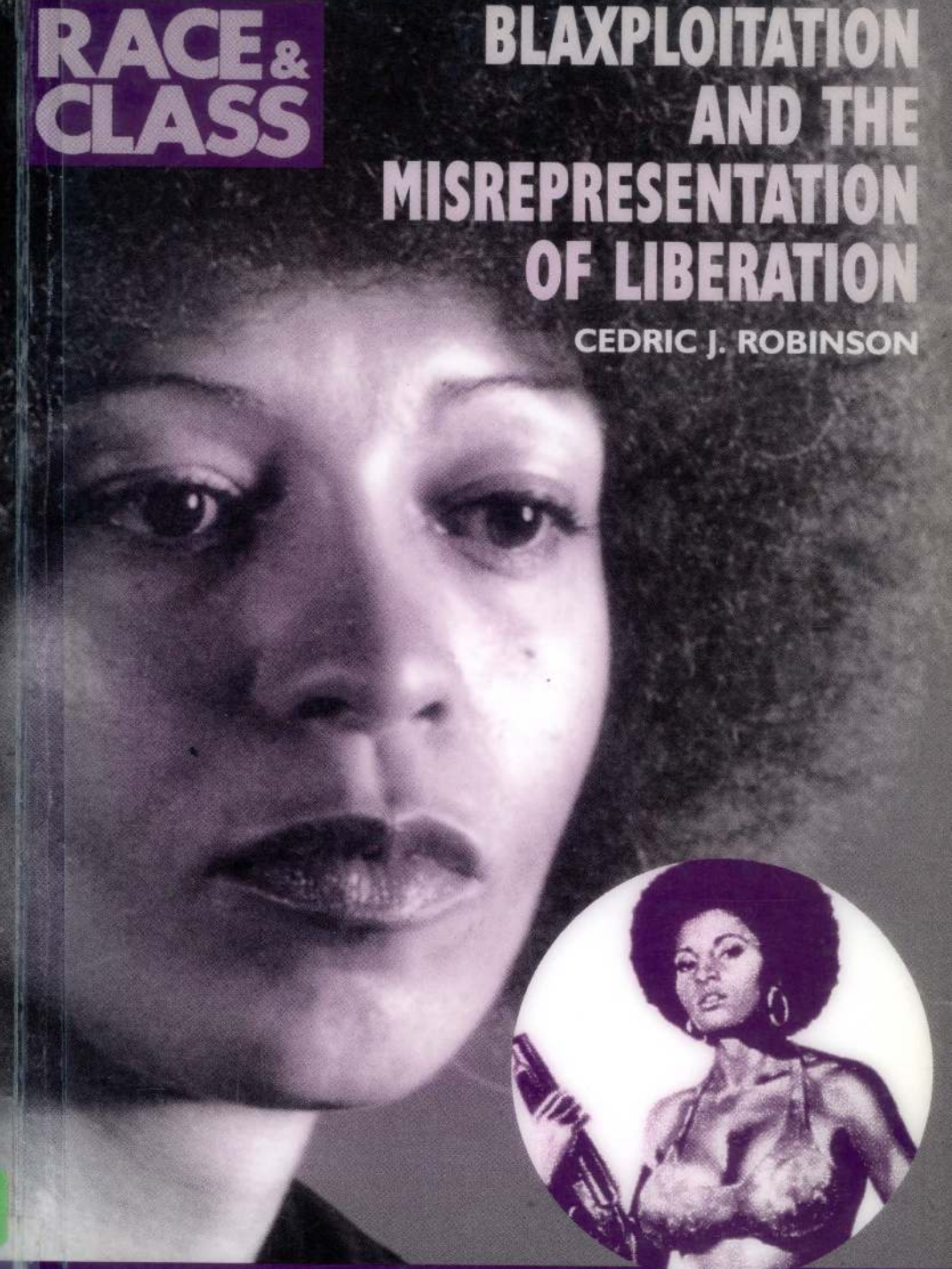
RACE & CLASS

BLAXPLOITATION AND THE MISREPRESENTATION OF LIBERATION

CEDRIC J. ROBINSON



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Blaxploitation and the misrepresentation of liberation*

In our own time a neo-Blaxploitation has occurred which blurs the memory of Blaxploitation by rehearsing the insults of the first. The off-screen sexual gymnastics of David Alan Grier's parents in *Boomerang*; Martin Lawrence's confusion of sex with 'quality time' in *Bad Boys*; Keenan Ivory Wayan's James Brown dance to ward off dogs in *Low Down Dirty Shane*; the minstrel tropes of *The Last Boy Scout*, *Booty Call*, *Senseless* (1998), Chris Rock's HBO show and dozens of similar tropes are familiar from thirty years ago. If you did not see them the first time around, the Blaxploitation films have become routine fare for the cable movie channels, particularly during Black History month. With a few exceptions, Blaxploitation was a degraded cinema. It degraded the industry which prostituted itself to political and market exigencies and constructed the genre of a urban jungle; it degraded the Black actors, writers, and directors who proved more affectionate to money than to the Black lower classes they caricatured; it degraded its audiences who were subjected to a mockery of the aspirations of Black liberationists.

The first Blaxploitation era, 1969-1975, appears precisely at that moment when Hollywood's 'liberal conscience' is at its apogee.[1] In the years immediately preceding the emergence of the Black ghetto melodrama, integrationism had become the reigning ideological drama

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of race-theme films. Sidney Poitier was the highly successful icon of this genre, earning the highest box office, and drawing a most respectable salary which placed him among the elite of movie stars.[2] If one remained within the parameters of film production, as many film historians do, the occurrence of Blaxploitation would seem to constitute a paradox, except for the facts that Poitier's stardom and the subsequent appearance of Blaxploitation coincided with the most militant phase of Black liberationism.

Thousands of young Blacks, in colleges and high schools, had determined that integrationism, the ideology which had dominated the Civil Rights movement in the post-second world war era, was a liberal conceit, premised on the belief that a kind of Christian forbearance would transform the hegemony of white racism. Their faith exhausted by the spectacles of bombings, beatings, insults, murders, and judicial and police injustices, many Blacks turned to the more muscular postures of Black Power, Marxism, or separationist programmes. Each contained a radically different America from that inhabiting integrationism, but they were never the same alternative America. Black Power, at least in its formal expression, suggested a permanently balkanised America, disaggregated by race, religion, and ethnicity. As Carmichael and Hamilton suggested in their declaration, Black Power was merely an admission to an American apartheid in which Blacks could justifiably desire a distinct political and economic base.[3] Rather than race, religion, or ethnicity, Marxism conceptualised a class-riven society whose correction required proletarian rule; class superseded race, thus class solidarity within a militant and class-conscious working class was the ground for a true resolution. Among the separatists, America was the creation of a malevolent deity and was impervious to change.[4] The only alternative was a permanent break, a dissolution which would allow the salvation of the good. Hollywood responded by simultaneously sustaining a more muted integrationism, while conceding that Black social protest was an emergent force from a community with a historical dimension and an urgent moral impulse.

In order to understand better the filmic transmutation of Black liberation in the early 1970s, it is necessary to review briefly the stratagem employed by cultural propagandists in an earlier social crisis. In the Great Depression, the most striking project of race training in films was conducted through the genres of the jungle and plantation movies. Each of the genres had been employed during the catastrophe of immigration occurring in the teens of the present century. But then their function as narratives of whiteness had been overshadowed by the greater urgency – as proposed in the Western, the Indian, and the Civil War genres – of fabricating a nationalist mythology in popular culture.[5]

The end of the silent movies era coincided with massive economic deterioration and the emergence of extreme political oppositions. On

the Right, one of the most powerful factions of American capital, the interest group coordinated by J. P. Morgan's minions, had initiated a conspiracy to 'seize the White House'.[6] The richly endowed plan was modelled on the emergence of the Italian Fascist movement, and sutured social materials from the American Legion, the Bonus Army, and the unemployed. On the Left, the increasing organisational impetus of communists, socialists, Black radicals and nationalists among the more alien immigrants and Black workers was facilitated by the advance of class identity. Moreover, as the events surrounding the Scottsboro trials evidenced, the racial barriers established less than fifty years earlier had begun to disintegrate. The alleged female victims, two poor white women, had worked as prostitutes. One, ideed, had regularly serviced Black men on what she called 'negro night'. The judge in the 1931 trial of the nine Black youths would have none of it:

> Where the woman charged to have been raped is, as in this case a white woman, there is a strong presumption under the law that she would not and did not yield to intercourse with the defendant, a Negro, and this is true, what ever the station in life the prosecutrix may occupy, whether she be the most despised, ignorant and abandoned woman of the community, or the spotless virgin and daughter of a prominent name of luxury and learning.[7]

The law, of course, was a fantastic artifice, a mythic concatenation of a fabulous white imaginary. The demise of the Klan in the 1920s, in a storm of sex scandals among its most prominent leaders, had exposed the hypocrisy of race patrollers like the judge. Nancy MacLean commented: 'As a site of debauchery, the Imperial Palace of the Klan rivaled some of the motion picture sets its representatives so habitually rebuked.'[8]

With the largest movie studios now under the hegemony of the largest fractions of capital,[9] namely the Morgan and Rockefeller groups, a significant proportion of Hollywood's productions in the 1930s provided justification for the re-establishment of overt Black repression, American colonialism, and domestic fascism. The most explicit genres were the jungle films and what Ed Guerrero has determined as the 'plantation genre'.[10] In both genres, the young white female serves as a besieged icon of whiteness, endangered by her own sexual desires. Concerning the first genre, Rhona Berenstein observes:

> A range of jungle films align monstrosity with darkness and position the white woman as the figure who negotiates the chasm between the white and black worlds. Her role is ambiguous: She is under threat and in need of white male care and she is liminal, aligned with and likened to monsters, blacks, and jungle creatures. The figuration of white heroines in jungle narratives underscores the slippage of race and gender traits in these pictures, and highlights the terrifying and

monstrous results of transgressions of the conventional boundaries of sex, species and race.[11]

The jungle film was thus a protocol of anti-miscegenation, and like D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, the plots of films like *Ingagi* (1930), *Trader Horn* (1931), *The Blonde Captive* (1932), *The Savage Girl* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933), all narrate the rescue of virginal white women from gorillas and Black men. Interestingly, the character's retrieval from an erotic immersion in darkness was often accompanied by the transformation of an effeminate white male into a heroically masculine figure.

In the plantation genre, the white women of films like *So Red the Rose* (1935), *Jezebel* (1938), and *Gone With the Wind* (1939) – three of the seventy-five major films of this genre produced between 1929 and 1941[12] – portrayed a complementary virtue of whiteness. The females' function – and invariably they were daughters of plantation-owning families – was to display the essential nobility inherent in whiteness. Typically, in the first half of the plot, their characters replicate the child-like females of Griffith's imagination, marred, however, by petulance, selfishness, self-conceit and a passion for trivial matters. Griffith's Old South was inhabited by white women who, though young, were devoted to their families and blessed with a heightened sense of responsibility. Their successors in the 1930s were less obviously so endowed. In the end, hardship (a slave rebellion, a plague of Yellow Fever, or the ruin of the Civil War, in the aforementioned films) matures them, providing an opportunity for their noblest virtues to come to the fore.

On the other hand, the slaves of the plantation genre displayed no such depth of social or self consciousness. The Red Summer, the judicial lynching of the Scottsboro men, the annual tabulation of actual lynchings, the constant litany of official and mob violence against Blacks, were figments of reality which had no place in American films. Unlike the Blacks in the real world of the Depression years, the slaves of the plantation genre were seldom sad, rebellious or militant. Their merriment exposed the essential and necessary paternalism of their masters; and frequently the slaves were so enthralled with slavery that they broke into song or dance. Indeed, Guerrero maintains, the only slaves who opposed slavery in the first fifty years of the cinema were the renegades depicted in *Birth of a Nation* and the short-lived rebels of *So Red the Rose*. Donald Bogle has christened the period as the Age of the Negro Servant, and has claimed 'No other period in motion-picture history could boast of more black faces carrying mops and pails or lifting pots and pans than the Depression years.'[13] There was no need then for the hard justice Griffith introduced in *Birth*; and certainly no rationale for the lynching of the mammy character and her family which Oscar Micheaux dramatically presented in *Within Our Gates* (1919).

Four decades after the Depression, American film makers deployed images of Black women which adopted the ideological stratagems of the jungle films and the plantation genre. Just as the white heroine had served as a canvas upon which was inscribed the nature of her race's supposed virtues and the conflicted construct of her gender, Black women were impersonated (to use Griffith's term for acting) to display the hidden and perverse nature of Blackness, and the essentially savage erotic impulses of Black women. Shortly after the nation had been inundated by the televised scenes of freedom-seeking Black bodies being mauled by police hoses and dogs, and mobbed and spat upon by white citizens, Hollywood film makers recast the freedom movement as outlawry and, in a sub-genre of Blaxploitation, Black women were portrayed as vigilantes. In the anarchy which constituted Hollywood's fabrication of Black society, all the libidinal desire and social pathology of America's urban classes was centred on the female body, the Black as well as the white female body. The white women in these films were either masculinised degenerates or from the poor white classes; in either instance they neither expected nor deserved redemption. Remarkably, only Black women possessed the savage, primordial instinct of self-survival to resist sexual degradation and their male predators. Inhabiting a society in which the rule of law and social civility were merely superficial veneers, a world in which the quest for civil rights was at best a naive self-delusion, the Bad Black Woman's self-preservation took the form of execution and banditry.

* * *

One of the most effective and clever manoeuvres of the Blaxploitation genre was the appropriation and re-presentation of Angela Davis's public image. This manipulation, of course, was of a piece with the commercial cinema's translation of the mass Black rebellion which occurred near the end of the Civil Rights era. And in lieu of a deliberate interrogation of the political and moral dilemmas which attended the failures of an integrationist activism, independent and then established film-makers trivialised the troubled activists of the movement into the now familiar male counter-revolutionary creatures: the male prostitute ('Sweetback'), the vigilante cops ('Gravedigger Jones' and 'Coffin Ed Johnson'); the dope pusher ('Shaft'); and the gangster ('Black Caesar', etc). The crises which communicated between American society, its dominant institutions, and the movement were masked in popular culture as ghetto epidemiology. By the era of Blaxploitation, Davis's likeness and that of Kathleen Cleaver had become two of the most familiar and alternative gender significations of revolutionary America. Film, however, transported Davis's form from a representation of a revolutionist to that of an erotic Black nationalist, largely devoid of

historical consciousness. This was achieved by eviscerating the original's intellectual sophistication, political and organisational context, doctrinal commitments, and most tellingly, her critique of capitalist society and its employment of gender, race and class.

The principal impersonations of Davis were performed by Pam Grier and Rosalind Cash, two young actresses who bore some physical resemblance to Davis. It was, however, a similarity with a difference: Grier's voluptuous figure licensed an eroticisation of Davis which consisted of sexualised violence (themes of rape, castration, and the broadest contraction of the gun and the penis); Cash (*The Omega Man*, 1971, and *Melinda*, 1972), whose actual resemblance to the original was even more striking, would be penalised ironically because her own screen reticence displayed an intelligence which lent too much ambivalence and texture to the mono-dimensional representation of Davis. And, true to the industrial marketing strategies of American films, the roles of Grier and Cash spawned secondary and even more shallow after-images, particularly in the persons of Tamara Dobson (*Cleopatra Jones*, 1973, and *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, 1975) and Teresa Graves (*Get Christy Love*, 1975). Unlike the original, then, these false Angela Davises were quarantined, shut off by a cellulose barrier which invited the vicarious thrill of participation into primitive exercises depicting the cosmic contest between good and evil with nothing at risk except time and boredom.

The cinematic deceit transmuted liberation into vengeance, the pursuit of a social justice which embraced race, class, and gender into Black racism, and the politics of armed struggle into systematic assassination. The screen impostors occupied a manichaean world in which whites were evil, corrupt and decadent; where Black accomplices to white venality were tainted with a similarly debased nature; and the central Black protagonists were preoccupied with vigilantism. Capitalism, signified at most by skyscraper exteriors, almost entirely disappeared, constituting a normalising space whose interstices lent marginal terrain for the practices of the drug trade and prostitution. The real world of the market, unseen and unremarked upon, hovered above the ghetto streets, the police station, the strip club and the dealer's locales (storefront, suburban home, high rise apartment, etc.). The world in front of the camera was some sort of twisted, perverted mirror of the normal, the reasoned, the ordered, the safe and unremarkable American landscape. The denizens dwelling in the nether world were as different from real America as gargoyles are from pigeons. The object was to exhibit these bizarre and semi-mythic life-forms while assuring the screen audience that they inhabited a space some safe distance away.

