, such as Pakistan, Thailand, South Africa, Israel and Honduras, were helping. Obviously, this all gave Casey some satisfaction.

This encouragement of counter-revolutionary guerrillas is indeed a major feature of current US strategy. It avoids the need to commit US forces directly, and it gives these gangs of bandits and rapists a popular veneer. People like Jonas Savimbi in Angola, or the Khmer Rouges in Cambodia, not to mention the feudal lords and sanctified smugglers of Afghanistan, can all now appear as fighters for freedom.

But the strategy is not new. Reactionary guerrillas are as old as revolution itself, feeding as they do off traditions of robbery and the money which external forces give them. And in this history, a special place is occupied by the attempt to overthrow the revolutionary government of Albania, a campaign run by Britain and the USA in the 1949-53 period. A failure it was, but an indicative one nonetheless.

The purpose of this operation, in which hundreds of hapless Albanian exiles were deluded into landing by sea and parachute in their country, was to hit at the apparently weakest Soviet ally in Europe. Nothing came of it because the revolutionary forces, who had won power after defeating the Italian and Nazi invaders, had a firm grip on the country. The subtitle of this book contains a silly, typically British, solipsism – that of imagining it was Philby's leaking of the information to the Russians that doomed the project. As anyone who knows what was happening in Albania could confirm, the project had no chance from the start.

What is most interesting, however, is the way the Albanian episode was a first run of a saga to recur in many other revolutionary states over the coming years – the undermining of the republican regime in North Yemen, in the 1960s, the recruiting and training of the Khampa fighters in Tibet, and the mustering of motley mercenary armies in the Laotian theatre of the Indo-chinese war. The current CIA fashion has, therefore, quite deep roots in cold war strategy.

Important too is the role played in all this by the British aristocratic mafia – Julian Amery, David Smiley and Billy MacLean – all of whom

reappeared later, making trouble in the conflicts of the Arabian Peninsula. Nicholas Bethell himself has now joined this gang, acting in particular as a champion of the Afghan counter-revolution. One can only hope that Bethell's current venture will meet the same success as that of its Albanian predecessor.

Transnational Institute

FRED HALLIDAY

Multi-ethnic Britain

By NANCE LUI FYSON (London, Batsford, 1984). 72pp. £6.95

One of the most shocking things about this ill-written, badly conceived attempt at 'background material for Social Studies at CSE and O level' is that its author already has some twenty books – aimed at the educational market – under her belt. And no writer as shallow in their thinking or as ignorant of the meaning of what they convey as Ms Fyson has any business writing for young people. The book has, one suspects, been assembled from a hotch potch of old Commission for Racial Equality publications (but lacking even their amount of conviction or punch), with the results of an opinion poll on something or other every few pages, embellished with the odd, badly-explained statistic or two. The latter presumably is intended to add weight and authority.

There is, it is true, a paragraph near the beginning which augurs something slightly better. After a trite canter through the usual centuries-of-mixed-blood of the British stuff (Romans, Vikings, Huguenots, with a few African slaves from the seventeenth century thrown in for good measure), there is a brief foray into explanation of the black presence in Britain today. After the Second World War, Britain, we are told, had a shortage of workers; it needed to rebuild and encouraged immigrants to come – recruiting in Barbados for workers for London Transport and the National Health Service. The 1948 Nationality Act is mentioned, but its significance is not brought out. It's all rather badly put – but at least some of the elements are there.

But that all shuts down quickly enough. Suddenly, 'some people in Britain' are beginning to 'worry' about immigration from 'Asia, Africa and Latin America'. And so we pass – in 1960 – to the first Commonwealth Immigration Act. In this stream of nonsense, Ms Fyson has even managed to get the date wrong! A brief – but far from concise – catalogue of immigration law follows. Ms Fyson is eager to stress that *more* people leave Britain now than enter it and to reassure us that, contrary to what most people think, immigration is strictly controlled. Racist attitudes, anti-black violence on the streets, the fact that the need for labour was already declining – none of this merits a mention here.

When the whole orientation of the book so carefully eschews any

consideration of racism as even a significant aspect of British society, let alone a crucial principle on which it is organised, what is the point of Ms Fyson's protestations that 'minorities should not be thought of as "problems" '? Indeed, in her very next chapter, she belies her avowed stance by taking great pains with circles and charts to show us how few non-whites there really are! So even if they are a problem, well it's not a very big one anyway. And in any case, they're all really rather quaint: 'Many Sikhs are outgoing and extroverted. Self denial is not a strong Sikh tradition. The pleasures of laughter, eating and dressing well are to be enjoyed.' The poor Bengalis, on the other hand, are 'regarded as fairly quiet, peace-loving people – but capable of going to the other extreme if oppressed'. The Chinese, apparently, care about 'losing face'. Hindus have a lot of festivals, while Muslims will 'eat fish that have fins and scales'.

The one saving grace that the book has is its utter boredom. It is highly unlikely to be read (voluntarily), and even less likely to be remembered. And it is so easy to mock that its true perniciousness could almost be laughed away. But pernicious it is. For what will children in the classroom, black and white, conclude when they read all about how 'West Indians' (sic) do worse at school than Asians and 'other leavers', when the only explanation Ms Fyson puts forward (apart from a few noises about 'low teacher expectations' seeming a 'discouragement') is that 'only 59% of the West Indian children lived in households where the father was present and only 37% where the parents were married'. Maybe someone should write a school book tracing the history of that particular stereotype through academic and pop sociology into political debate and media hypocrisy. And Ms Fyson's book itself could be approached as an artless transmission of many such stereotypes currently in vogue.

