RACE & CLASS

the gulf between: a school and a war

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The gulf between: a school and a war

I want to concentrate upon the impact of the Gulf war of 1991 on the lives of our students, and on our school itself as a living institution – but in doing this, I am all the time conscious of a certain irony in using the word 'gulf'.

For, in curriculum terms and within the scope of what we teach and learn, throughout this war there was another 'gulf' – if not an abyss. The war not only presented to us issues about internal school relationships, the pressure upon unity and the school's attitude to the communities which it serves. Over and above these crucial aspects was the war's function as a formulator and conductor of knowledge itself, and the gulf over which it stood between two versions of knowledge, two registers of assumed fact, that were in currency all around and through the school, its neighbourhood and communities.

On the one hand, there was a state-licensed, state-approved stratum of knowledge. This was one track in its perspective, national-chauvinist in its orientation, anti-Arab, anti-internationalist, and largely prevalent in the public consciousness outside the school. It was formed through television, tabloid newspapers, the positions (and consensus) of government and mainline 'opposition' – and squared with the ideology set down in the 'National Curriculum' currently being imposed on all British schools. On the other hand, there was a view that was organic and critical, arising from the real lives of the students at school – in particular the Arab students, for many of whom internationalism was a necessary aspect of their lives, having either been brought up in the Middle East, in

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Race & Class, 33, 4 (1992)

countries like Yemen, Syria or Jordan, or having been for long family sojourns there. This view was grounded in a community's real knowledge of life and its struggles, in a living understanding of the importance of the oil economy and the effects of oil imperialism.

There is no doubt that in many British schools the Gulf war had a damaging and divisive impact. Schools with all-white student populations often found themselves, almost automatically, because of force of culture, nationalism and the imperial legacy, taking active sides with British and US political and military objectives and strategies. These schools became the domestic cheerleaders for the allied war efforts, giving jingoistic support for 'our boys', the new crusaders of the Gulf, with mass letter-writing to the troops, parcel-sending, fund-raising and other such publicity exercises.

For other schools, composed of black and white British cohorts, a potentially more volatile situation emerged, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi students often supporting Saddam Hussein (whom many even saw as an authentic Islamic hero) while the white students retained an uncritical loyalty to the British military intervention. Sometimes inter-communal bitterness and violence broke out, both in and out of school.

While some of these schools futilely tried to press down the lid on their students' responses – some even forbidding classroom discussion and debate about the war – others took what they saw as a neutral and objective line, while still defending the allied position. The largest and most progressive British teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers, took a cautious approach in its 'advice' leaflet, 'Gulf war: the impact on schools'. This argued that 'it may be helpful to hold discussions about conflict resolutions whilst in no way seeking to influence the beliefs of individuals about the rightness or justice of the war. This would not be in keeping with the Union's long held belief in education for peace.'

A few other schools set out to create a spirit of genuine openness and discourse, while unashamedly standing up for peace and for a solution to be found by the Arab peoples themselves. The account that follows sets down the processes of response to the war in one such comprehensive school in Sheffield.

I write as the school's headteacher, but also as an active English teacher. The students all live in the neighbourhood of the school, a working-class district close to the industrial end of the city, where its once-great steel industry was located. With just under half the students from local white families, the others come from Pakistani, Yemeni, Somali and Caribbean communities. One of the school's teachers is an exiled Iraqi.

* * *

During the days before the war, and as the two huge armies face each other across the desert with the UN deadline approaching hour by hour, there is a fear and uncertainty among the students. Many of them can sense the scale and conflict of the events about to unfold. Many of them write down their reflections and read them out to each other in their English class. Some of these are marked not only by their honesty but by a sense of being overpowered by huge, uncontrollable issues which they cannot fully understand. One 12-year-old boy, Lee, writes:

> I do not think that Britain and the UN should go to war against Iraq because it would mean a lot of people would die, including people who are not soldiers. Iraq says that they are taking back land which already belongs to them and which the British took away from them...
>
> Some people say that America only wants to protect Kuwait because of the oil in the area, which is bought by other western countries.
>
> The environmental impact of a war in the Gulf would last for many, many years, causing further destruction of the ozone layer which would have a disastrous effect on everyone all over the world.
>
> There are many issues involved when discussing the Gulf crisis and some of these I don't understand. This makes the question 'Should Britain go to war with Iraq?' very difficult to answer. But I would like to see a peaceful solution to the matter.

Jackleen, a 15-year-old Yemeni girl who has only been in Britain for five months, is also tentative, but from a completely different perspective and exploring the contradictions she sees all around her:

> I don't know what I can say about this problem. Really it is a big problem because we do not know what will happen.
>
> I really don't like the war and every one I know doesn't like the war. Why the war, why? I get in my head more questions about this problem, I know I don't agree with anyone ... but this doesn't mean I don't like the leader.
>
> Why when Israel went to Palestine did no one do anything, it's just all countries said, 'It's not my problem, it is a Palestine problem.' *Why* does no country care about the Palestine problem? And same things in Afghanistan, why and why and why?? In this letter I want to ask America, England and all countries why, in an Arab area, have these countries come to help Kuwait?
>
> I know some people from America and England don't like the war and don't want to go to Kuwait to fight because it is not their country ... but the heads of state want to help Kuwait not only because they love Kuwait, not all this, it's because they want *oil.* I am sorry if I said this ... but this is all in my head.
>
> I don't like the war so please leave the Arabic countries to solve this

problem themselves. I really want to see all Arabic countries working together, not like as they do now.

And contradictions there are, rising all around our students. In the recently unified Yemen, many of their families are suffering the direct consequences of their government's neutrality and its refusal to support the US/British/Saudi military alliance against Iraq. The Saudi government has expelled nearly a million Yemeni migrant workers, and their remittances are no longer there to boost the national economy and provide a financial base for thousands of dependent Yemeni families. On the other side of the frontier, one of our fourth-year students, Abdullah, on an extended visit to his family in Jeddah, had been conscripted into the Saudi army. Abdullah is a tall, burly youth who looks much older than his fifteen years, and his uncle came to the school, seeking help to get him back to Britain. We wrote to the Saudi authorities asking them to secure his release from military service and allow him to continue his education with us. He came back just before the war began, beaming all over his face as he walked back into school. Now he laughs and fools around with his Yemeni classmates, who are obviously glad to see him. 'In Saudi when we dig in the sand, we find oil', he jokes. 'Not like you Yemenis. When you dig, all you find is dirty water!' The Yemenis, taking all this in good humour, seem to have the final laugh. 'He's a Yemeni like us, we know his family. His father now lives in Saudi so he thinks he's Saudi too.'

For some of the other students there is also a closeness to the war. A Pakistani girl, Majida, writes: 'I don't want the war to go on because my friend's dad has been to the war and this time he will have to go again. If he doesn't go he will be under arrest.' Brian, in his second-year class, also seems affected by the call-up of British military reservists, in the heart of his family. He sets down:

> Another reason why I don't want the war to start is because my Dad and my brothers will have to go back in the army, and they might get hurt and maybe get killed.

You would think that such opposing loyalties would polarise these young people. Everything around them is persuading them to take sides simplistically and emotionally: religion, national chauvinism, family connections, plus the media bombardment in the tabloid press, particularly the Murdoch press and the *Sun*. Morning after morning come the banner headlines pouring hatred and scorn on the Iraqi people. 'We'll bomb them till they drop' screams the *Sun* on 31 January. In the local daily, the *Sheffield Star,* there are photographs of schoolgirls up against the Union Jack, raising money to send gifts to British troops in the Gulf, and a story about another girl writing to the soldiers who have 'gone to the Gulf to fight for the Queen and our country'.[1] Whose country? The *Guardian* publishes an article about an 11-year-old

schoolgirl at Falla Park Primary School near Gateshead. She wrote a poem about Saddam Hussein that was published in the local newspaper, the *Gateshead Post*, after a local group of the Territorial Army sent it in to them. It goes like this:

> Saddam Hussein is the man we hate
> We'll get him just you wait!
> He's trying to take over, get him out,
> 'He doesn't belong there', we'll all shout.
> We'll take his head and mash it up
> Until it fits into an egg cup
> Take off his arms, take off his legs
> Bend them back until he begs.
> Take his head, take his heart
> Rip the stupid man apart
> Poke out his eyes, chew off his nose
> Kick him in the head, pull off his toes.[2]

Reading these published words, this sadism from one so young, I suddenly understand again something so horrific, residual, still there throbbing in the British and European mind towards the Arab peoples, welling out of their imperial past. I am reminded of the 'Crusades', the siege of Ma'arra in 1098, and how European historians themselves wrote how 'in Ma'arra our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots; they impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled'.[3] Or, closer to our own time, in the Yemen in 1967, of the Argyll soldiers and their inter-platoon rivalry in Aden, and how Robertson Jam golliwog stickers were awarded to any officer whose soldiers succeeded in killing an Arab. One officer had admitted:

> At one stage my platoon had notched up 13 kills and another platoon were one kill behind. The corporal even told the private he was to use his bayonet, for it was to be that kind of killing.
>
> They went into an alley and killed a young Arab who was out after curfew.[4]

Yet, in the midst of this historical and present hatred, our young people could keep their minds level, remember their schoolmates and friendships and still resist division. One 14-year-old Pakistani girl, Shazia, wrote:

> Soldiers are fighting for oil. People are dying because of this war. Innocent lives are involved in this crisis. People in Iraq and Saudi Arabia are all scared because of this war. President Bush and Saddam Hussein do not think about people, soldiers and their families. They just want the oil. When people ask me, 'which side are you on?', I say I did not want this war to happen in the first place. But it has. But I am

on no one's side. I want it to end. I do not want it to become a world war just because of oil.

* * *

During the first week of the war, while British, American and Saudi aircraft are bombing Iraq and the sorties go into their thousands, we hold year assemblies on the subject of the war. The objective is to formalise the dialogue going on between the students at the playground and classroom level, to hold their views together, and create more mutual understanding within the framework of peace. Of course there are differences which come across strongly in these assemblies. Corin, a 14-year-old white boy, makes these points out loud:

> Even though war is a horrible occurrence, sometimes it can't be helped. People being killed isn't a pleasant thing, but when someone just walks into a country and tries to take it over, something has to be done about it. Different people have different views, like some say England and America should mind their own business. I think this is true, but Kuwait asked the help of England and America, so I think they should stay where they are.
>
> Other views are that England are only in Kuwait because it's full with oil. This may be true, but why is Saddam Hussein in there? It can't just be that Kuwait used to be a part of Iraq, because what's the point in fighting for a bit of land unless you get something out of it at the end?

Nadia, his Yemeni classmate, gives her reply with all her year listening:

> I don't think Britain should go to war with Iraq because it would be very dangerous and it would affect the whole world. It was very dangerous for the Americans and British to get involved in the Gulf crisis! The Arabs should talk about it and sort everything out between themselves.
>
> Very innocent people will get killed around the world, especially in the Arab countries. The Americans and British are only in Saudi Arabia because they know that Fahad would give them something, e.g., oil, land.
>
> Why didn't the Americans and British go to help Palestine? In my opinion, I think the Americans and British didn't help Palestine because it is a poor country.
>
> The Americans and British would not like the Arabs to interfere with them!

The question of Palestine was often at the centre of the students' arguments. This year group has recently been studying the *intifada* and the lives of Palestinians on the West Bank, and several of the students have written letters to young Palestinians in a school in Ramallah, with

the intention of setting up a permanent link between our two schools. 'Why don't they [the British and Americans] stop Israelis taking over Palestine?', protests one Pakistani boy in his essay on the war, while another Yemeni boy answers the question: 'The Palestinians are not rich and they have got no oil.' In a similar vein, James, a classmate of Corin and Nadia, adds: 'But why should we have to fight? Why should we be greedy, and have all the oil. The consequences will be dreadful.' And, with strong insights on the same question and her mind on the Al-Sabah ruling dynasty of Kuwait, 13-year-old Haifa from the Yemen writes:

> No, I think that Britain should not go to war against Iraq because it is an Arab people's matter and the matter should be solved between Arab countries... The British people should take care of their own people not send them to battlefields as mercenaries, fighting to bring back one family to rule a country because that family is under the influence of the British government.

At a second-year assembly, spontaneous applause by almost all those present breaks out when Nicola, a 13-year-old white girl, reads her thoughts to all her year-mates. Muslim and Christian backgrounds, national origins, race and culture all seem in agreement and to be at one when she reaches her final suggestion.

> No!
> Just simply no!
> Britain should not go to war against Iraq. It's all Mr Bush's fault. If they hadn't roped Mr Major into sending forces, it would be all right.
>
> On TV last week, two wards at a hospital had to be closed down because two paramedics had to go on stand-by in the Gulf. Just think about all those people missing medical treatment.
>
> Saddam Hussein and Mr Bush should talk about what they're going to do about this war and leave everybody else out of it. Bring everyone home from the Gulf and re-unite them with their families! And if Mr Bush and Saddam Hussein can't make up their minds, we should let them fight it out themselves.

* * *

As the aerial bombardment of Iraq continues during the first three weeks of the war, the students continue to discuss and write about its meanings and implications. For the teachers, these raids have a special resonance. Our Arabic teacher, a much-liked colleague, is an Iraqi. His parents live in the neighbourhood of the bunker in Baghdad that is destroyed with a terrible loss of life. The war comes into our staff room too. Daily news bulletins are shown in the lunch hours in the Resources Area of the school, where national and local newspapers, from the Conservative

Daily Telegraph to the Communist *Morning Star*, are also on display. Yemeni students also bring in Arabic newspapers, and often lunch hour sessions are full with watchers, readers and talkers, all concerned with the latest situation in the Gulf. We find some enthusiastic graffiti about Saddam on the wall in a languages room, and there is a couple of pro-Saddam slogans in the boys' main toilets. But while there is frequent discourse and open discussion about the war, there are no fights or violent arguments, and no evidence of jingoism, warlike talk and antipathy towards either Islamic or white British students.

The war, ironically, has become a stimulus for those students struggling to learn English as a second language. This is particularly true for the Arab language students, for they feel a deep urgency and real motivation to express their views to their English peers across the school. Safa has been in Britain for only five months before the start of the war. Yet the passion and poetry of her beginner's English produces its own form of eloquence.

> No one can go to an Arab country to protect it unless they want something from this country. But it's always Saddam's fault because he can't take Kuwait from its people and get them out from their country. And I think they have to look for a good idea for them all. I think the good idea is that Saddam has to get out from Kuwait. I think this is the best idea for them all because we don't want war and we don't need it, because war is the worst thing in the world. Because it burns everything, it will make the world very bad and thousands and thousands of people will be killed, and the animals and everything. It will kill the smile on the lips and make everything look bad.

For Samieh, another newly-arrived Yemeni, there are so many questions about his Arab people and those who are interfering with their lives. It is the forming of such questions and the finding of answers to them that will bring him the language he is learning so quickly – as well as the truth for which he craves.

> As I heard in ITN news that President Saddam Hussein has attacked Kuwait because he thinks that Kuwait is a part of his country. I have seen, too, many people on the television shouting 'we do not want war', and I have also heard children saying 'why do we, the children, always have to bear the costs?'. Why don't Mr Bush and Mr Major the prime minister of the United Kingdom, why don't they bear the costs why, why and why?...
>
> And I also heard an old man saying why don't Mr Saddam Hussein and Mr Bush and Mr Major the prime minister of the United Kingdom solve this out with peace and without any war? Why does Mr Bush want to help Kuwait for the oil, and this oil will destroy our and their armies and their nation and our friends, and they have got

nothing to do with these problems? Why don't they solve the problems in the Middle East, since 1967? I will answer this question, because in the Middle East, which includes Palestine, the Palestinians are not rich and they have got no oil.

I am saying this especially to Mr Bush and Mr Major to do nothing about themselves. Nothing will happen to them because they are in England and the USA. Think about the Arab countries and about what will happen in Yemen or in Iraq or in Kuwait or in Saudi Arabia. I like to say these words, and I am saying this especially to Mr Bush *and* Mr Major, who do not think about them since nothing will happen to them... Think about what will happen in Yemen or in Iraq or in Kuwait or in Saudi Arabia. I like to say these words...

And I am saying to Mr Saddam Hussein, please do think about what will happen to him and his army.

If there will be a very long war I am ready to give my life and my blood to protect my Arab countries and my Arab families. I am ready to give my life and my body to save the truth.

God will be with the truth.

* * *

As students like Samieh work out their thoughts, and go to the computers to project them on screens and bring them out, the questions they raise are about subjection, imperialism, national liberation and economic independence. In their own words, they are dealing with these complex issues, and their English-born peers are listening to them and learning from them. The same questions are being put in the form of poems, and answers, too, emerge that are being shared by everyone. Mohammed Kassim asks:

Why is the world always in war?
Why do the rich hate the poor?
Why can't the whiteman love the blackman?
Why can't they be friends, what don't they like?

But there were powers behind these questions.

But no
They want to rule what is not theirs
They make excuses and support millionaires.
If only they could stop and think on their demands
Maybe war would stop and they could shake hands.
Peace could stop killing in the sand.
Peace could remove the gun from the hand.
Solidarity is the way we should live today
And together as one we should stand up for our say.

There could hardly be poetic thoughts so different from those of the girl in Gateshead. We manage to persuade a Sheffield local paper to publish Mohammed Kassim's poem too. The truth is that the presence of such a highly-motivated and clear-thinking cohort of students in our school as those from the Yemeni community has a genuine impact on the thinking of many other students. The Yemeni community has its own school: it organises its classes three evenings a week in our school buildings, regularly attracting over a hundred students to each session. It is voluntary, being completely organised by and through the community's contacts and infrastructures. It teaches Arabic, Yemeni, history and culture, Islamic studies, and 'manners' – or how to treat other people. All this has a dynamic effect on the mainstream daily classes in our school.

Then, in the middle of the war period, some stone-throwing racist whites attack the Yemeni Community Association minibus as it brings a group of children to the evening classes. The community has already felt the lash of other racist acts – abusive telephone calls, insults in the street and graffiti scrawled over their community centre – but the attack on the minibus is particularly dangerous, it could have caused serious injury, or worse, to the children. When the community asks whether the classes can be switched to weekend daylight hours to make attacks less likely, the school immediately agrees, and also asks whether some Yemeni speakers could conduct an in-service session for our entire teaching staff on the history of the community in Sheffield, its links to the homeland and its response to the Gulf.

This is a very productive session, and is pivotal in helping to raise the understanding of all our teachers. The film, *Thank you, that's all I know*,[5] by Christine Bellamy, which describes the history and struggles of Sheffield's Yemenis, is shown. It includes some grim footage of British colonial brutality in Aden, and the rounding up and mistreatment of Yemenis on the streets of the city – which is a revelation to some of the teachers. There is also an explanation of the literacy campaign being run from within the Yemeni community, delivered by one of its young women teaching assistants. Mohammed Kassim, himself a fifth-year student at our school, addresses his teachers and describes the curriculum and organisation of the community language school. What also comes out of the session is the realisation that one of our black colleagues, Owen (a Barbadian), had served as ground crew in the Royal Air Force for two years in Aden, in the early 1960s. In an interview, recorded later, with two Yemeni fifth-years, he tells them of his experiences as a part of the British occupying force during the years of the Aden insurrection. He recalls how the British officers prevented the black servicemen from mixing with the Arab population in case they showed sympathy for them, of the friendliness found during the times they did mix, and of the racist barriers in the British armed forces that stopped him, or any other black recruit

he knew, from achieving promotion.

* * *

'Think of all the people that are going to be killed. Don't just think about yourself, think about other people in the world, they may be in the war while we are England.' This message, written at the beginning of the conflict by Azra, a second-year Pakistani girl, becomes even more truth-laden by its end. International Women's Day falls during the week following the cease-fire, and among the visitors and speakers who come to the school to commemorate it is Jenny Hales, an elderly peace campaigner who lives in the neighbourhood of the school. Speaking on the theme of 'Women and Peace', she tells how she had been a member of the international peace mission that camped on the Kuwaiti/Saudi border, between the opposing armies, at the outset of the long stand-to before the war. She speaks of the Iraqi soldiers who were guarding the camp, and how they and the campaigners opened up their lives to each other during the cool desert evenings. She tells of the horror and betrayal that she felt when the allied bombers first flew overhead to bomb Baghdad, and describes how, when the campaigners were evacuated to Baghdad, the Iraqis there – even though her countrymen were flying the planes that were causing such death and destruction – approached them with warmth and friendship.

Jenny Hales's talk has a strong effect on many of her listeners, and, as she speaks, she shows them the awesome photograph of an incinerated Iraqi soldier that has been published in the *Observer* the previous Sunday, above the headline 'The real face of war'.[6] This one, terrible image of the carnage which followed the massacre of the retreating Iraqis on the Basra road during the last hours of the 'ground war', shocks and stays with many of the students. This is the 'enemy' that the triumphing allied commanders and their men have so roundly vanquished. During their English lesson the next day I suggest they write down the last thoughts of this Iraqi soldier.

Nadia begins in this way, with the soldier looking for a 'sense of peace':

My wife I'll be back.
Please don't grieve, I'll be back.
Son, I'll be back,
No, don't cry –

I'm on my way home.
Mother and Father
Do not weep.
Soon I will be home, to keep you strong.
I'll bring money, food and clothes.
We shall build a house,

Or even own a car.

Do not worry,
The war is nearly settled,
So, do not weep!

Marie, a white classmate, seems to find a kind of freedom in his mind:

Free at last,
Free from the danger
Of shooting guns,
Free from the danger
Of whistling missiles,
Free from the guilt
Of what has been forced upon me.

I'll see my family soon,
Not to mention my friends.
I hope they don't ask questions,
I don't want to live through pain again,
Tomorrow cannot come too soon.

While a Pakistani student, Izat, creates three lines that hold a whole war within them:

I can hear a voice of oil burning
Back in Iraq there are people crying for food
and yearning
I want this war to end.

But perhaps the most moving response is from Safa again – now a few war weeks further on in her learning of English. For her soldier it is only his family that matters, and in particular his brother whom he protects and loves as a parent.

My last thoughts

My little brother Saleh I am coming back to you as soon as this war has finished. I want to stay beside you, feeding you and giving you everything you want. I'll give you your books, pens to learn how to write and read. I will get you clothes for school, and new clothes for Eid.

Don't worry brother, I'm your father and mother and everything. I will stay near you and keep looking after you to protect you.

I will do all these things when I come back.

I want you to grow up and be a doctor or a soldier and anything good that you want to be. But I want you to remember your country and how to build it to be a prosperous country. I wish I could do all these things if I came back to you, if not, God will be with you.

Perhaps some people are happy and their families are around them,

but I know for others they are not.

I don't want you to cry. I want you to be a man, a strong man to feed yourself and look after yourself if I don't come back. I want you to be the best, not for me but for yourself first, and for your country second.

I want you to know that I don't want to kill anybody, for we are not animals, we are people.

I don't want you to forget this. I want you to remember it all your life. I am dreaming, and I wish to do all these things when I come back.

Afterword

Just as the war ended, another, different one began for the school. The local education department, as a part of its efforts to cut back its general schools budget, announced that either our school, or a neighbouring comprehensive school on an almost all-white working class estate, would have to be closed. This appalling decision virtually pitched the two schools against each other in a battle for survival: one would be the winner, the other the loser. Both schools resisted this pressure to fight it out, and embarked upon a unified campaign for joint survival, but the danger for both communities, in the potential loss of their main local education resource, was real.* For what kind of system was it that could spend £4 million daily on sustaining an interventionist war on another continent, and close its schools at home?

For us, the unity, made stronger by the weeks of the war, remained precious as we went into our campaign to save the school. As Shameem, a third-year Pakistani girl, wrote in her campaign poem which we published in our parents' newsletter (in an obvious rhyme that no one had discovered before):

Asians, Somalis, Saudis, Syrians, English and Yemenis –
We all come to this school and we're not enemies.

And her classmate Elizabeth reinforced this same message in another unifying image:

I don't want this school to close. Here I feel I've known everyone since I was small. We are all a family, teachers and children, black and white. It doesn't matter who you are. If you are in our school you are part of this family. There may be war in the world, but at our school we are at peace with each other.

As these new campaigns began, two fifth-year girls came to my office with an idea which had gripped them. One was Sawsan, a Jordanian, the other her white English friend Kay. They spoke of some Iraqi families

*After an intensive community campaign, both schools were saved from closure in May 1991.

that Sawsan had got to know. Unsupported by their own government, and not qualifying for any assistance from the British social services, they had no money at all. The next day, the girls brought in an Iraqi mother and, while her child played among the books in my office, she explained how her husband – a medical student – was now without his scholarship, and how the family had been left financially stranded. The girls decided to organise a series of fund-raising events for these families, and began with a sponsored lunch for the teachers.

This lunch had some publicity in the local paper, and the same evening Sawsan received a threatening, anonymous phone call, promising 'acid in your face' if she continued to raise money for Iraqis, plus a battery of racist insults. Frightened, but undaunted, the girls carried on.

Two weeks later, after the first payments had been made to the families from the money that the girls had raised, Sawsan brought in a beautiful hand-sewn tapestry, made by the Iraqi mother who had visited us. It was a gift for the school. Across the black fabric and written in Arabic in golden sequins, was a verse from the Koran, praising human unity and the God of the daybreak.

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CHRISTOPHER FYFE

Race, empire and the historians

In colonial Africa, authority was manifested very simply. White gave orders, black obeyed. A white skin (more properly, a skin imputed white) conferred authority. It was an easy rule to understand and enforce, and it upheld colonial authority in Africa for about half a century. Yet some historians seem unwilling to remember it.

The introduction of white rule into Africa

Before the European partition of Africa, a white skin did not in itself confer authority. Over most of the continent, white people had no authority. Those white people who ventured inland had to pay respect to African authority. Their white skin gave them no protection. If they suffered indignities or death, their home governments remained unmoved. Even as late as 1885, Kabaka Mwanga of Buganda could have a white bishop of the Church of England put to death with impunity.