Following the success of *Shaft* (1971), American International Pictures (AIP) began its own foray into Blaxploitation with *Slaughter* (1972) starring Jim Brown, and *Blacula* (1972) with William Marshall,

Vonetta McGee, and Denise Nicholas. By then, American International Pictures had enjoyed two decades of success. AIP was begun as an independent studio by Sam Arkoff and James Nicholson in the mid-1950s. Its first film, *The Fast and the Furious* (1954) was directed by Roger Corman, whom Arkoff and Nicholson launched in a four-picture deal. And, from the beginning, AIP focused on the neglected teenage market, producing and exhibiting monster films (*The Beast with a 1,000,000 Eyes!*), adolescent rebellion films (*Hot Rod Girl*), women in prison films (*Girls in Prison, Reform School Girl*), teen party films (*Shake, Rattle and Rock, Rock All Night*), Westerns (*Apache Woman*) and horror films (*I Was a Teenage Werewolf, The She Creature, The Amazing Colossal Man, Blood of Dracula*).[14] Typically, in the early years, according to Arkoff, the creation of a film began with a title (Nicholson's contribution), which inspired an ad campaign which then eventually produced a shooting script. Also typical was the use of untested film directors like Roger Corman, Francis Ford Coppola (*Dementia 13*), Woody Allen (*What's Up Tiger Lilly?*), and Martin Scorsese (*Boxcar Bertha*); young actors like Jack Nicholson, Michael Landon, Mike Connors, Peter Graves, Jayne Mansfield and B-grade actors like Richard Denning, Beverly Garland and Marla English and has-beens like Chester Morris and Anna Stens. Later this impressive list of firsts, according to Arkoff, would extend to first starring roles for Charles Bronson, Melanie Griffith, Bruce Dern, Cher, Chuck Norris, Dennis Hopper, Mel Gibson, Nick Nolte, Don Johnson, and Robert De Niro.[15]

On the other hand, Pam Grier's career at AIP had begun much less auspiciously: she had been a switchboard operator. Her first film at AIP was as an extra in *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970), written by Roger Ebert, now a mandarin in film criticism! The next year, Grier began her impersonations of Angela Davis in *The Big Doll House/Women's Penitentiary I* (1971), a film which is credited with launching the women's prison genre. These appropriations of Davis continued for the next several years and included the sequel to *The Big Doll House*, entitled *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), *Hit Man* (1972), *Black Mama, White Mama* (1972) – a rip-off of *The Defiant Ones* – *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), *Friday Foster* (1975), and *Sheba, Baby* (1975). In each of these films, Grier wore Afros and revealing attire; toted pistols, revolvers and shotguns; kick-boxed, mutilated and 'smoked' her antagonists; lectured enemies and friends on the necessity of upholding the law, protecting the community and its innocents; and eventually resorted to vigilantism. As the lone avengers against drug pushers, corrupt politicians and cops and Black and ethnic gangsters, her characters were estranged from community or political organisations and, when they infrequently required a posse, it was only for the ultimate dispatching of the villains 'with prejudice', as the CIA euphemistically had dubbed killing. *Foxy Brown*, one of Grier's best known and notorious roles of the period (she castrates her

tormentor), illustrates nicely how these misrepresentations of Angela Davis transported film audiences of the mid-1970s into a counter-liberationist realm.

Foxy Brown (Grier), a young Black woman of no apparent means, lives in a comfortably-furnished apartment in a Black neighbourhood. Her brother (Antonio Fargas) is a cocaine dealer who has run afoul of his white mobster suppliers (Peter Brown and Kathryn Loder); her lover, Michael (Terry Carter), a federal agent, is recovering from an attempted assassination by the same mobsters. The first hint of Foxy's unusual capacity for action is her rescuing her brother from the clutches of his mobster friends. She sequesters him in her apartment and then visits her lover in the hospital, eventually bringing him, too, to her apartment. Despite her lover Michael's plastic surgery, he is recognised by the brother, who then reveals his true identity to his partners in exchange for a return to their good graces as a dealer. Michael is killed, dying in Foxy's arms, and Foxy is transformed into the avenger. She extorts the names of the killers from her brother and joins the prostitution ring directed by the mobsters. Foxy and Ann, another Black woman (Juliet Brown), are assigned as sexual toys to a corrupt judge who, in exchange, is expected to give light sentences to two mobster thugs. Instead, the two women conspire to humiliate the judge, each for her own reasons (Ann has just witnessed her husband's being beaten by her bosses). The judge in revenge hands down long sentences. Foxy's identity is discovered by the mobster chiefs who pursue and capture the two women. Foxy saves her companion, who presumably joins her husband and child, but for herself it means a period of torture and rape. Foxy escapes, killing her two keepers. In retribution, her brother is now executed by the mobsters, and Foxy persuades an organisation of Black community vigilantes to join her in seeking justice and revenge. (She tells them: 'You just take care of the justice, and I'll handle the revenge, myself.'[16]) Together they ambush the mobsters at a cocaine drop, capture the mob boss, and Foxy castrates him. Foxy delivers the severed penis in a jar to the boss's mistress, kills the woman's bodyguards, and leaves the wounded mistress to contemplate a life with her castrated lover.

The exploitative properties of the film centre on the female body and brutal violence and are established in the opening credits when, borrowing from the James Bond films, Grier dances in a kaleidoscope of colours and in various modes of undress to the funky beat of an eponymous song. In her next appearance on screen, we see her bare breasts as she dresses in order to drive to the rescue of her brother. Her naked or dressed body is constantly reprised as a source of titillation in the film as she is in bed with her lover, as she is attired for her disguise as a prostitute, as she lures the judge into his own compromise, as she is drugged and raped, etc. Voyeuristic pleasure is also provided by the

naked bodies of several white women: the four prostitutes lounging in the laps of the judge's middle-aged cohorts, watching a pornographic film; and, most disturbingly, the camera conspires with the mobster killers to expose the naked body of Foxy's brother's lover moments before her jugular is severed.

The film's Blaxploitation elements are sometimes more oblique. By the time of the release of *Foxy Brown*, it had become obligatory in the form to portray the racial hierarchy of ghetto criminality: Black street dealers in the employ of white mobsters and their corrupt partners drawn from seemingly legitimate society. In this film, Fargas performed this function, effectively demonstrating his cloying subordination to the white bosses of the drug/prostitution ring. The extent of Fargas's subordination is confirmed when he violates loyalty to his own sister in order to serve his masters. It was also mandatory that there be a representation of urban anarchy: in *Foxy Brown* this was achieved quite early in the film. The opening sequence is the hunt, cornering and eventual rescue of Fargas in the stark barrenness of the city's streets at night. Shortly after, further evidence of this urban jungle is adduced with a scene ostensibly depicting Michael's release from the hospital. As he and Foxy stand at a corner in a Black neighbourhood, they witness the playing out of the Black outlaw by community vigilantes. A lengthy fight takes place between the villain and his three pursuers during which a young Black woman pushing her baby's carriage is mauled. The forsaken carriage swings into on-coming traffic, only to be reclaimed at the last moment. The villain is finally hustled into a car, destined, we are assured, for a place from which he will never return. The significance of the whole altercation, which takes place in broad daylight, is brought home by the total absence of the police, the society's and the state's emblem of order. Other erasures from this imagined community are less obvious but nevertheless telling: the absence of children and oldsters, of families, churches, legitimate businesses, recreational sites, schools and ordinary family dwellings.

Clyde Taylor has pointedly remarked that we can discern much from the comparison of a text to its subsequent adaptation.

> By lining up an adapted text diachronically behind its model, we can clearly see the differences that, when read as discursive ironies, matter in the politics of representation. Lay viewers from repressed communities are right on target in decoding the politics of adaptation by indexing what was added, changed, or left out in the transition between one telling and another.[17]

While his observations were specifically concerned with the conversion of a novel to a play, and a play to a film, it is also applicable to the transfer of social reality as text to film as text. At the time of Blaxploitation films, it was a commonplace that actual Black urban

communities in all parts of the country were heavily patrolled and policed by agents deployed by federal, state, county, local, and private institutions. The external imposition of order was manifested through electronic surveillance, informants, undercover operatives, special police intelligence units, interventions of mailed correspondence, photo surveillance, foot- and automobile-patrols, frequently centralised by inter-agency cooperation. From within the community, moral and civil order were maintained by church networks and the routines of daily labour, community associations, mainstream and radical political organisations, neighbourhood watch groups and a canopy of adult and youth activities. Why then would Hollywood and independent film makers construct this densely jungled urban landscape inhabited principally by predators? How might the manufacturers of such a fantastically unrealistic portrayal expect that their creation would achieve the ring of authenticity?

In the Bad Black Woman genre, the body of the Black female anoints this unreality as authentic. On the one hand, the undeniably erotic objectivity of the Black female body inscribes the mark of truth onto the social fantasy. And the narrative, filled with competing claimants for that body – lovers, rapists, and the merely obsessed (in *Foxy*, the judge is characterised by his taste for 'your kind') – transports the credibility of their desires into an authentication of the world in which these denizens are imagined to exist. Unlike her white female counter-part of the jungle and plantation films, it is not the Black female who is an ambiguous figure negotiating the chasm between the white and the Black worlds. It is the chasm which is ambiguous: male desire and the resulting calumny of male domination erases the distinctions between white society and Black society. In the total absence in the genre of any allusion to actual international capitalism, a predatory fratriarchy displaces modes of production as the source of evil. Material greed, political tyranny and the domination by capital of labour are merely vacuous surrogates for male desire.

The presence of the body in the female-centred genre permits the Black female to decompose the omnipresent, vocalised, and cartoonish Black racism which inhabits the Blaxploitation films drawing on male characters. While actual Black and non-Black revolutionaries had recited the existence of a ruling class, Blaxploitation films instructed their audiences that the subtext of the attack on bourgeois society and imperialism was really a disguised racial complaint. Liberation ideology had nothing to do with a revulsion with oppression but was fuelled by race envy. In the Bad Black Woman genre, even this masking of liberation is discarded. Black racism is displaced by female rage: Black women rage at the betrayal and abandonment by family, community, and society. These agencies have disintegrated, failing to protect her or even to provide a space for the conduct of normal life.

And in the same genre, as represented in the figure of the evil white female villain, white women appear to be inspired by a similar rage. Unlike their sisters of the 1930s, the issue is not their surrender to ravishing Black males (*King Kong*) but the betrayal they sense in white male desire. The whole official rationale for the lynching of Black males collapses, revealed as an elaborate deceit to conceal the white man's hunger for the Black female body.

The sub-genre of the Bad Black Woman thus negotiates its exaggerated unreality by its display of the Black female body. The false, Hobbesian depiction of the Black community, the procrustean social consciousness of its protagonists, the bluntly pathogenic and unrelievedly pure malevolence of its villains, the outrages perpetrated on the flesh of friend and foe alike, are all spun into credible artifices by the single truth of the Black woman's body. And as that body is transformed into that of the destroyer, a fascination with that violence overtakes and converges with sexual voyeurism. The pleasure of the flesh convenes with the excitement of revenge so that they might double for a notion of social justice. The enduring innocence of the avenger, beset on all sides by violence, corruption, betrayal and loss, installs the rightness of a simple, closing justice.

To paraphrase Gina Dent, the films of Blaxploitation were a historical practice.[18] Just how powerful a practice is now evident in the emergence of rap music over the past decade or so. Notwithstanding the Black bourgeois renderings of the Civil Rights and the Freedom movement era (in, for example, the television documentaries *Roots* and *Eyes on the Prize, I*), the young Black griots of the present recite history in Blaxploitation terms (Ren and Dr Dre: 'keeping a smile off a white face',) while, paradoxically, employing the racist imagery of minstrelsy (Chris Rock: 'You know what the worst thing is about niggas? Niggas always want credit for shit they supposed to do...like: "I take care of my kids". You supposed to, you dumb motherfucker!'[19]) In the early 1970s, however, a companion genre to Blaxploitation appeared, the Bad Black Woman narrative. Ironically, it borrowed more directly from reality by snatching Angela Davis from the pages of newspapers, news magazines and law enforcement dockets. On the one hand, this imagined Angela extended the life of the Black-action movie. More importantly, as the gun-toting impersonation displaced the original, it also served to rupture the transmission of Black radical thought. Between them, Blaxploitation and the Bad Black Woman narratives installed into popular culture a race-encoded critique of American society and resistance as it drew its first and later audiences further away from the reality of the liberation movement. Historical ambiguities and structural contradictions were engulfed, leaving behind an ideological apparatus ill-equipped to deal with research-based historical activity, to invite trans-racial resistance, or to reckon

with state tyranny in Africa or the Caribbean or domestic manifestations of Black fascism.

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14 Sam Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood By the Seat of My Pants* (New York, Birch Lane Press, 1992).
15 Ibid., p.5.
16 The scene takes place in the neighbourhood vigilantes' headquarters, where on the doors and walls are posters of Kathleen Cleaver and George Jackson, the only instance when the film refers to originals in the actual Black movement. In a long shot of very short duration, at the far end of a second room, a small glimpse is given of a poster of Angela Davis. But the scene is dominated by two shots of Grier in the foreground, positioned between the portraits of Cleaver and Jackson, and then another Jackson poster. The film makers thus deliberately shield their audiences from any direct exposure to what might disturb the imposture, the juxtaposition of Grier with her model. Natalie Morris, one of my students, has determined that there is also a oblique reference to George Jackson as Foxy's speech to the vigilantes appropriates the romance trope embedded in Angela Davis's *Autobiography* (New York, Random House, 1974).
17 Clyde Taylor, 'The ironies of palace/subaltern discourse', in Manthia Diawara, *Black American Cinema* (New York, Routledge, 1993), p.186.
18 Gina Dent, in discussion of her paper 'Legacies', at 'Unfinished Liberation' conference, 6 March 1998.
19 See Ernie Allen, Jr., 'Making the strong survive: the contours and contradictions of "Message Rap"', in William Eric Perkins, ed, *Droppin' Science: critical essays on Rap music and HipHop culture* (Philadelphia, Temple University, 1996), p.171 and Chris Rock, 'Bring the pain', HBO, 8 March, 1998 (original, 1996).

HAZEL WATERS

'An African's revenge': the black figure on the early nineteenth-century stage

From Oroonoko to Gambia, from Zanga to Hassan, from Karfa to Couri, from Muley to Black Sam, through all the manifestations of Pompey and Quashee, the black figure on the nineteenth-century stage embodies the processes of a racism continually reinventing itself culturally. Theatre then was much like television now. Before mass education and mass literacy, and in a period of explosive urban and industrial growth, it was *the* popular medium, drawing its audiences from all but the very poorest, with many going night after night. Bills were long, lasting from around six till midnight or maybe later, and varied, changing every few days. The appetite for new material was insatiable, much of it cobbled together from a variety of elements – old favourites and pastiches of them, stuff pirated from rival theatres, versions of French plays, reports of British victories past and present, circus, spectacle and pantomime, dumb-show, performing elephants, lions, dogs ... And in all this melee, the black character fawned or thundered, was, by turns, terrible, contemptible, grotesque; expressing not just that well-known psychological projection – the 'other' – but an ingrained, ongoing relationship to the development of nineteenth-century racism.

While the raw material for these representations was the accretion of folkloric prejudices built up over centuries, the crucible in which the elements were combined was largely fashioned from two major literary sources of black representation – Shakespeare's *Othello* and, more important both because more imitable and more overtly relevant to

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issues of slavery and colonialism, Aphra Behn's novel, *Oroonoko*.[1] While *Othello* supplied motives of revenge and sexual jealousy, *Oroonoko* supplied themes of African nobility enslaved and revolt.

What all the characters have in common, what fundamentally shapes them is the institution of slavery. They are all white creations, born out of and relating to, slave trading, slave holding, slave owning. As such, they and their innumerable ilk have, with only rare exceptions, no independent imaginative life; they convey no sense of the unexpected as can, for example occur in plays featuring Irish characters.[2] Their role is justificatory of black subordination, even when accusatory of slavery – or rather the slave trade – itself. Such a pattern reflects the wider socio-economic and colonial interests of Britain in this period and throws up paradoxes – the fundamental one being that slavery is justifiable, while the trade is despicable – which are resolved in the plays through ever more tortuous means. That is, until the black figure himself becomes so utterly constrained within a racist straitjacket as to be incapable of posing even the most inexplicit challenge to accepted values.

To understand the nineteenth-century portrayals, however, it is necessary to go back to the end of the seventeenth century and the dramatist Southerne's enormously influential dramatisation of Behn's novel.* It is worth describing *Oroonoko* in some detail, since it is such a rich source of further work, of images and themes.

Oroonoko – the source material

In Behn's original, based, she claims, on her experience while living in Surinam, Oroonoko is a West African prince of great beauty, nobility and accomplishment whose beloved, Imoinda, is taken by his grandfather, an absolute monarch, as a concubine. Both Oroonoko and Imoinda are forced to submit to the parting, but Oroonoko manages to find his way to Imoinda and they consummate their love. As soon as the king discovers this, he orders Imoinda to be sold off to the slavers, a 'cruel sentence, worse than death'. Subsequently Oroonoko – who has himself traded with European slavers – is tricked on board the slave ship of an unnamed captain, whom he had treated favourably at court, initially thrown in irons along with his entourage and finally sold into slavery in Surinam. Throughout, however, Oroonoko is accorded a different status to the rest of those enslaved – a pattern of treatment that continues in Surinam (where he is renamed Caesar), for '[t]he royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner without designing

* Behn's novel was first published in 1688 and was frequently reprinted: Southerne's play was first performed in November 1695.

it'.[3] Imoinda, renamed Clemene, is already in Surinam, owned by Trefry, who is full of desire for her (the 'company laughed at his civility to a slave' for not compelling her to submit to him).[4]

Oroonoko and Imoinda are allowed to live together. Desperate for freedom, which is constantly promised and continually denied (the more desperate once Imoinda is pregnant), Oroonoko finally leads a revolt against the English, but is betrayed by the cowardice of his fellows. For this, he and his lieutenant are bound to stakes and whipped, 'rending the very flesh from their bones'.[5] Subsequently, he and Imoinda again flee. So great, by now, is his desire for revenge and slaughter of all those who have injured them both, so hopeless their situation, that he and Imoinda resolve that he should first kill her, putting her beyond the reach of their enemies, then the governor and as many others as he can and, finally, slay himself. But his killing of Imoinda so desolates him that he is incapable of further action, remaining to grieve over her decomposing body, till the smell finally leads their trackers to him. Weak and faint, refusing capture, he begins his own disembowelment, yet still does not die; kills one of his attackers; is taken, healed of his wounds and punished by being first mutilated and then his body parts burned. Finally, what remains of him is cut into quarters and distributed among the plantations, as a warning to others.

Imoinda's death is the sacrifice to his revenge, and it is here that the first major theme linked inextricably to the black presence on the stage emerges. For obsessive revenge is the prime motivation, or the explanatory factor for a whole galaxy of black characters, from the tragic to the grotesque. What also becomes clear as the figure of the noble slave mutates in the drama is that the shocking savagery and unvarnished betrayal, presented so matter of factly in Behn's novel and which is generalised to the majority of the plantocracy, virtually disappears. Its residue is confined to the odd slave-trader or single bad slave-owner. The attack on Christian values – which allow Oroonoko to be lied to, tricked and betrayed – still remains, sometimes quite powerfully so, but the portrait of the plantocracy as a 'degenerate race, who have no one human virtue left, to distinguish them from the vilest creatures'[6] is not to be found.