But then, her book lends itself to such treatment, for it exemplifies all that is worst in multiculturalism. Racism, either in its historical development, or as a current relationship of power, is studiously avoided; consequently, there is no framework within which to enlarge the child's understanding of the nature of British society and his or her place in it. And what is left is a collection of disparate 'facts' which, not related to any larger whole, or, in this book, even to each other, remain unmemorable and dubious curiosities. Racism, almost more perhaps than any other issue, throws up questions not only of economic and social justice, but of the manipulation of ideas, beliefs, debate. In developing educational materials for children, that manipulation has above all to be cut through. On the evidence of this book, Ms Fyson has not even got to first base.

Occupation: Israel over Palestine

Edited by NASEER ARURI (Washington, Association of Arab American University Graduates, and London, Zed Press, 1984). 467pp. £9.95 paper

Israel has long sought to obscure the fact that, since 1967, it has been illegally occupying Eastern Palestine (West Bank), the Gaza Strip and Syria's Golan Heights. The Israelis call their military occupied territory 'administered areas' or 'liberated territory' and have renamed the West Bank, 'Judea and Samaria'. In 1981 they changed the status of the occupied territories from military administration to 'civil administration'. These cosmetic measures have done nothing to change the situation of oppression the Palestinian and Syrian people live under, as Aruri's collection of seventeen essays demonstrates.

As Israeli anti-Zionist attorney Lea Tsemel points out in her paper on legal rights, 'an occupation is an occupation', no matter how Israel tries to gloss the facts. And, as with any occupation, laws and special powers abound to keep the local population suppressed. Arrests, detention without trial, collective punishments and destruction of homes are a daily reality. She points to some changes, for the worse, that have taken place in the last few years. For example, severe torture is now being practised by settlers, prison guards and border police rather than the security forces (a change resulting from the *Sunday Times* 'Insight' report on torture in 1977), since they are less easy to investigate. In 1981, detention for fifteen days without access to a lawyer was introduced into Israel – aimed at the Palestinians living inside the 1948 borders. In 1981 it also became possible to convict a person on the allegations made against them in someone else's confession. The majority of Palestinians will at some time in their lives be imprisoned.

Raja Shehadeh continues the analysis of the law, particularly on the question of land. Local law is manipulated to Israel's advantage: 'The entire administration and legal system in the West Bank has been changed to facilitate purchase by Jews of Arab lands and to discourage use and transfer to Arabs.' The rapid expropriation of land for settlement building is discussed by Ibrahim Matar and Peter Demant. The term settlement usually conjures up visions of small settler outposts. Although these do exist, the term obscures the frightening developments that have taken place in the last few years. Matar provides well-researched material on the colonisation process, with statistics on expropriation, the location and the numbers of the settlements, while Demant takes a closer look at the political changes behind the Israeli 'Judaisation' of the West Bank. With Jewish Israeli birthrate and immigration in decline, these settlements are geared towards a redistribution of the Israeli population, making any future Palestinian state on the West Bank out of the question as far as the Israelis are concerned.

According to Matar, the objective is to have 120,000 Israelis in the West Bank by 1985.

The settlement programme has had devastating consequences for the rural economy of the West Bank, as Sarah Graham Brown analyses in her papers on the economic and social changes. Expropriation of land and water resources is ruining West Bank farming. Economic dependency on Israel has been created through trade restrictions (the West Bank imports 88 per cent of its goods from Israel, Gaza 91 per cent), restrictions on money from abroad have resulted in lack of investment in agriculture and industry, and tourism has declined. There has been the subsequent growth of a Palestinian semi-skilled workforce migrating into Israel each day. This workforce is largely unorganised (trade unions are banned), still tied to the villages and has not as yet developed a proletarian consciousness. Salim Tamari, however, points to an increase in politicisation amongst the rural population as a result of the occupation.

Rosemary Sayigh gives an important account of women's participation in the social and political spheres and how this is changing with a more educated and politicised younger generation. In particular, there has been a move away from traditional areas of community work in the charitable societies and a growth in the militant women's action committees. The occupation, despite Israel's claims to the contrary, has increased the oppression of women. The emigration of men in search of work or their political expulsion has increased women's workload and their role in keeping Palestinian traditions alive. At the same time, they are the backbone of the daily resistance, leading demonstrations and sit-ins – and many are imprisoned.

The dominant message of the contributors is that Israel has brought about changes that will be difficult to reverse and that they are preparing for annexation. What the book doesn't do is look at what forms of resistance are open to the Palestinians in these areas. They can hardly sit and wait for a diplomatic solution, especially given Israel's intransigence on this, and with the PLO now dispersed around the Arab world, the focus of resistance has once again come back to the occupied territories. Nevertheless, the collection is essential reading and contributes a great deal to our understanding of Israeli occupation, although the suffering of the courageous Palestinians can never really be grasped through the written word.

London

ROS YOUNG

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