Nor within the colonies of British and French West Africa was rule exclusively white. In Sierra Leone in the early 1890s, nearly half the senior posts were held by Africans. In the Gold Coast, Africans sat in the legislature from the 1850s and held senior office. In Lagos, it was much the same. As late as 1882, Lord Kimberley, the secretary of state for the colonies, rejected 'the usual recommendation, white men to take care of black men and all will be well'.[1] In Senegal, Africans domiciled in the four coastal French communes were allowed French citizenship. Alfred Dodds, of Senegalese birth and descent, rose to the rank of general and

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helped to conquer Dahomey for France. In the Portuguese colonies, the white Portuguese shared power with those of African descent. Even in Cape Colony, Africans who qualified under the franchise regulations were allowed a vote. Only in the two Afrikaner republics were whites given privileged political status.

The European partition introduced a new style of government. Whereas in the small coastal British, French and Portuguese colonies, the laws of the metropole were, or were deemed to be, more or less in force, the vast protectorates that were tacked on to them were ruled administratively. Moreover, they were ruled by Europeans. In the British protectorates under indirect rule, African rulers were under white supervision. And whatever authority a Sultan of Sokoto or a Kabaka of Buganda had over his own people, he had none over whites. Nor did the literate Africans who were used as junior officials have authority. They remained isolated politically and socially – inferior to the whites by colour, and to the 'native chiefs' by status. Frederick Lugard, who introduced the indirect rule system into northern Nigeria, even suggested that Europeanised Africans constituted a distinct race of their own, differing 'not merely in mental outlook from the other groups but also in physique'.[2]

The system introduced into the British protectorates gradually permeated the British West African colonies. As the twentieth century advanced, Africans were deliberately squeezed out of senior government posts. A few outstanding individuals lingered, but as exceptions to a rule that normally restricted authority to whites. Nor was racial stratification confined to the administrative service. The West African Medical Service, constituted in 1902, was restricted to whites: African or Indian doctors, however well qualified, were confined to a subordinate service with lower status and pay scales. However senior, they could not give an order to a white medical officer, however junior.

Thus British West Africa was ruled (to quote Richard Crook) by 'a racially defined alien bureaucracy'.[3] Not until 1937, when a unified colonial service was instituted, did the secretary of state cautiously recommend that, in future, distinctions between the conditions of serving officers should be made on grounds of domicile and not of race.[4] And not until 1942 were two Africans, A.L. Adu and Kofi Busia, appointed to the colonial administrative service.

In the mission churches, it was the same – white bishops and superintendents replaced black. And the large white business firms, with access to bank credit and their own racial solidarity, elbowed out the smaller black competitors who had prospered in the nineteenth century. By the First World War, white rule was firmly established throughout British West Africa.

In British East and Central Africa, introducing white rule was easier: there were no competing Africans to be displaced. But in Egypt, after

1882, the British occupying authority was faced with a long-established Turco-Egyptian administration. The solution devised by Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), the virtual ruler of Egypt, was breathtakingly simple – to treat the Egyptians as a 'subject race' and impose over them the authority of a white ruling race.[5] In the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, too, Egyptians were kept in subordinate posts. Only in 1942 was it seriously proposed that a Sudanese might be introduced into the Sudan Political Service.

In British settler Africa, racial hierarchy was more than a basis for authority. It was a charter for land. Whites claimed that they alone were able, and therefore entitled, to make proper use of the potential wealth on and under the soil. Hence they were justified in taking what they wanted and leaving Africans the rest. The principle of racial segregation as a means of controlling labour and land use was begun in Natal in the 1870s by Sir Theophilus Shepstone, extended into Cape Colony by Cecil Rhodes's Glen Grey Act, and throughout the Union of South Africa in 1913 by the Natives' Land Act. After 1948, it was systematised as apartheid. It was the same in the British East African Protectorate (Kenya), where the Highlands were reserved for ownership by settlers 'of our own race'. And similarly in Nyasaland and the two Rhodesias, legislation was passed over the years segregating white areas from black. Hence the tenacity with which white settlers clung to racial hierarchy, the guardian of their land as well as their authority.

In the Union of South Africa, as industry developed, racial rule gained a new dimension. From being a control to enable whites to rule blacks it became, additionally, a control to divide and rule the white working class. Faced with what they saw as the threat of black labour, the white workers persistently put race before class and eventually, in 1924, after decades of industrial strife, accepted alliance with their white class enemy. In the Rhodesias, it was the same.

In the French empire, white rule was more equivocal. The French could look back to the revolutionary decree of 1794 conferring French citizenship on 'all men, without distinction of colour', the basis of their famed policy of *assimilation.* A few black men did rise to the highest ranks – Blaise Diagne was nominated *Commissaire de la République* in 1918, Félix Éboue became governor of Chad in 1938. And the citizens of the four communes of Senegal successfully maintained their rights. Otherwise, no serious attempt was made to assimilate the black populations of French West Africa or to treat them as equals. As the American observer R.L. Buell put it in his strangely titled book *The Native Problem in Africa,* the French showed no intention 'of associating the blacks upon a basis of equality with the Europeans in the administration of the country'.[6]

In Algeria, as in British settler Africa, the white settlers (*colons*) wanted political power to run the country in their own interest. Those of

white immigrant descent were given citizenship under a law of 1889 allowing anyone born in Algeria of foreign parentage to be automatically naturalised. The indigenous inhabitants only qualified as citizens if they renounced their 'personal status', which meant renouncing Islam. This barrier deterred most, but let in a few. Hence the line of race was blurred. Nevertheless, the *colons* maintained their own racial solidarity resolutely, even to giving themselves a separate racial identity of their own as 'une branche nouvelle de la race latine' (a new branch of the Latin race).[7] This new Latin race of *colons* also displayed its racial identity in the 1897-8 riots against the Algerian Jewish community.

Portuguese rule, too, was equivocal. There was the appeal to the Luso-tropical myth which maintained that miscegenation was a positive colonising force that spread Portuguese culture. But against it was the doctrine held by António Enes and the 'generation of 1895' that miscegenation rotted the moral fibre of Portugal, and that only by copying their colonial neighbours in Africa and introducing racial rule could the empire be maintained and properly developed. In practice, though selected *assimilados* were admitted to positions of authority, ultimate power remained firmly in white hands until the end of Portuguese rule in Africa.

The Germans, coming into Africa unhampered by a non-racial colonial heritage, could introduce white rule from the start. As in British Africa, the racial premise was taken for granted – that each race has its own specific attributes and should govern, or be governed, accordingly. So German policy, whether brutal or paternal (and both were exemplified in German Africa), was formulated on the principle that it was the right of the higher races to govern the lower, and that all African reactions to German rule were explicable in racial terms. Moreover, as elsewhere in white settler Africa, the settlers in German East Africa and German South-West Africa saw the land as theirs by right, by right of being white, and strove with some success towards getting ultimate control of policy-making.

In the Italian colonies, racial rule was only formally introduced by explicit legislation after the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, when laws were enacted for the colonies providing for strict social and residential segregation by race and to prevent members of subject races presuming equality with whites. But they probably did little more than to ratify with penalties what was already existing practice.

In the Belgian Congo, the population was in principle stratified by culture, but in practice by race. Social distance was, however, tempered by the open association of white officials with African women, prompting Buell to remark that 'it would seem that Europeans who live promiscuously soon destroy the prestige which is the chief support of the white man's rule over the native population'.[8] But Buell got it wrong. It was not the white man's prestige that upheld his authority (it would not

have upheld it for long). It was his white skin. White Belgian rule was to maintain itself unflinchingly in the Congo for more than thirty years after Buell's visit.

As for the effects of sexual association between white and black, Ronald Hyam in his recent *Empire and Sexuality: the British experience* contends that 'sexual interaction between the British and non-Europeans probably did more long-term good than harm to race relations'.[9] This contention, whatever it may or may not be worth, is irrelevant to my present discussion. Hyam is considering something called 'race relations' which he believes to be closely related to sex ('sex is at the very heart of racism'). I am considering how race was used as a political control in colonial Africa.

To my mind, it is implausible to assume that the association of white officials with black women (what the French called *politique du lit* and the Italians *madamismo*),[10] or the long tradition of mixed unions in Portuguese Africa, somehow vitiated the principle of white authority. Whatever privileges these women enjoyed were dependent on the favour of their white protectors. And the large oppressed 'Coloured' population of South Africa bears witness to the compatibility of widespread miscegenation with strict racial rule.

White authority in Africa

Thus, throughout colonial Africa, authority was grounded on race. To quote Philip Curtin, 'virtually every European concerned with imperial theory or imperial administration believed that physical racial appearance was an outward sign of inborn propensities, inclinations and abilities'.[11] A white skin conferred authority and commanded deference from those without it. In Anthony Kirk-Greene's perceptive words, 'the European District Commissioner wore the bullet-proof waistcoat of his white skin: it might not stop the bullet, but it nearly always stopped the other party from firing'.[12]

Obviously, in the last resort, authority was maintained through the barrel of a gun. But, as Kirk-Greene observes, the gun rarely had to be fired. District officers did not have to flourish revolvers to carry on their day-to-day routines. White women did not need a gun to take them to the front of the queue. Their white skin was warrant enough to confer authority and privilege.

No wonder it was adopted as a political control. It was so amazingly simple, easy to understand, easy to enforce. There was no doubt about who white people were, one had only to look at them – though, to dispel any doubts, whites customarily added, on allegedly medical grounds, white clothes and sun helmets. Women and children were included automatically. Whatever their social status, those who wore the uniform of a white skin wore it with inherent authority.

Whites had, therefore, to be socially segregated from blacks in their own exclusive housing locations under better living conditions. Familiar contact would have blurred the lines of race and prevented the system from operating. White residential solidarity, reinforced by membership of the ubiquitous white club, helped to maintain racial solidarity. In this way, racial rule could also be used as a control over whites, to deter them from doing anything that might be held to undermine white authority.

Whites who did manual work were necessarily perceived as a disquieting anomaly – a threat to white status, doing work that no white person should be seen doing. Hence, the low status given to members of the public works department in British Africa. Lugard was also uneasy about white missionaries who did 'menial work'.[13] And in South Africa, the 'poor whites' were held to constitute a 'problem' – such a problem that the Carnegie Corporation of the US funded a large-scale commission to investigate them, publishing the findings in a five-volume report.

There were also sometimes disorderly whites who 'let down the side' by associating in a familiar way with natives. In the last resort, they could be deported. As late as 1946, the West African governors were discussing whether they should seek powers to exclude, or even deport, the white wives of African ex-servicemen married during the war.[14]

The nature of white rule in Africa

White rule is sometimes seen in retrospect as irrational or ridiculous. Far from it. It was a highly rational, intelligent system, written into the law and enforced systematically. It maintained authority effectively over a vast continent. Those who ridiculed it did so at their peril.

Nor is the label 'prejudice', which is frequently affixed to it, appropriate. True it fed on, and fed, prejudice. But racial rule was a way of exercising authority – and exercising authority does not demand prejudice. Army officers are not necessarily prejudiced against the soldiers they command. It was not prejudice but policy that kept the races apart.

Moreover, to be prejudiced is to be vulnerable. Prejudice is something shameful which rational discussion, enlightenment and education are supposed to be able to dispel. Whites in colonial Africa were not ashamed of what they were doing. Many of them were well educated, rational and enlightened. They saw no need to apologise for the system that maintained them in power. Cromer was not prejudiced against the 'subject race' he ruled over, indeed he felt sorry for them. 'Rather let us,' he wrote, 'in all Christian charity, make every possible allowance for the moral and intellectual shortcomings of the Egyptians.'[15]

In 1948, Sir Alan Burns, just retired from being governor of the Gold Coast, published a book entitled *Colour Prejudice*, the fact of which he

deplored. Yet, though deploring colour prejudice, he still, without any sense of inconsistency, firmly defended white political control of the 'coloured races'.[16] And he owed his own distinguished career to his colour. Born on the island of St Kitts (where such things were known to everyone), he would never have got into the colonial administrative service had he not been of impeccably established white ancestry. Prejudice, or lack of it, was irrelevant. Prejudiced or unprejudiced, colonial officials still had to maintain the authority of the white race. As an army officer establishes his authority by his uniform of rank, they established their authority by their uniform of skin.

Nor did missionaries dedicated to ending what they perceived as 'racial prejudice' necessarily see any need to question the political division of populations into races, and the exercise of authority by one race over another. In 1928, the International Missionary Council issued a statement calling on all Christian forces 'to work with all their power to remove race prejudice'. It went on to enumerate the duties that a 'ruling race' owed to its 'subject races'.[17]

There were, one must remember, many kinds of white people in colonial Africa. Some were harsh and domineering, treating Africans with contempt and brutality, some were gentle and caring, treating them with consideration. But, whatever their personal feelings towards Africans, whether brutal or caring, whether prejudiced or unprejudiced, they all had, whether they liked it or not, a privileged status, guaranteed by the uniform of their white skin – a uniform they could never take off.

It was the same for Africans. Whatever their personal feelings towards whites – hatred, indifference, affection – their feelings were irrelevant to the political reality that kept them apart, whites to give orders, blacks to obey orders.

Nor did whites in Africa have to face any serious challenge from home. By the early twentieth century, a generation had grown up in Europe which accepted without much question the basic racial hypothesis that humankind is divided irrevocably into fixed races.[18] Even critics of empire – J.A. Hobson, E.D. Morel, the Webbs, Leonard Woolf – accepted it.[19] However much they disapproved of the way the 'lower races' were being ruled, they did not question that they were 'lower'. And when Sydney Webb became secretary of state for the colonies he turned down the opportunity of opening the colonial service to all races.[20]

Racial rule in Africa was not identical everywhere; it took differing forms. At its most severe, it demanded abject obedience, enforced by violence, displaying the right of the master race to hold the subject races in thrall. But it could also manifest the duty of the white race to use its supposed inherent moral strength to protect the lower races. Hence, the strange label 'protectorate' affixed to so many of the conquered territories.

The implication is clear: Africans were like children in need of care and

protection. Drawing on the mythology of Africa as (in Hegel's words) 'the land of childhood',[21] whites could, without compunction, treat Africans as children – but Peter Pan children who can never grow up, a child race. Physiology was brought in to justify this with the 'suture' theory (given the credibility of being included in the ninth, tenth and eleventh editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), which claimed that 'Negroes" brains stopped developing at puberty. But whether or not white people believed this preposterous theory, they still went on calling grown-up Africans 'boys' (house-boy, mission-boy, mine-boy). In francophone Africa, they were addressed as children are with 'tu'. And one might speculate whether the prevalence of corporal punishment in colonial Africa may not have been partly grounded on the then prevalent adult belief that children (and hence members of a child race) are too stupid to understand anything else.

Thus, the colonial administrator could, if he wanted, appear as a father figure (from the mother country) among his 'children', and see his career as a career of service to them. Obviously, many of them did not want to: there were all sorts in the colonial services of the European nations. But those who chose to feel that they belonged to what are today called the caring professions could do so without any sense of incongruity. They could trust in the paternal authority which was deemed to be inherent in the racial authority of their white skin.

Missionaries could do the same. Nevertheless, white racial rule imposed a cruel dilemma on missionaries. The doctrines of the Christian religion know nothing of white and black races. Indeed, they explicitly preach one gospel to all. How, then, were missionaries to behave in a society founded on the principle (which was not to be questioned) that whites not only have, but must have, authority over blacks? If they really treated Africans as equals, they were questioning the foundations of colonial rule. By implication they were being disloyal. If they expressed their feelings too strongly, they risked deportation. The alternative – which most, to one degree or another, chose – was either to embrace white mythology openly, as the world-famous Albert Schweitzer did ('The negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without authority'),[22] or to acquiesce tacitly. Thus, they were distanced from their congregations by a barrier of race which gave them useful authority but prevented them from being equals.

White settlers could allow themselves no such doubts. Those who had them went home. White authority guaranteed settlers their land and their family's future on it. It had to be upheld rigorously: one individual African's defiance of a white could be construed as a threat to the whole structure. Fantasies of black racial conspiracies and wars (projecting on to Africans a desire for the ferocities the settlers themselves had visited on them), of a 'seething African pot' ready to explode, fed such white fears.[23] They also threatened settler determination to wrest political power from

remote metropolitan governments and paternalistic administrators whose attachment to white rule might wane.

The ending of white rule in Africa

And wane it eventually did. By the 1930s, the concept of race was being increasingly called into question by intellectuals. Biologists and social anthropologists began to discard it. Critics of empire demonstrated how race was used as a class weapon. Above all, Hitler's use of race, not just to govern some remote people in far-off Africa, but to try and exterminate white Europeans in the heart of Europe, showed frighteningly what racial rule could mean.

The awkward question lurked – was colonial rule in Africa different in principle, however different in practice, from Nazi rule in Europe? 'Master race', 'lower races' were not expressions to be used comfortably by the British, French and Belgians who were fighting against Nazi Germany. They might reprehend Hitler's barbarity towards those without 'pure Aryan descent'. But it was only in October 1939, after the outbreak of war, that the War Office, under strong pressure from the Colonial Office, grudgingly agreed to remove from King's Regulations a clause restricting commissioned rank to those of 'pure European descent'.[24]

Nevertheless, calling racial rule into question was questioning the mechanism that upheld day-to-day authority in Africa. Once it was accepted that whites had, after all, no inherent attributes to guarantee them authority, there was no longer any reason for them to go on denying it to others. Africans would have to be promoted – and if they were, the existing structure of colonial rule would disappear. Once the emperor had lost his skin, he had lost his authority.

'What is Empire', asked Lord Rosebery, 'but the Predominance of Race?'[25] What did the revulsion against the predominance of race contribute to the end of empire? The question is not easily answered. Those seeking an answer for the British empire find their path obscured by mystifications.

One underlying strength of British racial rule was that its existence was regularly denied. 'Let us recall the traditional doctrine of the British Empire on the subject of race', wrote Sir Keith Hancock. 'This is not a difficult task; the doctrine has been affirmed at successive imperial conferences in terms which are unambiguous and emphatic.' He went on to quote Joseph Chamberlain in 1898, 'the traditions of the Empire which make no distinction in favour of, or against, race and colour', and Winston Churchill in 1921, 'There should be no barrier of race, colour or creed which should prevent any man of merit from reaching any station if he is fitted for it.'[26] Hancock could have added Lugard's 'There is no colour bar in British Africa.'[27]

No barrier of race? No colour bar? A barrier of race rigidly separated white from black in colonial Africa. But the separation was never explicitly formulated as part of British colonial policy. There was no need; everyone understood it. When the Warren Fisher Committee reported on the system of appointment to the colonial service in 1930, it did not need to specify that one essential prerequisite was a white skin.[28] Nor did Sir Ralph Furse, who interviewed candidates for appointment to the colonial service from 1910 to 1948, have to explain that only whites need apply. No one had to be told what everyone knew already. To quote Sir Cosmo Parkinson, one of the great mandarins of the Colonial Office: 'One last point on the staffing of the Colonial Office. There has not, so far as I know, ever been any colour bar. But in practice the question did not arise.'[29] Even when Harold Laski published a blistering attack on the colonial service in 1938, though he commented that 'educated coloured people ... have practically no chance of a career' in the higher ranks, he did not go on to explain that a deliberate, if unspoken, racial barrier excluded them.[30]

So none of the statements on colonial policy issued during the 1940s included a renunciation of racial rule. Never proclaimed, it never needed to be renounced. It could be unobtrusively abandoned with the implication that it had never really existed – except in the white settler territories.

This was how the great gurus of the period presented it. Lord Hailey's *An African Survey* of 1938 has a long index entry on 'race relations'. But most of the references are to South Africa; the rest are to the Rhodesias, Kenya and French Africa.[31] Similarly, Sir Keith Hancock, writing in 1943, saw the 'colour bar spirit' advancing northwards from South Africa as if it were something unknown elsewhere in Africa.[32] Margery Perham in her 1961 Reith Lectures did admit that Africans had been denied official posts because they were not white. But she supposed that they would have experienced rejection as personal humiliation rather than as political oppression. She also implied that Africans going to Britain for higher education would there meet the colour bar for the first time in their lives – and might make up for it by 'the supreme racial compensation' of sexual intercourse with a white woman.[33]

In their two-volume series of documents *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-64,* Porter and Stockwell include only one document that refers, and that obliquely, to the end of racial rule. It is an internal Colonial Office memo of 1953 on 'The Africanization policy of the West African governments'. This begins:

> Africanization has been the policy of the Governments of the Gold Coast and Nigeria for many years... But lip service to this policy has not involved, except in very recent years, any pressure to implement it... The inaction, if not the policy, of HMG is therefore partly to blame for the present difficulties which the pressure for accelerated Africanization in West Africa is bringing.[34]

So, unobtrusively, whites gave up their racial authority, thus ensuring the end of the white empires. For without the authority of their white skin, how could they maintain their accustomed rule? How could the 'second colonial occupation' of the immediate postwar years succeed, once the white officials could no longer look to their skins to command obedience? And so, in British, French and (with a sudden lurch) Belgian Africa – for the French and Belgians could, like the British, plausibly deny that white racial rule had ever been part of their official policy – white authority came to an end. Africans were hastily promoted, while the white officials, no longer able to exercise their familiar racial control mechanisms, bowed themselves out.

In white settler Africa, the whites inevitably refused to surrender peaceably the racial principle that maintained not only their authority but also the title to their land – as they saw it, their homeland. It took years of warfare to dismantle white authority in Kenya, Algeria, Portuguese Africa and Zimbabwe. Only now is it beginning to be dismantled in South Africa.

Historians and white racial rule

Léon Poliakov, in the introduction to *The Aryan Myth: a history of racist and nationalist ideas,* published in 1974, described a dismaying obstacle that confronted him, that historians of Europe were busy excluding from their work any reference to race. '*It begins to look as if, through shame or fear of being racist, the West will not admit to having been so at any time*' [his italics], so that 'a vast chapter of Western thought is thus made to disappear by sleight of hand'.[35]

It is not only historians of Europe who have been operating this conjuring trick. There are distinguished historians, African as well as European, who still continue to close their eyes to how white authority was exercised in colonial Africa. Some, it is true, have indeed perceived, and stated unequivocally, that European rule in Africa was racial rule (I have given some examples).[36] Others prefer not to notice it.

Two standard histories of Africa may serve as examples. Volume VII of the *UNESCO General History of Africa,* covering 1880-1935, has a chapter entitled 'Methods and institutions of European domination'.[37] But the contributing authors, R.F. Betts and M. Asiwaju (one white, one black), say nothing of the racial methods and institutions of European domination. A.E. Afigbo, in another chapter, gives examples of racial policies but without indicating that they were part of a coherent strategy of government. B.O. Oloruntemehin ascribes racial barriers to 'illiberalism'. Illiberal they certainly were, but they also maintained a rational, purposive system of authority.

Volume VI of the *Cambridge History of Africa*, considering the years it covers (c1870-1905), might well have been given the fancy subtitle 'The

establishment of white racial rule'.[38] But white racial rule is hardly mentioned in the volume – except, of course, in South Africa. Yves Person recalls 'the racialism which accompanied the setting up of the colonial era', but without exemplifying it. John Hargreaves mentions 'the self-imposed reluctance' of the British in West Africa to retain Africans in senior posts, but without indicating clearly that 'reluctance' masked deliberate policy. G.N. Sanderson describes Cromer's administrative reforms in Egypt, but without noticing that they stratified administration by race. John Lonsdale, in his otherwise admirable synoptic chapter, leaves out racial rule.

Nor, in the Longman *History of Central Africa* edited by David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin, does Phyllis Martin spell out in her chapter on 'The violence of empire' how, in 'the rule of the feeble' (as she characterises European rule in Central Africa), even the feeblest rulers were stiffened by the authority conferred by their white skin.[39] And to add another of the prominent historians of Africa and empire, Anthony Low – in the opening chapter, 'Empire and authority', of his *Lion Rampant: essays in the study of British Imperialism,* he nowhere even hints that a white skin carried authority in the British empire.[40]

In 1978, the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom organised a conference in Oxford on the theme 'Whites in Africa: past, present and future'. White racial rule was again overlooked. A selection of papers was published in a special issue of the *Journal of African History* under the title 'White presence and power in Africa'.[41] Terence Ranger set the tone in his introduction: 'It did indeed turn out to be very difficult to correlate "whiteness" exclusively with any particular range of activities.' Very difficult? Was it really so very difficult to perceive that white presence was always correlated with white power? None of the published papers (or the unpublished papers circulated at the conference) contained the message that authority in colonial Africa was white authority, exercised through the presence of an imputed white skin.

Somehow the memory of racial authority had been swept under the carpet. Yet those who shut their eyes to it were missing the basic strategic control which kept colonial Africa quiet, and enabled its rulers to exert day-to-day authority over their subject peoples effortlessly.

Meanwhile, studies of decolonisation and 'transfer of power' come streaming out from the publishers. Many such studies have appeared (if I have missed some, I apologise). What one finds in them is familiar: authors who, having failed to notice that the basic day-to-day authority in colonial Africa was white authority, have not considered its disappearance. Indeed, most of them follow the 'official mind' and pretend it never existed, politely averting their eyes from the spectacle of a skinless emperor.

There are some exceptions. Richard Crook, in his article 'Legitimacy, authority and the transfer of power in Ghana', exemplifies the

'difficulties' of Africanisation mentioned in the 1953 Colonial Office memo quoted above. He also explains how the Convention People's Party, not in itself a 'racialist' party, was obliged to use the rhetoric of race in order to attack a racially entrenched white government.[42] The late Charles Carrington also admitted that 'time was when the white man was master and when all white men's values prevailed', and that, therefore, 'racialism has been made a part of the platform of African political leaders'.[43] John Flint, writing on 'Planned decolonisation and its failure in British Africa', shows how 'racism, officially condemned in London and in governors' circulars to district officers, remained rife and seriously compromised social cooperation with the educated elite'.[44] Brian Gardner, in *The African Dream,* points out that the 'simple fact of pigmentation bedevilled the last years of the British Empire in Africa'.[45] And Partha Sarathi Gupta has illustrated how, within the Labour Party, the Fabian belief in racial hierarchies was gradually given up.[46]

Rudolf von Albertini, John Darwin, John Hargreaves, R.D. Pearce and Ronald Symonds all refer to racial rule in their respective books, as does Paul Rich.[47] But none of them indicate that it was an essential tool of government which underpinned colonial authority. Nor do they consider the implications of its abandonment, or investigate when and how it was given up – what happened when the emperor took off his white skin. They overlook the 'difficulties' referred to in the 1953 Colonial Office memo. None relate the passing of racial rule to the failure of the 'second colonial occupation'.