Thomas Southerne's play *Oroonoko*,[7] first performed at Drury Lane in November 1695, follows Behn fairly closely. It was an immediate success and continued in popularity well into the nineteenth century, though in a much bowdlerised form. Its history is instructive. What Southerne takes from Behn is the tragic nobility of the hero Oroonoko and his love for Imoinda – who, here, is the daughter of a European who saved his life in battle. (There is an echo of *Othello* in the fact of the black-white marriage but none in the actual relations between Imoinda and Oroonoko.) The desire for revenge, given such weight in Behn is there also – though the drama's complexity means that it is less

foregrounded here than it later became. We first meet Oroonoko on his arrival in Surinam (at this time held by the British). As in Behn's novel, the distinction is clearly made between the natural nobility of Oroonoko and the generality of slaves. In the words of the 'liberal' slave-holder Blanford, 'Most of 'em know no better; they were born so and only change their masters. But a prince born only to command, betrayed and sold! My heart drops blood for him.'* Oroonoko foils an attack by the indigenous Indians on the plantation, in the course of which he and Imoinda are reunited through the good offices of their owner, Blanford (who also provides Oroonoko with his own slave-servant, his old friend Aboan). They live for a time happily together. But Imoinda is pursued by the governor and Oroonoko is urged by Aboan to lead his fellows – whose lives are much harsher – in revolt.

Oroonoko: If we are slaves, they did not make us slaves,
But bought us in an honest way of trade...
Mistake me not;
I do not tamely say that we should bear
All they could lay upon us, but we find
The load so light, so little to be felt...
We ought not to complain.

Aboan: My royal lord!
You do not know the heavy grievances,
The toils, the labours, weary drudgeries
Which they impose ...
Nay, sometimes in their proud, insulting sport,
How worse than dogs they lash their fellow creatures...
Oh could you know
How many wretches lift their hands and eyes
To you for their relief!

The revolt is betrayed by a fellow slave but, in the course of the fighting, the slaver, Captain Driver, who originally captured Oroonoko, is killed. Tricked into surrendering by the governor, Oroonoko is shackled and torn apart from Imoinda, who is herself rescued by Blanford from the governor's attempt to rape her. Oroonoko is freed by Blanford and, before his recapture, encounters Aboan, dying from the tortures inflicted on him by the slaveowners. Together, Imoinda and Oroonoko decide to commit suicide – Imoinda dies and Oroonoko, discovered by the governor, kills him before killing himself. In this, at least, his revenge is more successful than the utter futility depicted by Behn. Throughout, the dignity, honour and honesty

* One performance of *Oroonoko*, in May 1759, created a sensation when it was attended by two Africans, one a prince who had been sent to London for education, but sold as a slave by the ship's captain. The case became a *cause célèbre*.[8]

of Oroonoko, the loyalty of Aboan, the love and strength of Imoinda are contrasted with a range of other values, in particular the cynical treachery of Captain Driver, the mercenary cruelty of the slave-owners and the self-seeking lust and betrayal of the governor.

> *Oroonoko*: I am unfortunate, but not ashamed
> Of being so. No, let the guilty blush,
> The white man that betrayed me. Honest black
> Disdains to change its colour.

Nonetheless, the play offers no outright condemnation of slavery – 'We are not monsters all,' says Blanford, Oroonoko's protector. Oroonoko himself has the dignity and bearing of the noble and tragic hero; cast in the mould of the noble savage, he turns a mirror onto 'civilised' Christian society's view of itself. And the impassioned, succinct and moving blank verse of his diction gives him more dramatic potential and presence than most of his successors. Ultimately, however, the scope for his character and its expression in action remains limited, defined by his enslavement. It is not his own weakness that finally destroys him as with the greatest figures of tragedy, eliciting our deepest human sympathies and involvement, but the sheer weight of external circumstances. Othello could not have existed as a slave.

To all of this, Southerne adds a comic sub-plot, in which two sisters (one disguised as a man) have come to Surinam to look for husbands – the theme of buying, selling and tricking into a good bargain in marriage resonating with the buying, selling and trickery involved in slave trading. The acting version of Southerne's drama was rewritten in 1759 by a Dr Hawkesworth to remove the comic sub-plot, which increasingly came to be considered immoral and out of keeping with the noble and tragic tone of the rest of the play. (There is much sexual innuendo between a wealthy, slave-owning widow and the sister in male disguise – culminating in the 'male' sister organising a surrogate partner for the widow's bed.)

The removal, though regarded as necessary, was not entirely successful. In the judgement of the authors of the *Biographica Dramatica*:

> there seems somewhat more wanting than such a mutilation, to render this play what one would wish it to be; for as the comedy took up so considerable a share in the length of a drama of no immoderate extent, the story of the tragedy was apparently not sufficiently full of business to make out the catastrophe of an entire piece ... the little further extent that [Dr Hawkesworth] has given to the characters of Aboan and Hotman seems not sufficient to fill up the hiatus which those omissions have occasioned.[9]

Moreover, as views on slavery polarised and the movement to abolish the slave trade grew, the play was increasingly criticised by anti-slavery

campaigners for not making an explicit condemnation of the institution. John Ferriar, for example, saw the drama as a potential enlister of recruits to the anti-slavery cause:

> When the attempt to abolish the African slave trade commenced in *Manchester*, some active friends of the cause imagined, that by assembling a few of the principal topics, in a dramatic form, an impression might be made, on persons negligent of simple reasoning ...[10]

He went on:

> Although the incidents appeared even to invite sentiments adverse to slavery, yet Southern, not contented with refusing them, delivered by the medium of his Hero, a grovelling apology for slave-holding ... and an illiberal contempt of the unhappy Negroes is so entwined with the fabric of the Piece, that it was impossible to separate it, without making large encroachments on the Author's design.[11]

It is hard not to agree with him when he pours scorn on the impracticability of the slaves' plan for revolt, on 'the absurdity, of this familiar talk, of *planting* a *colony*, under the eyes of a force superior in arms and discipline ... the leader of an insurrection, avowing that he trusts to *some accident* for the execution of his purposes.'[12] But staging a practicable revolt was not Southerne's dramatic purpose. So far, I have found no record of Ferriar's version being performed – it reads rather as a tract. But its anti-slavery implications may nonetheless have been too committed. In Liverpool, for example, where, in the actor G.F. Cooke's memorable phrase, 'there is not a brick in your d— town, but what is cemented by the blood of a negro,'[13] *Oroonoko* and its variants were prohibited as 'reflecting too much on the conduct of those Liverpool merchants engaged in the Slave Trade'.[14]

Aldridge and Oroonoko

When, therefore, the young, black American actor, Ira Aldridge, came to England in 1825 to begin a career unthinkable in America, and played Oroonoko at the Royal Coburg, some seven or eight years after Edmund Kean had revived it at Drury Lane, the play already had a long history as a statement about slavery and race.[15] It is impossible to discover precisely which version Aldridge played – but, presumably, it would have been some close variant of Hawkesworth's version. For example, that published in *The Acting Drama* [16] not only omits the sub-plot, but also a number of Oroonoko's speeches. It places more emphasis on slavery and the revolt – but, at the same time, the slaves are shown to be more easily tricked and betrayed. Aboan's suspicion of his intemperate fellow-slave Hottman and his wild threats of vengeance, carefully established in Southerne's original and proved to

be fully correct, is transformed into an eager acceptance of all Hottman's bloodthirsty promises – rendering the slaves easy and stupid prey to their enemies. Oroonoko's explicit condemnations of Christianity as practised by its professors, already less frequent in Southerne's version than in Behn's original, are further watered down. Thus, in Southerne, Oroonoko's condemnation of his cowardly fellow slaves:

> *Oroonoko:* To think I could design to make those free,
> Who were by nature slaves; wretches designed
> To be their masters' dogs, and lick their feet

is balanced by his continuation:

> Whip, whip 'em to the knowledge of your gods,
> Your Christian gods, who suffer you to be
> Unjust, dishonest, cowardly and base,
> And give 'em your excuse for being so.

In the 1834 version, this latter passage is omitted. Similarly, much of the interchange between Oroonoko and Imoinda in Act 5, scene 5, when they are resolving on their joint suicide, has been cut – making Imoinda more passive and Oroonoko less tender. The process of reducing the drama's complexity and further limiting the amount of agency and universal human quality allowed to Oroonoko (already constrained from Behn's novel onwards into the mould of the noble savage) has begun.

Nonetheless, enough survived to make the play still controversial – at least, with a black actor in the title role. For, it should not be forgotten that this was a period of intense discussion and debate over slavery. While the trade had been abolished in 1807,* the movement to outlaw slavery entirely was gathering pace. The fore-runner of the Anti-Slavery Society had been formed in 1823; in 1825 it began publishing the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*; a network of local branches publicised the issue and organised petitions to Parliament. In such a context, Aldridge's portrayals of characters such as Oroonoko and Zanga (see below) would carry a resonance beyond that of cliché or stereotype. The 'bombast and affectation' detected by the press in Southerne's drama would be overlaid by the physical reality of a powerful, black actor, from a slave society, involved in an all-encompassing passion for his white wife and a doomed bid for freedom and revenge. The subsequent reviews – all struck with the 'novelty' of Aldridge's debut appearance – testify to this. *The Times* was unqualifiedly racist in its assessment – the shape of Aldridge's lips

* Performances of *Oroonoko* seemed to be fairly frequent in the 1780s – a time when the movement for abolition of the trade first began to gather pace in Britain – and Genest records a performance at Covent Garden in March 1806.[17]

made it impossible for him to speak English properly, though it grudgingly admits that he acted the part 'as well as was necessary'. It sneered that the 'black stockings' of Aldridge's supporting actor, playing Aboan, did not match Aldridge's own 'dun colour'.[18] *The Globe* found his 'conception of the character was very judicious ... Several of his touches in the last scene were impressive and notwithstanding a very evident disposition among the audience to indulge the risible faculty brought down spontaneous plaudits.'[19] That Aldridge's career seemed to go into abeyance for about a year after it was launched[20] is alleged by the historian Edward Scobie, a friend of Aldridge's youngest daughter and possessor of his diaries and cuttings, to be due to the influence of the pro-slavery interest, following Aldridge's marriage to a white English woman.[21]

It is significant that most of Aldridge's other major roles are in plays which predate the nineteenth century (though here I shall only be considering a selection of them). As such, almost all contain echoes of Enlightenment values; the primacy of reason, the dignity of man, the worth of freedom, the necessity of restraint.* Or they reflect that spectral other of the Enlightenment – Gothic excess. And the black characters can symbolise both aspects of the culture that produced them. There is the tragic dignity of a humanity robbed by slavery of its native and natural associations – wife, children, home and native land, which is stressed not only in Southerne, but in Young's *The Revenge* (1721, see below); Lewis's *Castle Spectre* (December 1797) and Morton's *The Slave* (November 1816), in all of which Aldridge played. The theme is later echoed in Jerrold's *Descart, the French Buccaneer* (September 1828) and Murray's melodrama version of the serio-pantomime, *Obi; or Three-finger'd Jack* (1830, apparently written for Aldridge). It even gets an unlikely mention in Fitzball's melodramatic potboiler, *The Negro of Wapping* (1838).

As is evident from Southerne's *Oroonoko*, such themes can evoke a certain nobility, even if it is the nobility of the savage. And, that it is the nobility of the *savage* allows these characters also to function as inhuman monsters, motivated by violent, unrestrained emotion. This is the case with Zanga in *The Revenge*,[22] in which Aldridge played the lead role.

The Revenge and its influence

Zanga, the majestic and demonic villain of Young's verse tragedy is, in his implacable hatred, the impassioned imaginative heart of the play. The love-lorn, jealous posturing he foments in his hated conqueror,

* Of course, one result of this reflection of universalism is that the characters have no recognisable qualities as Africans enslaved; no difference in diction or in values expressed. Their humanity is general.

master and 'friend' Alonzo is, by contrast, tedious and time-consuming – absurd even within the world of this highly stylised artificial drama. Despite Mrs Inchbald's judgement that the play was 'but seldom brought upon the stage',[23] the records appear to show that it was fairly frequently performed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. All the interest focused on Zanga whose 'high-sounding vengeance ... charms every heart'[24] and in whose portrayal Young was deemed to rival Shakespeare; it was 'equal, if not superior to anything in our language', according to Dr Johnson.[25]

> [T]he actor who performs Zanga must be [the play's] sole support. This character is of such magnitude, and so unprotected by those who surround him, that few performers will undertake to represent it ... Mr Kemble stands foremost ... and draws some splendid audiences every year, merely to see *him*; though the intervals between his exits and entrances are sure to be passed in lassitude.[26]

Kean – whose portrayal of Oroonoko was not considered to have succeeded – electrified audiences with his 1815 revival of *The Revenge*.

In the case of Zanga, the theme of black revenge becomes all-consuming. Othello turned Iago, he has a direct and powerfully expressed motive for his hate. Not only was he conquered and captured, he was turned by his conqueror into a body servant:

> I then was young, he placed me near his person
> And thought me not dishonoured by his service.
> One day (may that returning day be night,
> The stain, the curse of each succeeding year!)
> For something or for nothing, in his pride,
> He struck me. (While I tell it do I live?)
> He smote me on the cheek – I did not stab him,
> For that were poor revenge – E'er since his folly
> Has strove to bury it beneath a heap
> Of kindnesses, and thinks it is forgot.
> Insolent thought! and like a second blow![27]

There is an awareness here of the degradation not so much of conquest as of the enforced submissiveness derived from Zanga's circumscribed status – which, significantly, Alonzo completely fails to realise. It is, in its way, a telling paradigm of the master/slave relationship, its insight striking the modern reader all the more forcefully given contemporary assumptions that 'slaves' would be 'grateful' for considerate treatment; that these inferior beings were transparent to their 'masters', their motivations as easily read as those of children.

Alonzo, whose 'godlike arm/Has made one spot the grave of Africa' is, finally, utterly subdued by Zanga's machinations. Brought to the fever pitch of suspicion against his beloved Leonora – who kills herself

rather than be so accused – he then attempts his own death. Further torment awaits:

Zanga: Your anguish is to come
You much have been abused

Alonzo: Abus'd! By whom?

Zanga: To know were little comfort.

Alonzo: Oh, 'twere much!

Zanga: Indeed!

Alonzo: By heaven! Oh, give him to my fury!

Zanga: Born for your use, I live but to oblige you.
Know, then, 'twas – I.

Alonzo: Am I awake?

Zanga: For ever.

It is hard here not to feel more thrilled by Zanga's terse, ironic mastery than appalled by his villainy. His last minute, brief remorse once Alonzo is dead – 'all thy good/Now blazes' carries little conviction and the play returns to the utterly mundane with the Spanish ruler, Don Alvarez's concluding homily on the '[d]readful effects of jealousy', his warning lest 'each man finds a Zanga in his heart'. What, of course, prevents the warning Zanga poses of the dangers of slavery from becoming more generalised and coming too close to home, is the distancing in time and space of the action, the sheer artificiality of the play and, most importantly, the fact of his original status. Like his predecessor Oroonoko and like Oroonoko's descendant Gambia in Morton's *The Slave* (1816), he is of royal blood; it is his lineage that impels him to revenge. Class, it would seem, can mitigate colour.

The blow that Zanga has been struck is also significant – as the black character deteriorates from the noble savage into the ignoble, as the claim to universality fades under the impact of capitalist slavery, the remembered grievance of the unmerited blow alone may be considered sufficient motive for the black villain. While dramas like *The Revenge*, performed at the major theatres like Drury Lane may have set the theme, it was taken up and broadcast more widely among less prestigious establishments by dramatists catering especially for them. So for Couri, an African leader and thirty years a slave, who escaped back to his native land (Jerrold's *Descart, the French Buccaneer* (1828)),[28] it is the blow from a master whom he had learnt to love for his kindness that finally tilts him over the edge and drives him to vengeance:

Couri: Time wore on; one day he rebuked – I answered him – he

> struck me. Yes! even now I tremble from the blow: I had been scourged, but I could smile and bleed, for I scorned the wretch that goaded me; but from one that I had succoured, loved! ... From that hour I vowed revenge.

For the evil sailor, Muley, who mutinies against his captain in C.P. Thompson's *Jack Robinson and His Monkey* (1829),[29] the blow is all that motivates him; all the (uncomfortable) context of entrapment and slavery, which Jerrold powerfully insists on has vanished:

> *Muley*: I have received a blow – yes a blow; and yet the striker lives. Now mark an African's revenge! [The captain is bound] Lower the boat there quick; stow provisions lads – plenty mind; a compass and a chart. And you fair lady shall share our perils, or our safety.

Muley and the mutineers escape, leaving the captain lashed to his sinking vessel. It is left to the honest tar, Jack Robinson, shipwrecked years earlier on the island, to give lip-service to the rigours of slavery. Finding Muley unconscious on the shore, he declares:

> Ah, a son of Afric's clime – perhaps he was a slave; if so, death was no punishment, but a blessing. Poor fellow! I will not mourn for you, for now no more you'll quail before a tyrant's eye – no more your flesh will bleed beneath the torturing lash.

That such a sentiment is placed in the mouth of the iconic figure of the British sailor includes the audience in a comforting sense of moral superiority that overrides any uneasy awareness that Britain may still be complicit with such an institution. So degraded indeed, has the vengeful black become in this reworking of the theme ('Brandy and revenge!' is Muley's constant cry) that, in *Jack Robinson and his Monkey*, it is the animal that defeats Muley, locking him up, knocking him down and seizing his pistol – a graphic embodiment of the equation of Africans with apes.

Capture and enslavement – from Hassan to Three-finger'd Jack

The blow, however, often as it surfaces as a motif, is still a variant on the main theme of capture and enslavement as the motive for a revenge that is bottomless. The expression of this is both frequent and powerful. Monk Lewis's *Castle Spectre* (1797),[30] was first performed at a time of revolutionary ferment in Saint Domingue (Haiti), when British expeditionary forces were being sent to the Caribbean, when anti-slavery opinion was advancing even as the slave trade was growing to 'extraordinary dimensions'.[31] In the play, four black slaves appear, servants to the evil Osmond. The foremost among them, Hassan, aims

to revenge himself on white society by aiding and abetting Osmond to do as much evil as possible.

> *Hassan*: I have been dragged from my native land, from a wife who was everything to me, to whom I was everything! Twenty years have elapsed since these Christians tore me away; they trampled upon my heart, mocked my despair, and, when in frantic terms I raved of Samba, laughed and wondered how a negro's soul could feel! In that moment, when the last point of Africa faded from my view, when as I stood on the vessel's deck, I felt that all I loved was to me lost for ever, in that bitter moment did I banish humanity from my breast. I tore from my arm the bracelet of Samba's hair; I gave to the sea the precious token, and while the high waves swift bore it from me, vowed, aloud, endless hatred to mankind.

Given the power of such a speech, the dramatic charge it gives to Osmond's overweening villainy – which is thereby strengthened not only by its own resources of lust and cruelty, but by the perversion of what was once truly noble (Hassan's love of wife and home), yet in another register is associated, through racist belief, with the less than human – it misses the point to state, as does Genest, that the black slaves are considered an 'anachronism'.[32] The tenor of this speech was echoed, some thirty years later, in Jerrold's *Descart, the French Buccaneer*[33] (1828):

> *Couri*: Insult! grinding, degrading odium! It is now thirty years since, entrapped from my country, my skin gave me to the white man as his drudge. – I will not now relate the scenes, the woes I have endured – how, companioned by beasts, I've seen my fellows toil, a merciless jaundiced wretch stalking in proud authority over their bleeding hearts ...

This again was a period when radicalism was in the air, with reform of 'Old Corruption' and when the movement was growing in strength for the immediate and total abolition of slavery (finally legislated in 1833). Couri is a somewhat tragic character, whose revenge rebounds on himself, for it consists of his having stolen a white child and taken her as his daughter and, of course, he has to be left behind when she is reunited with her own kind:

> *Bland*: Losing her! – why not accompany us?
>
> *Couri*: What, I? Oh, I have seen the proud-built world – have felt its best refinement. I accompany! – What, the black man! – why even my Imla, my dearest doating Imla, when civilised might blush for the poor negro, her foster-father?

So, the strength of the attack on slavery is balanced by an equally certain and complacent awareness of racialised hierarchy.

This becomes even more obvious when one examines the career of Jack, in *Obi, or Three-finger'd Jack* (1800). This began life as a serio-pantomime by Fawcett[34] and continued to be played, in pantomime form, at least until the 1820s.[35] In 1830, a dialogue version 'written expressly for the African Roscius [Aldridge] by J. Murray' was performed in Bristol.[36]

In the original pantomime, there is no suggestion of what motivates three-finger'd Jack. He is a lawless terror, existing outside the beneficent world of the plantation, dwelling in a cave and heading a band of robbers who live in superstitious dread of him and his mother, an obeah woman.* It is not difficult to see in this an echo of the Maroon communities of Jamaica – escapees from the plantations who established their own independent communities, with whom the British authorities had been forced to sign a peace treaty in 1739 and who had gone to war against the British in 1795-6. So close to the event, Jack's evil needs no further explanation – that he is outside colonial control is enough. Jack, with his continuation of African cultural practices and traditional religion, is the terror of the plantation slaves, for whom life is otherwise sweet:

> We love massa – we love massa, when he good,
> No lay stick on negro's back –
> We love much kouskous he gives for food,
> And save us from three-finger'd Jack.[38]

Finally, Jack is hunted down and killed by two of them, Quashee and Sam, in return for the promise of freedom. At the last:

> Quashee crosses his forehead, and tells him [Jack] he has been christened. Jack is daunted and lets his gun fall ...

The pantomime ends with Jack, already faint with loss of blood, just about to be decapitated by Sam and Quashee. The message, of hierarchy and colonial control, is utterly transparent, reinforced by every carefully arranged detail of the on-stage disposition of characters and chorus, song and dance. It all culminates in a 'grand march and procession' in which the centrepiece is the bearing aloft of Jack's severed head and hand.

The melodrama version, in which Aldridge played Karfa (three-finger'd Jack) follows the events of the pantomime closely. Initially, the holiday nature of plantation work is insisted on even more explicitly

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* This character was terrifyingly played by Richard J. Smith, subsequently dubbed O. Smith. Smith, who ran away to sea in his youth, had himself been involved in freeing some Gabonese from a slave ship.[37]

than in Fawcett – perhaps in an attempt to contain what will follow:

> *Overseer*: ... Adieu to labour! Let the sugar canes take care of themselves, and hey for mirth and merriment!

Similarly, the fine treatment is stressed:

> *Overseer*: Why, ladies and gentlemen, to judge from your aversion to work, Obi seems rather a fashionable disorder, but as to not eating, drinking or sleeping, I really discover no symptoms of the complaint, so set your minds at rest and enjoy the sports.

Within a year, Jamaica was to see a major revolt, in the form of a cessation of labour, spread among the slaves which took troops and militia two weeks to suppress and put down.[39]

At first, Karfa, the embodiment of revolt, is presented, by Ormond the planter, as pure evil incarnate:

> each day but added to his ferocity; crime followed crime, until the villain dared to attempt the honour of my wife. The signal punishment which awaited him drove him to madness, and under shade of night he burst his bonds, broke into my chamber and before my sight murdered my unhappy wife. Vainly I endeavoured to grapple with the monster ...

(Ormond is carefully presented as a kind and benevolent master.)

Karfa, however, is allowed to tell his story differently, echoing as he does so, the familiar themes of capture, betrayal and irreparable loss:

> Years have elapsed since I sacrificed the wife of the white man, a victim to the memory of my beloved Olinda, whom they tore lifeless from these arms as they dragged me from my native land; can I forget? can I forgive? Never ... As Africa receded from my gaze I swore that the white man who purchased Karfa's services should feel his hate.

A powerful and outspoken character, Karfa continually threatens to burst his bonds. Openly contemptuous of his mother's, the Obi woman's, traditional magic, the sense of modernity he projects is exhilarating:

> Your white man, I am told, can soar into the air, fathom the deep, ransack the mine, and enslave in every clime where his accu[r]sed arts find access. Here, here alone, no white man finds an entrance but as Karfa's slave ... obey me! the white man must now labour for the black.

The latter speech is all the more shocking in that it is spoken to Rosa, the planter's daughter, who, disguised as a boy, has been taken prisoner by Karfa.

The mould of stage villainy, it would seem, allows such a forceful counterblast to the colonial status quo simply because it is such a fixed and defined identity. It is safe to let Karfa express such wildly revolutionary ideas because they are contained within his status as a racialised black villain. How else can one account for the, to modern eyes, glaring imbalance, whereby Quashee (the obedient plantation slave), with his inarticulate broken English, his gratitude to Massa, his inability to dispose of Jack without the help of two others, has to carry the dramatic weight of restoring the status quo. This becomes obvious in the following exchange:

Quashee: Stand back, Massa Jack! this lady good missee, and me no see her hurt.

Jack: Slave!

Quashee: Me *no* slave! me free! me *gentleman*, me *Mr* Quashee now, and no care a button for you or Obi either.

The powerfully argued justification for Karfa's fury is, in the event, outweighed by the hierarchy of the plantation, by the granting of 'rewards' of freedom and basic human status – a status that is undermined even as it is asserted, by the very manner in which that assertion is made. Only a culture in which the assumption of racial superiority and inferiority is endemically ingrained could accept that the Karfa/Quashee equation balances out, that Karfa's rebellion is even lower in the human scale than Quashee's manifest inferiority.

Revenge – the Gambia twist

That revenge is such a potent theme in the depiction of black roles, that it is returned to again and again, not only draws strength from the age-old stereotypes about the uncontrollable emotions of blacks, their lack of the higher faculties of rational control, but also attests to a need to assuage a collective uneasiness over the moral rightness of enslavement; that sowing the wind might reap the whirlwind. Again and again, it is the slave *trade* that bears the brunt of moral condemnation, not the continuing practice of slavery itself. The horrors that are part and parcel of Behn's *Oroonoko* (not an anti-slavery tract) disappear from the dramatic record.

There is a great deal of debate over the relative weight of all the factors underlying Britain's abolition of the slave trade – the role of free trade, the move to an industrial economy based on wage labour, the high levels of revolt among the enslaved – before it was outlawed by other European powers, and while slave production of basic commodities was still in full swing. But one by-product of it was that, in this context at least, Britain could take the moral high ground. The *trade* in

human beings could be attacked without violating, but rather reinforcing, the national identity.

Thomas Morton's popular pastiche of *Oroonoko*, entitled *The Slave, or the Mother and her Child*[40] (also subtitled *The Revolt of Surinam*) shows how this could be done. First performed in November 1816, with Macready playing the lead role of the slave Gambia, it was described by Genest as 'the most successful play which came out in 1816-1817',[41] a success which was 'greater than it deserved ... the grand part of Gambia is unnatural to the last degree'.[42] Yet it continued to be performed well into the 1850s. A dreary sub-plot mimics that of Southerne, with two cousins attempting to wheedle an ugly old aunt out of her money.

The play opens in the midst of a revolt whose chief purpose appears to be for the slaves 'To burn, insult and massacre even their own countrymen'. Having thus economically established the greater guilt of the victims of slavery, this theme is carried through in the character of Gambia, a man of superhuman strength and fidelity, whom 'Nature has kindly fitted ... to [his] fate'. Slavery is denounced, but in a way that takes any discomfort out of the denunciation:

Governor: No misery to endure?

Gambia: Misery! Sir, I am a slave: – In that all human wretchedness is compounded ...

Governor: Your story –

Gambia: Is soon told. In Africa I was a slave

Governor: A slave?

Gambia: The vilest – the slave of fierce ambition; revell'd in luxuries purchased by blood, stimulated by baubles, hunted by my fellow men [sic] – But the hunter was taken in the toils! just, full retribution even to the uttermost pang is now my doom, that freedom I denied to others is now far from my hopes as hell from heaven, that country stained with my crimes, sends its burning breeze across the main, to fire my blood to madness. That innocent man I sold to slavery – he has pardoned me. Can I forgive myself?

Whereas Oroonoko's involvement in the slave trade serves to mark him out from his fellows as of royal lineage, here Gambia's becomes a guilt far greater than that of any of the colonial agents involved.

Gambia, like other black figures, swears revenge ('to his nation, revenge is virtue') though not for his enslavement. Here Morton has recast the Oroonoko/Imoinda theme, turning its intensity to absurdity. Gambia's animus is directed at Clifton, the white, would-be husband of

the beautiful Zelinda, also a slave, and father to her child. Zelinda, of course, is beloved by Gambia. But Gambia's revenge takes an unusual form. The colony is under threat from rebels and the following passage of stage direction and dialogue shows just what could be expected of the truly noble slave:

> *Rebels suddenly attack – Clifton retreats combating them – enter Gambia* – 'Now I'm revenged' – *Zelinda* – 'Oh mercy! mercy!' – *Gambia hears her voice – fights to* ***save*** *Clifton* – 'Yes, proud Briton, thou shalt feel and own my power!' *Exit.* [emphasis added]

For this heroism, Gambia is rewarded with his freedom:

> Liberty! give me the language of gods, to tell that I am free! ... Generous Briton! prophetic be my tongue! when through thy country's zeal, the all-searching sun shall dart his rays in vain, to find a slave in Afric ... write but on my tomb, that Gambia died free!

But Gambia then goes on to sell himself *back* into slavery to raise the money to save Clifton from a debtor's prison and enforce Zelinda's manumission. In a fight with Clifton's deadly enemy, Lindenburg, whose machinations have caught Clifton and Zelinda, he is magnanimous, sparing Lindenburg's life – for, 'I never traffic with my humanity'. There is only one reward commensurate with such nobility:

> England! shall I behold thee? Talk of fabled land or magic power! But what land, that ever poet sung, or enchanter swayed, can equal that, which, when the slave's foot touches, he becomes free!

Some revenge. It is paradigmatic of how the awkwardness of issues like slavery – at one level strong dramatic fare – can not only be contained, but actually spin-doctored into outright flattery of the audience. Oroonoko, already a pattern figure, has declined into the 'clap-traps' (Genest's word) of Gambia; the demonic scheming of Zanga fades to the subordinate wickedness of Hassan and, ultimately, the drunken mutiny of Muley; while the overtly rebellious like Karfa and, to a lesser extent, Couri are contained within a wider frame of colonial values and slave institutions which render them ineffective. Couri, at the end, knows his place: Karfa, who refuses to know it, is shown no quarter.

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JANINE LITTLE NYOONGAH

Australian cleverwoman: an Aboriginal writer beats the blues

...language was a glass door we walked into BANG all the time, and not many white people could see it ... Occasionally white people who'd worked with Kooris would say, 'We as a white race are losing out on a spiritual journey.' Black achievements were an invisible glass door to white people. Not a barrier. Just invisible.[1]

On May Day this year at La Trobe University, a woman who has blazed the trail of die-hard Australian political writing for the past decade finally got some of her due. Ruby Langford – Ginibi in her Bundjalung language – took on the mantle of Honorary Doctor of Letters with all the grace and majesty of her namesake, the black swan. *Doctor Ginibi* seems a far cry from the Koori[2] woman who built fences in the scrub, fought on the streets for Aboriginal justice, and who can show you some pretty angry scars to prove it. Yet the Koori writer, educator, grandmother, auntie and activist reckons it is all part of the same history, all another step in the struggle to realise the justice for her mob that is not only slow coming but, even as she dons the robes of those she is asked to re-educate Koori way, draws further and further into the neocolonial distance.

In that endeavour, Ginibi has been indefatigable and unsparing. Her first book, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (published in 1988 and now in its tenth reprint), was five and a half years in the making – writing

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up, as Ginibi put it, 'all the hurt and death'.[3] Drawn from her and her family's struggles and experience, it was followed by *Real Deadly* (1992), a collection of stories. *Real Deadly* was written while Ginibi was also researching and writing her third, massive manuscript, *My Bundjalung People*, the story of her journey back to her own country in northern New South Wales (a bowdlerised version was published in 1994). And *Haunted by the Past: Nobby's story*, to be published in 1998, tells of her son's experiences with the New South Wales prison system. Like all of Ginibi's work, it has the overriding objective of telling her people's stories 'from our side of the fence' and takes the form of lectures, speeches and poetry, as well as her 'true stories' in prose.

Ginibi's own writing and publishing history is a paradigm of that larger Australian irony of the Indigenous woman bearing the full brunt of an expansive history of oppression and dispossession. She fights for survival, she fights for survival of her family, then her community, then for justice for that community, and she is smacked down hardest by the invisible obstructions she describes in the epigraph. Yet she emerges again and again in personification of the sheer magnitude of difference between her and those who want so much to publish her, market her and, perhaps, to subdue her. Many have tried.

Speaking into the historically constituent devaluation of Aboriginal women's narratives, however, Ginibi resists even the most intoxicating word maps of contemporary cultural theory. These word maps into anything *but* a cosmology of Indigenous Australia are attaining more and more bad press for indulging in what one reviewer described recently as 'ink marks on the page ... a kind of finger painting in minutiae' and, in the postcolonial daubs that at least offer some scope to the Koori as subaltern subject, as 'unadulterated Gayatri-Chakravorty-Spivak-ese'.[4] Ginibi does not care much for postcolonial theory, as she said in an interview I recorded with her in 1994, but she cares less about fiction – insisting at every page or conversation turn that she deals in 'true stories' and that she has not 'discovered fiction yet'.[5]

In the epigraph about banging into glass doors, Ginibi says what her Koori community most often leaves to the non-verbal gesture, the screen slid up deftly in the cross-cultural, chance encounter. She, and they, draw upon the cumulative effect of years of being simply unable to talk to white people. More specifically, however, she describes repeatedly through her books and conversations the incapacity of *middle-class* white people to admit that the looming silences that are these encounters are not empty, but in fact contain the profound attachment of White Australia to that 'glass door' of a language it believes it commands. When asked about her use of the 'glass door' metaphor, Ginibi's response was spontaneous: 'Well, it means that we're invisible to white people.'

If her experience with the editing and publishing of her third book, *My Bundjalung People*,[6] is anything like the rest of her stoushes with mainstream publishing institutions, Ginibi's most recent experience of what African American film maker and critic Michele Wallace calls 'invisibility blues'[7] must still have her in combat stance. In a recent conversation, Ginibi told how *My Bundjalung People* was 'fucked up', becoming something almost unrecognisable from the sweeping manuscript of prose, speeches, letters and testimonials that she churned out after her fingers had ceased to smart from another notorious encounter with her first publishing house. I saw that manuscript, read it with admiration not only for Ginibi, but for Aboriginal women writers in general. There are so many tales of women spending years on manuscripts, only to start over again when the original is destroyed by fire – Glenyse Ward – or by storm – Labumore (Elsie Roughsy) – or, worst of all perhaps, by editing – Ginibi. I marvelled at Ginibi's reach into history at a time when all around me in the cultural studies academy was turning to the fractured, the relative and the discursive, and most of all I was afraid that this academy would find little of value in the mobile archive that is Ginibi's third book. The book I saw at the other side of the University of Queensland Press was not it, but I will explain this difference later as being a matter of supreme orality.

Long after the 1992 publication (and mostly restrained) reception of her collection of family vignettes, *Real Deadly*, Ginibi was travelling the country, telling audiences in schools, universities and writers' festivals that as a Koori author she has no need for fiction, and that she accepts her project as an inherited vision from her ancestors of 'setting the record straight'. Ginibi's books are most often read as vehicles for a now familiar kind of race, gender and class triad in Australian criticism, and in some of these readings the faintest sniff of the superior intellect indulging the uneducated black woman is there, as are some genuinely committed positions on oppositional politics, against the tyranny of conventional generic forms.[8] For both the committed and strained readings, however, there is the problem of the tendency to privilege one subject position, where the Aboriginal woman is struggling to exist in her own terms and in the already exhausting state of invisibility that keeps replicating itself every time the irresistible force of publishing meets its immovable object.

When power relations privilege this race/gender/class menu of subjective sorts, Aboriginal women's prose is read inevitably into the very invisibility that Ginibi has resisted and combated. It matters little that most of her oral testimony, speeches and historical documents were removed by the University of Queensland Press (UQP) from *My Bundjalung People*. The mainstream audience or reading public finds such diversions from the smooth journey narrative distasteful, or distracting from the business at hand of turning all parts of the 'My',

the 'Bundjalung' and the 'People' to the service of a prearranged discourse on race and place in Australia. Where will the Gayatri-Chakravorty-Spivakese slide into play if Ginibi allows no space for it? By chopping away Ginibi's oral material, the editing process ensured that the historical and immediate outreaches into cross-cultural relations in Australia, that are represented fully in her manuscript, remain hidden within soberly middle-class conventions of narrative journeys towards home and towards that most sovereign 'self'. At the same time, the brand of racism that indulges and excludes on the grounds of Aboriginality may be reconceptualised without recourse to Ginibi as anything but a conduit for amorphous blackness, while the racism that has constructed Ginibi as somehow 'deviant', 'immoral' or 'victim' is able in the end to win out in the demonstrably cleaner, nicer and stodgier Aboriginal woman writer represented by *My Bundjalung People*. The connotations of such subtleties in cultural production for Indigenous communities hardly need elaboration in these neo-conservative times of eroded tolerance and expanding private space.