The rest (forty-seven works in all) ignore it, or follow Lord Hailey in confining it to white settler Africa.[48] And in the final volume of the *Cambridge History of Africa* (volume VIII, c1940-75), the editor refers merely to 'the myth of white superiority', not to the reality of white authority and its rapid disappearance.[49] The index references under 'race' and 'racism' send the readers to Southern and Eastern Africa. The only African contributor to the volume, the late Billy Dudley, has nothing on the end of racial rule in his own Nigeria.

Appropriately (recalling the quotation from Poliakov at the beginning of this section), it is a German political scientist, Franz Ansprenger, in his *The Dissolution of the Colonial Empires,* who has let the cat out of the bag: 'It is not the done thing nowadays – and for good reason – to work with the racial concept.'[50] But there remains one puzzle. That white historians should feel that working with the racial concept 'is not the done thing', and should wish to distance themselves from a political device that links them with the policies of Hitler and Verwoerd, one can understand. That African historians should do so is less comprehensible. Are they, perhaps, uneasy at admitting that their country-people were so long the victims of what seems, in retrospect, a gigantic confidence trick – a trick that fooled millions of people into believing that a white skin somehow conferred authority? Confidence

trick or not, it was a highly effective way of keeping colonial Africa under control.

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ROBBIE McVEIGH

The specificity of Irish racism

The existence of racist ideas and practices among Irish people – in Ireland and elsewhere – has been almost completely ignored. When it has been addressed at all, the issue has been *whether*, not *why*, Irish people can be racist. Here and there, Irish people and others have engaged with this racism in piecemeal ways, but little theoretical work has been done on the structural question of how Irish people – given our own experience of colonisation and racialisation – can be racist. There are several reasons for this undertheorisation. To some extent, the existence of a long and proud internationalist and anti-imperialist tradition in Ireland has disguised other contradictory and reactionary strands in Irish politics and identity. This tradition has naturally led many Black people to identify with anti-colonial struggles in Ireland. In consequence, no doubt, some people have been reluctant to threaten anti-imperialist alliances by challenging instances of Irish racism. More recently, 'Irish racism' has been theorised out of existence by the disingenuous use of the 'racism = prejudice + power' equation to argue that Irish people, like Black people, have no power to be racist.

I want to challenge the notion that Irish people cannot be racist. I do not believe that ascribing guilt for the sake of it has any useful role within anti-racism, but I am certain that recognising the existence of Irish racism is a prerequisite to engaging with its divisive and reactionary consequences. To this end, I want to begin to 'situate' racism in Ireland, and to examine the extent to which the form and content of racism in Ireland is different from its manifestations in Britain and elsewhere.

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Does racism assume specific forms in Ireland because of the particular nature of the social formation there? Obviously, my theorisation of racism in Ireland is going to be schematic. It is not offered as a definitive analysis and is intended to open debate rather than close it. What I can do is point to some of the key factors which structure and reproduce particular manifestations of Irish racism, and point to some of the implications that the theorisation of Irish racism has for anti-racist praxis in Britain and elsewhere.

The undertheorisation of racist practices and ideas among Irish people might be relatively unproblematic if, to use Sivanandan's dichotomy, these characterised racialism and not racism.[1] If Irish racism amounted to no more than different instances of unfocused, interpersonal prejudice, then it might be argued that it required no further analysis. But, although I do not want to suggest that white Irish racism is the same as white British racism, I believe that our racism cannot be dismissed as the consequence of ignorance or insensitivity. I want to suggest that there are certain structural factors which produce and reproduce a specifically Irish racism which is divisive of anti-imperialist unity and which *does* become manifest in discrimination and racist violence at times. Thus, while white Irish people experience anti-Irish racism, we are also capable of being racist ourselves. The contradictory power location of the Irish within the modern world system means that we can both experience and reproduce racism.

I am concerned here specifically with the racism experienced by racialised minority communities in Ireland. These communities can be categorised as: Black people, Jewish people, and Travelling people. The Black population in Ireland has its origins, mostly, in Black countries colonised by the British. In Northern Ireland, it comprises South Asian and Chinese people, in Southern Ireland, it includes these, as well as a substantial number of African and Afro-Caribbean people and a number of Black Irish people. The Irish Jewish community is long-established in both parts of Ireland and includes people of Sephardic and Ashkenazi origin. The Irish Travelling community is present in – and indigenous to – both parts of Ireland.

I would characterise some of the experiences of these groups as experiences of Irish racism and I want to examine the specificity of this racism. But this begs two rather obvious questions. The first is: 'Is there any racism in Ireland?' The second follows on: 'Even if there is racism in Ireland, does it matter?' The commonsense and popular answer among white and 'sedentary' Irish people to both these questions is 'no'. These responses also beg a third question because they are almost invariably based upon the premise that there are no Black people in Ireland. This is untrue, but it is nevertheless crucially important because it is the central means by which Irish people deny their own racism. This, in turn, allows them to retain the moral high-ground vis-à-vis racism in

other countries – notably, of course, Britain.

It bears emphasis that the proposition, 'there is no racism in Ireland because there are no Black people here', is unsound for two basic reasons. First, it is wrong simply because there are Black people in Ireland. But it is also unsound for another more important reason: it is not a requirement of racism that there be Black people in a given social formation for (anti-Black) racism to exist. For example, the process of British imperialism was thoroughly racist at times when there were relatively small numbers of Black people in the imperial heartland. The idea that there needs to be a Black population before there is racism is both erroneous and dangerous, because it inevitably suggests that the presence of Black people in a given environment causes racism.

However, it is the case that the presence of Black people in a given social formation means that racism will become manifest in particular ways. I have no doubt that racism in Ireland would be different if there were genuinely 'no Black people here'. But that is by-the-by: there are Black people in Ireland, north and south; and there are other racialised minority communities in Ireland, north and south. Census figures on the sizes of these communities are notoriously inaccurate, but, at a rough estimate, there are about 20,000 Black people, 3,000 Jewish people and 21,000 Travelling people. So, approximately 1 per cent of the Irish population belongs to a racialised community. The Twenty-six Counties is slightly more 'multi-ethnic' than the Six Counties, but the difference is a small one; it is certainly not structurally significant in the sense that it would engender different racisms, north and south.

The issue of specificity

It is clear that there is a racialised minority population in both parts of Ireland. (Furthermore, all suggestions are that this population will grow substantially over the next few years.) Thus, the commonsense perception that there are no Black people in Ireland is palpably false. The next question vis-à-vis the issue of racism in Ireland is whether these people experience racism and, thus, whether Irish racism is an issue which requires addressing. It is clear that these racialised minority populations do experience racism in a variety of ways. Sometimes racism in Ireland is experienced in subtle and intangible forms. However, other more direct manifestations of racism, particularly racist harassment and racist violence, are already taking place.[2] Populist appeals to racist sentiment are now widespread in Irish political discourse – especially at a local level. (Most notorious of all was the call by a former deputy mayor of Belfast for the 'incineration' of Travelling people.) There are already openly racist (albeit small) political organisations in Ireland on both sides of the border. Thus, racism in Ireland is not simply a racism in terms of the otherness – or

pathologised 'difference' – of Black and other racialised minority people (although this is an important part of the experience of Irish racism). Racist violence and discrimination already occur in Ireland: they are something which is happening, not something which may or may not develop sometime in the future.

Rather obviously then, Irish racism *is* a 'problem' for Black and Jewish and Travelling people in Ireland. As such, it can be argued that racism is also a problem for all Irish people in the sense that it is a phenomenon which should be opposed by everybody on good moral and liberal grounds. But there are also further ways in which racism in Ireland impacts more directly and negatively on the lives of white and sedentary Irish people. Obviously, it encourages the denial and exclusion of significant influences on Irish culture. This ethnocentrism leaves us with a distorted notion of Ireland itself – constructing it as either homogeneous (white and sedentary) or exclusively and permanently dichotomised along Protestant and Catholic lines. This denies the increasingly 'multi-ethnic' and 'multicultural' character of the Irish world. Perhaps more importantly, Irish racism is also part of a process which, sometimes consciously and actively but more often through a kind of immanent logic, reworks and transforms tensions within white and sedentary Irish communities in the interests of dominant and reactionary forces. This divides people and communities; it militates against radical social and political transformation. This means that Irish racism is not just the concern of racialised minority groups: it is a problem for every subordinate and oppressed community in Ireland. For this reason, opposition to racism in Ireland should not be the preserve of well-intentioned liberals but, rather, part of every radical political project.

I have argued that there is racism in Ireland and that this racism is a 'problem' for both Black and white Irish people. But is there a specifically Irish racism? Does it assume particular forms precisely because it occurs in Ireland? This question of specificity is an important part of any attempt to challenge racism. Racism is not some timeless essence which floats unchanging through history; it is always located in particular structures of power and oppression. Analysing the function of racism within a given situation is a necessary part of political resistance to it. The specific difficulties attached to radical political work in the Irish situation mean that such a theorisation is prerequisite to effective anti-racist practice here.

I will argue that racism does assume a specifically Irish form precisely because it functions through and alongside other features of the Irish social formation. These necessarily include class and gender and other structuring elements which are present in every social formation. But, in Ireland, they combine with other forces in very particular ways which account for the specificity of Irish racism. To

begin to make sense of this specificity, one needs to look at five discrete, though always interacting, processes. These are:

1. the 'diffusion' of racism from Britain;
2. the involvement of Irish people in the process of western imperialism;
3. the Irish diaspora;
4. the 'grafting on' of racism to internal forces, notably sectarianism and nationalism, and
5. the existence of an endogenous anti-Traveller racism.

In Ireland much popular culture is received fairly passively from Britain. For most of our history, Irish people have necessarily made sense of the world through a filter of British perceptions of that world. I characterise this process as one of 'diffusion' (although it was never a 'natural' process – control of information in Ireland has always been a key part of British colonial strategy). Thus, when British popular culture is actively racist, Irish people will undoubtedly reproduce elements of that racism. This means that Ireland experienced and learned from British racism in the high colonial period. But it also means that, increasingly, Ireland learns from contemporary Britain. It experiences the 'new racism' in Britain which has as its focus post-war Black migrants and their children.

It would be wrong to dismiss all British culture that enters Ireland in one form or another as racist. When they do actually occur, positive images of Black people in Britain are an important anti-racist influence in Ireland. There is a sense in which Irish lives have become 'multicultural' via the British media, no matter how seldom we meet Black people in 'real life'. Nevertheless, there is also a racist subtext to much British culture which undoubtedly has its effects in Ireland. The mimicking of the racist abuse of Black sportspeople, which has occurred in both parts of Ireland, is one obvious example. In a perverse contradiction, two Black footballers from Linfield in Belfast – a club whose identity is closely linked to loyalist sectarianism – have been racially abused. Similarly, Serge Blanco, the French Rugby captain, was racially abused at Landsdowne Road in Dublin. In each of these instances, the abuse assumed identical forms to that observed by Irish people every time they watch an English soccer game on television – bananas were thrown at Black players, they were booed continuously when in possession of the ball, the sound of 'monkey' imitations followed them around the pitch.

It is not 'natural' – in any sense of the word – to abuse a sportsperson simply because he or she is Black. The impulse comes from somewhere; it is reproduced in a particular social context for particular reasons. We have to make sense of these reasons in order to understand given manifestations of racism. These examples of Irish racism can only have come from the 'diffusion' of racist ideas and practices from Britain. In

this instance, racism in Ireland happened because some Irish people observed the abuse of Black sportspeople in Britain and reproduced it in Ireland. Countless other examples of this kind of 'diffused racism' occur in Ireland. White Irish people often make sense of their encounter with Black people through racist ideas they have been exposed to because of the influence of British popular culture in Ireland. This influence is manifested in Ireland in a whole profusion of ways – in British newspapers, on British TV and radio and so on – and every time these media reproduce British racism, this necessarily has some effect on Irish consciousness.

However, other examples of Irish racism are not explicable simply in terms of 'learning' from Britain (or elsewhere); they are more closely connected to the experience of Irishness. Although there has never been an immediately unequal power relationship between Irish people and Black peoples (Ireland was colonised, it did not colonise), Irish people had a place within imperialism which had a profound effect on ideas about Black people. This had a more significant structuring role in other instances of Irish racism which I now turn to.

Irish involvement in imperialism and colonialism

Understanding the place of Ireland, and of particular forces in Ireland, within British imperialism is a necessary part of making sense of contemporary Irish racism. The relationship of the Protestant bloc in Ireland – itself a product of settler colonialism – to British imperialism ensured general support for, and involvement in, the process of imperialism in Asia and Africa. Although Presbyterian radicalism in the 1790s prevented Belfast from engaging in the slave trade, subsequent developments within the Protestant bloc encouraged racist ideas among Irish Protestants. Nineteenth-century Belfast self-consciously combined its sectarian and imperial chauvinisms – the city is still pathetically littered with relics of imperialist iconography degrading and exoticising other colonised peoples.

But Irish Catholicism also encouraged elements of anti-Black racism as a specifically religious phenomenon. This is illustrated by the collections for 'Black babies' which, until recently, were a ubiquitous feature of Irish church propaganda. These necessarily encouraged Irish Catholic people to regard Black people in a particular way – as passive and helpless, to be saved by the proselytising ambitions of the church. Thus, even if the Catholic church in Ireland was not immediately implicated in the process of western military and political imperialism and its accompanying racist ideologies, it colluded in western religious and cultural imperialism. And, even though Irish Catholics had more cause to challenge British imperialism in Ireland than their Protestant counterparts, some of them still found a place within the British

imperial project elsewhere.

The co-option of Irish people in this process is personified by Thomas Moore, a Catholic and sometime Irish 'national poet'. He produced the seminal orientalist text, *Lalla Rookh,* in 1817. He had done a similar disservice to Caribbean peoples with 'Odes to Nea', inspired while serving British colonialism as registrar of the Admiralty Prize Court in Bermuda. He returned to London to write poetry in response to a growing demand in Britain for exoticised accounts of colonised peoples. But there was no mention of solidarity with the colonised, no suggestion that, because of his Irishness, Moore should stand with them rather than the coloniser. *Lalla Rookh* is an offensive caricature of South Asia – Moore knew next to nothing about the cultures he pretended to describe, but, in the imperial heartland, 'oriental romance' was in greater demand than the truth about the brutality of colonialism. In Bermuda, he had already suggested that Black people were nothing more than an unpleasant reminder of imperialism and slavery in the midst of his 'poetical' fantasies:

> These little islands are thickly covered with cedar groves, through the vistas of which you catch a few pretty white houses, which my poetical short-sightedness always transforms into temples; and I often expect to see Nymphs and Graces come tripping from them, when, to my great disappointment, I find that a few miserable negroes is all 'the bloomy flush of life' it has to boast of.[3]

Moore's career provides a perfect illustration of the way in which some Irish people encountered and reproduced British racism through imperial service. Thus, though racism was not 'organic' to Ireland, the Irish situation within the imperial system in general, and the British empire in particular, fostered a racialisation of Irish consciousness. In a similar way, other Irish people who were unambiguously survivors of colonialism, rather than its servants, became racialised through the parallel process of the Irish diaspora.

Since the eighteenth century, emigration from Ireland has led to the establishment of Irish blocs in the different countries of settlement. These blocs, in Britain, in the USA and Canada, in Australia and Aotearoa (NZ) and in South Africa, were placed and continue to exist in specific relationships to indigenous peoples and to other immigrant groups. Each of these relationships assumed racist forms at times. For example, the Irish-American community found itself in a particular relationship to Black Americans, which worked itself out in particular ways through a specifically Irish (or Irish-American) racism. The uniqueness of the Irish experience is evidenced by what is perhaps the most perverse amalgamation of colonial racism and Irish anti-imperialism. Thus, in 1972, in the midst of Black/Irish tensions around 'desegregation' in Boston and in the wake of Bloody Sunday in Derry,

the watchword of the Boston Irish was, 'Brits out of Ireland, niggers out of Boston'. Undoubtedly, racism from the diaspora became important in the construction of Black people in Ireland itself. And, since emigration is a common feature of the Irish social formation, north and south, it continues to have a significant effect. Many Irish people are still encountering their first active racism among Irish communities in Britain, America and Australasia. This racism is 'repatriated' through contact with Ireland and, of course, when Irish emigrants return to Ireland.

Such 'repatriated' racism has always been 'made sense' of in specific ways in Ireland. By way of illustration, witness the support for slavery given by John Mitchel. As he put it in a letter to a friend:

> when any of your taunting friends asks you again, 'What do you think of Ireland's emancipator now? Would you like an Irish Republic with an accompaniment of slave plantations?' – answer quite simply, 'Yes'. At least I would so answer; and I never said or wrote anything the least inconsistent with such a declaration. But enough of the Blacks.[4]

Yet Mitchel had been an active anti-imperialist in Ireland. He was transported to Tasmania (he subsequently escaped to the US) because of his forthright espousal of revolutionary violence and he wrote powerful condemnations of British imperialism in India. Whatever contradictions existed in Mitchel's position when in Ireland, his racism was activated by his removal to and location within Irish America. This is one example of Irish racism which came out of the Irish diaspora. But it also serves to illustrate how such racism is 'repatriated' and thus becomes significant within Ireland. The justification of Mitchel's position by Arthur Griffith (founder of Sinn Féin) is an example of how such racism is reworked 'at home' by being 'grafted on' to internal forces.

In his preface to Mitchel's *Jail Journal,* Griffith berated those who had attempted to 'excuse' Mitchel's views on slavery: 'his views on negro-slavery have been deprecatingly excused, as if excuse were needed for an Irish nationalist declining to hold the negro his peer in right'.[5] This is one small example of racism from the diaspora which has been 'repatriated' and 'grafted on' to internal forces. If Griffith's racism is an example of the way that nationalism – an internal, Irish discourse – can reproduce racism, there is plenty of evidence of how Irish unionism is equally capable of generating racist ideas. The ease with which Powellism, manifestation of the 'new racism' in Britain in the 1960s, found a political home in the Ulster Unionist Party is an obvious example.

Thus, there are certainly elements within Irish nationalism and unionism which have encouraged and reproduced racism. In the case

of anti-Semitism these elements dovetailed neatly with the specifically religious anti-Semitism of the Catholic church. (Until 1965, the Catholic church held that Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.) In Ireland, this had its most infamous consequences in the Limerick pogrom of 1904-6. The pogrom illustrates how Irish racism is worked out through sectarian division, another example of racism 'grafting on' to internal forces. Hyman records how:

> The attack on the Jews of Limerick was an attempt to make them suffer for the supposed wrongs of Redemptorist Fathers expelled from France, an expulsion for which the French Jews were being blamed... Father Creagh [the instigator of the pogrom] endowed the Jews with the most diabolical character imaginable, and enjoined on his hearers 'not to deal with the Jews', which was interpreted to mean not only not to buy from them but also to repudiate debts incurred. With two or three exceptions, the community was pauperised. The Protestants of the city espoused its cause and opened relief funds, but this only intensified the rancour of the Redemptorists and of the Community of the Holy Family. The attack mounted and, through no fault of their own, the Jews became a kind of buffer between two antagonists; they asked that no further subscriptions be canvassed among Protestant sympathisers, and the anti-Jewish campaign in the press was ignored.[6]

This Protestant beneficence may have been a fine example of Irish Protestant liberalism. However, Protestant support for the Limerick Jews may equally have been an excellent way to antagonise local Catholics. Either way, it is an illustration of how the character and course of racism in Ireland is structured by existing sectarian division. There is no doubt that sectarianism is more important in terms of its structuring role in the manifestation of contemporary Irish racism in the Six Counties, but this example shows that it can be important in the south.

The linkage between sectarianism and racism in the north becomes manifest in the overlap between loyalism and British racist and fascist groups. Fortunately, the process has been largely one-way, in that racist and fascist groups have targeted Northern Ireland for recruiting 'political soldiers' without significant response. The 'Third Position' element of the National Front has even argued that 'the British revolution starts in Ulster', but their attention has been largely unrewarded. Racism does surface among loyalists in different ways which are often crudely articulated to sectarianism. (For example, a song entitled, 'The Pope's a Darkie' was the 1990 'number 1' in *Ulster*, the magazine of the loyalist UDA.) British racist iconography certainly has some appeal to loyalist youth, but this has remained largely unfocused. The NF presence in East Belfast ended ignominiously

when the UDA characterised them as 'tossers and perverts' after they were found to be selling copies of Colonel Ghaddafi's *Green Book*.[7] Despite the keen interest of British fascists, there is no simple way to combine British racism and Irish sectarianism. Nevertheless, the continued efforts to synthesise the two have to be guarded against: the affinity between loyalism and British racist politics signals what is, potentially, the most dangerous source of an activated racism in Ireland.

Organic 'Irish racism'

While much of the racist ideology and practice I have pointed to has been 'imported' – that is to say it has its roots elsewhere and has been reworked in the Irish context – there is a pre-existing racism which is organic to Ireland. This is anti-Traveller racism. The prejudice, discrimination and violence which Travellers experience can clearly be characterised as racism. As the Belfast Traveller Support Group argues, racism

> is a practice that labels the culture of the Travellers as deviance and seeks to impose the values of the dominant group on the Travellers. It is a practice that creates negative stereotypes of the Travellers and seeks to interpret the Travellers on the basis of such stereotypes. It is the racism of the settled majority that is at the root of the economic, political, and cultural exclusion of the Travellers. Unless this problem is dealt with, there can be no just and lasting solution to the problem of Travellers.[8]

Thus, Ireland has its own endogenous racism, a racism which cannot be treated as an undesirable 'foreign' import from Britain or anywhere else. Undoubtedly, this overlaps and interacts with newer manifestations of racism in Ireland. Court points out:

> The terms *dirty* and *clean* and alternately *black* and *white* have been used in many social contexts, including this Irish one, to designate outsiders and insiders. Tinkers, for example, have frequently been called black by Gypsies as well as by settled Irish, two peoples who were themselves named *black* and *dirty* by the English. The *black* or *dirty* person in these instances is one who is not entitled to full participation in the institutions that embody the vital, moral structures of the given society, one who is denied its membership and protection (original emphasis).[9]

So this racialisation of the Irish Travelling population is not separate from the racialisation of Black people. Endogenous Irish anti-Traveller racism and other racisms are reworked in relation to each other. One obvious and crude example of this is the development of the nursery

rhyme 'Eenie, Meenie, Miney, Moe'. The object in both Britain and Ireland was originally a 'tinker' or Traveller. By the 1950s, the word 'nigger' had replaced 'tinker' in response to the 'new racism' in Britain; it gradually began to change in Ireland after this.

To understand the dynamics of anti-Traveller racism and its relationship to other racisms, we have to address it as an endogenous development. The origins of the Irish Travelling population remain disputed, but Irish Travellers have their roots in a Celtic (and possibly pre-Celtic) nomadic population in Ireland. They are very definitely not *Rom* (or 'Gypsies'), whose origins lie in a nomadic population which moved from India, through Egypt and Romania (hence Gypsies and Romanies) to western Europe. In fact, very few Gypsies have ever come to Ireland. The original Irish nomadic population may have been supplemented at various times in Irish history by dispossessed labourers and other marginalised people. Gradually, this population developed a clear sense of its distinct social and cultural identity – an identity which was, and still is, bounded by overt prejudice and racism from the sedentary Irish community. This racism is, however, different from, say, English racism. It is not steeped in colonial domination and imperial justification, but rather constructed out of what has been called 'sedentarism'. Certainly, the attachment to land and locality among sedentary Irish people contrasts starkly with the absence of such strictures among Travelling people. A mixture of mistrust and envy of their supposed 'freedom' ensured that Travelling people came to occupy a central position within sedentary Irish culture as a symbolic 'other'. To 'explain' – and indeed to counteract – contemporary manifestations of Irish racism, it is vital to pay much greater attention to the development and reproduction of anti-Traveller racism, as well as to its interaction with other racisms.

The experience of Irish Travellers illustrates that racism in Ireland assumes forms which cannot be made sense of simply in terms of 'learning' from Britain or elsewhere. Racism is always reworked in the Irish situation and is, at times, crucially dependent upon endogenous rather than exogenous forces. Irish racism cannot be explained solely in relation to the colonial history and imperial conceit which structured the way in which white British people 'made sense' of post-war Black migration (although, as I suggested above, Ireland was never free of imperialist ideologies). Particularly in the case of Travellers, we have to look to other internal factors which encouraged and encourage the racialisation of the Irish social formation. The most immediate of these is the strength of community in Ireland. This had its roots in a rural setting, but it has also been reproduced in an urban environment. It has been reinforced by the process of sectarian conflict and social closure, especially in the north. Within the 'warmth' of the community, outsiders have always been perceived as profoundly problematic. This was

undoubtedly the case historically with Travelling people, but it has also, I think, been a key part in the construction of other racialised communities. At a deep level, Travelling people, Jewish people and, more recently, Black people have threatened the very nature of 'community' in Ireland.

Racialised 'outsiders' have come to represent the presumed chaos which lies outside the protection of the community in Ireland. In this context, 'community' is not simply a warm and embracing notion, but rather a central element in communal repression. In order to 'protect' the community, contradictions, tensions and inequalities within the community are reworked and controlled. Racism becomes a central means by which these tensions are symbolically transferred from inside the community to the outside. Thus, through a convenient sublimation, people inside the community are not sexually active, Black people are; people inside the community do not exploit their fellows, Jewish people do; men inside the community are not violent to their partners, Travelling men are. In pathologising the 'out-group', the 'community' de-pathologises itself. This process is obviously negative for the 'out-group', in that it encourages discrimination and violence against them to ensure that they stay an 'out-group'. But it is also inherently problematic for the white and sedentary community, since it does not successfully resolve tensions around sexuality, gender, class and so on. It is a means of controlling and repressing – but not transcending – these different tensions. If this analysis is correct, then opposition to racism in Ireland is not about 'sympathy' for 'victims of racism' (although it has often taken this inherently patronising form). Rather, anti-racism is a necessary part of tackling existing inequalities in terms of class, gender, sexuality and so on for less selfless reasons. This is because Irish racism is already a crucial articulating force for oppression in Ireland. Reactionary ideologies and practices which affect the whole Irish social formation have been constructed and reproduced at the race/gender/class nexus.