Every time I talk with Ginibi, she reminds me that the representation *they* want will never match the woman they get. Jan (Jindy) Pettman argues that the borders (glass doors) inherent in working relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women, and possible ways of opening them, are 'under-theorised in Australian feminism'.[9] She stresses that gender relations are 'highly political and highly contested sexual politics', rather than being 'static or fixed'. It is useful to compare this view with that of the historian Tim Rowse as a means of contrasting the effects of different attempts to chart this contested territory. In his study of Ginibi's *Don't Take*, Rowse undertakes a comparative reading with *My Place*, an autobiographical novel by Sally Morgan, also an Aboriginal writer. Rowse suggests that non-Aboriginal hegemony and the 'weight of colonial history' are not obstructions to Ginibi's subjectivity as he perceives them to be for Sally Morgan in *My Place*. He argues that subjectivity is hampered instead by 'the contingencies of kinship fractured by rural-urban migration and the fickle vulnerabilities of men'.[10] Suggesting a bourgeois concept of the 'fractured family', empowered as it is by class-based constructions of the rural-urban divide, this reading disavows a possibility that Koori clans might be altogether outside conventional ideas about families in their non-fractured form, and that at the base of this irreducible difference might be the rather dissimilar gender relations in anglocentric patriarchies and the many and varied Indigenous clans. In attempting to negotiate a fixed, historically knowing subject in Ginibi – indeed, one who 'nurtures the reader' – Rowse does not indulge the black woman as much as he implores her to grieve, to heal and to cosset like any middle-class white woman with the luxury of time and territory of her own. Approaching Ginibi's prose is contingent upon her

experience as having had neither. As a result, she articulates a specifically Koori perspective of the invisible woman in a context where class is certainly sure to inscribe itself in the language of critical reception, even as race and culture are considered surmountable boundaries.[11] One way of crossing these boundaries is to engage with the material Ginibi uses to structure her narratives, which is apparent whenever she emphasises the sameness of her narrator and herself. When this material is excised in the editing process, as it was with *My Bundjalung People*, that strange flirtation of the bourgeois Australian reader with the Aboriginal subject echoes in the hollows of the postcolonial dream.

* * *

In 1992, Ginibi published her second book, *Real Deadly*, and won a legal battle with her first editor to reclaim full copyright on her first, *Don't Take*. Ginibi was in the curious position of sharing copyright on *Don't Take* with her editor, which meant that when she died her book would belong not to her family, but to the editor. Being new to the world of literary contracts and editing deals, Ginibi could not imagine how her story could wind up being anyone else's property. Published by Penguin, *Don't Take*, now in its tenth printing, is a set text for many secondary and tertiary subjects in English, anthropology, history and sociology. While *Don't Take* has been labelled an example of how Aboriginal literature often negotiates a mediatory path in 'middle-class power play' through editing,[12] recent events in Ginibi's hard won literary subjectivity indicate that her sheer determination to hold true to her Koori history and historiography confounds such power plays and, so very importantly for a society in which proletarian shiftlessness grapples with a still kicking working-class consciousness, proves that the committed and strong are always the last standing when the indulgence is long over.

With *Don't Take*, Ginibi became enmeshed in a court case over royalties to extricate herself from the editorial process in which she found herself. As Ginibi said, she did not realise, as an inexperienced author, that there was a difference between royalties and copyright. She told how *Don't Take* represented 'four-and-a-half years and a near nervous breakdown', during which she also underwent major surgery. With *Real Deadly*, Ginibi might have believed that her struggle to exist, to be visible both in text and in her own right, was won. However, a review in the *Australian* by Mary Rose Liverani showed again that her resistance to accommodating middle-class conventions of style and language could be interpreted as literary inadequacy or a lack of personal and political agency. In 'A Koori's Lesson in Dispossession', Ginibi tells her reviewer to:

> Sweep the dirt from your own door, Mary Rose Liverani, and stop making moral judgements about me. Are you so perfect? The alienation and dispossession forced me outside the social mainstream; it's not a question of me rejecting social norms. We Kooris were not allowed into your social enclaves.
>
> Liverani talks about us Kooris as though we had a choice, which shows how little she knows of the Aboriginal experience of Australia; and besides, I had the same search for happiness as everyone else.[13]

So often, within the race/gender/class triad, the writing subject is interpreted as a subject trying to consolidate an identity, or prove something about their racially oppressed position. Having 'the same search for happiness as everyone else' is an experience singled out deftly by Ginibi as encapsulating all that is wrong on Liverani's high moral and cultural ground. The niceness and stodginess I mentioned earlier get short shrift in Ginibi's performances, which are served always by humour as the energy and life force of the woman and the text. Later in her response, for example, Ginibi states that 'if Liverani ever needs to brush up on her Aboriginal studies, I'd be only too happy to tutor her'. Liverani had charged Ginibi with 'exhibit[ing] no moral consciousness at all – nor any apparent notion of cause and effect' and concluded that Ginibi 'has difficulty of making sense of her life and offering insight into it'. Apparently, Ginibi has enough insight into her life, and into that of Liverani, to choose the word 'tutor' over 'teach' or 'help' and so to mobilise a distinct set of connotations about the interrogations that Koori culture is able to conduct on the epistemic and moral sensibilities of the mainstream. The humour and parody involved in this choice is subtle to the extent that it may be pitched for the Koori eye alone, for the enjoyment of the community in on the joke.

There are so many jokes in Ginibi's novels, yet the humour of her writing is rarely discussed. A partial explanation for this may be that 'glass door' that makes Indigenous cultures invisible to white Australian society, although a more basic instinct, fear of being considered racist seems more likely. Much of the humour in Ginibi's stories derives from her recalling particular scenes of fighting, swearing, drinking and casual sex. Many white, middle-class readers would interpret these aspects of Ginibi's narrative according to codes that are familiar in terms of morality and law. It is more useful, however, to view these representations as integral in the maintenance of extended family and friendship connections that endure at the interface of Aboriginality, sexuality and gender with racism, sexism and colonialism. Swearing and fighting are never random or futile and always ritualised along specific codes and signs. A passage from *Don't Take* offers a good example:

> So we went to the Empress and down to the Clifton. Bob bought a big bottle of gin and put it in my bag. We got so pissed that when I woke up next morning Bob was on the divan beside me. I was embarrassed about this, he was Neddy's boyfriend. Oh well, she would take these little holidays.
>
> When she came back I told her about it. She had a good laugh about my embarrassment and said, 'OK, he's your boyfriend now. No problem, plenty more fish in the sea.'[14]

Here, a potential fight turns into two friends sharing their boyfriends, recognising that there are more important fights to win and more men around the corner.[15] The humour evident in Neddy's trade-off involves a resistance to the patriarchal order in which Aboriginal and working-class white women have been historically objectified. This story appears within a chapter titled 'Deaths and Weddings', which focuses upon the death of Ginibi's daughter, Pearl. Like many of the other humorous stories Ginibi tells, it is mixed with what are tragic elements in any language. Marcia Langton argues, however, that Koori conversation and storytelling are determined by particular codes that modify those elements according to the fullness of an individual's own historical experience.[16] This might be as simple as recognising that humour, like fighting, swearing, drinking and casual sex, often serves a politically determined purpose in the Aboriginal community by being practised as ritual mourning, always inside the confines of the community. As Ginibi comments in *My Bundjalung People*:

> ... laughter is the only thing we've got left, we've been dispossessed of everything else. It's the thing that elevates us above all else; it's the thing that's kept us going all our lives...

Unable to 'acquire' her humour any more than her suffering, readers positioned within or close to the dominant ideologies that seek to victimise and imprison Koori women – in literal and literary senses – relinquish their power to Ginibi as complete presence. The museum mentality, the quest for enlightenment through acquiring knowledge-as-property finally falls down when confronted with her humour. The search for an 'ordered totality' turns again to silence when there is no basis on which to share the joke. Ginibi's humour and its strategic use is indeed part of the project of mobilising spirituality, knowledge and education as political agency against readings that envisage only a sadder tale for an Aboriginal woman writing and struggling. In Ginibi's words, 'Aboriginal humour is our survival mechanism ... if you couldn't laugh you'd spend a lot of time cryin'!'

* * *

It is easy to read the urban Aboriginal communities Ginibi presents through her narratives as socially 'outcast' and her method of portrayal as inadequate, ambiguous or in need of drastic editing. This may be why Ginibi has so far been through three publishers for each of her three books, and is now trying Allen and Unwin. The Sydney publisher took the remarkable step of agreeing to re-publish *My Bundjalung People* after Ginibi was given back the rights by UQP. According to Ginibi, UQP has since tried to buy back the rights, an exchange that she recalls as culminating in her advising their representative where to go with the request. Like *Don't Take*, the manuscript version of *My Bundjalung People* that will be republished in its 'non-Gubberised' version by Allen and Unwin demonstrates the importance of self-articulation in a cultural and political system which views difference as something to be made into sameness. There are no drawn maps in the second version, the intended version. As in *Don't Take*, where the introduction and conclusion affirm a position of resistance for an Aboriginal woman who has defied both the colonialist trope of naming and racist and sexist constructions of 'the Black matriarch',[17] Ginibi's intended work is supreme in its orality. In the *Don't Take* preface titled 'Names', Ginibi writes:

> You can think of me as Ruby Wagtail Big Noise Anderson Rangi Ando Heifer Andy Langford. How I got to be Ruby Langford. Originally from the Bundjalung people.

Ginibi addresses the reader personally with the nomenclature and indicates its direct relation to the story it precedes. With *Real Deadly*, Ginibi adds her tribal name to the list so that the two books function as affirmations of an identity as Aboriginal woman, through the process of their production. As a writer, Ginibi claims the ground of naming as structurally and politically imperative. At the conclusion of *Don't Take*, she says that writing her story helped her to 'examine my own life from it and know who I was', and that it 'may help to better the relationship between Aboriginal and white people'. Self-articulation is linked to social and political contexts and suggests that readings of the autobiography are enhanced by a willingness to engage with the cues that frame it. The cues might be recapitulated throughout the process of reading if we are to 'know' the speaker, and understand what is said and not said. Ginibi reinforces the fact that this is an ongoing process for production and reception of her work when she says that 'it might give some idea of the difficulty we have in surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here'.

Ginibi's work has always been about compelling self-examination in terms of the perceptions of Aboriginal people into which she, as a Koori writer and educator, has intervened. Throughout *Don't Take*, as in her later books, Ginibi's experience of a particular racial history

operates, whether or not her immediate topic deals with her own personal passage. In a chapter which tells of Ginibi's life in a tent near St George, she says that:

> I felt like I was living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close-knit family. The food-gathering, the laws and songs were all broken up, and my generation at this time wandered around as if we were tribal but in fact living worse than the poorest of poor whites, and in the case of women living hard because it seemed like the men loved you for a while and then more kids came along and the men drank and gambled and disappeared.[18]

The common plight, with Ginibi, is always at some point linked with the personal fight but is never confined to it. When she moves to Green Valley, for example, Ginibi has to stand her ground by demanding that a complaining neighbour:

> 'Come out and fight as good as you can talk and complain,' I said, 'while you bastards were having your kids in comfort I was battling to raise mine in a tent where my husband had left me with a gutful of his next child – you don't own the land your house is on, my people were here first, so get off, come on and fight me if you're game you bitch.'[19]

The anger of the passage derives from an experience that Ginibi identifies as the difference between working-class white women and Aboriginal women. Even though Ginibi and Mrs Jenkins share some parallel experiences of working-class life in patriarchy, she tells of continual complaints from her about 'the kids fighting'. Ginibi's response of calling her neighbour out onto the street for a fight is not only funny, but also suggests that the children's fight and her own fight are from the same source. That is, the pressure of trying to live Black and cope with the barriers and intolerance in force through a white society that understands little of that struggle. Ginibi has commented that she believes there is an affinity between poor white and Black women in Australia. However, she believes that while working-class white women have had their stories told, Aboriginal women are still trying to be heard.[20]

Together, these passages operate historically and politically by linking the destruction of Aboriginal culture and struggles for land rights with an Aboriginal woman's experience as mother and writer. In *My Bundjalung People*, Ginibi's political project will be recovered when the speeches she has made as a 230-time guest lecturer, excerpts from historical material and her own analysis of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal issues is returned to the published version. In *My Bundjalung People*, narrative is inscribed across and through Ginibi's physical journey back to her homeland. As a Koori woman now existing and determining her presence as an author,

Ginibi is able to strengthen the connection of past, present and future contexts through the act of writing and publishing. Ginibi explains in *My Bundjalung People*:

> Every time the politics of our people is mentioned I just go off like a shotgun! It's a chain reaction! 'Boom!' Talk about Jengwallah [mouth almighty] ... Through us writing our own history we can say quite clearly that we are still here and that we can talk our own language! We're still the same people. We're in the triangle of Australia us Aboriginal people, we're right in the centre. 'You see they take our land but they can't take our Butherah [spirits, clever things],' Aunt Millie said.

This is in part a recollection of a passage in *Don't Take* which portrays Millie Boyd, the cleverwoman custodian of Nimbin Rock, and the workings of Koori magic interconnected with sacred sites. Ginibi is so conscious of this interplay that she says that she writes to correct white history and that 'it's only for our people because white people have taken too much already. They split our people up, took the jarjums [children], trained 'em to be slaves, but they don't give nothing back.' Ginibi makes heavy use of intertextual reference in her preferred version of *My Bundjalung People* to exemplify this point, most notably from the work of other Aboriginal writers, critics, historians and activists. That these sources are often known personally to Ginibi, along with the fact that they are combined with a reliance on genealogical knowledge and stories, adds to the ways in which her texts retain their supreme orality.

The association of non-Aboriginal researchers and intellectuals with the perpetuation of colonialism has continued throughout Ginibi's novels and her personally defined public life.[21] One of the symbols of colonialism that is inverted to represent a process of political resistance through narrative is the museum, with its connotations of acquisition and imprisoned history, spirituality and culture. These connotations usually remain obscured, however, in what Ken Gelder identifies as a desire for the exoticised process of enlightenment grounded on a power relation in which one group secures the property of another in the name of 'knowledge'.[22] In her *My Bundjalung People*, Ginibi tells how 'black Australians are confronted with the knowledge that their ancestral bones are scattered all over the world', a reference to demonstrations in London for the return of 3,000 Aboriginal remains from scientific institutions across Britain. While this information and much more like it was edited out of the published *My Bundjalung People*, it remains illustrative of Ginibi's explanation of why she writes: that there are 'academics, anthropologists, big-shot writers' who 'don't know a damn thing about us'. Knowledge is understood and approached as a source of power and a means of confrontation and, interestingly for the

contemporary critical mode, as being as absolute as the land upon which it is based.

Existing interest in Aboriginal history, culture and literature is revealed as being neither past, contemporary, nor that much different from the museum imperialism in which European scientists desecrated and robbed Aboriginal burial sites. Gelder notes that the museum paradigm is one where relics of the past can be laid out to 'remind spectators that this *is* the past'. It is a past that can be reconciled with preconceived notions of racial embodiment and difference, but Ginibi's undiminished political consciousness confounds this 'nice' version. She connects the discourses of 'the past' with obscured power relations of colonialism in the Australia that is around her today. Ginibi's stories have always offered an alternative approach to reading other Aboriginal women's writing; it is just that other Aboriginal women's writing is considered easier to read. Ginibi does not allow her narrative to be appropriated by the contradictions and silences of a colonialist ideology she has described as 'still here'. She challenges analyses of her work to acknowledge the ongoing influences of colonialism that her own Koori language resists. These are influences on her function as author – banging into language – and Koori woman, and on the methods by which knowledge and education are attained.

In her fourth book, *Haunted By The Past: the story of Nobby and others*, Ginibi's son Lindsay 'Nobby' Johnson moves from a position of powerlessness in 'the clutches of the prison system' to one of empowerment through spirituality and education. An excerpt from *Haunted By The Past*, which was accepted by Allen and Unwin after Ginibi left UQP with her *Bundjalung People*, tells the story of Nobby's release from gaol and his first experience of Ginibi's work as an educator.[23] When speaking with a group of school students, he says, while passing his artwork around, 'If I didn't have my Koori spirit to guide me, I would have been a goner.' Ginibi then tells how Nobby's return to gaol affected the whole family, with 'the worry, that he might kill himself, it was unbearable'. Throughout the story, Nobby's spirituality, expressed through his artwork and his sharing in Ginibi's research and education, define his road out from under the oppression of a white Australian authority system. After speaking to the school students about Kooris and the prison system, Ginibi writes:

> The whole room went deadly silent. You could have heard a pin drop. After the lecture, they all trooped over to me to sign their books. They rounded up Nobby to sign them too, and were all shaking his hand. I glanced at him. I could see he was well pleased with all the attention he was getting. I thought, 'I now have one of my mob to pass on all my research and educational stuff to'; he proved that he could handle it, and very well.

Nobby is apparently a success because he has survived the prison system, and, while he is constructed through the story as a product of that system, he is also represented as being empowered with the ability to confront it. The deadly silent room is a mark of respect that perhaps indicates the way through to a society where incarceration, colonial law and their impact on Aboriginal communities is best expressed by the fact that Aboriginal deaths in custody have actually increased since the Royal Commission on them was held in 1989.[24] Ginibi is conscious of writing into this political context:

> They were the convicts, you see what I mean? Now they're building more gaols and our people are still dying in deaths in custody. We're not quite two per cent of the population that stands at 17 million and still our people are dying at a rate faster than anybody. And what does it say to you? It says ... you just ask any Aboriginal person that's been incarcerated. Aboriginal people are being brutalised in the whole racist gaol system in this country.

Ginibi's *Haunted By The Past* will be the first book published in Australia to include the pages of an inmate's record from a state Corrective Services Department (NSW). Her son Nobby approved of the pages appearing in the book, saying 'You'll have to put all the blood and guts in and tell it like it really is.' Ginibi also believes that the government's own records of its treatment of just one Koori inmate would speak volumes, especially when included in a mother's experience of her son's incarceration. She commented on how it affected the entire family:

> When he got there, he used to write angry letters home, and I've got some of his letters there too. He'd go crook if some of the family forgot to write or send him a card for his birthday, just hittin' out at the system, and real angry. And I wrote back and said, 'It's all right for you to be angry and take your spite out on us, because you're locked up and we're out here. But every time you were jailed, we went to jail with you. Every time you were bashed, we felt it too. Everything that happened to you happened to us all as a family. You never received all the knocks on your own because we felt everything.'

In her autobiography, *Mumshirl*, Shirley Smith offers a contrasting perspective on how incarceration impacts upon the entire community structure of Koori people. Mumshirl spent much of her life visiting Koori prisoners and lobbying for prison reform, recognising that problems such as poverty, lack of adequate housing, poor health and nutrition were exacerbated by the incarceration of family members who were usually male.

Both Mumshirl and Ginibi assert through their narratives that it is

only Koori family bonds, spirituality and education that will enable survival within and in spite of Australia's ongoing denial of the dispossession of Indigenous people that is represented in the government's tinkering with Native Title legislation. *Doctor* Ginibi is living proof of that survival.

References

1 Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love To Town* (Ringwood, Penguin, 1988), p231.

2 Koori refers to Aboriginal Australians from the southern states, while Bundjalung is a clan group within Koori communities and the dialect spoken in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales.

3 Janine Little Nyoongah, 'Talking with Ruby Langford Ginibi', *Hecate* (Vol. 20, no. 1, 1994), pp. 100-120.

4 Julian Samuel, review of *The Fact Of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and visual representation*, in *Race & Class* (Vol. 39, no. 2, 1997), pp. 101-104. Samuel goes on to argue, in a way that seems especially relevant to Ginibi, that 'political violence may not be a good companion to cultural and sexual politics; indeed, it may be bad to support it when trying to become a tenured high priest of cultural studies'.

5 'Talking with Ruby Langford Ginibi', op. cit.

6 All references in italics to *My Bundjalung People* are to the manuscript. All unsourced quotations from Ginibi are from our conversation. 'Talking with Ruby Langford Ginibi', ibid., and from its field tape, now in Ginibi's files.

7 Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: from pop to theory* (London, Verso, 1990).

8 See, for example, Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and cultural studies* (Kensington, NSW, New South Wales University Press, 1992); Tim Rowse, 'The Aboriginal subject in autobiography: Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*', *Australian Literary Studies* (Vol. 16, no. 1, 1993), pp. 14-29; Ian Syson, '"The problem was finding the time": working-class women's writing in Australasia', *Hecate* (Vol. 19, no. 2, 1993), pp. 65-84.

9 Jan (Jindy) Pettman, *Living in the Margins: racism, sexism and feminism in Australia* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1992), p. 77.

10 Rowse, op. cit., p. 28.

11 Pettman, op. cit., p. 76.

12 Mudrooroo, '"Couldn't Ya Cry, If Ya Couldn't Laugh": the literature of Aboriginality and its reviewers', *SPAN* (Nos 34/35, 1992), pp. 376-83.

13 Ruby Langford Ginibi replies to Mary Rose Liverani's review of *Real Deadly*, *Weekend Australian Review* (2-3 May 1992), p. 6. See Mary Rose Liverani, 'From outside without insight', review of *Real Deadly* by Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Weekend Australian Review* (28-29 March 1992).

14 *Don't Take*, op. cit., pp. 150-1.

15 It is a different story, however, when men are depicted threatening women. For example, in the passage in which Ginibi and Neddy are sleeping in the same bed, Ginibi's boyfriend mistakes Neddy for another man, and punches her in the face. Ginibi then 'hauled off and punched him straight in the face and got up and kicked him in the guts' (ibid., p. 124).

16 See Marcia Langton, *Well, I Heard It On The Radio...* (Canberra, Australian Film Institute, 1993); and 'Medicine Square'. See my MA thesis, 'Which way – directions in recent Aboriginal women's prose' (University of Queensland, Department of English, 1995), for a detailed explanation of this point and a list of bibliographic sources.

17 Jan (Jindy) Pettman, 'Racism, sexism and sociology', in Gill Bottomley, Marie de

Lepervanche and Jeannie Martin (eds), *Intersexions: gender/class/culture/ethnicity* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1991), pp. 187-202.

18 *Don't Take*, op. cit., p. 96.

19 Ibid., p. 176.

20 Working-class white women are rarely the subjects of their own storytelling, given the disparity in access to resources that has historically been the case in Australia.

21 Ginibi's longstanding policy of requesting payment for interviews and collaborative projects has accompanied her insistence on reading all material produced. Her negative experiences with publishing houses were in spite of these practices, which again invokes the problem of cross-cultural research and production protocol. For a more elaborate look at this issue see my MA thesis, op. cit., or 'Tiddas in Struggle: a consultative project with Murri, Koori and Nyoongah women', *Span* (No. 37, 1994), pp. 24-32.

22 Ken Gelder, 'Aboriginal narrative and property', *Meanjin* (Vol. 50, nos 2/3, 1991), pp. 353-65.

23 Ginibi's manuscript, *Haunted By The Past* has been complete since 1994, as she discusses it in the *Hecate* interview, op. cit. She has collaborated with Penny van Toorn to edit it for Allen and Unwin publication in August 1998.

24 The Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody's 239 recommendations are yet to be met. I was also referring to the value of a study of how the effects of prisons and incarceration are represented in Indigenous literatures, or the study of those literatures which takes account of how incarceration produces semi-nomadic Koori families.

AARON NORGROVE

But is it music? The crisis of identity in *The Piano*

Jane Campion's feature film *The Piano* won critical acclaim both at the Cannes Film Festival and in the media for its compelling imagery and feminist exploration of nineteenth-century sexual repression.[1] But the exclusive focus on gender, by critics and Campion herself, serves to mask a network of power relations that have been described as the 'transposing [of] nineteenth-century sex and race-bound colonial structures of meaning onto a twentieth-century colonialist narrative of romance'.[2] *The Piano* engages in this ideological project in three ways. First, representations of Maori and Pakeha rely on an overdetermined fixity of difference that turns around a nature/culture bi-polar opposition. Second, in order to mask the reliance of European cultural identity on the negation of the 'otherness' of the Maori, a heroic 'go-between' character is required, one who transcends this opposition as a means of forging a unique 'Pakeha' identity. Third, the ability of the film to cover the appropriations of the colonial system relies on the multi-national production process and the place of the film industry in the globalised market place as a source of information and ideology, utilising stereotypical depictions as a means of cementing a western interpretation of colonialism into the audience's psyche.

By way of context, a brief narrative of the text is required. The story involves the arrival of a mute Scottish woman, Ada, and her daughter, Flora, in New Zealand. Her purpose for doing so is to marry and settle with Alisdair Stewart, her pre-arranged husband. Ada becomes entwined in an adulterous sexual relationship with a settler named

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Baines, and the rest of the film unfolds as the development of this relationship. The romance is mediated through Ada's piano, a metaphor for her repressed sexuality that must be unleashed in this new land. The specific location and historical period are never indicated, although the imagery and a familiarity with New Zealand history would suggest the coastal South Island in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The absence of this information is, however, important if the way in which *The Piano* engages with colonial discourse is to be understood.

Representations of the Maori throughout the film are as racist as those embedded in colonial discourse. I take racism here to mean the 'generalised and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit, and at his [sic] victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privilege or aggression'.[3] The love of European clothing displayed by Maori in *The Piano* reproduces an image of nineteenth-century Maori familiar to many New Zealanders through the art of C.F. Goldie. These paintings 'appeared to be reasonably sympathetic, with men depicted as chivalrous if blood-thirsty warriors or as gentlemanly chiefs ... and young women depicted as romantic heroines ... but reality of the Maori was being falsified to conform to European notions of the "noble savage" and the bare-breasted, dusky maidens'.[4]

The Maori also display a sexual morality at odds with Victorian sensibilities. This is particularly apparent in a scene where a young Maori male makes homosexual overtures towards Baines, and is reprimanded by a Maori woman who exclaims 'balls were wasted on you'. The desexualising of the Maori male is necessarily at odds with the reliance on fear and danger that are required if the Maori are to appear as dangerous, uncivilised savages who need the taming hand of a European master. However, it is important to recognise that race and sex are not ideologically separate categories in this film, but prerequisites to the establishment of relationships between the white characters.[5] Passivity and femininity are linked with the Maori as a means of controlling the origin of a more masculine Pakeha identity which is in contrast to that of the savage inhabitants of New Zealand.

Character development of the Maori is also stifled in the film. The camera frames the Maori only in groups, or as background props to the foregrounded white characters. While names are granted to each actor in the final credits, throughout the film the woman Hina is the only character identified with a name: the others are referred to only as the 'button man' or 'Maori negotiator'.[6] This in itself is a means of reproducing the inequalities of colonial discourse, with a coloniser having control over the ability to name and confer identity on the colonised. Furthermore, the conflation of individual identities into a singular group allows the positioning of Maori in their 'natural'

environment to be made. Lens filters were used in order to 'represent [the bush] honestly and let it be a dark place'.[7] The Maori and the surrounding natural bush are, literally, inseparable.

The systematic blending of the Maori with nature is finally accomplished by the apparent absence of an identifiable culture. With a childlike demeanour, the Maori exhibit a social and economic immaturity, hinging on the rejection of the material gain offered them for transporting the piano. The colonial perspective that colonised peoples were only useful for manual labour is a constant feature of the film, as Maori carry the piano back and forth across the landscape under the watchful eyes of the colonisers, accompanied by music titled 'From here to there'.[8] An inability to distinguish reality from representation informs their aggressive reaction to an apparent beheading in a stage-play. When a similar occurrence is threatened by Stewart, this time in reality, the reaction of the Maori is one of uninterest. In effect, an image of nostalgic essentialism represents the Maori as unpolluted beings who symbolise all that has been lost through modernity.[9] This is a perspective that 'associates whiteness with order, rationality, rigidity, qualities brought out by the contrast with black disorder, irrationality and looseness'.[10] It is to the representation of whiteness that I now turn.

* * *

Stewart embodies all that is negative in colonial history. He is represented as a masculine, aggressive, exploitative machine repressed by a Victorian morality, especially evident in his relationship with Ada. He is actively engaged in the transformation of nature, his house being located among burnt stumps and attempts to uproot the Maori from the land. Stewart is driven by a calculating rationality that views all things in terms of economic use-value. The piano, being of emotional value to Ada as well as a symbol of her sexuality, is left idle on the beach due to Stewart's unwillingness to organise its transportation. The desire of the Maori to retain their land is met by Stewart with scorn as he exclaims, 'What do they want it for? They don't cultivate it, burn it back, anything. How do they even know it's theirs...?' His initial reaction to Ada is at the level of physical appearance: 'she looks stunted' is his observation. The consequence of this representation is that the audience is immediately asked to reject Stewart as a legitimate ancestor of colonial history. Maori are used to assist this reaction by rejecting Stewart, first in his attempts to trade guns for their land, and second his proffered reward of buttons for their labour. As well as this, his sexual potency is called into question when he is referred to as 'old dryballs' by a Maori 'assistant' on the beach.

The rejection of the aggressive, racist Stewart is accompanied by a rejection of other agents of colonialism. The frivolity of the Reverend

and his wife Morag, along with the daughter, Nessie, when combined with the portrayal of the drunk and filthy sailors at the beginning of the film, adds a humorous aside to the story which nevertheless appeals to a dismissal of religion and both bourgeois and working-class English culture as factors in Pakeha identity formation. A fundamental contradiction is realised here: the identity of white New Zealanders relied on 'Englishness' for most of the twentieth century. The re-assertion of Maori identity in the 1960s and 1970s, combined with Britain's increasing focus on the European Economic Community, threatened this white identity and has made colonialist reinterpretations of history necessary as a means of fixing a point of authentic ethnic origin.[11]

The character of Ada is inscribed with both racial and sexual features that combine to form an extreme contrast to the dark and dangerous Maori. Again, the Maori are used to effect this interpretation. When Ada and Flora are greeted on the beach, the Maori exclaim, 'They look like angels', when they may well have thought they looked like death.[12] Ada's 'white as pure' symbolism is inscribed with the rhetoric of transcendental christianity, where there is a conflation of an angel-glow appearance with a sexual aura.[13] Maori are also used as the symbolic counterpart to Stewart's mistreatment of Ada. Shots of Stewart's attempted rape of Ada are interspersed with the fumbling antics of the Maori as they transport the piano through the forest. First dropping the piano and then ripping it apart, they are used to demean the metaphor of Ada's sexuality, as Stewart commits the concrete act. In this way, negation of the Maori is complete: as racialised stereotypes, they not only symbolise a dark and dangerous 'other' in their own right, but this fact of 'otherness' is used as the means of representing the evils of those who are defined *against* this 'otherness'.

It is at this point that several contradictions in the film are evident. The European characters most apparently actively involved in the colonial process are shown in acts of oppression or stupidity, while the identity of these characters can only be confirmed with reference to those they oppress. There is one character that a predominantly Pakeha audience may identify with, Ada, yet there needs to be a way for her to negotiate the stereotyped landscape of *The Piano* that ensures a masking of colonial oppression and prevents audience over-identification with the Maori as heroic figures, lest the ideological project the film is engaged in is threatened. It is the 'suggested [material] dependency of white on black in the context of continued white power and privilege that throws the legitimacy of white domination into question',[14] and therefore requires a demonstration of the virtues of whiteness that would justify continued domination. This is achieved in *The Piano* through the character of Baines, who transcends the nature/culture divide constructed in the text and is the central attempt at

forging a genuine Pakeha identity in colonial history as well as contemporary time.

The character of Baines fulfils the role of a 'go-between', 'the character who most centrally embodies the competing pulls of European society/culture and Aboriginal society/culture'.[15] In the context of *The Piano*, Baines is a 'Pakeha-Maori'.[16] This expression was once used of those Europeans who appeared to be naturally at home with Maori people, speaking their language and observing their customs. Thus it is Baines who translates for Stewart in the land negotiations and lives in a hut which he sometimes shares with the Maori. The surrounding environment is unscathed by European hands, Baines' home a virtual 'enchanted cottage' which the audience is invited to regard with awe.

Baines has a facial tattoo of apparently Maori design that is, suggestively, unfinished. For Baines is not Maori, this much is obvious from the colour of his skin. Yet he is not to be regarded as European, as he does not participate in the oppression of the Maori or Ada as Stewart and the other 'real' Europeans do. He therefore represents a claim to indigeneity that the others do not: he has no religious beliefs, is from neither a bourgeois or working-class background, and is not involved in the explicit destruction of the natural environment. Baines is also kind towards Ada, observing her as 'tired' at their first meeting – all the more important, if he is to be regarded as a hero in any way, when juxtaposed with Stewart's physical observation. The colonial process thus created a Pakeha identity that was free from the class structure, religious values, sexism and racism that had blighted England and the rest of the 'old world'. Baines must help Ada to throw off these shackles, exemplified in her discarding of the symbolically bourgeois piano at the end of the film, while she must save him from losing all faith in 'whiteness' and becoming too much of a 'native'. The construction of a middle-class society is completed at the end of the film when Baines and Ada leave the bush for a sparkling white cottage in the picturesque town of Nelson.

This representation of colonialism as a 'fairy-tale narrative of reconciliation'[17] between nature and culture serves to subsume the appropriations of colonialism under an ideological project of identity formation. Baines is an agent of colonialism: there is no question that the eighty acres of land he trades for Ada's piano are his. In portraying colonialism in this way, the acquisition of Maori land by settlers is legitimate so long as those who acquired it are authentically 'Pakeha'. This falsification of history, in light of a large and growing body of evidence to the contrary, reveals *The Piano* as a reassertion of the superiority of whiteness at a time when this assertion is being threatened throughout the world. The lack of a historical time-frame or location, combined with the use of racist stereotypes, acts to reinforce

the virtues of the colonial system in all locations, not only New Zealand. The representations of Maori in *The Piano* 'derive from the long parade of lazy Mexicans, shifty Arabs, savage Africans and exotic Asiatics that have disgraced our movie screens' for many years.[18]

It is therefore possible to situate *The Piano* as functioning in a similar manner to US films such as *Dances with Wolves* and *Last of the Mohicans* and the Australian films, *Mad Dog Morgan* and *We of the Never Never*. These films are all located in settler-colonies and present European characters in a series of relationships with colonised peoples. The hero of each film is a go-between who must negotiate a path towards an authentic identity and cement the success of the colonial process. In order to do so, the colonised are represented en bloc as an 'other' inscribed with a fixity of difference that is overdetermined; paradoxical stereotypes that 'vacillate between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated'.[19] Maori are shown with a lack of intelligence that contradicts knowledge about the complex cultural and economic practices that existed at the time of colonisation. It is this ambivalent representation of the Maori, originating in colonial discourse, that enables colonialist narratives such as *The Piano* to repeat the stereotype in a new historical setting as a means of producing 'that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed'.[20]

* * *

That *The Piano*, apparently an 'arthouse' film, is able to use the stereotype in this manner is in part due to the multi-national nature of the production process. Directed by a New Zealander, starring predominantly foreign actors, produced by an Australian company and financed with French money, any sympathy towards the political realities of race relations in New Zealand can be conveniently overlooked. The one scene which provides potentially the most political statement about Maori land issues at the time of colonisation has been edited out. In it, a Maori woman, Hina, discusses with Baines the issue of land sales to Pakeha in exchange for guns. The importance of the scene is that she alludes to the need for such sales if her *iwi* are to protect themselves from their enemies.[21] The consequences of Pakeha acquisition of land, the privileging of the war capabilities of one *iwi* over another, is a feature of British imperialism that is left out of the final text, as possibly too political for a 'romance'. It is unclear, in fact, whether this scene would have served such a purpose or would have provided another 'prop' for the sympathetic portrayal of Baines. Recognising the multi-national character of the production process is important, however, for recognising the potential for unequal power

relations to manifest themselves in this apparent feminist exploration. This is to see the vehicle of film as an element of a cultural apparatus that is dominated by predominantly white, western, middle-class men.