Making sense of 'sedentarism'

It is not easy to theorise sedentarism in any simple or straightforward way. Analyses which see racism as rooted in imperialism and colonialism are sometimes mechanistic and inadequate explanations for 'new racisms', but they undoubtedly explain the ideology of the coloniser. Any legitimation of enslavement or colonisation will tend to be racist by default, since racist ideology is simply the easiest way to justify the undemocratic and repressive control of one group by another. However, racism of the kind I have identified in Ireland is less easy to explain in this mechanistic way. Prejudice, discrimination and violence against 'outsiders' and nomads is more difficult to make sense

of than the racism used against the colonised or the enslaved (although it may well be more analogous to what has been termed 'internal colonialism').

Certainly, at one level, anti-nomadism represents a key part of the hegemony of capitalist social relations. The continued criminalisation and persecution of 'vagrancy' or 'itinerancy' seeks to deny an existence which is, symbolically, the antithesis of dominant and dominating modes of production and consumption. This goes right back to the land enclosures and the expropriation and capitalisation of common land. Since then, at least, the travelling dispossessed have represented a fundamental challenge to established order, both practically and symbolically. Their existence is testament to an act of class theft which was a definitive part of the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. Without romanticising the oppression experienced by Travelling communities, it is possible to suggest that their cultural and social identity undermines hegemonic notions of work and property relations. Thus, the refusal to work for others, the refusal to be 'settled', and the refusal to recognise capitalist definitions of ownership and control, remain profoundly subversive acts. Hence, any group of Travelling people requires immediate policing by the state and engenders widespread distrust among a sedentary population which has internalised the dominant ideology of property rights – which, in turn, underpins and legitimates social relations within capitalism. Drawing on this analysis, I would tentatively argue that sedentarism represents a specific form of racism which developed out of the interface between nomadic and sedentary modes of production and their attendant cultures. But this is not the 'solution' to anti-nomad racisms; it is only a provisional attempt to analyse them properly.

The importance of theorising sedentarism as a fundamental part of racism is not limited to making sense of the race/class nexus in Ireland. This is one area in which the Irish experience can inform anti-racist struggle in Britain. Anti-Traveller and anti-Gypsy racism must be incorporated into British anti-racist struggle as well. (My own experience of involvement in different anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles in London was of almost total separation between the struggles of Travelling people and other communities in resistance.) However, as I have suggested, the 'integration' of the experience of Travellers into the broad anti-racist and anti-imperialist movement is not simply a political project but also a theoretical one. Anti-Traveller prejudice is impossible to make sense of in terms of crude colonial or post-colonial models. We need to include an understanding of 'otherness' structured by power, and an analysis of the deep-seated hegemony of sedentarist and anti-nomad ideologies within *all* sedentary classes in the West. I think this is not only possible, but that it also articulates in quite specific ways with the experience of Black

and Third World peoples in Britain and across Europe. There is a simultaneous degradation and exoticisation of otherness anywhere where racism is focused on 'outsiders', whether these are nomads or migrants or refugees. Much work, practical and theoretical, needs to be done in this area. But it promises much in return: new understandings, new alliances and new modes of resistance.

In this sense, working towards a proper understanding of Irish racism is part of a wider process of theorising and challenging the increasingly complex and sophisticated racisms of Europe in the 1990s. However, by way of conclusion, I want to return to the issue of the specificity of racist ideas and practices among Irish people. I have argued that Irish racism exists and that this racism must be addressed rather than ignored. Towards this end, I have traced some of the factors which situate racism within the Irish social formation. I have also attempted to analyse the 'sedentarism' which lends much of the specificity to Irish racism. But, of course, all this insistence on the existence of Irish racism would be dangerous if separated from anti-racist praxis. Since reactionary forces are all too efficient at exploiting divisions between different communities in resistance, it would be wrong to construct such divisions for them if there were no point to it. Focusing on Irish racism is only useful if it can facilitate the dismantling of that racism. I have no doubt that recognising Irish racism is absolutely essential to this process. If Irish racism is ignored or denied, as it has been by the Irish Left, this precludes any anti-racist practice. Moreover, it reproduces divisions within the anti-imperialist and class struggles in Ireland and between Irish people and other communities in resistance elsewhere. Once Irish racism is recognised, however, this process can be reversed: just as the Irish situation produces a racism specific to it, so it can be used to inform an Irish anti-racism which is similarly specific. If we draw on our anti-imperialist history, we can build an anti-racist praxis that is not separate from other political struggles in Ireland but rather integrally bound in with them. Only then can we begin to challenge the reproduction of repression and exploitation at the race/class/gender nexus. For this reason alone, Irish anti-racism cannot be allowed to remain the prerogative of the liberal petit-bourgeoisie; it must become integral to every liberatory movement in Ireland.

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FRED HALLIDAY

Yemeni workers' organisation in Britain*

From the 1940s onwards, there have been political organisations amongst the Yemeni community in Britain. One such organisation, active amongst South Yemenis during the 1970s, was exceptional in comparison to most workers' and immigrants' organisations. It was not a trades union, in the sense of being concerned directly with the position of its members on the shopfloor, nor primarily with the social situation of its members in British society. It was, first of all, an arm of the Yemeni state, an expression of Yemeni society and politics. It also reflected the fact that so many of the Yemeni working class, from both North and South, were forced to work in exile. Their contribution to the development of their country and the manner in which their union was organised by the South Yemeni state to aid this development was a reflection of the underlying distortion of Yemeni society and the political forces this threw up. The reason why there were Yemeni industrial workers in West Bromwich was because there were no comparable jobs for them in Dhala and Taiz: it was in this context that the workers' organisations amongst the Yemeni community defined their task.

The Yemeni Workers Union (YWU) was founded in February 1970 and, at the end of 1975, its peak of activity, it had an official membership of around 1,900. In the late 1970s, it became less active and in 1984 ceased to operate. The YWU was not the only organisation within the

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Yemeni community, but it had the widest range of activities and it most clearly illustrated the kind of work involved. The basic assumption of the union was that it constituted a link between the workers in Britain and their home country; it was, consequently, a reflection of the relationship between the migrants and their homeland, and tried to define the function of the British Yemeni community within the development of the home country.

Most analyses of immigrant organisations tend to concentrate on the relation between the immigrants and the community in which they have come to work. But this is far less important for Arab communities in Europe in general, and for Yemenis in particular. In this respect, the Yemeni community in Britain bears similarities to the Algerian community in France: the most obvious point that these two communities have in common in the organisational field is that it was not conditions in the country of work that determined the growth of their organisations, but the development of the nationalist movement at home that led to a mobilisation of the migrant workers abroad. For both the Algerians in France and the Yemenis in Britain, their awareness of the nationalist movement was all the greater because they were working in the country that was dominating their homeland and against whom the nationalist movements were fighting – from 1954 to 1962 and from 1963 to 1967, respectively.

There are two other features of the Algerian community in France which are comparable to that of the Yemenis in Britain. First, the history of the nationalist movement in France reflected not only the growth of, but also the divisions within, the nationalist movement at home. Prior to the FLN's campaign, a section of the Algerian community in France had been organised by the rival grouping led by Messali Hajj, and this rivalry, in some ways more open in France than in Algeria itself, continued at least until the FLN won independence in 1962. Second, following independence, there was a general expectation amongst the Algerians in France that the national government that had come to power would be able to find jobs for all those who needed them. Between 1962 and 1965, many Algerians who had been working in France went home in the hope of finding work. But this was a vain hope as the newly independent republic was stricken by economic and employment problems that made it impossible to absorb the potential labour force.

The emergence of political organisations

The Yemeni community in Britain has always been numerically far smaller than that of the Algerians in France. It has, therefore, never played a political role in the UK comparable to that played by the Algerians in France in 1957 or 1961. But the history of the Yemeni community has been, like that of the Algerians, determined by the

development of the nationalist struggle at home. As one leading official of the YWU in Birmingham put it to me: 'Our struggle here has been political – not social, or over working conditions. It has been part of the Arab struggles.' The first organisation that had any stability amongst the Yemeni community was the Allawia Society, founded by Sheikh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi in the late 1930s. Although first of all a religious organisation, it had an important social role in organising the community and, in the late 1940s, under the impact of events in North Yemen and in particular the Free Yemenis revolt, it began to play a directly political role. After the failure of al-Hakimi, the Allawia Society continued to operate; but, whilst it still served a religious function, and whilst many more traditionally-minded Yemenis still owed their prime loyalty to it, it did not play an active role in the industrial centres to which the second wave of Yemeni immigrants came.

Whilst there was a general sympathy among Yemenis in Britain for Arab nationalism and for the opposition movement in Aden in the mid-1950s, this did not at first lead to the growth of political organisations among them. Only after some years of trade union activity in Aden did an organisation form in Britain. This tendency was then encouraged by the revolutionary overthrow of the Imamate in North Yemen in September 1962, which led to the proclamation of a republic and to the eight-year civil war between republicans and royalists. The revolution in the North also led to a deterioration of the British position in South Yemen and, in 1963, a guerrilla movement began in the Radfan mountains north of Aden: after four years of conflict, in both the mountains and in Aden itself, South Yemen gained independence under the leadership of the National Liberation Front (NLF).

Before discussing the impact of these later events, it is necessary to ask why the community reacted more favourably after 1962 than it had done to the events of 1948. The reason must lie in the character of the movements in the home country. The 1948 attempt against the Imam in North Yemen was both secretive and, after some months, defeated. Its social base lay among merchants and intellectuals, not amongst the peasantry from which the migrant workers were mainly drawn. The later movements were ones which mobilised thousands of workers in Aden and which in North and South Yemen involved, after 1962, protracted military campaigns that were reported in the media and followed by the migrant workers via radio reports. They had a different social character and were more visible – and successful. The radio was very important as a means of arousing nationalist feeling throughout the Arab world in the 1950s and this was true, too, of the Yemeni community in Britain, who could listen to Cairo's 'Voice of the Arabs' and its reports of events in both parts of Yemen. The migrants who came after the second world war were also far more in touch with developments at home than were those of a more traditional outlook who had left earlier. They had close

contact with relatives and fellow villagers in Aden and in the areas of military conflict, and were far less cut off than the sailors of the earlier period, who might, in any case, spend months at sea without any direct news of what was happening at home. By the late 1950s, the working class in Aden was led by the Aden Trades Union Congress, which had organised several important strikes on a variety of economic and political issues. The first reflection of this kind of movement in the UK came in 1958, when a short-lived attempt was made to found a nationalist workers' organisation, the Yemen Workers Union. This claimed a membership of around 1,000, mainly in Birmingham, but lasted only a few months, and it was only in 1961 that a more permanent organisation came into existence, the Arab Workers Union (*Ittihad 'Ummal al'Arab*). This was Nasserist in outlook, in line with the nationalist movement at home, and was, throughout the 1960s, the dominant political organisation amongst the Yemeni community.

The first response of the Yemenis in Britain to the overthrow of the Imam in 1962 was a tendency to support the newly proclaimed Yemeni Arab Republic. Out of economic optimism and patriotic interest, the Yemeni community in Britain, like Yemeni exile communities elsewhere, contributed part of their earnings and past savings to the newly founded Yemeni National Development Bank: within a few months an estimated £60,000 was deposited by Yemenis in Britain. This was, of course, a somewhat risky endeavour, given that Britain was fighting a war in Aden. On one occasion, in 1963, an inflammatory article in a British daily paper alleged that the funds being sent to North Yemen were being used to finance forces who had killed some British SAS soldiers in Radfan, on the boundary between the two states. As a result, the police in one of the larger industrial towns raided the homes of various Yemenis and took away papers. But, despite a constant stream of anti-Arab and anti-Yemeni commentary in the British press during this period, there were never any arrests or serious incidents. Later, during the four years of guerrilla struggle in South Yemen, a group within the AWU collected money for the NLF forces and transmitted funds through either the NLF's offices in Cairo or individual couriers who were returning home on their temporary visits. At one time, around 500 workers were sending an average of £1 a week each to the NLF.

In the late 1960s, the AWU began to be affected by stresses within the nationalist movement as a whole. First of all, in South Yemen there was a split between the nationalist organisation FLOSY, which remained loyal to its original nationalist position and preserved close relations with the Egyptian state, and the NLF, which, although similar in origin to FLOSY, had developed along more radical and independent lines.[1] Second, while in the late 1960s the conflicts in the two parts of Yemen came to an end, they did so in strikingly divergent ways. In South Yemen, an independent state, led by the NLF, was established in November 1967,

whilst in the North, a coalition government uniting royalists and republicans was formed in the spring of 1970, bringing the civil war to an end. Third, within the NLF itself in South Yemen there was a running battle between two wings of the organisation, and only after 22 June 1969, when the 'left' wing of the party gained decisive control, did there exist a more stable government and firmer political line in Aden. By early 1970, therefore, there existed two 'camps' within the Yemeni movement – one led by the NLF in South Yemen, and one loyal to the government in the North, including former royalists, supporters of FLOSY and other republican elements. Whilst it reflected the profoundly different social situations in North and South Yemen, and while each camp rallied its main support from those originating in either camp, the division was more than just one between Northerners and Southerners: when the division between the AWU and YWU occurred in February 1970, each gained some support from people originating in both North and South Yemen.

In the mid-1970s there were four distinct organisations within the Yemeni community, reflecting different aspects of the turbulence of the 1960s.

(1) The *Arab Workers Union*: it continued to hold meetings on national and religious holidays, and to publish its magazine. Its main support came from workers originating in North Yemen and it was quite closely identified with the policies of the Sana'a government.

(2) The *Yemeni Welfare Association (al-Jamia al-Kheiria al-Yamania)*: this was a small grouping, based in Manchester, with an official membership of 300. It organised some meetings, and regarded itself as an organisation for helping migrant workers with problems they might have in relation to employment, passports or taxation.

(3) The *Arab Workers League (Rabeta al-'Ummal al'Arab)*: this was based in Birmingham, and was especially strong amongst workers originating from the Makbana region of North Yemen. Its official membership was also around 300.

(4) The *Yemeni Workers Union*: along with the Arab Workers Union was one of the most powerful and active groups amongst the Yemenis. Some of the work of the YWU, however, was also carried out by other groups, especially the AWU. They too held meetings on suitable occasions, organised literacy classes, produced magazines, and mobilised workers for Palestine demonstrations. Many of the features and problems of the YWU's work can, therefore, be assumed to apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to these other organisations.

Function and structure of the YWU

The YWU emerged from the AWU some time after the divisions which had caused the split in Britain had matured at home. One reason for this

was, no doubt, the fact that it was not so much 1967 (formal independence) as 1969 (the advent of the 'left' of the NLF to power) which provided the basis in South Yemen for an initiative amongst the workers in Britain. A further reason is probably the fact that, as was also evident in France, delays occur between the country where the nationalist movement is fighting and the emigrant community that is supporting this movement. Unity may preserve itself in the exile community after disunity has broken out at home. Conversely, whilst reunification or reconciliation may occur at home, older animosities may survive abroad.

The YWU was founded at a meeting of eighty people in West Bromwich, Birmingham, on 8 February 1970, and in the first issue of its paper, *The Workers* (*al-'Ummal*), dated May 1970, the editorial asked 'Why the Yemen Workers Union?'. The explanation went:

> The establishment of the YWU in this country is intended, in the first place, to forge a link between the workers here and the workers' movement and the revolutionary socialist movement in the homeland, and therefore to transform work within the ranks of the workers and to increase their understanding of our Yemeni homeland and of the affairs of the Arab homeland and of the affairs of the Arab nation... The reason for setting up this union is to serve the interests of the workers, even though this is a task beset with difficulties. We know we have few trained cadres, but we shall strengthen our work and we are serious about serving the interests of the workers. We shall build this union into being a true representative of the workers.

It is this 'link' which, above all, explains the work of the YWU. Politically and economically, it was designed to provide support to the government in South Yemen and to the work being undertaken there in order to develop the economy. This was, in effect, a transformation of the pre-existing ties between Yemeni migrants and their homeland. The distinguishing characteristic of Yemeni migration was its 'recurrent' character, or, put another way, the maintenance of the link between a migrant and his family and village. With the establishment of a government in South Yemen that was committed to mobilising all available resources for economic development, the exile community took on a new character: its role was no longer to help those at home on a personal or family basis alone, but to contribute to the overall development programme of the society as determined by the state.

A clear statement of the YWU's outlook was given in a speech made by one of its officials at a conference of Yemeni emigrés held in Aden in 1971. The speakers declared that the establishment of the YWU was 'an honest expression' of developments in the Yemeni homeland, and had come after protracted political struggles. The YWU, he said, supported the 'progressive forces' in South Yemen and was building ties with progressive Arab groups in Britain and with British left-wing groups.

The speaker then went on to describe the contribution being made by the YWU to economic development in South Yemen: £7,000 had been raised for the 'Water Plan' then being implemented. Time and again in statements made by the YWU, this theme of economic support recurs. For example, the political report presented to the Third Congress of the YWU in February 1976 stressed that 'the greatest achievement of your union has been its organisation of support for the economic development plan, and its backing for the undertaking of the masses'.

The YWU's organisational structure was in a pyramid form, with at the base small local groups (*heiat*), above which was the district (literally region, *mantaga*), and above this the section or area (*gesm*). Overall, the strength of the YWU lay amongst the newer immigrants in the industrial towns – particularly Birmingham and Sheffield and (to a lesser extent) Manchester – with small supporting groups in the ports where the older communities lay. The highest body of the YWU was the congress, which met every two years, according to the constitution. After 1970, the YWU held three congresses: in March 1970, October 1972 and February 1976. The third congress was attended by around 200 delegates and it elected a number of committees to run the YWU: a central committee of members, an executive committee, a cultural committee and an organisational committee.

A considerable amount of time inside the YWU was devoted to the discussion and coordination of the different branches and of reports on what was happening in the various locales. Routine as this may seem, the difficulty of such coordination can perhaps be appreciated by bearing in mind the limitations of the YWU itself. It had no full-time officials – all its members worked free and after work in factories. The fact that workers were often on Friday-Saturday nightshifts meant that members might not be available for discussions till late on Saturday afternoon. Even a simple operation like getting a cheque or letter countersigned by the three officials responsible could take one worker a whole evening – he would have to take it around to the different houses, which might be in various parts of Birmingham. Few of the workers were on the 'phone, and since they were on different shifts, the only time someone would be sure of getting them at home was in the early evening – or around 7.00 in the morning. The problems of organising members were even greater. They lived in different towns and a large percentage were illiterate: communications had to be by word of mouth and the convening of a regional, let alone national, congress was in itself a major organisational task, given the limited resources of the union.

Union activities

Within the overall scope of the YWU's activities, there were five main aspects of its organisational work. These were:

(1) fundraising for development projects at home;
(2) mobilisation of support for political campaigns in Britain;
(3) convening of public meetings for the Yemeni community;
(4) literacy classes;
(5) publication of magazines.

(1) Support for development projects at home was the activity into which the YWU put its greatest efforts and the one of which it was proudest. It must be remembered that, even in the 1970s, the per capita income in South Yemen was under £50, and that, at the time of independence, there was not a single doctor or hospital outside Aden in a country of 112,000 square miles. Illiteracy was as high as 85 per cent and, in the years immediately following independence, the South Yemeni economy was further hit by the closure of the Suez Canal and the closure of the British base in Aden, on which the prosperity of the town at least had been based. Four years after independence, in 1971, South Yemen began its first modest development plan, a three-year £40m project, which was only partly successful because only about 65 per cent of the funds promised from abroad actually arrived. In 1974, a second, five-year plan totalling £80m was begun; but South Yemen's vulnerability was evident in the period 1974-75, when it suffered badly from inflation in raw material prices and from heavy flooding, which caused millions of pounds worth of damage.

As already mentioned, the YWU began collecting money for a plan to develop water resources as early as 1970, and within a year £7,000 had been collected. In May 1973, a special economic development fund was established by the union: YWU members were asked to contribute 50 pence a month, later raised to £1 and then to £2. On the wall of the YWU office in the Attercliffe area of Sheffield hung a photograph of a hospital, built at a cost of 31,000 dinars (about £50,000), at Shu'aib in the Second Governorate of South Yemen. The hospital was named the Hospital of the Three Martyrs, after three members of the NLF killed by a British mortar on 11 February 1967, on nearby Jabal Awabil. It was funded jointly by emigrants in Britain, Kuwait and elsewhere: the YWU provided £5,000 for a landrover and mobile medical unit sent off from Birmingham in November 1975. Other projects supported by the YWU included a road in the Yafai area of the Third Governorate, the establishment of various schools and cultural centres (*Marakiz Thaqafia*) in the countryside and schools for Beduin (£2,000 in 1973). The YWU also provided a contribution to the general fund of the 1974-8 five-year plan. In all, in the years 1973-5, the YWU economic development fund collected £18,000 for economic development in South Yemen, of which £9,800 came from Birmingham and £8,800 from Sheffield.

(2) The second major area of activity was mobilisation of support for different political campaigns in Britain. 'The union', stated the political

report to the third congress, 'will support the positions of all revolutionary forces in the Arab world and will be an ambassador of the cause of the Arab nation in this country.'

This political activity took the form of participation in demonstrations about relevant issues, the convening of meetings within the Yemeni community, the publication in YWU journals of articles on these struggles and the provision of funds to causes supported by the union. The YWU always took an active part in the campaign to support the Palestinian resistance, and participated in demonstrations held in London on this issue. The YWU, and other workers mobilised by the AWU, formed the largest group on marches backing the Palestinians and could be seen with their banners in Arabic and English massed around the podium from which speeches were made. During the October 1973 war, the YWU sent a sum of £7,000 to the Palestinian resistance movement.

Another issue on which the YWU was active was support for the resistance movement in South Yemen's neighbour, Oman, where, from 1965 to 1975, a guerrilla war against the Sultan was taking place. One worker in Sheffield told me how he had gone around his factory canteen with English-language publications of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, trying to get the English workers to oppose the presence of British troops in Oman. He found little support from his work colleagues for this position, however. A third issue on which the YWU has been active is in opposition to racist activities in Britain. This is the one area of direct contact with other groups in Britain with no connection to affairs in the Middle East. In Rotherham, for example, there were some hundreds of Yemenis amongst the 6,000-strong community of Asians during protests against the National Front in 1976.

(3) The central means of mobilising support amongst the workers was the public meeting held on occasions of national political significance. These were organised by all Yemeni groups and served a social function, as occasions to meet other workers, as well as a directly political one. There were three sorts of occasion for such meetings. In the first place, they were held on, or near, dates in the Yemeni political calendar that were also celebrated at home: such as 26 September, the 1962 revolution in North Yemen; 14 October, the official beginning of the NLF's guerrilla campaign in 1963, or 30 November, independence day in South Yemen, 1967. Then there were dates of more general significance in the socialist and Arab nationalist calendars: the first week in March, anniversary of the workers' strikes in Bahrain in 1965, and conventionally held as a week in support of the workers' movement in the oil states of the Gulf; 1 May, international workers' day, and Eid.

Meetings were also held when government officials were in Britain on visits or in transit from Europe or North America. Meetings of this latter kind had indeed been a long-standing feature of the Yemeni

community. In the 1970s, they took the form of question-and-answer sessions between visiting ministers and groups of workers, on developments in economic, social and political matters. In the 1960s, leaders of the nationalist movement in Aden would travel to the Midlands when in London for conferences on the future of the then British colony. In the 1940s and 1950s, sheikhs and members of the royal family from North Yemen would visit the workers and expect their obedient presence. All such visitors were, in different ways, aware of the economic importance of these communities: the difference is that in the 1970s it was people from the same background as the workers, and who claimed to be representative of their interests, who were coming up from London to talk with them.

Some of these meetings were held locally, but around half a dozen a year were organised as national meetings of the YWU. These tended to be held alternatively in Birmingham and Sheffield, with smaller delegations from the other towns coming to either. On one occasion, I travelled from Birmingham on a Sunday morning with three coachloads of Yemeni workers going up to the 1 May meeting in Sheffield. By 7am, when most of the city was still asleep, dozens of Yemeni workers had gathered in the terrace house being used as a centre by the community at the time. Yemeni music was being played on cassettes and, as the buses drove through the deserted early Sunday morning streets, the workers started singing about the then PDRY President Salem Rubbiya Ali – known by his followers as 'Salemin': *'Salemin, Salemin, Ya Mohebb al-Kadehin'* (Salemin, Salemin, Beloved of the Workers). One can only imagine what the few Birmingham residents then on the streets to get their morning milk and Sunday papers would have thought if they could have understood what these busloads of men were singing, attacking British imperialism and the perfidy of the Saudi ruling family. After the three-hour drive, the buses stopped for a couple of hours at a Yemeni cafe in Sheffield before going to the meeting at 2pm. As well as being a trip to a political meeting, this was obviously also a social outing, an occasion to go to another town and to meet friends working there.

Sheffield civic hall, normally used for concerts and the conventional activities of such a centre, was, on this day, decked with portraits of the South Yemeni leaders and with placards bearing slogans about the economic development plan and the need to fight Iranian expansionism in the Gulf. In the entrance hall, there was a picture exhibition of development projects in South Yemen. About 350 workers attended the meeting, packing the lower section of the hall. Such meetings were usually opened by a YWU official and there were then speeches by three or four officials of the union. These were sometimes followed by brief messages of greeting from friendly organisations – from local groups of Palestinian students, from Iranian students and from British groups working with the YWU on Middle Eastern matters.

In contrast to other political gatherings, there were two features of these meetings that struck the outsider. The first was that, by conventional standards, the political speeches tended to be very short: there might have been one of ten-fifteen minutes at the beginning, but the rest rarely went beyond five and could be much shorter. The second feature was that, after the political speeches, the workers themselves put on various acts. There exists a popular tradition of Yemeni poetry and, in Yemen itself, it was usual to give oral recitations. Amongst the Yemeni community in Britain, there were also some workers who wrote poetry, and they came on to the stage and read their poems in a vigorous style to the meeting. These poems tended to be about similar themes – their homesickness and their thoughts about Yemen, the work of the revolutionary movement and the struggle for independence. Alternatively, there were performances by Yemeni comedians, who gave a deadpan stand-up performance in a Yemeni dialect, incomprehensible even to the other Arabs. At the end, there was often an Arabic film or, in the case of visiting officials from home, a discussion.