'Films are made available for consumption through distribution and exhibition ... film as one apparatus of the mass-media is a potentially important vehicle ... through which "knowledge" and easy assumptions can be gained. In this light, filmic products must be seen in terms of their capacity for cementing, reinforcing or opposing racist discourse.'[22] When one puts together the nature of the production process of *The Piano* and the readings of the representations within the film given above, the power asymmetries that exist in the realm of image production become obvious. Knowledge about the Maori, who were separated from their land by the original colonists, and about the formation of their identity in the eyes of the European came, for the most part, through the biased discourse of the colonial enterprise. This separation is continued in contemporary time, where Pakeha dominance over the institutions of the cultural apparatus maintains power over the formation of Maori identity in the eyes of the paying public. The audience becomes entwined in the market relations that determine the flow of ideological meanings, from an apparatus that has a vested interest not only in reaping the profits of the movie business but in maintaining a hegemonic hold over the public conception of racial difference.

The promotion of ideology through the market-place, requiring large-scale production techniques and the dissemination of culture in economic relationships reveals the potentially dangerous effects that could emerge through monopoly or oligopoly over ideological construction. 'In this way the freedom of choice is obviously limited; cultural commodities representing all imaginable alternative ideologies may not be available.'[23] The audience at the end of this commoditised flow of meaning may thus have its perspective shaped by it. In this way, films such as *The Piano*, by leaving the colonial construction of the category 'race' unchallenged and reinforcing the associated meanings, merely reproduce familiar stereotypes of Maori and other colonised peoples.

These films therefore become elements of the 'mediascape', a dimension of global cultural flow that involves 'the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and the images of the world created by these media'.[24] Such mediascapes provide a volatile mixture of images, narratives and ethnoscapes that blur the lines between the real and the fictional, due to the sheer volume and complexity of the variegated methods used to display that mixture, for example, billboards, screens, and print. The audience experiences this within the framework of its own perspective, leading to the construction of an 'imagined world' of the 'other' comprised of possibly 'chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects'.[25]

Informing this construction of the 'other' are the 'ideoscapes', images that are often political in content and composed of fragments of the Enlightenment master-narrative; 'a concatenation of ideas, terms and images, including "freedom", "welfare", "rights", "sovereignty", "representation", and the master term "democracy".'[26] In appropriating the content of colonial discourse, films like *The Piano* also appropriate the Enlightenment ideal of the 'perfectibility of man' through the process of modernisation. The increasing intensity of the fight for indigenous rights is met by colonialist narratives with this proposition: it was through the process of colonisation that you became civilised; your only alternative is the return to traditionalism as depicted in these mediascapes. The freedom fought for in *The Piano* is the freedom of a Pakeha, Baines, from the contradictory space he occupies between nature and culture, and it is only through *his* freedom that Ada, as a woman, can regain *her* voice. The threats to this freedom come explicitly from Stewart and implicitly from the Maori.

The silencing of the colonised in *The Piano* is not without further implications. Colonialist narratives such as *The Piano* make use of the strategy of 'mimicry', the imposing of a flawed identity onto colonised people who are then obliged to mirror back an imperfect image of the colonials. Fanon described the colonised 'mimic-men' as those colonial subjects who have been 'dusted over with colonial culture'.[27] *The Piano*, however, seeks to invert the 'black skin/white mask' dichotomy and replace it with the 'white skin/black mask' dichotomy evident in Baines. By appropriating the *moko* from the Maori and conferring it onto the character of Baines, a site of cultural resistance is at once acknowledged and denied; it becomes a part of the wider political context of a New Zealand that is defined as bi-cultural but dominated by Pakeha institutions and social structures.

In doing so, the narrative reveals the colonial identity as contradictory. While denying the presence of the colonised through silencing them, their historical presence is required in order to mark the existence of the coloniser. Simultaneously, as sites of resistance are negated, whether they be cultural or otherwise, new ones are created: as Baines must be identified in relation to both the Maori *and* the English, his identity must become a hybrid that embodies Enlightenment values while acknowledging the existence of the colonised. Thus the political contradictions of the ideoscape become apparent. Colonialist narratives form a body of work that at once constructs an imagined consciousness of existence and the triumph of the colonial project, yet betrays the ultimate failure of that project: the failure to eradicate the colonised. The continued existence of the colonised and the over-determination of their differences in colonialist narratives present new opportunities for resistance as Enlightenment ideals reveal themselves as inherently contradictory and finally destructive.

The Piano, then, takes the form of an 'epic novel', one that depicts the totality of relations as 'naturally given', but rounded from without by a controlling ideology: in the case of *The Piano*, this ideology is racism. The epic novel celebrates a society in the face of both theoretic and practical attacks by presenting heroes who are 'lone champions of the system's values who, locked in their myths, embody society's contradictions and thereby overcome them'.[28] The hero embodies the abstract category, 'civilisation', in conflict with the oppositional and also abstract category 'primitivism'. In *The Piano*, it is the character of Baines who undertakes this 'heroic' role. He embodies the conflict between the 'civilisation' of Europe and the 'primitivism' of the Maori. His resolution of this conflict at the end of the film does not dislodge the power relations that initiated and maintain this conflict, but serves to reinforce the rhetoric of the colonial enterprise. Baines champions the bourgeois values of individualism, marriage and the pursuit of material wealth by moving with his new wife to a gleaming white cottage in the settlement of Nelson (this is significant as the only location that is named throughout the film, its importance due to the 'Englishness' of the name in the new colony). The move entails leaving behind the Maori, who have served as the means by which a bourgeois Pakeha identity could be forged, in their 'natural' place. 'There are neither good nor bad colonists – all are "colonialists". All actions contribute to the maintenance of oppression, nothing is changed.'[29]

It is the process of Pakeha identity formation in *The Piano* that marginalises the Maori and reproduces the racialised discourses of colonialism. Perhaps some of the international success of the film may be credited to its representation of familiar stereotypes that do not challenge a predominantly white audience's assumptions about colonised peoples, explicit in colonial discourse and implicit in colonialist narratives. The possibilities of filmic production were optimistically summed up by D.W. Griffith, director of *Birth of a Nation*, in 1915: 'Fortunes are spent every year ... teaching the truths of history, that we may learn from the mistakes of the past ... the truths of history today are restricted to the limited few attending our colleges and universities: the motion picture can carry these truths to the entire world, *without cost*'(emphasis added).[30] Present patterns of control over the flow of ideology and the unequal power relations they create mean that those who bore the costs of the colonial history continue to bear these costs through the colonialist reinterpretation of this history.

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ANGELA GILLIAM

The Brazilian *mulata*: images in the global economy*

Black feminism and the anthropologist

The black anthropologist must develop work for multiple audiences. The broad range of people to whom and for whom we write includes those in our community whose opinions and interpretations of life are rarely reflected in the media; other scholars whose alternative analyses enrich our own work; the judges of the intellectual calibre of our conceptual development, who sit on hiring committees, boards of refereed journals, and otherwise determine our attainments as academics.

So, whether one likes it or not, our academic work is constrained by the historical fight for full citizenship. Though such a battle has been primarily a struggle for 'equal access', nonetheless many have nurtured a vision of national transformation as well. In addition, the black scholar has the double burden of creating a theoretical discourse of opposition within the field, one that will be at least taken seriously by other scholars. Yet these two purposes are usually at odds.

Moreover, the work that black feminist anthropologists do is focused towards bridging a complex gap between male dominance in the community-wide struggle against racism and white female dominance in the battle against sexism. Often the issues of international power and unequal economic relations have been inserted by

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black feminist scholars. This paper follows in that tradition by historicising the current problem faced by women today as they struggle to survive in an intensified global economy, characterised by neo-liberalism or privatisation and deregulation of public services – those very services that poor women have used to aid their families for decades.

Some of this information was gleaned as part of work for the Northwest Labour and Employment Law Office (LELO) and the international meeting that was organised earlier this year by mostly minority workers. Thirty-five ordinary working women and men from eleven countries went to Seattle to share interpretations of the current historical moment and collectively to search for ways to insert themselves into the national and international debates about the directionality of the future. Getting working women into the United States to attend this conference was extraordinary because of new immigration regulations. Since visitors to the US are considered to be 'intending immigrants', especially if members of the working class, LELO's invitees had difficulty getting visas. This was especially true for women, who are often required to have high minimum balances in bank accounts, at least two children being left behind, property, or the signature of a husband in order to enter the US on a temporary visa.

Nonetheless, ordinary workers are increasingly demanding both to participate in the debate over who is a worker and also calling for a more global analysis of the issues facing them.

This conjoining of domestic and international labour issues is growing within the United States, in spite of the force of individualism in the national 'master narrative'. LELO assumed that ordinary workers should be a part of the debate about what is happening in the world and challenge the notion that others should speak for them. This is particularly germane within the US, as social services become identified with the 'parasitical behaviour' of black women.

> New workfare workers are not welcomed by employees with low pay who fear being replaced or having their hours cut. Women workers in domestic services and sweatshops have no voice in the middle-class women's movement. Workers of color fight for equality and justice but cannot get access to the civil rights leadership in Washington, D.C. who lay claim to their voice. There are millions of workers around the world who have no voice.[1]

Mass media particularly, in the United States and elsewhere, reproduce a narrative in which there is a link between a reinvestment in patriarchy and rising inequality. Thus, the assaults on reproductive rights for women and on welfare are of one cloth, though US feminists have been slow to link the global economy to the international narrative about women.

Although the vast majority of women on welfare in the US are white, the attack on social programmes continues a centuries-long 'Afrophobia',[2] because welfare has been coloured 'black' in the national imagination. Black women in particular have been depicted as dependent 'welfare queens' ever since president Reagan used that construction publicly. One is tempted to conjecture whether the Right could have assaulted the principles of equality and work equity so completely in such a short period of time, had these principles not also been identified with 'minority parasitism' and 'inherited welfare dependency'.

Moreover, gender relations intersect with global economics and modernisation. The loss of employment security and the rise of inequality also means a resegregation of the job market, not merely at the level of gender but of 'race' as well. The fact is that neoliberal policies of privatisation and deregulation are really planned economic strangulation on both the micro and macro levels. Increasingly, the nations of the South service the North, while an internal 'South' develops in industrialised nations.

This paper attempts to make the linkages in all of the aforementioned theoretical sites in order to unmask locations and suggest directions for further work by black feminist anthropologists.

The international economy and its impact on women

The transformation of the world economy has brought new challenges to women. On the one hand, the rights that were taken for granted in the former socialist countries have been eroded by the emergence of the 'unipolar' world, in which capitalism has been universally defined as the way forward. The major media in western countries do not often challenge the narrative that links the rising inequality in the world with a reinvestment in patriarchy. When a patriarchal analysis is used to encapsulate the effects of capitalism in the world, it is done so as to reproduce the position that the expansion of capitalism is an improvement over what has gone before. 'The liberty that began here in the days of Mikhail S. Gorbachev... has led to a very visible erotic culture.'[3]

Moreover, the new globalised economy increasingly relies on the import of female labour. The fact of neoliberal policies of privatisation and deregulation in countries of the South has created a context in which women are the servants of the world. Gender relations are a function of global economics and politics, part of a pattern of development of authoritarian modernisation.[4] As producers, women are the most affected by elimination of the public sector, where they had made some gains in some countries. Hence, there is the export of labour power representing a type of human capital investment – 'warm

body export'. In the case of certain countries, debt is paid to the IMF with this money. Thus, the problem of exported female labour is one in which women feel forced to seek migration because they are often the single largest source of foreign exchange for their countries. The rapid growth of the international sex trade has been linked to the ideological notion of women as property and their bodies to be consumed.

> Internationally organised prostitution depends on a pernicious combination of Third World poverty, First World economic development policies, laws that permit international trafficking and indentured servitude, and worldwide patriarchal cultural norms that encourage male sexual prerogatives. More and more women ... are discussing the global politics of prostitution: the direct links between developmental policies pushed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the experiences of 14 and 15 year old village girls in such countries as ... Brazil.[5]

Thus, women's bodies are both labour and raw material,[6] and, at the same time, there is a reinvestment in their bodies as property with commercial value. The loss of job security and the rise of inequality also means a resegregation of the labour market.

In the former socialist countries of eastern Europe, the commodification of women's bodies is frequently connected to the emergence of 'liberty'. Einhorn notes that one of the first effects of a free press was a boom in pornography. A similar narrative burst out in Portugual after the 1975 *Revoluçao dos Cravos* ('flower revolution'),when anything touted as 'banned before 1975' was connected to freedom and progress.

> Pornography's boom is also alleged to be a healthy example of the operation of market forces, namely of consumer-led demand ... pornography, that is utilising women's bodies as an object for consumption on the one hand, and on the other, in the sanctity of marriage and motherhood as the reincarnation of a patriarchal model of gender relations.[7]

Even China's transformations in this regard are frequently described as inevitable byproducts of modernisation which ultimately 'improve' the lives of people. 'The economic explosion has boosted prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases.'[8] This discourse about China masks the role of capitalism, the growing gaps between 'haves' and 'have-nots' and the accompanying devaluation of women.

Patronage and cultural capital

In the talk she gave at Georgetown University one year after the Hill-Thomas hearings, Anita Hill averred that part of her problem in

Washington, DC was that she arrived without patronage. Patronage, or male sponsorship, is still essential for black women throughout the world. It is a form of cultural capital that bounds the behaviour of women and men in many public spaces. Moreover, by making the rising inequalities at the global level more salient, we reintroduce a stronger linkage between issues of sexual exploitation and international economic forces. Such a repositioning also highlights the degree to which women are not only losing their rights to work, but travel for women is going back to the time when poor or working women could not move from place to place without losing respect, in part because they lacked either the patronage or cultural capital to be identified as honourable. These factors are intersecting with a rapidly increasing gap between rich and poor on a global scale. The economic policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to foster a market-centred approach to all social life means that the consumer (especially from wealthy countries) defines the directionality of world culture. All of this is juxtaposed with the enhanced sexual commodification of women and children.

In addition, connected to the fact of women's vulnerability as they leave their countries to look for work is the fact that most women who do so under these conditions often do not speak the language of trade and exchange. Usually a European language, and more than likely English, the language of commerce thus functions as a type of surrogate patronage – as cultural capital. The degree to which one commands such a language and the linguistic and cultural manifestations of the elites is the degree to which a woman travelling can garner respect and be assumed to have honour. Without such patronage or respect, women also cannot return to their home cultures. With the rise of unemployment in the world, ever younger women are moving from place to place to survive.

> In accordance with international dependency structures, women are traded between the first and the Third Worlds, where the first world controls the demand for women of the Third World. International power structures express themselves through the bodies of women.[9]

This complex issue emerged in full debate at the international women's meeting in Beijing, where women searched for distinctions in language and concepts among prostitute versus migrant, child versus adult. In addition, women from Third World countries increasingly take the position that privatisation and deregulation policies are pushing certain effects onto their countries, causing the vulnerable members of these societies to leave as migrants or refugees.

A major struggle of Southeast Asian women activists around these questions has been to get the issue of trafficking to be seen as a human rights issue, on one hand, and a problem of migration, on the other.

Ensconced within the question of migration is the presumption of the right to meaningful work. Thus, women's migration and the forced trafficking dilemma of the international sex trade are part of a growing, low-intensity conflict that particularly affects working-class women from the donor countries.

> [T]raffic in women is an integral part of international migration and ... is a global problem. Investigation should be made in connection with the international division of labor and labor export/import policies of sending and receiving countries and the impact they have on national and international migration of women. Secondly, traffic in women is a contemporary form of slavery and a gross violation of women's basic human rights.[10]

Even more acute is the reality of child prostitution and the international community is attempting to organise around it. Brazil especially finds itself in debates as to whether a 12-year-old deemed to be 'promiscuous' can be said to have engaged in consensual sex, or whether sex tourists can be replaced by 'eco-tourists'.[11] Central to such debates is the question of the 500,000 to two million Brazilian children who live on the streets in precarious situations.

> Child prostitution is not new. But sex has become a multi-billion dollar industry, and today children are being bought sold, and traded like any other mass-produced good. In the ever-expanding free market, child prostitutes are among the hottest commodities. Brazil alone has between 250,000 and 500,000 children involved in the sex trade.[12]

Thus, the transformation of the global economy has fostered the commodification of women and children who have become increasingly identified as representing a growth industry, replete with advertising campaigns that transcend borders and boundaries and the entrepreneurial characteristics of an organised industrial sector.[13]

Notwithstanding the invisible nature of this industry, as it grows unfettered and mimics other capitalist enterprises, it becomes more difficult to confront.

The cultural rules of looking relations in Brazil

There are two feminist paradigms that enable us to make a case study of the Brazilian situation – Gaines's 'looking relations' and Hester's 'eroticised construction of inequality between men and women' – by applying them to the social construction of the Brazilian *mulata*. By juxtaposing a historically shaped paradigm from the colonial plantation economy with these two constructs, the subsequent reformulation allows for a more particularised analysis of the ways in which the

increasingly unequal global economy merges race, gender, and class issues. It is within these dynamics and constructs that the question of the Brazilian *mulata* must be placed.

Although some Brazilianist social scientists have affirmed that the *mulata* identity is a constructive sign of 'multipolar' and contextualised race neutrality, Brazilian blacks increasingly adopt the classification of *negro* or *negra* as a point of self-identification. This is especially prevalent among women whose phenotypes could position them as *mulatas* but who reject such an identity either politically or because of the historical opprobrium it carried within the colonial plantation traditions. Some Brazilian women define themselves as black in order to gain honour and respect, even though that honour will be accorded only within the black community. For a black woman whose employment is frequently a literal reproduction of the historical slave role, idealised as the *mãe preta* (black mammy), respect is difficult to craft and receive. As White points out for the US situation, 'Surely there is some connection between the idea of Mammy, the service and domestic jobs readily offered to black women, and their near-exclusion from other kinds of work.'[14]

There are two points that one must acknowledge in this discussion. The still-powerful support for the sexualised narrative of plantation life does not confront the issue of historical violence – the *mestiçagem* ('miscegenation') moment. The historical pattern of race mixture in the classic colonial plantation economy is one in which the male partner was of one race and class and the woman of a subordinated race and class. Furthermore, nowhere in the Brazilian national narrative is the role of the black woman in the formation of national culture acknowledged. Moreover, the historical violence against such women continues to be romanticised, leading to an extant eroticisation of the structural inequality between elite men and subaltern women.