It is evident that these meetings had, formally and informally, an important social function. Formally, this was reflected in the inclusion of poems, films and comic acts within the programme. Informally, it was clear from the fact that hours were spent meeting and talking before the official business of the day began. Such meetings provided the one occasion when the Yemeni community in the UK as a whole came together in a coherent and distinct way.

(4) The most important social activity performed by the YWU was the holding of literacy classes. Before independence, there were few primary schools in South Yemen, and most of the population were wholly illiterate: in the mid-1970s, the government in Aden had just begun a literacy campaign for adults, and adult illiteracy in the country was over 70 per cent. Most of those workers who had come to Britain were also illiterate and, whatever else they had learnt in the UK, Arabic literacy was not part of it. Few had learned to speak English with any proficiency, even though English words were incorporated into their Arabic speech.

The YWU had tried to run such classes for some years: a first attempt was made in 1970, but this was discontinued. A second try was made in 1975, and in 1976 there were six classes in all – three in Birmingham, two in Sheffield and one in Manchester. The classes tended to be from 2.00 to 6.00 on Saturday afternoon, as was the case on the day I visited the three being provided in Birmingham. These were placed deliberately in different parts of the city, since one of the reasons why the early attempt had failed was that the workers found it an extra burden to have to travel far to get to the class. The first class, in the Sparkbrook area, was divided into two: one half was learning Arabic reading and writing, while the other half learnt English. The second, in a school in West

Bromwich, had a class of fifteen and, in a separate room, a group of six beginners – three workers and three small boys. The teacher, Mohammad Saleh Qutaish (originally from South Yemen), was a student of government at Birmingham University. The third class, in the Halesowen district, was larger, with about twenty-five workers and four young boys. Here, there were two teachers, both workers. One was an official of the YWU, the other was a well-known poet and singer within the Yemeni community. The class here was studying four subjects: Arabic reading and writing, English, arithmetic and South Yemeni politics.

The running of these literacy classes for Yemeni workers was a more difficult venture than it might at first appear, and these difficulties were not specific to the YWU: they cropped up in the literacy work being done amongst Algerian workers in France and were met by the other Yemeni groups who tried to run these classes, including those coordinating adult literacy work in South Yemen. In the first place, there was a shortage of teachers. Some of the workers themselves were literate and hence could teach; but they were untrained and tended to use very traditional teaching methods. The largest supply of available literate Arabs in Britain were Arab students, many of them at universities or polytechnics in the towns where there were Yemeni workers. But the links between Arab students and workers were too rarely durable or close, and full use was certainly not made of this resource. There were, in addition, considerable problems in getting the workers to classes and even more so in ensuring that they continued to come. As the workers worked on different shifts, it was often hard to ensure that those who came to a class one week could come the next. Those who worked a permanent Friday night shift could not make it to a class that started at 2.00 on Saturday afternoon. As in South Yemen itself, teachers also reported that the workers who came expected to learn to read and write too quickly: after some weeks, they had not made enough progress and thereby lost enthusiasm and stopped coming. On top of this must be added the particular difficulties of learning to read and write Arabic whilst in Britain. First of all, the learning in class was not reinforced by the fact that Arabic was being used all around the worker. There was, therefore, no confirmation of the learning, and no occasion to practise in the way in which there was at home. Second, the worker was deprived of the encouragement that comes, or may come, from participation in a widespread adult literacy campaign of the kind taking place in South Yemen. Where relatives, neighbours and workmates were involved in a campaign, and where the literacy classes were reported prominently in the media, there was a greater incentive to attend and to continue attending, than there was in the already alien atmosphere of Attercliffe or West Bromwich.

(5) The final distinct area of YWU activity was that of publications.

Books and newspapers from South Yemen, from other Arab states and from Palestinian organisations were circulated among the workers, who also listened to Arabic radios – to Algiers, Cairo and to the nearest audible Arabic language radio of all, East Berlin.[2] However, the different organisations also provided publications of their own and, after its founding, the YWU produced *al-'Ummal* (*The Workers*), a duplicated quarto magazine of around ten pages, with a printed cover bearing the slogan, 'On the shoulders of the workers are built the civilisation of peoples'. Characteristically, it would contain an editorial, news on developments in South Yemen, letters from YWU members, and articles on other struggles. In addition, many issues also contained poems by Yemeni workers in Britain, or by popular poets at home. Issue number 23, for example, contained two poems that had been read out at meetings in Sheffield and Birmingham to raise money for the development programme in South Yemen. *Al-'Ummal,* although supposed to come out every month, did not always do so, and this was understandable enough once it is remembered how overburdened the YWU was with its organisational workload. The magazine itself was produced on an old duplicator in the bedroom of one of the YWU officials: he and the other people in the house collated it, although on one occasion I saw it was collated collectively on a bus taking workers to one of the big Sunday meetings. The magazine, of which 300 copies were printed, was distributed amongst the community, roughly on the basis of one copy per house: it was reckoned that there would be one literate person there who could read it to the others.

A political orientation

Apart from these five areas of activity, the YWU had some contact with other groups in Britain. Its main relations were with organisations working in fields of direct relevance to it – on Middle Eastern matters, at a national level, or against racism, in local situations. While political speeches at Yemeni meetings sometimes reviewed the overall political situation in the world, and mentioned the role of the working class in the 'advanced capitalist countries', the YWU had little contact with British trades unions, at either the national or local levels. Virtually all Yemeni workers belonged to a British trades union as well, and this was normally the AUEW, given the kinds of engineering work done by Yemenis. But the Yemeni workers maintained a distinction between the two organisations: the British union covered matters on the shopfloor, the YWU carried on its quite separate activity. There was, indeed, a feeling within the Yemeni community that the British unions neglected the problems of Yemeni workers and black workers generally. 'They just take our money and ignore us', was a typical comment. The YWU had no significant contact with British unions: its invitation to the TUC to

send a delegate to the Third Congress of the YWU in 1976 did not receive a reply.

The YWU had additional reasons for avoiding any intervention on the shopfloor. All Yemenis were aware of the fact that they were in an exposed position. The racist outbursts that occurred in British towns and the campaigns against some Arab workers in Europe (Algerians in France, Palestinians in Germany) were followed closely, and with unease. There was also the fact that, as one official of the Sheffield section put it to me, the YWU could not act as a union in any factory. In no factory was there a 100 per cent Yemeni workforce, even assuming that all the Yemenis there were members of the YWU. Moreover, the YWU had no strike funds: whatever it managed to collect it sent home for the economic development fund. In addition, there was an acute awareness that the reason they were in Britain was to help their families to live in Yemen. If the workers struck, their families at home would suffer, and there was no social security there to fall back on. The upshot was that the YWU had no presence on the shopfloor where its members worked. A handful of its members were shop stewards, but this was in their capacity as members of British unions.

What kind of organisation was the YWU? It was not a *trades* union, since it was not organised on the basis of a specific branch of employment. Nor was it a typical immigrant organisation. These tended to be based either on a kind of organisation existing at home, which they had brought with them – religious and secret-society type organisations, for example – or on some kind of organisational attempt to help them settle and adjust to the new situation in which they found themselves. The YWU differed from the former in that the members were not in the YWU when they came to Britain – it did not exist beforehand in South Yemen or in the UK – and in the fact that the YWU was based on a quite new kind of principle – it was a *workers'* organisation, not the expression of some traditional or cultural system existing in the country of origin. The YWU differed from the latter in that it did not engage directly with British society, and, on the other hand, saw its main role as that of building political and economic bonds between the workers in Britain and the country they came from. The YWU was something unique in the UK, a political organisation acting as part of a revolutionary state abroad. The organisation of migrants was, from the perspective of the South Yemeni government, on a par with that of workers, peasants, women, students at home.

The YWU was the product of three distinct features of Yemeni history and emigration. The first was the fact that the immigrants did not consider themselves permanent settlers but were, as they saw it, in Britain to help their families at home; they still saw themselves as belonging to Yemeni, not British, society. Second, through the turbulence of the 1960s, a socialist government had come to power in South Yemen which

appealed explicitly for the support of workers at home and, by extension, abroad. Third, this government had, by the early 1970s, begun a process of economic development and social change (especially in the field of education) which the Yemeni workers in Britain both supported and, in the literacy campaign, reproduced here.

The early and mid-1970s represented the high point of YWU activities, and the third congress, held in 1976, was to be the last that it was able to organise. Following this congress, the YWU declined in influence and organisational coherence and, by the early 1980s, it had ceased to operate in a coherent way. A number of factors contributed to this. First, the recession in the engineering industry from the mid-1970s onwards led to increased unemployment amongst Yemenis, and many then left to find work in the Gulf or in Yemen itself. Some of the main organisers of the YWU were amongst those who were so affected and who departed. Second, the apparent unity which the South Yemeni leadership had been able to maintain in the early 1970s came to an end in late 1977 and early 1978, culminating in the outbreak of factional fighting on 26 June 1978, in which President Salim Rubiyya Ali lost his life. This crisis in Aden itself had its impact on the YWU – and on the community as a whole – and made it more difficult to operate. It was some time before, in the mid-1980s, and in a different climate in both the UK and the Yemens, a new generation of Yemeni organisations, based on close cooperation with local government, were to emerge and continue the distinctive phenomenon of social and political organisation within the community.

References

1 There is an account of the complex and changing relations between different nationalist groups prior to 1967 in my *Arabia without Sultans* (London, 1974).

2 The BBC Arabic service is nearer, but it cannot be picked up in Britain itself, except with special receivers.

Notes and documents

UK commentary

Signs of the times*

Twenty years ago, the staff and membership of the Institute of Race Relations won a protracted fight with the then members of its governing body over how the Institute should be run, and whom it should serve. Initially established as a neutral and objective body, by the late 1960s, the Institute had, in the eyes of most of its members and staff, become a handmaiden to British business and government interests. The 'new' Institute now decided to change course and put its services to the use of the wider community – in particular, those most directly affected by racism.

Since that time, the Institute's journal, Race & Class, *has shown a consistent commitment to justice for the have-nots and never-will-haves of the world. In this, it has inspired and nurtured the hearts and minds of many people worldwide, who have been drawn by the clarity of vision and vigour of analysis therein.*

Central to the character of the journal and the Institute is the work of its director, A. Sivanandan. Like many of my generation, I have grown up on his writings. Although I must confess that sometimes (even now) I cannot quite follow the details of his reasoning, what has always been clear is whose side he is on.

Today, when so many issues – whether the environmental degradation and exploitation of the Third World, or the pitiless measures against asylum-seekers in the First World – are coming together, to claim our attention and energies, people need more than ever to organise

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* An interview with A. Sivanandan by Paul Grant for *Time to Act* (Birmingham, Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice, forthcoming).

effectively and act consistently. As part of that process, it seemed quite natural that I should ask Sivanandan how he sees the world and the struggles of the future unfolding, from the vantage point of a life given to fighting injustice and inequality.

PAUL GRANT

Paul Grant: What have been the most difficult times for you and the Institute of Race Relations?

A. Sivanandan: All times have been difficult for the Institute, but there have been different difficulties. Our principal difficulty has been financial, but within that, there is an even more profound difficulty, which is one of principle. And the two are related in a way in which they would not perhaps be related in another institution.

Even when our finances were bad and we have had to cut back on staff, we still had to perform the tasks that we felt were needed by the community. We still had to answer letters from kids in schools, we still had to bring out the journal and keep up the library: all the things we felt we needed to do as a servicing station for the community. To do all that when you don't have the money and the staff, and to do it correctly without compromising your principles, is very difficult. And what happened to us when we found ourselves reduced to those circumstances was that we taught ourselves to think dialectically, to say, 'Hell, we are poor, but on the other hand we can be arrogant. We have nothing to lose but our poverty.'

Then, when we have been financially all right, with our staff increased, and we have been able to undertake research, such as into *Black Deaths in Custody* or *Policing against Black People,* or publish our educational books – during these times, the difficulty is more one of self-appraisal. Because the danger then is that we might be getting too smug, beginning to look at ourselves as good performers, good producers, good publishers, getting ourselves some sort of attention. The difficulty here is whether we have lost sight of our commitment in our pursuit of achievement.

If I can sum it up, there are times when the finances are wrong and the principles are right and there are times when the finances are right and the principles are in danger. So, we are always in difficulty, but the basic message is don't get too big for your boots and don't get too small that you are afraid to fight for your principles.

PG: What actually inspires you to do this kind of work?

AS: I think that in the Institute we have one thing in common which binds us all. Each of us, in our own particular way, has an absolute and profound hatred of injustice. A hatred that is visceral, plangent, tangible. And, as a byproduct of that, we have a sort of ascetic bent for doing

without things, for subtracting from our needs instead of adding to our wants. But to balance that, I think it ought to be said, we are also fairly good at laughing at ourselves: as long as we don't take our principles too seriously we can continue to be principled. The dangerous thing about principles is that people take them too seriously, and then they do other people in.

PG: What would you say to people who have just become involved in the struggles for justice?

AS: I think that I would tell them nothing. I would tell them to come and have a cup of tea. The only way that I can honestly answer that question, without being pretentious, is to say that the way I tell is by doing. The telling is in the doing. If what I do and what the Institute does tells people that there is a struggle on our hands, that there is a constituency which we have to serve, that there is an integrity which we have to uphold, that there is a confirmation which we have to make of our fellow creatures, then that is enough telling. Our telling is in the doing.

PG: So you wouldn't so much offer concrete guidance as encourage people to offer the work and history of the Institute as an option, rather than a prescription?

AS: The Institute as such offers a prescription for no one – in fact, it is precluded from doing so by its constitution. But each of us working at the Institute, in our personal capacities, is involved in other struggles: anti-fascism, the whole question of Israel and Palestinian rights, the question of feminism and so on. That is because the struggles of black people for justice cannot be any different from the struggles of other people for justice. For my part, I have always seen the struggles of the Third World, the struggles against imperialism, the struggles against racism, sexism and homophobia as connected, one with the other. I have argued that we must fight both oppression and exploitation; oppression and exploitation are part of the same continuum.

PG: For many people oppression and exploitation are seen as almost interchangeable...

AS: They are not interchangeable. Exploitation is something very specific and Third World workers will understand what it means. It refers to the question of material goods, to the question of your labour being exploited, of your sex, or whatever, being exploited in monetary terms. For instance, for me as a husband to mistreat my wife is an oppression, not an exploitation. If, on the other hand, I prostitute my wife to make money out of her, that would be exploitation. It would be exploitation also for me to use her labour for my own aggrandisement. But I am making a broad sweep here, without going into the nuances of oppression and exploitation.

A black doctor can be as oppressed as a black conductor. But a black doctor is not exploited in the same way that the black conductor is exploited. We must understand that when we talk about oppression, we can talk about oppression of blacks qua blacks, but when we talk about exploitation, we are talking about the exploitation of a particular class of blacks, i.e., the working-class blacks. It is the black middle class that collapses the two – in its own interests.

PG: There are two views on Europe: the black middle class presents it as a time of opportunity, as European markets open up; the word from the grassroots is that the effects of 1992 will be increasing hardship for black people, both within Europe and in the Third World. How do you see things developing after 1992?

AS: There is a whole new racism that is coming into being centred around European unification. We have to look at the times we are living in in terms of the economic base of society. (Even though it is fashionable not to and people will accuse me of being economically determinist. But then, if I don't have bread, if our people back home in Sri Lanka don't have food, clothing and shelter, there is an economic imperative. Even on our own doorsteps, the people in the ghetto are confronted by economic imperatives all the time.) The whole economic tenor of our society is different, the rhythm is different, the beat is different. We have moved from industrial capitalism to post-industrial capitalism, into silicon age capitalism.

After all these years when labour tried to be emancipated from capital, capital is now free to move wherever it likes. It can go to any country and set up factories all over the globe; it has so much freedom that the working class is at its mercy the world over. With the massive sea changes that have taken place in society, the centre of gravity, the centre of attention, has moved from production to information. The axis on which modern advanced capitalism turns is not so much production as information.

This information is to be understood at two levels. The first is the information that aids production, the data that is fed into computers. The second, the information that is fed to you and me as citizens. And that which is fed to you and me is mostly disinformation; the people who manage our thinking are the people who propagate the 'information' that benefits them through the media that they own or control. Given this, what has become important today is not so much the ownership of the means of production as the ownership of the means of communication.

Because of this and the capitulation of the Left (which became sort of freefloating even as its orthodoxies were removed from beneath its feet), the whole question of the Third World, of imperialism, of the exploitation of Third World workers has been taken out of our ken. It has been taken out of our political focus and become the subject of jamborees

and charity shows, ad hoc things which allow you to raise money and give it to the poor and then forget about them the next day. The Third World has become a sop to the First World's conscience. People have stopped talking about what is going on in our countries, the exploitation of our countries by western interests – and that is also why there is such a misunderstanding, an un-understanding about the nature of the refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers who are coming to the West today.

Whereas, in the 1950s, Britain conscripted us indirectly, through centuries of slavery and colonialism, for the job of post-war reconstruction, now it doesn't need that labour – for two reasons. The first is that the post-war reconstruction is over, the second that the technological revolution does not need that type of labour. What new technology needs is, on the one hand, a hard-core of highly skilled workers to design systems and programme computers and, on the other, a flexible, unskilled workforce to clear up the dregs, switch on the robots, clean up the nuclear power plants and so forth. This is a sub-robot class who have to do shittier work than we did when we came here in the post-war period. By the very nature and requirements of the work, it is best served by peripheral, ad hoc, temporary labour. So, even though Europe does not need labour today in the way that it needed it in the 1950s, it is more than happy to make use of the refugees and asylum-seekers who fit the cheap, unskilled labour bill perfectly. They are peripatetic, ad hoc and temporary: here today and, hopefully, gone tomorrow.

What makes me angry is that all this has been written out of the agenda of the Left, almost written out of the black agenda in this country. In fact, the Third World has written itself out of the agenda by not being revolutionary any more, by not having movements to overthrow imperialism. There are no Third World movements any more; no more liberation struggles; no freedom movements. No more Nicaraguas, Grenadas; they have been suppressed and/or become satellites of America. There is only the US now, there is not even another superpower to oppose it. And, with the UN as its handmaiden, the US is a monolithic power in a monolithic world.

People say that there is no such thing as a Third World because there is no Second World. But the Third World is not a category, it is a relationship and, in terms of that relationship, we in the Third World are being exploited as we have never been exploited before. It's an exploitation which applies even to the Newly Industrialising Countries, but in a different way. What is developed about them? There's still poverty and hunger there. True, they have a handful of very rich people, but the mass of the population is poor and suffers dictatorships. There are dictatorships in Singapore, in Korea, in Taiwan. Democracy? There is no democracy in these countries, and their dictatorships are sustained by international investments, which are, in turn, sustained by

multinational corporations and the governments of the western states. (When it is absolutely necessary, the western powers will install the governments which will allow the multinational corporations to continue to invest in the Third World countries on their own terms and in their own interests.) Saddam Hussein and Noriega were partly creatures of the US. It was when they failed to serve the purposes of the US that they were attacked, if not removed. We didn't want these dictators, we never wanted them, but, having imposed them on us, we felt that the US should not unilaterally decide to take them away when it wanted to.

The governments of the Third World are not self-governing any more, if they ever were. Their regimes are not regimes chosen by the people. And yet they stay in power, because they open up their countries to western investment, provide markets for western goods and services, a dumping place for western waste, a venue for western charity. And what this means for Third World countries is ecological devastation, population displacement and poverty. Poverty creates political strife and political repression – and political repression creates political refugees.

You cannot distinguish between economic migrants and political refugees any more, like this government seeks to do. In making such a distinction, you miss out a whole series of steps in the process of how economic refugees become political refugees. And you miss out on a basic truth: that your economics is our politics. Hence, the intake of refugees must be based on need, not numbers – on how desperate their need for refuge is, not on how many should be allowed to be desperate.

PG: So how can we go about building unity again when there are so many disparate and desperate people around?

AS: There are a number of fronts we have got to fight on and, since we have been talking about an information society, let us start there. We are all the time bombarded with information, ideas, images, representations. So much so that we have no time to think or reflect. At the same time, schools, especially with the imposition of the National Curriculum, refrain from developing the critical faculties of students and focus instead on the development of the technical skills that will allow them to get jobs and make money. What I detest most about the National Curriculum and the type of education that it represents is that it is not about developing the critical skills with which you can question and oppose the system, the newspapers or the TV messages and do your own thinking. Instead, it gives you pre-digested, pre-packaged thought and history. The 'black studies', 'women's studies', 'Third World studies' and all the other possibly insurrectionary and insurgent studies have all been taken out of the National Curriculum. Or, if not taken out, debased, watered down.

The first point, then, is that we are living in a disinformation society,

and it is our business to inform ourselves and the sisters and brothers on the street of that fact. In other words, those of us who have had the privilege of an education must use it for the good of the community. We should begin by using that education to tell our people like it is. That is how the whole civil rights and Black Panther movement started. To be sure, when everybody is telling it like it isn't, it is almost a revolutionary act to tell it like it is. Truth kills power.

A number of things follow on from that. We must continue to teach our children to think critically, even if they don't do it at school. We must also look critically at the work of the black media and make it accountable to the community. We must stop our friends and say, 'No, no. I don't agree that that black film was good just because it was black or spoke to two or three important black people. They had the medium in their hands and could have reached a thousand people, why only two?' Isn't it because they were more committed to the artistic aspects of form than to the truth of the content? They looked on themselves as artists who happen to be black rather than blacks who happen to be artists. An artist, who happens to be black, is a mercenary on hire to his people, whereas a black, who happens to be an artist, is a soldier in the people's army. That is why it is important that the blacks in the information and media game are made aware of their greater responsibility to the community; they are our front line in this information society, and it is their business to inform black people what the truth of the matter is, not feed them artistic lies.

PG: Wouldn't those same black media people argue that the community can become a shackle in terms of their telling it as it is as media people and that accountability becomes a trip wire and an obstacle?

AS: That is where the real artistry comes in, though: the political artistry of balancing on that trip wire (if I can mix a metaphor), of using the dialectic, of living artistically. Because real creation comes out of tension. This is the tension that black media people have not had before: the tension between serving the community and serving their artistic instinct, and surviving to tell the tale, again and again.

PG: If we take that idea about tension a little further. With the cutbacks in local government funding and the like, there is increasing competition between the different black groups for funding and survival. However, as yet, there's been no solution articulated and people are slipping into a devil take the hindmost mentality.

AS: No, I don't accept that at all. These internecine wars between Africans, African-Caribbeans and Asians and whoever, these need not concern us. We only have one question for them: how do they serve the community? It does not matter which community they serve, African-Caribbean, Asian, whatever, but how do they serve the least in that

community, those with the least voice. That is the yardstick. I'm not saying that they have to be the only constituency, but the way in which you serve the community as a whole has to be derived from the needs of the most deprived amongst us. Otherwise, it becomes self-serving.

PG: There have been increases in racist and fascist violence across Europe and the people at the bottom are getting an increasingly tougher time. Now, how can we put their experiences back on the agenda, to resist the attacks, as well as the ravaging of the services which were meant for those who have least?

AS: As you know, we have been trying for the last two or three years to create some sort of black communities' resistance movement right across Europe. But the problem is that the racism in each country is different. So, before we can develop a common policy amongst ourselves, we have got to have an understanding of the different racisms in each country and how those racisms affect us, not differentially, but in terms of their common denominators. So there are two things to be done, initially. We, in the Institute, addressed the first with our special issue of *Race & Class* on 'Europe: variations on a theme of racism'. We looked at the nature of racism in France, in Germany, etc., how each came about and how each should be fought. We looked at the different ways in which racism has come to obtain through the slave and colonial periods in the major countries of western Europe. Secondly, we looked at the way in which that racism evidences itself in those various countries today. And then it becomes comparable. In other words, where the racism comes from in France, Germany, Britain or Italy may be different, but where it is at today, in all these countries, is the same. A common European market requires a common European racism – institutionally. If we are to fight it, as blacks stretched all over Europe, we must understand where those racisms come from, for our individual struggles, even as we understand the common denominators of that racism for our joint struggles.

It is these common denominators of racism which we have to look at when we look at 1992, and they are elucidated for us in the Trevi and Schengen treaties. If we look at the administrative aspects of racism laid out by these treaties and agreements, we see the shape of the new institutional racism being set up by the common market. Furthermore, we have enough experience to know by now that, although we black settlers in Britain have British passports and can travel in and through Europe as we like, we actually wear our passports on our faces. There is nothing to distinguish me from any other refugee, migrant, immigrant or asylum-seeker and all the institutional racism set up by Trevi and Schengen will apply to me, an old black Britisher, as much as to the new refugee from Turkey or Morocco.

So, how are we going to combat that institutional racism? While we have a national agenda to fight racism, there is also an international

agenda which says that all these racisms are equated by Trevi and Schengen to all non-whites in Europe and make no distinction in effect, at the point of delivery, between settlers and migrants. Therefore, the first thing to do is for settlers and migrants to come together as a whole. That unity is absolutely essential. Unfortunately, it is one of those occasions where the unity must come before the strategy.

PG: To get together and see what happens?

AS: No, to get together and do something. To provide asylum, safe houses, services for non-English-speaking peoples, to hide people who might be deported and certain to meet their death if they go back. These people are genuine refugees. Are we, the settled black communities, going to allow them to be sent back home and killed? What is the difference between them and us, is it that they are paler shades of black?

In the 1950s and '60s, when we started black struggle in this country, we came together as a people and as a class because of the common undifferentiated racism that we faced in our communities. Now, there is undifferentiated racism with regard to non-white peoples across Europe. Yet, because we speak different languages and we don't come from the same Commonwealth countries that Britain drew upon in the post-war period, because we are Kurds, Turks, Tamils, Chileans, Eritreans and Somalis and so on, because of all our differences, we have to have unity first. The settlers, who have fought and made certain gains, have to make common cause with those who are less well off, the refugees and asylum-seekers who are coming into the West today.

PG: Doesn't this fly in the face of the trend for black people to identify themselves not so much with the poor and the oppressed as with the successful and the aspirant? You seem to be saying that our strength actually lies in turning our back on that kind of attitude.

AS: Let me go further than that. It is not just our strength, it is our legacy, our tradition, it is who we are! It is not just our strength, it is our identity, and where does identity come from if not our history? And what is the history of black people, the history of Third World people, the history of ordinary Asian, African-Caribbean and African people, working people? Go back 500 years, come back to today. What is our identity, what is our history? We are poor, we are powerless, and we are poor and powerless because we are non-white.

PG: You talk of traditions and identity, but what more living lessons can we draw from our history for the 1990s?

AS: As I said, our traditions are not about making money and going places by ourselves. There is nothing wrong with ambition and aspiration so long as you take the rest of the family with you. Aspire by all means, but take everyone else with you. Remember Nyerere once said that the

business of the educated is to return it to the people who gave it to them. So, the question concerning aspirations becomes whether our identity is a collective one, which takes into account the hunger and poverty of our people, or is it about the individuals who have managed to escape the hunger, poverty and degradation and made it. What I am saying is that if we are talking about black people, Third World people, what they should be aspiring to is to lift their people above the poverty level. That is a worthwhile aspiration. There is no reason why the individual aspiration should not be also the collective aspiration; but where the individual aspiration is only individual, you cease to be black, you are white. We cannot have the experience and miss the meaning.

PG: On the same subject, what role could church people play in the formulation and construction of a new, different Europe, one concerned with meeting people's need rather than making money?

AS: I think that the churches must return to first principles (and now is the easiest time in which to do it) and see what their role is. Twelve years of Thatcherism, a decade of Reaganism and Kohlism, have reduced western society to a simple choice. The issues that are posed for us today are whether you want to be an individualist and feather your own nest, or whether you want to be part of the collective and help the community. In this type of either/or situation, the churches should have no confusion as to where they belong. So I don't see how the question could even arise if Christian people were serious.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who was Thatcher's nominee, faced up to the issue quite honestly, I thought, when he condemned the poverty which caused the riots in Newcastle. What that said to me was that even he, who was supposed to be a conservative archbishop, appointed by the most conservative prime minister this country has had in living memory, even he, when faced with this dilemma, came out on the side of social remedies.

PG: How do you link that up with some of the problems in black and working-class communities where there does not seem to be that kind of community spirit, but more a kind of dog-eat-dog and 'gangsta' mentality, where people do anything to survive?

AS: You are right and it is very depressing. It happens that, in the bad times, we get worse. But we need to look at why it has happened. It is for two reasons. The first is the degradation of values that has taken place in western society over the last ten to fifteen years through rampant individualism. The other is the context which allows that degradation to take institutional form: the new technological, media and get rich quick revolutions. Because of the technological revolution, there is no class conflict and, in a sense, we are freer than ever before. The tension between capital and labour which created the Factory Acts, which brought about

freedom of speech and all the things that labour fought for and capital had to give in order to survive, that tension has gone. What is left is not a vacuum, but people themselves. There is no class struggle which will give them a morality, no membership of the capitalist class which is forced to act morally because it is scared of the working class. The removal of those two poles of morality has left people free to choose their values. We have to choose, and this is the time for the churches. If the tension between capital and labour has been removed, and with it the bourgeois morality that existed during industrial capitalism, who shall bring those values to ordinary women and men today but the church?

PG: Along the same line, many of the black nationalists in the US have had religious support, if not religious bases: the message of nationalism going hand in hand with the religious and moral upliftment. For instance, it has been argued that, although Farrakhan has said some dubious things, the message of moral upliftment and political engagement has actually saved or put some spirit back into communities. In this time of increasing nationalisms, is it now time to think again of the black nationalisms of the 1960s and '70s?

AS: No, I think that you have confused two things. You see, there is reactionary nationalism and revolutionary nationalism, as Cabral might have said. He talked about the culture of a people as that which, at any moment of time, takes on a political form or revolutionary form to overthrow oppression and liberate people. Religion is an aspect of that culture. When we talked about the established churches that is one thing, but when you ask me about Farrakhan and religious political revival that is another, because we are no longer talking about values and morality, but the renascence of the black community. We are talking about fundamentalism and Islam and how it raises the spirits of the poor and the deprived in the inner cities.

Look at the example of Sharpton, who uses the media to get a message across by being sensational. Don't you see what Sharpton is doing? He is a sensationalist, because he understands that basically the media only understands sensationalism and drama. So, he says, 'I'll give them that drama and through that drama put the black condition on the screen.' That is all Sharpton is saying. That to me is important. If he gives me that much, I take that bit and throw out the rest. I don't have to swallow him wholesale. That is dogma. Why can't we be discriminating in the correct way?

Similarly, with Farrakhan, why can't we understand that we should not equate all types of fundamentalism; that it is incorrect to equate Christian fundamentalism with Islamic fundamentalism. For me, Christian fundamentalism is fascist because the Christians are in power. Islamic fundamentalism, in the final analysis, can turn fascist when it has the power, but it hasn't got there yet. And, in the meantime, if that

fundamentalism can be used to lift the spirits of the ordinary inner-city people, to lift their sights and keep them from drugs, drink and killing each other, if it is a means to an end, then we must look on it as something positive, but to be worked with cautiously and carefully, because it can get out of hand and quickly become its fanatical opposite. At the moment you can only begin with where you are, with your nationalism, but that nationalism can become a bad thing. It can become reactionary and exclusive, inward looking and fascist. So long as your nationalism opens you out to your possibilities, and therefore the possibilities of every other nation and every other people, then that is a seedling of your growth. If it closes you down on yourself, it is death.

To put it differently, as old man Marx said, when we talk about that type of religious movement, we are talking about religion as the sigh of the oppressed, but when we talk about religion in the western world, we are talking about the opium of the masses. Churches in the West have been an opiate, in the sense that they have worked in cahoots with the state to stop the masses from understanding and getting power. In these terms, the church is the drug trafficker for the state, it sells opium on behalf of the state. In Third World situations, religion is the sigh of the oppressed.

Young people in the ghetto have no belief in anything. They have no belief in themselves. It is all right for people to say 'Pull yourself up by your bootstraps', but what if you don't have the bootstraps of faith, as it were? What Farrakhan is doing is giving them a belief in themselves through making them believe in God. Basically, the only way that he can give them a belief in themselves is by first making them believe in God. Making God an intermediary, a pimp, a go-between.

PG: So God believes in you, therefore you must believe in yourself?

AS: No, that is orthodoxy. What I am saying is that you believe in God and, through that, you see that you believe in yourself. In other words, it gives individuals the habits of belief and faith. That is where the western churches and church people fall down, they generally start with God. But we are in a pre-God phase, a pre-historical phase, before history, before faith. While in the West you have everything, you are post-history, yet our kids in the inner city are pre-history. These are kids who have no belief, nothing. They are nihilists, therefore there is nothing for them: no history, no past, no future, only now, the moment. If you start before the moment, you are starting in pre-history and you have to teach them to believe something. And that something is God, a faith in something positive instead of faith in nihilism. That is why I say that religions in those circumstances are the sighs of the oppressed.

PG: Are you saying that people need to have the habits of belief, a belief in something beyond themselves?

AS: I think that to believe in oneself is enough. Having once arrived at oneself through God, one must leave God. God is a means to an end, a way of arriving at myself and, having arrived at myself, I must get rid of God because he becomes a hindrance. Even the fact that he calls himself he becomes a hindrance, and the fact that everybody else has elevated him, whilst doing the cruellest of deeds in his name, is a hindrance. So I want to disabuse myself of God once God has brought me to myself. God belongs to the pre-history of humankind, but once humanity has a belief in itself, it must also believe that God is within. God brings me to myself and, having brought me to myself, must depart, his sentence is served, his term is over and I shall go on alone from here on.

PG: An interesting re-working of the Incarnation?

AS: And I shall work towards my own divinity and then, when I get to the end of my life, we shall meet, God and I, and we can be friends again.

Racism and resource colonialism

Wisconsin has, in recent years, been the site of intense racial conflict; it is a conflict that has bitterly divided many northern communities ever since off-reservation treaty rights for Wisconsin Chippewa Indians were reaffirmed by a court decision in 1983. Chippewa seeking to exercise their lawful right to spear fish outside reservation boundaries have been met at the boat landings by angry white protesters, who have hurled rocks, fired shots and yelled racial slurs like 'Timber Nigger' at Indians. But there is another crucial – but often overlooked – factor in this. That is the state's desire to open up northern Wisconsin to mineral resource exploitation by some of the world's largest and most powerful mining corporations. By focusing on the resource control issue, it is possible to see the convergence between the anti-Indian movement and the state administration's pro-mining policy.

Treaties and minerals

Long before Columbus set sail for the 'New World', the Chippewa bands who inhabited the Lake Superior region knew of its rich copper deposits. The desire to control mineral deposits in Indian territory was a major component in the series of treaties that followed the early adventurers.

In 1826, at Fond du Lac, one of the first treaties between the United States and the Chippewa gave the US mining rights to all of Chippewa country. The 1828 Treaty of Green Bay dispossessed the Winnebago, Potawatomi and Chippewa of their lead mines. The 1842 'Miners' Treaty' of La Pointe dispossessed the Chippewa of the Keeweenaw,

Michigan copper districts. Finally, the Chippewa were dispossessed of the iron wealth in northern Minnesota in the Treaty of 1854.[1]

Wholesale impoverishment of the Chippewa enriched several generations of East Coast copper- and iron-mining families, including the Aggasizs and the Rockefellers. It also set in motion the great mining and lumber booms, which then went bust, leaving large portions of the Lake Superior region in severe economic depression that still continues today.

More than a century after the first mining treaty, competition for Indian land and resources continues. Since the early 1970s, multinational mining and energy corporations have intensified their search for resources as a hedge against Third World economic nationalism. After a decade of geophysical exploration, it is clear that the Chippewa, Potawatomi, Menominee, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oneida and Winnebago were resettled in mineral rich areas of Wisconsin.

In 1975, the US Bureau of Mines, under contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), began a systematic mineral resource evaluation of US Indian reservations. In 1976, the BIA reported that copper, zinc, gold and uranium might be found beneath various Wisconsin Indian lands.[2]

In 1976, Exxon Minerals announced its discovery of one of the world's largest zinc-copper deposits near Crandon, just a half mile from the Sokaogon Chippewa reservation – and a mile from a lake where the Chippewa have for centuries gathered wild rice. Tribal members were deeply offended when Exxon's biologist surveyed their lake and expressed amazement at why there was so much concern about 'those lake weeds'.

From Exxon's perspective, there was never any question of whether there was going to be a mine, only when. Robert Davis and Mark Zannis have summed up what lies behind such an attitude:

> Simply stated, the difference between the economics of the 'old colonialism', with its reliance on territorial conquest and manpower, and the 'new colonialism', with its reliance on technologically-oriented resource extraction and transportation to the metropolitan centres, is the expendable relationship of the subject peoples to multinational corporations.[3]

Just a few miles from the Exxon discovery, energy giant Kerr-McGee had found uranium 'hot spots' on Potawatomi lands. Tribal leaders turned down Kerr-McGee requests to explore, but the company quietly optioned 22 per cent of the reservation. At no time was the tribe informed of this by either Kerr-McGee or the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Faced even with tribal mining bans, US Department of Energy subcontractors and private mining companies have been caught taking unauthorised water and rock samples from tribal lands. Since the mid-1970s, multinational mining companies have quietly leased mineral rights to more than 300,000 acres of land. The top corporate leaseholders

include Exxon, Kerr-McGee, Amoco Minerals, Noranda, Chevron, Newmont, Utah International and Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ). More than a dozen corporations are now exploring, drilling and planning to mine the region's reserves of copper, nickel, lead, zinc, vanadium, titanium, gold and uranium.

Resisting tribal resistance

Across the country, there has been heightened tribal nationalism regarding Indian resources. Since the 1950s, tribes have gone from being 'politically stable' resource colonies to sovereign governments trying to assert and defend their treaty rights.

Both the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa, whose reservation is downstream from Noranda's proposed Lynne mine, and the Lac Courte Oreilles Chippewa, whose traditional hunting-gathering territory includes the Flambeau river downstream from RTZ's proposed Ladysmith mine, have raised the issue of their treaty rights as a basis for objecting to those mines. And in 1986, in Wisconsin, the Exxon mine project was put on hold – partly due to stiff resistance from a coalition of Indians and environmentalists.[4]

Pro-mining interests have responded with renewed calls for Congress to terminate treaties. Often, abrogation has been portrayed as needed to 'free' the Indian. At the same time, the increased exercise of tribal authority in zoning, taxation, construction and land-use ordinances has spurred non-Indian resentment.

Organised reactions began in western states, and, in 1976, many local anti-Indian groups joined forces as the Interstate Congress for Equal Rights and Responsibilities. This network 'linked on-reservation non-Indian landowner opposition to tribal governments with off-reservation non-Indian sport and commercial fishermen opposed to tribal treaty-protected fishing rights', notes Rudy Ryser.[5]

In Wisconsin, anti-treaty groups organised after the 1983 court ruling reaffirmed the off-reservation treaty rights of the Chippewa. These groups took names like Wisconsin Alliance for Rights and Resources (WARR) and Equal Rights for Everyone, and tried to convince the public that the Chippewa were out to 'rape' the resources. Their members used slogans like 'Save a deer, shoot an Indian' and 'Save a fish, spear an Indian'.

In 1985, WARR founder Larry Peterson started yet another anti-treaty organisation called Protect Americans' Rights and Resources (PARR). The new organisation has tried to avoid some of the overt, blatant racism of its predecessors. According to PARR, the problem is not so much the Indian as the federal government which keeps the Indian separate from the rest of society. The solution, according to Peterson, is to make Indians like all other citizens.

PARR's literature emphasises the national concern of its members. In

1987, PARR hosted a national meeting of the anti-Indian movement in Wausau, Wisconsin, and representatives from almost every active anti-treaty organisation in the country attended. Out of this meeting came a national effort 'to push the US Congress to study and change federal Indian policies'.[6]

Pro-mining/anti-Indian

With the election of Tommy Thompson as state governor, the anti-treaty movement went from the margins to the mainstream of Wisconsin politics. Thompson, in a campaign speech to PARR, had said, 'I believe spearing is wrong, regardless of what treaties, negotiations or federal courts may say.' And he appointed, as secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Administration, a man who had been Exxon's chief lobbyist while the company was seeking state permits to mine near Crandon – James Klauser. Klauser was also a mining consultant to the Wisconsin Association of Manufacturers and Commerce, the state's most influential business lobby.* Some of the most active members of WMC are Milwaukee-based mining equipment firms like Harnischfeger and Nordberg.

One of Klauser's first acts as the governor's top policy adviser was to arrange a meeting in the governor's office for Exxon vice-president Ray Ingram to explore the possibilities of the company reapplying for mine permits. Although Exxon did not reapply, Kennecott Copper Corporation announced its decision in May 1987 to seek mine permits for its Flambeau river site near Ladysmith, Wisconsin. But the authorities of Rusk County (where the site lay) had adopted a tough mining code to protect the environment. According to reports in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, Kennecott developed a sophisticated strategy to override this 'extremely onerous' code and 'neutralise' opposition.

Integral to this strategy was the role played by the governor's ad hoc task force on mining, created in May 1987. This recommended legislation be passed so that so-called 'local agreements' between communities and mining companies could bypass the county ordinance. This legislation was drafted with the help of a Kennecott lawyer and added to Wisconsin's 1988 budget bill. Thompson signed the amendment into law in May 1988. It was the single most important piece of legislation for promoting mining in Wisconsin and it was passed without public hearings or public discussion of any kind.

The 'Indian problem'

The other potential legal obstacle to opening the Northwoods to mining

*'Wisconsin has world-class mining potential... It's really hard to appreciate the mammothness and the potential impact of this industry', Klauser had told a 1981 Democratic Party meeting in Madison.

was the assertion of treaty rights. Governor Thompson's response to racist violence against the Chippewa for exercising their lawful treaty rights was to propose buying or leasing such treaty rights from them in exchange for cash and government services. Klauser was the governor's personal representative in the treaty negotiations.

But most tribes rejected such negotiations outright, and two voted down proposals in referendums. One of the major issues of concern to those arguing against such proposals was the possibility that to lease out treaty rights would provide a way for mining companies to acquire mineral rights on reservation lands. In fact, although rarely mentioned, after such buy-outs, Congress is more likely to consider changing treaty rights.

When the anti-Indian movement increased its agitation, the state was able to intervene and suggest that some form of de facto treaty abrogation was a reasonable way of resolving the conflict. Throughout the controversy, both Thompson and Klauser continued to meet with representatives of PARR and the more militant Stop Treaty Abuse (STA). The political legitimacy extended to these racist groups should not be underestimated.

Both PARR and STA are members of the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA), a national alliance of the anti-Indian movement. In 1988, CERA joined other right-wing extremist groups like the American Freedom Coalition and corporations like Exxon at a 'Multiple Use Strategy Conference' in Reno, Nevada. This conference was called in response to attempts by a broad environmental coalition to reform the 1872 Mining Law, which gives mining companies free access to federal land without having to restore it or pay royalties. By preaching the 'continued multiple use' of public lands, the industry has appealed to ranchers, loggers and anti-Indian groups in a backlash against emerging environmental reforms.

The county connection

While the conference was important in establishing links between the anti-Indian movement and right-wing elements, CERA's ties with the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) are crucial for the legitimation of anti-Indian politics in mainstream national political debate.

The backlash against Chippewa treaty rights has extended to many Wisconsin county governments, who fear that the Chippewa, as well as practising off-reservation hunting and fishing, might exercise their right to harvest timber on public (county) lands. That treaty claim has been rejected by a federal judge, but the counties continue to be concerned about questions of jurisdiction as between tribe and county.

WCA executive director Mark Rogacki has taken a leadership role in organising counties 'from all over the United States, which are on or near Indian reservations', into a National Coalition on Federal Indian Policy.

According to Rogacki, the exercise of treaty rights is 'not in tune with contemporary society or the needs of local government'. Last year, Rogacki brought together county association representatives from nine other states to examine how treaty rights affect local government and prepare a strategy to lobby Congress for change.

Klauser was there too. Rogacki explained his participation reflected the fact that 'the [Thompson] administration and the county governments share the perspective that the federal government has to settle these matters'. Also among the speakers at the conference was the WCA general counsel, Milwaukee attorney Robert Mulcahy. Mulcahy has led a court battle, on behalf of most Wisconsin Counties Forest Association members, against the rights of the Chippewa to harvest timber. In February 1991, Mulcahy told a WCA meeting in Madison: 'Timber is not the only issue... Not many understand. Mining is the real issue. Serious claims are being made against mining in the Ladysmith area.' At that meeting, a Wisconsin Counties Forest Association representative told WCA members that 56 per cent of the public land in the state is in the County Forest system and that the counties 'would realise big profits if they could open these lands to mining'.[7] Once again, we see the convergence between the anti-Indian movement and pro-mining interests at both the state and county levels of government.

Corporate assault

Historically, the anti-Indian movement is linked to the economic expansionary needs of American capitalism. When the dominant European-American society needed land and raw materials, Indians were defined as a problem or threat, and their lands and resources were taken. Now, having been left with land nobody else wanted, it turns out that some of the last remaining energy and mineral resources are located on Indian lands or on off-reservation lands in the ceded territory of Wisconsin. Once again, national hysteria surrounds 'outdated Indian treaties' and the so-called 'misuse of resources'. Much of this hysteria is orchestrated by anti-Indian groups, but, increasingly, the state itself is playing an important part. 'In defiance of court rulings, the state appears to be trying to regulate the Chippewa indirectly, through the manipulation of public opinion', noted Indian law scholar Rennard Strickland in his report.[8]

The economic stakes involved in mining are staggering. At the same time that the public has become more aware of the serious environmental costs of mining, the anti-Indian movement has become more politically sophisticated and has extended its influence into mainstream politics at both the state and national levels.

The mass media have inadvertently assisted the anti-Indian movement by focusing public attention narrowly on the more sensationalist aspects of the treaty controversy. But the media have

virtually ignored the economic and political context of the issue. Underneath all the racist rhetoric of the spearfishing controversy lies the essential and inseparable connection between the political assault against Indian treaties and the corporate assault on the environment in the 1990s.

Center for Alternative Mining Development
Wisconsin

AL GEDICKS

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500 Years OF RESISTANCE CAMPAIGN

On July 10th 1991, in committee room 10 of the Houses of Parliament, the campaign **500 Years of Resistance** was launched by over 20 national organisations working with Latin America and the Caribbean.

The campaign is the national committee of an initiative in the Americas which has brought together the indigenous, black and popular movements of Latin America, North America and the Caribbean.

The campaign will work over the coming year to present the other side of the history and consequences of Columbus's invasion. Already, there are 16 local committees of the campaign in all areas of Britain and more are being formed.

The priority issues of the campaign will be:

★ Human Rights in the Americas
★ The North-South relationship
★ The External Debt
★ Environmental and Natural Resources
★ Refugees and Economic Migrants in Europe.

Join us and help to build a broad movement of opposition to the official celebrations of Columbus's voyage.

.....

I/we would like to join the 500 Years of Resistance campaign and enclose

☐ £6 (individuals)
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☐ £15 (local organisations)
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Book reviews

True Confessions: some Tory memoirs of the Thatcher years – a review article

The Thatcher government has yet one more atrocity to inflict on us: the succession of memoirs that are now regularly discharging from former ministers and various members of her inner circle. While these are generally worthless, insofar as they conceal considerably more than they reveal, they do, nevertheless, unintentionally provide some insight into the way that members of her government thought and behaved. Ministers cannot, of course, boast openly of what they actually achieved for the British ruling class, so that their memoirs cannot be considered as making any serious contribution to the history of the period. They do, however, reveal something of their attitudes, prejudices and underlying assumptions.

The first memoir to appear was written by Francis Pym, who was sacked as foreign secretary as early as June 1983. His *The Politics of Consent*[1] is really a memoir-cum-manifesto, an attempt to argue that there were alternative policies for a Conservative government to follow, policies rooted 'in the Disraelian tradition' of 'One Nation Conservatism'. His reservations with regard to Thatcher concerned her economic policies during her first term and he records his astonishment at 'the rapid rise in unemployment' and how he 'looked at the figures with disbelief'. It was just commonsense, as far as Pym was concerned, that monetarism 'pursued during a severe recession would result in soaring unemployment'. Where he saw the danger of civil unrest, however, Thatcher saw an opportunity to discipline the working class and break the power of the trade unions. Her policies made her the most unpopular prime minister on record with electoral defeat seeming inevitable, only for the Falklands war to save her. This was 'to transform the fortunes of the government' and, together with the bottoming out of the recession and the splits in the Labour party, gave the Tories their 1983 general

election victory.

Pym's important role in seeing Thatcher through the Falklands war did not save him. He was a 'wet' and was promptly sacked after the election. What did his Disraelian alternative amount to? While he considered mass unemployment a danger rather than an opportunity, he still believed the government had been 'generous' towards the unemployed. He urged it to 'examine the feasibility of privatising some or all of the social services'. And, of course, he warned of the problems confronting Britain because of 'the failure to curb immigration at an earlier stage'. So much for 'One Nation Conservatism'.

Pym's thoroughly mediocre effort was soon followed by that of another sacked 'wet', Jim Prior (one-time employment minister). In his much more lively *A Balance of Power*,[2] he makes quite clear his contempt for Thatcher and her supporters and sets about settling some old scores with the Tory Right. He provides a most interesting account of Enoch Powell's sacking from the Heath government after his notorious 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968:

> Most of his senior colleagues were angry and flabbergasted by Enoch's attitude over immigration. They remembered all too clearly how as Minister of Health he had stubbornly refused to improve a 2½ per cent pay increase for nurses in 1962... I was told that he had been adamant that if nurses didn't wish to accept his pay award, he could recruit plenty of women from the West Indies and other places.

As far as Prior was concerned, Powell had quite deliberately set out to stir up 'the racial pot'.

What of the Thatcher years? Like Pym, Prior was absolutely staggered by Howe's economic policies and came near to resignation over the 1981 budget. Quite clearly, it 'would add to unemployment', but Thatcher and co. were unconcerned because 'industry was discredited in the eyes of the monetarists: they looked to the City as the fount of all economic wisdom'. Of course, none of the 'wets' actually resigned over mass unemployment quite simply because, in the last instance, what they had in common with Thatcher was more important than what divided them. Similarly, Prior found himself opposed to Thatcher's confrontationist stance towards the trade unions. As early as the 1981 civil service strike, her personal intransigence prevented a settlement after seven weeks and prolonged the dispute for another twelve. The cabinet was split, with Thatcher apparently telling Whitelaw she would resign if she did not get her way.

Once again, it was the Falklands war that saved Thatcher. Not only did it transform 'the political outlook' and give victory in the general election, but it also saved the Conservative party from a disastrous split. If Galtieri had accepted either the Haig or the Peruvian peace plans, then the government would have had to have done likewise and this would

have been totally unacceptable to perhaps some sixty MPs. Some would have resigned the whip over it. The Belgrano sinking saved the day.

Unlike Pym, Prior was not sacked after the 1983 election; instead, he was appointed Northern Ireland secretary. Here, the hunger strikes convinced him that more repression was not the answer. He was very concerned about the danger that the SDLP might be eclipsed politically and that 'Sinn Fein could yet become the leading Catholic party'. To prevent this, what was required was social reform, a reduction in unemployment and the winning of the trust of the Catholic community. Predictably, this was not popular with Unionist politicians, who compared him unfavourably with Labour's Roy Mason, 'the best secretary of state they had had'. For Prior, Northern Ireland proved to be a temporary place of exile, preliminary to his inevitable sacking.

Another prominent 'wet' was Lord Carrington, whose *Reflect On Things Past* was published in 1988.[3] He had been defence secretary in the Heath government and establishes his liberal credentials early on with the remark that the Bloody Sunday massacre was 'a pretty restrained effort'. Under Thatcher, he was to become foreign secretary and, in particular, was responsible for handling the 'Rhodesian Crisis'. Carrington makes quite clear his sympathy for the white settlers: they 'were not to blame for the fact that fashions and perceptions in international politics had dramatically changed since the days when their predecessors had created a new country'. All they were guilty of was being 'defiant, resolute, somewhat backward-looking and certainly bloody-minded. In a word, they were being British.' He recalls some 'spirited discussions' with Thatcher before he was able to persuade her that the Smith regime could not be saved and that a deal would have to be arranged with the leaders of the black guerrilla forces. As for her domestic and economic policies, Carrington was a convinced sceptic and only praises Thatcher when, as far as he was concerned, she went against her instincts. His resignation in April 1982, accepting responsibility for the Falklands invasion, also marks him out as a most unThatcherite figure. The contrast with other ministers, such as the current Home Office minister Kenneth Baker, who have clung desperately to office no matter what catastrophes they have presided over, is stark.

The key figure in the early years of the Thatcher government was without any doubt William Whitelaw (home secretary and later deputy prime minister). It was his support for her that effectively emasculated the threat from the so-called 'wets'. He had the standing within the Conservative party to have challenged her, but instead gave her his unflinching backing. Little of his motivation is revealed in his particularly undistinguished recollections, *The Whitelaw Memoirs*.[4]

The most interesting section of Whitelaw's memoirs is his account as home secretary of the 1981 riots that spread to many British cities. These events 'took me back to my days in Northern Ireland, for there was the

same pessimism, the same anxieties and the same need to maintain outward calm and good humour while inwardly suffering deep depression and self-doubt'. He remembers being awoken in the early hours of Monday, 6 July, with an urgent request from Kenneth Oxford, the chief constable on Merseyside, to be allowed to use CS gas. The next day, he visited Liverpool:

> Once again I was struck by the worrying similarity with Northern Ireland and the disturbances there. Most of the city of Liverpool appeared perfectly normal and outwardly calm until we reached the riot area, Toxteth. Suddenly one drove from a normal city into streets of damaged buses and smouldering fires, crowded with hysterical groups of people. Ken Oxford was adamant that we did not stop and particularly that I did not get out of the car.

Back at the Home Office, there was 'a suppressed atmosphere of impending doom, and an unexpressed fear about where it would all end'. That weekend, he left London for his country home 'with a sense of foreboding'. There he found comfort:

> I remember sitting out after supper on a beautiful hot summer evening, looking at the fields and trees of Burnham Beeches. It was a perfect, peaceful English scene. Was it really in the same country as the riot towns and cities which I had visited that week? Was it really in the same vicinity as parts of London a few miles away which were at that moment full of troubles? Surely, I thought, this peaceful countryside represents more accurately the character and mood of the vast majority of the British people.

This captures the essence of Whitelaw's particular brand of conservatism and helps explain his support for Thatcher. Rural England is the real England, while the inner cities were alien territory that had to be kept under occupation in case the denizens broke out to menace the peace and calm of the countryside. Whatever Thatcher might do to the people of the inner cities, she had Whitelaw's support as long as the 'real England' was protected and continued to prosper. The British government was, in Whitelaw's eyes, little more than a colonial administration so far as many parts of Britain were concerned. Whitelaw congratulates himself on having increased the number of police to cope with this development.

By far the slightest memoir to appear so far is that of former junior health minister Edwina Currie. Her *Life Lines*[5] is really only of interest as an example of how the Tories have tried to marginalise the poor and rubbish news of increasing poverty under Thatcher. Shelter, for example, is airily dismissed as an organisation that 'just moans about the problem of homelessness' – unlike the government, of course, which is busy causing it. As for that hallmark of the Thatcher era, the increasing numbers of people sleeping rough on the streets, well, life is not too bad

even for them. She quotes one homeless young man as telling her that it is 'convenient and easy once you know how'. Indeed, some of the homeless actually 'complained that they could not get any rest with so many do-gooders waking them up to feed them and offer them a bed'. Currie's political acumen is demonstrated conclusively by her hope of the good that the poll tax will do!

Easily the worst written memoir is former trade and industry minister Lord Young's *The Enterprise Years*:[6] apparently he saw himself as Mr Spock to Thatcher's James Kirk! Young describes how, in the 1960s and 70s, he believed that Britain was lost to socialism, only for Thatcher to come to the rescue. It is interesting to consider what he describes as one of the watersheds in her period in power: Joseph's announcement to the Commons of the payment of a £1.8 million fee for the services of Ian MacGregor as chair of British Steel. This was 'one of the bravest political acts of the decade'. At last, the rich were going quite openly to give themselves the rewards they deserved. While enthusing about the MacGregor hand-out, however, Young seemed extremely perturbed by the sums being squandered on the unemployed: 'people were beginning to adjust to being out of work'. His account of being chair of the Manpower Services Commission is replete with *Daily Mail*-type stories of 'dole scroungers', and he makes quite clear that his Jobstart scheme had a 'hidden agenda' of intimidating people off the register. He writes of people 'resting' on the dole while the unemployment figures were rising remorselessly to over three million. Nevertheless, all this was necessary to restore Britain's 'entrepreneurial spirit', and he claims that the Thatcher government will be recognised as having 'laid the foundations for the rebirth of UK manufacturing industry'. This was, of course, written before the second Thatcher recession.

Young suggests one constitutional reform that presages a prominent future as a political thinker: the prime minister should be able to appoint notable people (like him) to seats in the House of Commons. A novel idea: instead of getting rid of the Lords, let's get rid of the Commons!

Norman Tebbit's memoirs, *Upwardly Mobile*,[7] are also disappointing, hiding, one suspects, considerably more than they reveal about the murkier side of Thatcherism. They do provide some insight into his political character, however. Apparently, Tebbit (former Conservative party chairman) was a Tory prodigy, having by the age of 14 already reached the same conclusions about socialism and the free market 'which unknown to me, Professor Hayek was expressing in *The Road to Serfdom*'. This, of course, tells us more about the simplemindedness of Hayek's ideas than it does about the precocity of the young Tebbit. Instead of going into politics, he became an airline pilot and only became politically active in the 1960s. What brought about this awakening? It occurred while he was piloting DC7s and 'realised the scale of immigration from the Caribbean. Night after night charter flights

brought immigrants into Britain.' There was no doubt in his mind that the Macmillan government was sponsoring this immigration, 'bringing in cheap labour' to do the 'dirty and low paid jobs'. This was all wrong. Instead, the government needed to tackle the trade unions so that white workers would have to take these jobs. This skewed, petty-bourgeois fantasy is, it is worth reminding oneself, the considered opinion of someone who was, until recently, a government minister and who is still treated with respect by political commentators.

After the grim years of socialist corporatism under Macmillan, Wilson and Heath, Thatcher came to turn the tide. Mass unemployment was all part of 'the great industrial shake out' and, anyway, there was so much fraudulent claiming that he doubted 'if unemployment ever reached three million at all'. He emphasises the importance of the government defeating the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984-5 – only Thatcher had the necessary 'courage to win a coal strike' – but professes puzzlement that the victory did not increase the government's popularity. He is quite open about the direct way that the Tories tried to exploit privatisation for their own political benefit. All the people who bought shares in British Telecom, for example, received a mail-shot from the Conservative party soliciting donations and membership. There could not be a more explicit demonstration of privatisation as the biggest electoral bribe in history.

One interesting aspect of Tebbit's memoirs is their often spiteful and vindictive tone. After leaving school, for example, he worked for a short time on the *Financial Times* and had to join NATSOPA, the print union. We are told in all seriousness that 'NATSOPA paid dearly for bullying a 16-year-old boy into its ranks. I swore then that I would break the power of the closed shop, an ambition I finally achieved thirty-five years later.' Similarly, when he was busy privatising BOAC, he remembers how this same company had marked him down as unsuitable for management when he worked for them. Tebbit comes across as the embittered little man put upon by the big battalions, whether it be the unions or the corporations. His voice seems very much that of a British Poujadist, brought to the centre of power by the peculiar momentum that Thatcherism was able to build up in the 1980s.

In his *Ministers Decide*,[8] Norman Fowler, former health minister, tells how he went into politics out of concern for the old, the sick and the poor, only to find that the trade unions and the nationalised industries were in the way. Only Thatcher had the courage and determination necessary to overcome these obstacles. He writes admiringly of her style of leadership and of how it inspired the British people. She

> attracted public support because she seemed to be taking action which the public overwhelmingly thought was right but never thought any government would have the nerve to carry out. In May the SAS were sent in to storm the Iranian Embassy in London which had been taken

> over by armed gunmen. The following night I was speaking at a transport dinner in London and found myself sitting two or three down from a general. Before I rose to speak I was asked by the chairman to express to the general their admiration for the SAS's action. The reaction from the audience almost took the roof off...

Tough decisive action was, according to Fowler, her hallmark. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine any other post-war prime minister manufacturing mass unemployment, fighting a year long miners' strike or standing by while ten IRA prisoners died on hunger strike.

Fowler had a chance to show what he was made of during the 1982 health workers' dispute. This, he boasts, gave notice to the unions that the Thatcher government 'would not easily give way in a strike'. He gratefully records the part that Albert Spanswick, chair of the TUC Health Services Committee, played in trying to sell out the hospital workers. 'Albert' visited Fowler's home without the knowledge of the other union negotiators and together they secretly worked out a formula that he could foist on the unions. Then 'Albert' went off to the TUC conference in Brighton where 'he roundly denounced me and all my works – without revealing that he was without his customary hat which he had forgotten and was hanging safely on a hook in my hall'. This was, apparently, the acceptable face of trade unionism.

There were other secret meetings at Fowler's house while they planned out and rehearsed their negotiating strategy for the official meeting between Fowler and the unions. On the day, Spanswick asked Fowler questions that they had already secretly prepared answers to, in the hope of selling the deal to the unions. Unfortunately, this treachery failed when the unions rejected the offer and the dispute became a battle of attrition.

Fowler makes clear that he regards trade unions as unnecessary relics of the past. He advocates pay review bodies replacing negotiated settlements and looks forward to an eventual ban on strikes in 'essential services'. He goes on to claim credit for persuading Thatcher to confront the dockers and abolish the dock labour scheme. The Tories' hostility towards militant trade unionism was forcefully demonstrated when this decision was announced in the Commons and produced 'the biggest Conservative cheer ... since the 1979 election'. For Fowler, the government's success in breaking the power of the trade unions was 'one of the most important achievements of the Thatcher years'.

Fowler also hails privatisation as one of the greatest achievements of the Thatcher years. He claims to have been one of the architects of the policy and makes clear that it was intended to benefit the consumers and employees, rather than the rich as many people mistakenly thought. Having privatised the National Freight Corporation, he promptly joined its board once he resigned from the government. There was nothing corrupt about this, of course, it was just another everyday event in Thatcher's Britain.

This brings us to press secretary Bernard Ingham's *Kill the Messenger*,[9] the story of a humble retainer's devotion for his mistress. When reading this account, it is necessary continually to remind oneself that the author was ostensibly a civil servant. Ingham, a former Labour party member, believed 'that the British trade union movement was abusing its power and had to be curbed'. He wholeheartedly endorsed Thatcher's decision to let the people face 'the consequence of their wage claims i.e., unemployment' and admired the courageous way she persevered 'through more than 3 million unemployed to a different kind of society'. But, he hastens to add, she was not uncaring: 'She cared more than her critics could ever imagine.' The trouble with this is that Ingham gives the impression that he would not know a caring person if he ran one over and that if, by some chance, he did meet one, this would be his immediate inclination. One piece of evidence that he cites as proof of the caring Thatcher is the poll tax! Not only did this make the great majority of the poor less well off, but it has also been responsible for reintroducing imprisonment for debt into Britain. Ingham's own compassionate nature has been shown since his retirement by his attacks on the homeless.

One ominous pointer for the future is his revelation that, as part of the 'peace dividend', Thatcher was considering redeploying army officers into the police force. This suggestion has, it is to be hoped, died with her departure.

Without any doubt the most self-serving of all these memoirs is that of the longest surviving 'wet', the former Welsh secretary Peter Walker. In his nauseating *Staying Power*,[10] he describes himself as a 'liberal Tory' and lays claim to the mantle of Disraeli. Like Prior, he considered resigning over the 1981 budget, which was responsible for pushing Britain 'into much greater recession than other countries in Europe... We had a bigger loss of jobs and production than was needed.' He makes the point that the Thatcher boom only looked impressive because of the depth of the recession that preceded it. Nevertheless, he does give her credit for ending apartheid and overthrowing Soviet communism.

An insight into Walker's politics is provided by the revelation that, in 1981, he made an official visit to Argentina and advised the military regime on how to set up a Conservative party to take power once it had decided to relinquish control. He was given 'the most incredible VIP treatment'. In turn, Argentinian representatives visited Britain to see the Conservative party in operation at first hand. Walker continued the good work on a second visit when, once again, 'civilised talks' took place. He was, of course, offering advice to a military regime that had only recently been conducting its 'dirty war' of torture, mutilation and murder against the Left, a war in which over 15,000 people 'disappeared'. In the event, it decided not to follow his advice but to try to remain in power by means of a military adventure: the invasion of the Falklands.

Walker is particularly proud of his role as minister of energy in the

miners' strike. This was 'the greatest threat' to Thatcher's government and he claims much of the credit for its defeat. Arthur Scargill was attempting to thwart the government's plans 'to give miners and their families a better future'. He makes clear that, if necessary, the police would have been used to move coal from the strike-bound pits and that the army would have taken over the docks: 'Winning the dispute was that important.' Walker was even able to help out personally with the scabbing, taking a regular phone call every Sunday evening from a signalman in Nottinghamshire who told him what shift he was on the following week because he, unlike his colleagues, would let the coal trains through – this was 'the funniest and nicest of incidents'. A government victory was necessary, according to Walker, in order to achieve 'the correct balance between efficiency and compassion'.

Since his resignation from government, Walker has joined the boards of numerous companies – among them, British Gas, which he had earlier privatised. There is, of course, nothing corrupt about this practice.

An interesting counterpoint to Walker's epistle is provided by the memoirs of that staunch Thatcherite, former Treasury minister and minister for the environment Nicholas Ridley. His *My Style of Government*[11] also makes clear the central importance of the miners' strike in the history of the Thatcher years. He describes his part in planning for the conflict as early as 1978, when he produced his notorious confidential report that was to serve as the blueprint for victory. The strike was, as far as he was concerned, 'closer to a revolution' than an industrial dispute. It was similar to 'a Peasants' Revolt or a Luddite assault' and he argues that without all the careful preparations that were made, the NUM might well have won. The defeat of the miners together with victory at Wapping 'left the way clear for the enterprise culture to flourish'.

Ridley is very revealing about Thatcher's attitude towards the social services. She hoped that the numbers using state services, i.e., education and health, would dwindle 'as more and more families became able to afford to choose the higher standards in the private sector... She never believed it either possible or desirable to bring standards in the public service up to the highest levels in the public sector.' This would deny the well-off choice and only reinforce the dependency culture. Ridley shared her concerns and admits to 'less than total sympathy' for one-parent families. Women, Ridley believes, deliberately become single parents just so they can claim benefit. As for the homeless, 'some even seem to prefer the streets'.

Nevertheless, Ridley is a worried man. He is afraid that the Thatcher revolution might be over and sees the abandonment of the poll tax as an ominous development. The Major government has 'vindicated the rioters and those who had refused to pay. Lawlessness seemed to have paid off.' His is the only account that recognises the fact that the Tories

suffered a massive defeat over the poll tax. It was this that brought Thatcher down.

A number of general points can be made with regard to these memoirs. First of all, they bring out the very partial nature of the so-called 'wets'' opposition to Thatcher which certainly played a part in their failure to oppose her effectively. They show that the Tories themselves believed that victory in the Falklands war played a crucial part in their 1983 election victory. They indicate the vital importance to the Tories of their traditional class war victory over the miners and the trade union movement. They identify a racist discourse in much Tory thinking. And, lastly, they bring out the extent to which the Tories themselves (along with *Marxism Today*!) believed their own propaganda about a British economic miracle. What about the issues they remain silent on? The list is, of course, endless, but certainly none of these memoirs mentions their greatest success, that is the dramatic shift in the distribution of wealth in British society that they accomplished. Under Thatcher, the rich got considerably richer, while the poor got poorer and substantially increased in numbers. The Thatcher government has to be seen from this point of view as a militant Tory government that waged the class war with grim determination to the great personal advantage of the rich. At the same time, it presided over the continuing decline of the British economy and displayed a historic degree of incompetence with regard to education, health, transport and, of course, finally the poll tax. But this is not the story that these or any other Tory memoirs will tell.

Books reviewed

1 Francis Pym, *The Politics of Consent* (London, Sphere, 1984). 196pp. o/p.
2 James Prior, *A Balance of Power* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1986). 278pp. o/p.
3 Peter Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past* (London, Collins, 1988). 406pp. o/p.
4 William Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London, Aurum, 1989). 280pp. £14.95.
5 Edwina Currie, *Lifelines* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1989). 256pp. £13.95.
6 David Young, *The Enterprise Years* (London, Headline, 1990). 338pp. £16.95.
7 Norman Tebbit, *Upwardly Mobile* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988). 280pp. £14.95.
8 Norman Fowler, *Ministers Decide* (London, Chapmans, 1991). 372pp. £16.95.
9 Bernard Ingham, *Kill the Messenger* (London, Fontana, 1991). 408pp. £6.99.
10 Peter Walker, *Staying Power* (London, Bloomsbury, 1991). 248pp. £16.99.
11 Nicholas Ridley, *My Style of Government* (London, Hutchinson, 1991). 320pp. £16.99.

West Indian Women at War: British racism in world war II

By BEN BOUSQUET and COLIN DOUGLAS (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1991). 176pp. £9.99.

As a child raised in the 1950s – at a time when 'laissez-faire' racism was characterised by notices in typically lace-curtained windows declaring

that blacks, Irish, gypsies and dogs were persona non grata in this self-professed Motherland – I belong to a generation with an urgent and ongoing quest. It is a quest which seeks to reverse that distorted, eurocentric version of British history that denies the contribution of black women and men, and speaks only of glorious white (male) achievement; a quest to establish that glorious black (fe/male) achievement also played a role in the shaping of this island's destiny.

Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas's study of *West Indian Women at War: British racism in world war II* is an important and welcome contribution to this end. Their book reiterates the pivotal socio-economic role of women during the war years. It also highlights the crass, opportunistic racism which both informed government policy from 1939-45, and laid the foundations for that post-war 'lace-curtain' variety which was to shape the lives of black people who were either raised or lured here in the 1950s and 1960s.

Revealed in all their paternalistic self-interest, here are the secret memos and documents which determined the role which West Indian women would be permitted to play in a fight which, our school textbooks declare, was, first and foremost, in defence of democracy. Unfortunately, then as now, the few who were prepared to query the stark contradiction between the public policy of defying Hitler and a private policy of unashamed anti-black discrimination were largely ignored.

British deference to America's own peculiar notion of white supremacy, with its segregationist paranoia and its lynch-mob mentality, became the War Office's earliest justification for its insistence that female recruits from the West Indies should be confined to 'girls (sic) of purely European descent'. Indeed, there is a weight of evidence to show that President Roosevelt's declaration that the regimental intermingling of black and white army personnel would prove 'destructive of morale and detrimental to the preparations for national defence' provided a convenient excuse for the whites-only recruitment policy of War Office bureaucrats. They proceeded to turn somersaults in their efforts to defend such an overtly racist stance against the arguments of their Colonial Office counterparts, who, ever alert to the inherent danger of such a policy to future colonial relationships, were eventually successful in achieving its hasty, if somewhat overdue, reversal.

Among the various excuses offered up before 1943, when imperial expediency finally won the day, the oft-quoted concern that black women recruits to the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) might experience difficulty in adjusting to the British climate and way of life rings most hollow – particularly given what we now know about Britain's cynical negligence of the many thousands who responded to the post-war call for black labour.

Using interviews with a relatively small number of women, *West Indian Women at War* confirms the extent of the courage of those who,

spurred by patriotism and a belief in the mother country, left their homes in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and elsewhere in the Caribbean to service Britain's war effort. In their refusal to be deterred by the official contempt and everyday prejudice which overshadowed their lives in wartime Britain, they clearly paved the way for the tens of thousands who were to follow.

Giving voice to such women, and thus establishing the extent to which we have been 'hidden from history', must, however, be motivated by a desire to do more than simply extol past virtues or expose past injustice and hypocrisy. As we re-examine the evidence and unearth the ugly truths behind the official version, we should reiterate constantly the diasporic nature of our historical experiences – for how else are we to restore those vital connections which slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism have sought to undermine? Bousquet and Douglas's analysis is marked by a regrettable (albeit acknowledged) absence of any analysis of Britain's policies towards its other colonised peoples – policies which sanctioned the use of tens of thousands of African and Asian lives as cannon fodder in a fight not only to 'defend democracy', but also to defend an empire that was built on the same fascist foundations and delusions of racial supremacy that motivated and inspired Hitler.

This missing dimension detracts from what is otherwise a timely attempt to (in the authors' own words) 'place the contributions made by West Indian women during the war into the footnote of history [in the hope that] historiography, when less blinded by racism and sexism, will one day acknowledge that role as deserving its rightful place in the main text'.

London STELLA DADZIE

Palestinians: life under occupation

By NANCY MURRAY (Cambridge, Ma., Middle East Justice Network, 1991). $12.95, 100pp. (Distributed in UK by CAABU, 21 Collingham Road, SW5, £5.00.)

How does one rekindle interest in a liberation movement the media no longer consider newsworthy, or re-sensitise the public to human suffering when the images of horror have passed into cliché? Nancy Murray and the US-based Middle East Justice Network have found a way. *Palestinians: life under occupation* is one of the most potent and moving indictments of Israel's occupation to appear in the last few years.

The peculiar strength of this handbook emanates from the way it is constructed. There are three strands. Firstly, there are clinical facts and figures about the occupation – its genesis, its intensification, the Palestinian economy, together with issues such as education, religion, family life, medicine, human rights violations, sieges, beatings,

community self-organisation. Then there are quotations from the Israeli press, statements from Israeli politicians and excerpts from formal international resolutions. And, by juxtaposing these two sources against over seventy evocative photographs, a powerful argument is mounted for Palestinian rights – almost without the reader's knowledge.

Against a photo of a young Palestinian, hands on head, being yanked in two directions by four Israeli soldiers, is set Article 71 of the fourth Geneva Convention which states that 'Accused persons who are prosecuted by the occupying power shall be promptly informed in writing, in a language which they understand, of the particulars of the charges preferred against them'. And next to a quotation from Article 53 about the prohibition of the destruction by the occupying power of real or personal property, are photos of a demolished house and a family (including babe-in-arms and grandmother) standing before a tent on the land on which their house used to stand. Line drawings of different tortures (provided by the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem) stand opposite Articles about the expected humane treatment of protected persons and prohibition of physical or mental coercion to obtain information.

But this kind of juxtaposition, with its inherent irony, is no gentle persuader. The photo of four doleful, silent children holding out to the camera the family memento of its martyrs is moving in itself. But, when placed opposite Article 27, which states that 'protected persons are entitled in all circumstances to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights', one cannot help but be moved to rage. And the poem on a wall of a senior officer of the Civil Administration in the Gaza Strip

> Yes, it is true that I hate Arabs
> I want to take them off the map.
> Yes, this is all (my) work.
> My life passes pleasurably
> One shoots a bullet and a head is flying...
> There are beautiful places in the territories
> There is sea and sand and many palms
> It is a pity that there are Arabs there too

alongside a picture of a triumphant, fist-raised Kahane is as horrific as any picture of beaten victims.

One reason that *Palestinians: life under occupation* is so telling a tool in the struggle is that it uses Israeli voices to condemn Israel. Ari Shavit, who spent twelve days on reserve duty at Ansar 2 detention camp, wrote in *Ha'aretz:* 'At the end of your watch, on the way from the tents to the showers ... from over the galvanised tin-fence of the interrogation section come hair-raising human screams ... from this moment forth you will have no rest. Because 50 metres from the bed where you try to sleep, 80 metres from the dining hall where you try to eat, human beings are

screaming... And despite the fact that there is no room at all for comparison ... you start to understand some of those other guards, who stood in other places, guarding other people behind fences. Other guards who heard other screams and did not hear a thing.' The same theme is taken up by Yehuda Maor, author of a book about patrolling the occupied territories, who concludes the section about a night raid quoted here: 'I told myself it cannot be. I saw, I swear, that night I saw the Nazis again.' Jonathan Kestenbaum's self-questioning takes a different turn. 'How', he asks, 'do you embrace your wife after arresting a 17-year-old pregnant girl who was dragging potatoes home twenty minutes after the end of the curfew break?'

The book is graphic and moving, but it is also comprehensive in its coverage and detailed in its information. In certain areas, for example in its treatment of Israeli settlements and the question of water supply, it concretises issues in new ways. And its series of three simple photos all taken from the same spot in Amwas – in 1948, when it was a thriving Palestinian village, in 1968, when it was reduced to scrub land, and in 1978, when Canadian Jews funded the 'blooming' of a national park – speaks volumes about the brutal and all-pervasive nature of occupation.

Institute of Race Relations JENNY BOURNE

Empire Boys: adventures in a man's world

By JOSEPH BRISTOW (London, HarperCollins, 1991). 233pp. £35 cloth, £13.95 paper.

When I was 11, I was desperate to join the Girl Guides. Later, I became aware that they had not been invented just to relieve my pre-teen suburban boredom but had a history and, more generally, that much of what was offered to lower middle-class girls like me was in some way secondary. In comparison with what the boys were getting – OTC on Wednesday afternoons and a commission at National Service, prefects' 'privileges', the roll of honour commemorating old boys who had made the 'ultimate sacrifice' – our experience seemed deficient. Boys were clearly going to become Men, but our destiny was more problematical; there was no ideal marked 'Woman' in quite the same way, and when we dressed for the business of learning, we put on shirts and ties.

I began to feel uneasy about all this long before I understood how it fitted into an ideological programme that held most of us in thrall, and Joseph Bristow theorised for me my intuitive sense of lack and exclusion. One of the pleasures of reading *Empire Boys* is to see exposed a structure as extensive and elaborate as, in my blinkered adolescence, I had dimly suspected – though not, perhaps, one as solid as the works of physical engineering that were contemporaneous with it. The cultural terrain of

manly adventure is still the site of some lively imaginative engagements, and it is mapped out in this book in interesting ways, all of them turning on ideas about masculinity.

Empire Boys has roots in two areas of recent theory and research: first, the responses of radical male scholars to the challenge of feminism and, second, the concept of 'post-coloniality', with its implications for white cultural politics and academic practice, an intellectual moment represented by the work of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Bristow's aim is 'to put together connected parts of a cultural history of imperialist boyhood and manhood', and he does this thematically, moving 'from the domestic realm into the imaginary depths of the empire's dark continents'. My first impression was of familiar material (the debate on national literary culture, the moral panic over cheap fiction for boys of the 'dangerous classes', the recruitment of middle-class boy readers to 'respectable' magazines like the *Boy's Own Paper* which identified imperialism as a unifying ideology) presented in a slightly novel way. But, as I read on, I had a growing sense of the potency (the word supplies itself in this context) of the adventure stories Bristow discusses, and the way they fostered a disposition to construct the world in terms of a 'hegemonic masculinity of an imperialist kind', and to put a central value on what he calls the 'homosocial bond'.

In his chapter on school stories (Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays,* F.W. Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little,* Kipling's *Stalky and Co*) he examines contradictions between codes of violence and (Christian) virtue which were uncertainly reconciled in the twin ideals of 'philathleticism' and 'muscular Christianity', and looks at models of hero-worship and love which, while necessarily not overtly homosexual, preempted and subordinated heterosexual desire and experience. His sense of the instrumentality of boys' reading, the way in which it came to be commonly perceived as a preparation for action in the real world, emerges in his discussion of 'island stories' (*Masterman Ready, The Coral Island, Treasure Island*) and novels of Africa (*King Solomon's Mines, She, Heart of Darkness,* among others). He shows how homosocial relations negotiate the disturbance caused by female presences (especially in Haggard), and he has interesting things to say about the place of Africa in the Victorian consciousness, but when he speaks of 'cultural mechanisms – that is, the prevailing systems of representation – driving armies deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness', in my view, he overestimates their causative force.

Finally, Bristow examines Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (a book which, as he notes, has been in print since its publication in 1908), Kipling's *Kim* (giving a subtle picture of his complex imperialism), and Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes.* Scouting was an activity that showed very transparently its imperial function, and Bristow neatly defines scout law as 'the law of conservative Edwardian citizenship in

miniature'. He sees the seeds of a fascistic order in its emphasis on loyalty to the imperial nation, above class or party, and, in its interest in 'forensic' techniques of observation, an obsession with the physical, and, from them, the presumed moral, characteristics of people who were to be studied like specimens.

Bristow sees the 'imperial male survivor' of modern popular culture as the descendant of his Victorian boy-heroes, and, reading *Empire Boys,* I was reminded of latter-day projects like 'Operation Raleigh' which still use the language of 'exploration' and 'self-reliance', and in whose vision underdeveloped people receive assistance and 'the individual' learns to submit (him)self to the 'group' while remaining a privileged subject, a defence against the wrong sort of collectivity. Bristow gave me insight into why I had felt alienated from boys' books, inarticulately knowing that they were not written with me in mind, and he sent me back to them with new interest: 'The *Nellie,* a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide...'

London

IMOGEN FORSTER

The Wages of Whiteness: race and the making of the American working class

By DAVID R. ROEDIGER (London and New York, Verso, 1991). 191pp. £34.95 cloth, £12.95 paper.

The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: class politics and mass culture in nineteenth-century America

By ALEXANDER SAXTON (London and New York, Verso, 1991). 397pp. £39.95 cloth, £13.95 paper.

In 1988, Republican George Bush was elected president of the US on the basis of white votes, including white working-class votes, obtained by a racialised campaign, culminating in the infamous Willie Horton TV ad.* Bush built upon the success of Ronald Reagan, in 1980 and 1984, who had run similar campaigns opposing affirmative action, bussing and welfare and calling for a return to 'traditional values'. Both Reagan and Bush benefited from the groundwork laid by Richard Nixon and his 'southern strategy', which was designed to wean the white working class away from

* Willie Horton was a black convict in Massachusetts who had been allowed out on furlough and who had then committed further crimes, including the rape of a white woman. The Bush campaign ran an ad, on a nightly basis, referring to Horton and featuring a large number of black men apparently coming out of a prison through a revolving door.

the Democratic party and to turn the South from a solidly Democratic region to a solidly Republican one. The basis of this transition was to be an appeal to the racial identity of whites of all classes. The Democrats were to be presented no longer as the party of white people, but rather as the party of blacks. The symbols and code words of this strategy included: bussing, law and order, state's rights. So successful has this strategy been on the national level that the Democrats have won the presidency only once since 1968.

What is crucial about these developments is the willingness of white working-class people to vote as whites. Their racial identity functions as the key to their behaviour, even in the face of concrete attacks on their conditions of life and their future hopes and expectations. Thus, Ronald Reagan and George Bush were elected by white voters, including white working-class voters, to protect white interests, even as they were implementing capital's agenda of restructuring the US economy at the expense of the working class, including the white working class, through massive cuts in the already low social wage, through boosting the greater use of temporary and part-time workers, and through the dismantling of many of the regulatory processes dealing with workplace safety and environmental issues.

These developments are rooted in the centrality of racism in the American political and popular culture. Whiteness has been the central identification for white working-class people and has been the vehicle through which successive waves of European immigrants could attain acceptance as Americans. That racial identity was, of course, in opposition to the alternative of a more inclusive identity and required the construction of a set of negative stereotypes of peoples of colour, non-whites, against whom the whites could measure themselves and find themselves superior. That whiteness, of course, also constructed the very meaning of class in the US. What was created was a racialised class consciousness, which shaped the behaviour of white workers and the outcomes of the political processes.

The question of why the US has lacked a class-conscious working class and working-class political institutions has long concerned scholars and progressive political activists both in the US and abroad. David Roediger, in *The Wages of Whiteness,* and Alexander Saxton, in *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* have each made important contributions to our understanding of what has often been called 'American exceptionalism' through their sensitive and detailed handling of a wide range of original sources in nineteenth-century America.

Roediger concentrates on pre-Reconstruction America, while Saxton covers a period which ends with the triumph of social Darwinism and the failure of late nineteenth-century challenges to industrial capitalism. Roediger's major argument is that 'working-class formation and the systematic development of a sense of whiteness went hand in hand for the

US white working class'. Building on the work of George Rawick and W.E.B. DuBois, Roediger analyses the development of 'whiteness' in the white working class in 'the broad context of class formation rather than in the narrow confines of job competition'. Thus, for Roediger, 'whiteness was a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labour and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline'. Saxton examines similar problems, looking at the construction of a racialised popular culture and addressing the 'degree to which white racist ideas and institutions tended to inhibit effective opposition to ruling-class legitimacy'.

The creation of the 'other' enabled the white working class to distance themselves psychologically from the loss of autonomy and control over their own labour and lives which had been brought about by changes in the economy and methods of production. They could take comfort and pride in the fact that they were not slaves and that they were not black. But, since the reformers and moralists of the new factory order were attempting to create a new person, willing to accept the disciplines and priorities of the factory, they had to destroy, or at least delegitimate, the 'old person', the person who could value leisure over production, who could control the pace and intensity of her/his labour, whose labour was shaped by seasons and nature rather than by the time clock. The solution, or the accommodation, was projection. So, in Rawick's classic formulation, Englishmen and profit-minded settlers in America 'met the West African as a reformed sinner meets a comrade of his previous debaucheries'. The racist, like the reformed sinner, creates 'a pornography of his former life... In order to insure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed fantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled.'

Thus, according to Roediger, 'Blackness and whiteness were ... created together.' Alongside the continuing creation of blackness was the development of a language and culture which ensured that the reality of the new order was either sanitised or hidden. 'Servants' thus became 'hired hands' and 'masters' became 'bosses' (a Dutch word); 'free labour' was counterposed to 'chattel slavery'. These ideological constructions became the central themes of the labour press, of political discourse, and of the music hall and minstrel shows. Saxton shows how racist ingredients were reworked in the mass culture and in both Whig and Jacksonian politics to justify what he terms white egalitarianism. This white egalitarianism – an appeal for class harmony by emphasising racial divisions – became the basis for the resolution of class conflicts. It incorporated yeomen and artisans into a supposedly inclusive *racial* republic – under which, however, Native Americans were exterminated in the West and blacks were demonised as the other.

Both Roediger and Saxton are thus dealing with the construction of

what Van den Berghe called *herrenvolk* democracy, although Roediger prefers the term *herrenvolk* republicanism, because 'racism was not effectively linked to any significant social or political levelling among whites'. Both authors document the conservative nature and consequences of such an incorporation of white workers into an increasingly hierarchical class society, and its ability to incorporate new groups of white immigrants into a politics which operated to maintain class dominance. Roediger's discussion of how the Irish – in other circumstances intensely hostile to the Anglo-Saxon – became subsumed into this 'white' identity is particularly sensitive:

> The [pre-Civil war] Democratic emphasis on natural rights within a government 'made by the white men, for the benefit of the white man' appealed to Irish Catholics in large part because it cut off questions about their qualifications for citizenship. Under other circumstances, Irish-American Catholics might not have accepted so keenly the 'association of nationality with blood – but not with ethnicity', which racially conflated them with the otherwise hated English. They might not have so readily embraced a view of 'American nationality that stressed the relevance of "race" while putting the Irish safely within an Anglo-Celtic racial majority'. But, within the constrained choices and high risks of antebellum American politics, such a choice was quite logical. The ways in which the Irish competed for work and adjusted to industrial morality in America made it all but certain that they would adopt and extend the politics of white unity offered by the Democratic Party.

'*Herrenvolk* republicanism', argues Roediger, 'had the advantage of reassuring whites in a society in which downward social mobility was a constant fear – one might lose everything but whiteness.'

The politics of white unity has continued to be an unconsidered habit for large parts of the white working class. The price paid for it by people of colour has been enormous and is increasing in the ghettos and barrios of urban North America. The price paid by large sections of the white population has always been high in terms of a diminished humanity; it has, in addition, been high in material terms in the workplace, in the environment and in their communities. The material improvement in the conditions of life for most of the white working class was a consequence in large part of the degree to which they acted as protagonists for their interests as working-class people rather than as whites. If the white working class continues to act on the basis of appeals to their whiteness, their ability to protect their fundamental life conditions will be nugatory – they will, instead, be more and more dependent on what W.E.B. Du Bois called 'a public and psychological wage'. The rationing of scarce resources from the public exchequer, which historically has benefited whites under racism, is proving to be increasingly unable to meet even the

most basic needs of white working-class people. They will, therefore, be fed more and more psychological wages – in the form of Willie Horton attacks on affirmative action and 'political correctness', and on the underclass.

University of Manchester LOUIS KUSHNICK

George Washington Gómez

By AMÉRICO PAREDES (Houston, Texas, Arte Publico Press, 1990). 302pp.

The Heirs of Columbus

By GERALD VIZENOR (Hanover, New Haven and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1991). 189pp. $18.95.

'"There is no doubt that there are too many people in the United States," Leytón said. "They're going to have to expand pretty soon and grab more territory." Manuel scowled. "They'll probably try to expand to the south again, damn their souls."' This conversation between Leytón and Manuel takes place conspicuously on Columbus day in a barber-shop in Jonesville, Texas, on the Rio Grande border between the US and Mexico, and is recalled by George W. Gómez from his last visit to the town, his home-town, three years earlier, when he had just 'finished law school and was getting ready to move to Washington'. George Washington Gómez, or Guálinto as he had been known in his youth, is the title character and main protagonist in this novel by Chicano writer and scholar Américo Paredes. Written between 1936 and 1940, it was not published, unrevised, until half a century later, in 1990. In the interim, and parting company perhaps with his fictional hero, Paredes himself had gone on to university and a distinguished academic reputation as author of *'With his Pistol in his Hand': a border ballad and its hero.*

The early novel, a quasi-*bildungsroman,* ostensibly presented as the education and formation of George Washington Gómez, narrates not only the life story of its title persona, but the continuing history of the occupation of northern Mexico/southwestern US and provocatively anticipates as well the persistent border conflicts that divide still that political and cultural space and its populations. Born early in the century into a family of *sedicios* under attack from the Texas Rangers, Guálinto, his grandmother's pronunciation of his given name, Jorge Wachinton, is educated in the gringo schools and on the barrio streets of the early twentieth-century southwestern US. At the end of the story, he will, both like and unlike his murdered father, be actively engaged in the US-Mexican border disputes already written into his bifurcated name. As George W. Gómez finally admits, to the shock of his uncle Feliciano on

his temporary return home on the eve of the second world war:

> 'All right, I'll tell you the truth. I am in the Army. I'm a first lieutenant in counter-intelligence.' 'What does that mean? You are a spy?' 'My job is border security. That's why I must wear civilian clothes and keep a secret.'

The story of George Washington Gómez, which opens with his christening and ends with a remembrance of Columbus day, began at least half a millennium earlier in that still longer history of discovery, conquest and occupation retold by the community of storytellers in *The Heirs of Columbus*. '"*Stolen* is the right word", whispered Felipa. "*Discover* is more accurate", said Doric.' Doric and Felipa are characters in this newest novel by the celebrated Native American fiction writer, Gerald Vizenor. Doric Michéd is a member of the Brotherhood of American Explorers that has 'acquired' four medicine pouches for its collections. Felipa Flowers, a 'trickster poacher', who belongs to the Heirs of Columbus, has been delegated by the Heirs to repatriate their pouches.

Unlike the *bildung* structure that most obviously underwrites *George Washington Gómez*, the narrative of *The Heirs of Columbus* moves abruptly, often fantastically, from site to site, from, for example, the Santa Maria Casino, the 'decorated bingo flagship ... anchored on the international border near Big Island in Lake of Woods', to the Explorers' Conquistador Club in New York, to a federal court hearing the 'issues of ownership and legal standing, jurisdiction, and circumstantial evidence' in the case of the stolen pouches and to London, where Felipa has gone to arrange an exchange of the remains of Columbus for those of Pocahontas. Part two of the novel, following Felipa's violent disappearance in London, is set at Point Assinika, which had been 'declared a sovereign nation on October 12, 1991, by the Heirs of Columbus'. Point Assinika, given the healing attractions of its therapists and storytellers as well as the promotions of a radio talk show, quickly becomes a popular site of convergence for the physically and culturally dispossessed – and thus a target for the machinations of both tribal and federal governments.

Written on and against the two territorial borders of the continental US, with Mexico to the south and Canada to the north – borders that still tensely divide and recombine the populations of those regions – the two novels by Paredes and Vizenor both mark and remap the consequences of that erstwhile 'discovery of America' by Christopher Columbus in 1492. As Chaine Riel Doumet, legatee of an earlier *métis* uprising in Canada, testifies during the Heirs' federal court hearing, 'stories are in bones, stones, trees, water, bears, air, everywhere, and stories have natural rights to be heard and liberated'. And as the inhabitants of Jonesville recall more than once a year: 'Mexican history had

conveniently given them two holidays for this purpose, Mexican independence day on the sixteenth of September and the Cinco de Mayo fiesta, the anniversary of the Mexican victory on May 5 1862, over the French at Puebla. Though they lived in a foreign country, Mexicotexans always celebrated these days, American citizens or not.'

Engaging with both the national politics and the academic disciplines, from the history textbooks studied by Guálinto in the 1930s to the anthropologists of 'native peoples' in the 1980s, that have institutionalised the truncated history of 'America' as the property of its present rulers, *George Washington Gómez* and *The Heirs of Columbus* suggest that there are still other stories to be told, a rediscovery of America still to be accomplished. Vizenor concludes the bibliographical epilogue to his novel with the speculation: 'Christopher Columbus, no doubt, would rather be remembered as an obscure healer in the humour of a novel and crossblood stories than the stimulated quiver in national politics; he deserves both strategies of survival in a wild consumer culture.' Written half a century apart, and yet published within a year of each other, on the eve of the quincentennial of the 'discovery of America', *George Washington Gómez* and *The Heirs of Columbus* maintain the pressure of borders and propose, both retrospectively and prospectively, a continuation to the bitter conversation between George and Feliciano that concludes Paredes's novel:

> 'Does "your country" include the Mexicans living in it?' 'I'd rather not go into that again. I must leave.' He extended his hand. His uncle took it without getting up from his rocking chair. 'I'll tell you', his uncle said. 'This is one of those times when I wish I believed in another life, in a life after death.' 'It is?' 'Yes. Then I could look forward to seeing your father in purgatory or limbo or wherever it is that Mexican yokels go. We could sit down and have a good long talk about you.' George smiled. 'I didn't know you had a sense of humour,' he said. 'I don't,' his uncle said.

University of Texas, Austin BARBARA HARLOW

Aboriginal Youth and the Criminal Justice System

By FAY GALE, REBECCA BAILEY-HARRIS and JOY WUNDERSITZ (Cambridge, CUP, 1990). 168pp. £30.

Though slavery never existed 'officially' for the original inhabitants of Australia, it was not until the 1960s that the beginnings of citizenship rights were granted. The 'Aboriginal protection' laws which had kept Aborigines imprisoned on missions and reserves as 'wards of the state' were removed during this period and, after a referendum in 1967,

Aborigines became, legally speaking, citizens of Australia. Yet despite the changes that have come about, black communities continue to experience a level of police coercion and criminalisation that is unknown in even the most marginalised white communities.

Aboriginal Youth and the Criminal Justice System, written by three Australian academics of high standing, attempts to look at the treatment of Aboriginal youth within the legal system in modern Australia. Their case studies are all based in South Australia. First, it is the only state which consistently records 'Aboriginality' in its crime records; second, it has an international reputation for progressive innovations in the field of criminal justice. The book is in the genre of empiricist social policy which sets out to examine the facts and figures 'without any particular doctrinal or political preconceptions'. What it uncovers is the massively 'disproportionate representation' of black youth at every level of the system. The story the authors tell is not dissimilar to what happens in the UK and the US. Black youth are less likely to be cautioned or warned by the police and more likely to get arrested than any other ethnic group. Once arrested, they will generally go into the 'hardest' end of the system, unable to gain access into its more 'rehabilitative' parts. Moreover, once in the courtroom, they get the toughest and longest sentences. What distinguishes Australia is how much worse the situation is there. In one of the book's many tables, while white Australians are seen to be slightly 'under-represented' in a proportion of -1:8, Aborigines are 'over-represented' 23:4. These figures are not uniform across the state – on the Lower North Yorke Peninsula, the extent of 'over-representation' is a massive 102:3. The authors are thus able to confirm the conclusion of a previous investigation which stated that 'Australia's Aborigines [are], if not the most incarcerated people in the world, then at least second to no other'.

Like many books in this mould, there is more substantial discussion on the extent of Aboriginal criminalisation than on its causes. Implicitly, the authors argue from the standpoint of a liberal sociological model of society which assumes a combination of rights and obligations to be the prerogative of every citizen. Yet the credibility of the model groans under the weight of their own assiduously collected evidence. For example, in the chapter on 'Welfare and justice', the authors look at the way welfarist norms became incorporated in the legal system in the 1960s and 70s. Although these had the 'laudable motive of achieving greater equality for all members of the community', the authors' figures reveal that 'the more attempts [were] made to improve the delivery of justice, the more disadvantaged young Aborigines became'. Elsewhere, the authors attempt to develop a profile of the 'young Aboriginal offender' by bringing together statistics on the type of offences young blacks are picked up for with information about the socio-economic position of their communities. What is revealed is the huge number of arrests for

minor offences, often involving alcohol, that would be of little consequence for whites. Indeed, the level of criminalisation in some areas suggests that Aboriginal youth are not able to move without attracting the attention of the police. The socio-economic picture that emerges is dominated by poverty, unemployment and welfare dependency unparalleled in the poorest white communities. What is also revealed is a deeply ingrained level of police racism, often reinforced by the attitudes of other whites, particularly in small rural communities.

If the state of non-citizenship which Aborigines live in is really going to be understood, then a number of factors must be considered. First, there needs to be a recognition of the sheer scale of devastation that has been wrought on black Australia by attempts, for over 150 years, to obliterate the social and cultural fabric of Aboriginal societies. Removing black children from their communities and placing them in white institutions is only the most infamous example. What are the consequences of all this in modern Australia? Second, there are the belated formal citizenship provisions of less than thirty years ago. Did these represent a disavowal in any sense of the former colony's past? Or have colonial relations of power been re-inscribed in modern Australian society, and, if so, through what mechanisms? These issues are only hinted at by the authors. For example, an Aboriginal youth running down a street is stopped by the police and asked where he is going; he tells the officers to 'mind their own fucking business'. He is arrested for abusive language and additionally charged with resisting arrest. Obviously the police's starting point in this situation was either the automatic assumption that the youth was involved in criminal activity, or, even worse, that for 'daring' to be so 'uppity' as to run down the street, he needed to be 'taught a lesson'. But the authors tend to see this merely as an example of the police's 'irrationality' – that is that the youth could have had any number of reasons for running down the street. In the event, such an approach focuses discussion on the 'racial bias' of the police, etc., and on racist incidents, rather than taking on the wider processes of racial positioning which are at work.

Gale, Bailey-Harris and Wundersitz have written a book which will be useful for those engaged in exposing the deeply racist nature of Australian society, a fact which both the Left and liberals have been unwilling to face up to. However, the book ultimately fails to go beyond reflecting on the need for legal reforms to ensure that Aborigines are treated more 'compassionately', instead of using its substantive material to generate a critical perspective on Australian society as a whole.

London STEPHEN COWDEN

Culture and African American Politics

By CHARLES P. HENRY (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990). 149pp. Cloth £20.50, paper £7.99

At a time when much of the research on the black community concentrates on its deficiencies and offers only dim prospects for any form of revitalisation of collective political action, Charles P. Henry's *Culture and African American Politics* offers a fresh perspective on how culture is used as a resource in politics. Henry rejects the political culture approach used primarily by political scientists and draws on insights from several disciplines to illuminate the relationship between masses and elites in black politics and culture. He views culture as a discursive arena of social interaction – energised and animated by bottom-up creativity and top-down power. Culture thus emerges as a critical site of contestation that gives force and direction to collective politics, rather than as a set of reflexive, unchanging values and practices. Popular construction of everyday weapons of struggle looms as a significant element of political mobilisation, along with analytical and organisational skills provided by elites.

Henry explores four areas of Afro-American culture – blues, religion, political leadership in general, and the Jackson presidential campaigns in particular – to illustrate the linkages between daily experience, modes of coping and expression, and grand political strategy. Perhaps the book's most compelling feature is its exploration of continuity in Afro-American resistance cultures. While the material conditions and the legal status of Afro-Americans have undergone considerable change from the slavery era to post-industrialisation, Henry contends that culture remains a medium for negotiating a synthesis between the pursuit of selfish individualism and group responsibility. General themes that emerge include the rejection of invisibility, assertion of identity, the blending of the sacred and the secular and the articulation of moral vision for the group and society. From this perspective, blues music serves a dual role in providing 'expressive communal channels of relief', and as a form of protest because it allows for 'an expression of thoughts and ideas not permissibly verbalised in other contexts'. Henry identifies what he calls four steps in the making of the blues. He then likens these to Martin Luther King's methodology and philosophy of non-violence. The increasing popularity of rap music represents an extension of this chain. As with blues, Afro-American religion can serve as an agent of social and political transformation. By providing means of liberating vision, religion acts, not as an escape, but as an effort to link transcendence of day-to-day obstacles with grand political theory.

While Henry has considerably broadened the context for examining African American culture, he does not explore the consequences of post-

industrial structural transformation on the black community. Increasing deterioration of the human and material resources in the inner-city has intensified social class stratification, and accelerated the removal of significant numbers of Afro-Americans from political and social institutions that had been indispensable to the mobilisation of mass movements in the early post-war years. Declining membership in local as well as national political organisations, the rise of black neo-conservatism, young people's belated 'discovery' of racial consciousness, and the various attempts to escape or negotiate racial identity clearly reflected this transition. The political economy has evolved in ways that alter significantly the terrain upon which Afro-American politics is constructed. Such profit-oriented institutions external to the community as record companies, film studios and distributors, radio stations, media cultural critics and foundations which fund the arts, exercise substantial influence on the production and distribution of African American cultural commodities. Increasingly, the products (for example, music, art, film, images, etc.) deemed worthy of promotion by external agents reflect assimilationist or crossover values. This process further marginalises cultural products that critique mainstream American values.

The insights, perspectives and experiences that Henry brings to the study of Afro-American culture need greater theoretical grounding. What are the primary agents of culture? What unites the disparate elements emerging from various social classes within Afro-America to produce a shared culture? How does that culture reproduce itself as African-Americans extend their geographical, occupational and ideological range? How might the role of mass culture change as technological developments expand?

Culture and African American Politics, nevertheless, provides a framework for connecting the study of political dimensions of black culture with other interdisciplinary modes of analysis such as popular culture, social movements and postmodernism. Too often scholars have viewed the Afro-American masses as susceptible to manipulation by charismatic nationalists or by liberal reformers. By demonstrating how culture is an ongoing part of resistance against further domination by mainstream values and institutions, Henry provides a critical new understanding of the dynamic relationship between politics and culture in the African American community.

Madison, Wisconsin DONALD R. CULVERSON

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This listing does not preclude subsequent publication of reviews

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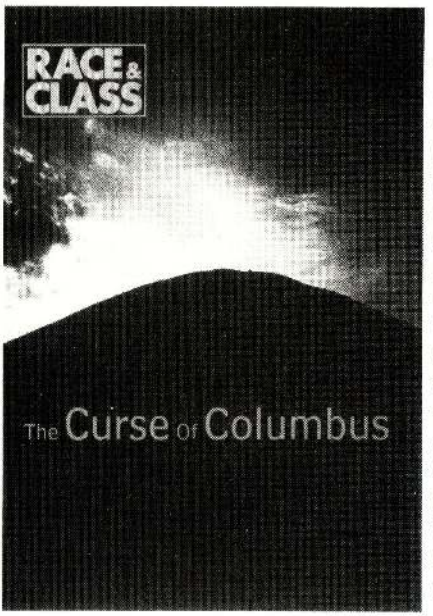

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