Poor Brazilian women have become increasingly identified as elements in a growing sex trade on a global scale,in part due to the tradition of romanticising and 'not talking' about predatory patriarchy. The extension of the *mestiçagem* narrative into the twentieth century disembodies women's capacities for power and authority over their lives.

As Brazilian blacks seek ways to reinvent individual and collective identities, they increasingly confront the establishment of 'experts' on black life, the 'negrologists'. These gatekeepers to academe hold fast to power, thus black people are kept marginalised from the possibility of producing alternative analyses of Brazilian society.

Gaines's theoretical breakthrough in feminist film theory posed the question of who has authority to observe, to look. Whose gaze frames the text? In critiquing feature films, Gaines reveals how the female body is appropriated by the masculinised viewing vantage points which

ultimately control the cinematic depiction of the female body.[15] Mulvey's phrase – to-be-looked-at-ness[16] – fits the situation of the Brazilian *mulata* whose identity is surrendered because of the coding her body has for strong visual and erotic associations. For most of the international sex trade, the motive force of its expansion has been the market-centred drive from wealthy countries.

In the Brazilian case, however, the traditional erotic attachment to the Afro-Brazilian woman has been shaped by Brazilian national culture. The mythical *mulata* fulfils the historical constructions of the patriarchal fantasy. Giacomini's provocative hypothesis about the role of the *mulata* shows in Rio avers that the structure of such 'looking spectacles' is geared to reinforcing not only Brazilian colonial plantation history but their relevance to the contemporary global inequalities.

> *É como se o gringo, hoje, validasse o colonisador de ontem, vice versa: ambos curvados diante dos dengos, quindins e requebros da mulata.* [It is as though the foreign man, today validates the coloniser of yesteryear and vice versa: both are swayed by the charms, sweets, and shaking hips of the *mulata*.][17]

The mythical *mulata* does not want marriage or other symbols of respect; she is content to be considered not 'wife-able' and to be 'consumed' instead. Such a formulation leads directly to the current-day situation in which the men from wealthy countries are merely consumers of a service provided by subaltern women.

Thus, where Gaines's insight falls short is in her failure to link the concept of looking relations to national social relations and geopolitical relations between nations. The subordinated agency of the Afro-Brazilian woman has been sustained within a history of 'whitening' as national norm and a generalised Afrophobia at the level of international elites. The mixed race woman's social value rests in her identification with sexualised depictions of her life and body. Most Brazilian women can adjust their phenotypes – especially their hair – to fulfill the requirements of *mulata* identity.

> For the identity of *mulata*, the variables that delimit this category also function together. Age, weight, geographical region, clothing, speech patterns, profession and mixed race identity are among the most salient characteristics ... Above all, it is the style of hair towards 'long and wavy' and away from an African esthetic that creates the *mulata* identity.[18]

The eroticising of structural inequality has historically been an unacknowledged factor in the hierarchical relationship between men and women in western cultures.[19] The ways in which a society is organised to distribute goods and services reflect this structure. Some

get more than their share of the rewards of a culture, others garner a disproportional amount of punishment. In Brazil, this has been linked to the reproduction of the 'racial democracy narrative', rooted in the sexualised narrative of plantation life. In such a context, the sexual violence against black women is romanticised, and subsequently the inequality between men and women is both eroticised and racialised. The challenge to this patriarchal narrative has only recently been given voice.

> In her latest incarnation, in the Globeleza vignette, in which technology is utilised to represent [the *mulata*] she is at least as important as her embodiment of all those ancient attributes, thus we have a species of stylised *mulata*, abstract, or imaginary, who incorporates or synthesises all of her historical ancestors.[20]

Just as frequent, however, is the titillating marketing of Brazilian woman by the Brazilian state government agencies for the purposes of enhancing tourism.

> Official and private agencies in the Northeast were responsible for the sale of numerous 'travel packages' and for the utilisation of images of regional women as tourist products in pamphlets, videos, magazines and other forms of advertising, distributed in the principal targeted countries. At the side of this arsenal of information, the boom of '*axe*-music' in Salvador, the merchandising of black culture as a symbol of Bahia, the stereotypes constructed around the sexuality of black women and men, all contributed to feed a growing market – that of sexual tourism – and with specific products such as the *jambo* colored brunette, for example.[21]

Nonetheless, Brazil is frequently depicted internationally as a place where women are easily available. Central to the appeal of such women is their characterisation as 'exotic' or different. The subalternity of the exotic rests within *echange inegal* – unequal exchange between visitors and the places they travel to as tourists.

> One of the persistent tropes of exoticism is the fascination with the erotic possibilities of the colony, which in effect becomes the eroticisation of racial power ... Exotic images of women have to do with colonial fantasies of power, and the sexual availability of women classified as exotic is for the most part dependent on the ability of the colonist to coerce, that is, to militarily and economically control the colony.[22]

The carnivalisation of poverty and Brazil's dependence on the tourism industry has pushed poor women into the situation of seeking escape from their minimal access to the nation's resources via sex tourism. But for Brazilian teens, long seduced by the idea of the desirability of the

loiro de olhos azuis (blonde with blue eyes), leaving the country does not mean entering the sex trade, but rather following a movie narrative to a happy ending.

> With this backdrop, a new form of trafficking [in] *negros* emerges. However, this form of trafficking is different from what existed in the past. Now there is less resistance. In fact, the victims deliberately seek out their tall, blond, blue-eyed buyers. These men appear to be smiling angels ... Thus, it is in this exuberant Brazilian culture, with its exotic beauty, that the meeting of the northeastern, black, girl-women with the 'Viking Prince' takes place.[23]

Such is the image of the foreigner, even though a much older man. Conversely, the image of Brazil as a site of 'permanent party' uses, reproduces, reissues and reshapes the carnival image. Virtually all of the country's port cities are full of men from wealthier countries. 'The image of the "tourists" is constructed by origin, age, profession, and income. They come from diverse parts of Italy, US, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Sweden and they are much older than they.'[24]

Some Brazilian men reproduce the master narrative in their analyses of the problem. 'Sexual tourism exists in the whole planet. In the North-east of Brazil, it is different: more romantic and less professional.'[25]

Kahrsch maintains that this marketing of Brazil emerged during the military dictatorship:

> Twenty years ago, there were very few foreign tourists found in the Northeast region of Brazil. Only during the dictatorship (1964-1985) was this region transformed into the El Dorado of mass tourism. The military needed foreign currency and a new image. The country of terror and torture should transform itself on the outside into the paradise of the tropics. The big campaign for 'everybody's tourism' in the Northeast counts on two cliches: beautiful beaches with palms, and exotic, hot-blooded, beautiful *mulatas* in provocative tangas.[26]

In any event, August 1975, the height of militarism in Brazil, marked the first *Playboy* in the Portuguese language. This period coincided with the national launching and international touring of Oba Oba, Oscar Sargentelli's *mulata* show, which was often characterised by a racialised dress policy. White entertainers remained clothed, darker women arranged their tops so that their breasts were visible. US materials marketing the 'darkness' of Brazilian woman, link them to polygamous customs from Africa, implying that Europeans are not so. 'Brazil's genetic mix was made even more exotic by the polygamous blacks brought in chains from Africa.'[27] In this way, the notion of the European man as helpless before such wanton libido is reinforced. As E. Guerreiro-Ramos points out, the myth of the *mulata* also stipulates

that it is always the *mulatas* who tempt men – who under normal conditions are perfectly pure and helpless. This reproduces the medieval warning to men in the *Malleus Maleficarum* about how to detect witches. One sure way to identify the same was an erotic feeling about the person. Hester's formulation about the eroticisation of inequality holds true on a continuum of 600 years that also intersects race. Thus black women in Brazil – and other parts of the Americas – are caught between the gloomy ethics of the Catholic Church in which virgin purity is prescribed for women who would be respected on the one hand, and sexual marketing, on the other. To use Mullings's framework, this mammy/*mãe preta* versus Jezebel/*mulata* bifurcation is another version of the madonna/whore binarism that is so prevalent in western society.[28]

Even Cuba, in which the revolution temporarily controlled sex tourism, finds it returning with a vengeance. As Cuba also appeals to tourism to address the problem of a weakening economy, it finds itself in a world that is increasingly being shaped for the enjoyment of people from rich countries. For the Federation of Cuban Women, this is primarily part of a national crisis that has been generated by the US-led economic boycott.

> Another problem is the small minority of women who have turned to prostitution ... we have to look at it in terms of gender, discrimination against women as sexual objects, and the search for material products.[29]

And like the Brazilian *mulata*, the Afro-Cuban woman is central to the appeal of Cuba for tourists. '*Mulatas* are once again the focus of sexual exploitation and sexual mythology.'[30]

Much of this return to the sexualised Cuban woman is connected to the rise in tourism in general. In addition, journals such as *Playboy* evoke a mysterious, previously off-limits country pressed for foreign exchange. Witness the emphasis on the newly-available Cuban women as being 'dark', as their appeal is constructed in a men's magazine. 'To a land of dark, sensuous women who at one moment can be proudly aloof, the next as giddy as schoolgirls.'[31]

Conclusion

The current trends of privatisation of the global economy, also referred to as structural adjustment programmes and/or neo-liberalism, have accompanied the rise of women who leave their home countries in search of work. Those who lack the finances or the cultural capital (i.e., expertise in an international language of trade and exchange) often find themselves on a pathway that links them to the increasingly widespread sexual commodification of women and children.

The problem of the sex trade is one of a working woman's struggle to survive and work within her country or without. Thus, the sexualisation of the search for meaningful labour is intimately linked to the contemporary stage in the advancement of capitalism and the concomitant loss of woman's rights worldwide.

In the cases of Brazil and Cuba, the sexualised woman of mixed race in both countries is pushed towards a position of *mulata* subjectivity. It is the perception of her behaviour that determines this reality. The sex trade issue is thus one of inequality and unequal exchange in the global economy.

Moreover, throughout the world, as the most vulnerable sectors in each country, women and children are the first to be affected by privatisation and the loss of public sectors. 'Looking relations' are, in effect, manifestations of inequality that become maximised when they are part of this global power tangle. The intersection of race, gender and class on a global scale elucidates how a question of labour can be framed within a crisis of sexual appropriation and domination.

For the woman whose body is coded as *mulata*, travel outside the country can mean loss of patronage and the ability to negotiate the world. While many feminists agree with the premise that women's rights are human rights, few US feminists have juxtaposed the search for work in the new global economy, immigration, disparate access to international movement based on race, gender and class with the rise in the international sex trade. This is especially true for the Third World where signs of a return to colonialism gain strength.

It is in making visible such a complex cultural conjunction that the objective of many black feminist theorists to uncover, critique and transform such global, structural inequalities lies and that black feminism is affirmed. It is especially important for black feminists to claim this knotty juxtaposition because of the traditional denial of the global nature of our silenced subalternity. Though women are allowed to write about – and study – women and feminism, many African Americans have found that we are expected to separate our ethnic identity and related struggles from scholarship, or else be labeled essentialist. As African American feminist anthropologists rupture the narrative that limits our critique, our newly strengthened voices simultaneously address the concerns that anthropologists have been bemoaning in the last five years especially – that the themes of 'race' and 'culture' have become lost to anthropology.

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Commentary

Israel at 50

Zionism's cultural 'revolution'

Virtually any definition of 'culture', in the commonly-used sense, would include such things as academic institutions, literature, the arts, theatre, music, etc. A society is said to have a cultural life when it has such institutions, or amenities, and they are lively and in constant, popular use.

'Civilisation' is more fundamental than that. It is something that cannot be government-subsidised, something that is not necessarily expressed in concrete institutions. Take a French peasant and a Parisian intellectual and remove whatever sets them apart, what will be left – i.e., what they have in common – will be the French civilisation. I remember reading an anthology of Chinese stories set in villages and small towns in the early twentieth century, and being struck by the sense of a deep-rooted civilisation in which even the illiterate peasants were steeped, encompassing Chinese traditions and concepts going back untold generations, including the basic mores, beliefs, social customs, notions about the home and the world, aesthetic conventions, etc. The same thought occurred to me when I visited Egyptian villages, and it was reinforced by the sight of families of villagers spending their free days strolling about the ancient monuments of their pharaonic past. (Amitav Ghosh's book, *In an Antique Land*, brings out the sense of continuity in rural Egypt extremely well.) Civilisation, then, is something organic, something taken for granted by the people who share in it, who inherit it as their world.

No one can deny that in Israel there is quite a lot of culture – there

are many academic institutions, museums and galleries, publishing houses, theatres, orchestras, fiction, poetry, art, creative people and a sophisticated, culture-consuming public. What is missing is an underlying civilisation. There is a brittle, superficial quality about the Hebrew culture, though, to the people who are immersed in it, it constitutes most of what they know and experience intellectually. If American and other western elements keep pouring in, this is pretty well the case throughout the world today. But secular Israeli society is still an artificial creation, even though some of its members have behind them two, three generations in this place. The establishment of Hebrew as the spoken and written language dates back only to the first decades of the century, and the parents of most native-born Israeli adults did not themselves speak Hebrew as their first language. This puts Israel in the category of immigrant countries, and I shall draw comparisons with the US, Canada and Australia further on. We also had 'folk songs' made up for us, along with 'folk dances' and their costumes. The music was generally borrowed from Russia, along with some other sources, e.g., Yemenite-Jewish melodies. A body was appointed – or appointed itself – to supervise the revived language, and continues to do so, making changes in usage, pronunciation, spelling and meaning of even common words, and distributing instructions to newspapers and publishing houses, who obey them as though they were laws. But the society as a whole remains a hotch-potch, a strange kaleidoscope, consisting of many pieces which move against one another in various combinations, but do not mesh into a recognisable entity. The recent massive Russian immigration and the influx of foreign workers are shaking up the pieces some more.

Some writers, aware of this condition, have attempted to alter it by *inventing* a thicker, deeper Israeli society. Meir Shalev's novel, *Roman Russi*, which some reviewers compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, sought to project a picture of an Israeli village as though it had existed for untold generations. The book was pleasant to read, but was as phoney as a three-dollar bill. That village, if the truth were told, would have been settled no earlier than the 1920s or '30s, on land acquired from Arabs, and the old folk in the novel were not Hebrew-speaking old Israeli peasants, as depicted, but Yiddish-speaking Jews from eastern Europe who had transplanted themselves physically and mentally to the nascent Zionist reality. So the charming novel was essentially bogus. Other novelists have tried to create similar images: Amos Oz in *Black Box* invented a kind of Israeli landed gentry, and so did Binyamin Tammuz in *Minotaur*. There are probably many other examples that I don't know about. By contrast, the playwright Hanoch Levin and a few other writers and dramatists have come closer to tackling the real stuff of Israeli society, though focusing on the Ashkenazi petty bourgeoisie.

The only Jewish society in Israel which may be said to have a civilisation is the orthodox community. It hasn't any culture – there are none of the above-listed manifestations of culture in the orthodox communities – but they do have a civilisation, in the most organic, deeply-rooted, unquestioned form. They need not fear literary reviews of their writings, visual arts they have none, their music is never new, their festivals and celebrations are as repetitive and familiar as the seasons, their moral values and social customs are taken for granted. The greatest innovation in their world might be a new kind of wig for orthodox women – provided it receives the sanction of the rabbis.

This civilisation is very old and far-flung – much the same customs and mores prevail wherever there are observant Jews (as a recent French film about North African Jews in the garment business in Paris illustrated). It may not be especially attractive, but it is as solid as a rock.

There is also in this country another civilisation, an autochthonous one, that of the Palestinian Arab population. It is likewise a very old civilisation, organic and deeply rooted. It includes some variants, chiefly that of the Christian minority, but it shares basic concepts and mores with the vast Muslim/Arab world. Here too there is little cultural activity, in part because Arab society in Palestine/Israel has been repressed and deprived of amenities by the Zionist state. But it doesn't need concert halls and galleries to be unmistakably a civilisation.

Comparisons with immigrant societies are very illuminating. In the United States, *the* immigrant society par excellence, the foundations were laid by the original English settlers, who imported their civilisation from the old country, lock, stock and barrel. Language, religion, mores, customs, everything derived from the British Isles, and only slowly did local adaptations creep in. When other ethnic groups began to settle they had to fit in with the established, dominant civilisation which had been laid down by the Founding Fathers. Their impact was imperceptible, in part regional – the Yankee differing from the Southerner, etc. – and took a long time to affect the general trend. To this day, despite the predominance of the Jewish minority and the contributions of the Blacks, Italians, Irish, Latinos, etc., it is still very much an 'Anglo-Saxon' country in terms of its bedrock civilisation.

Much the same may be said of Canada (alongside the French community, which imported its own civilisation), Australia and New Zealand. In Latin America, the foundations were laid by Spanish or Portuguese settlers who brought their Iberian civilisation with them. The presence of Indian elements, whose autochthonous civilisation was devastated by the conquistadors, did affect the outcome, but slowly and (in most places) marginally.

In this country, the Zionist settlers resolutely discarded their Jewish civilisation along with their Jewish dialects and orthodox practices. In

their place they invented the New Hebrew Man, 'Ari Ben-Canaan', 'our sweet prickly Sabras', etc. The tenuous Jewish tradition which they retained – mainly as a net for drawing and holding together the disparate immigrant Jewish communities – consists today of rather irritating constraints on foods, marriage laws and the like, as well as a calendar of Jewish holidays which the pre-independence Jewish leadership and then the state adopted and imposed (largely, though not entirely, for political expediencies). This is probably the one vestige of the genuine civilisation, but being isolated from the rest of the organic structure it does not signify very much. Indeed, it suffers the fate of all religions in the secular, westernised worlds, but if elsewhere the underlying civilisation can survive the secularisation of its traditions, this society lives in an uneasy limbo. The attraction of orthodoxy for certain individuals in secular Israeli society lies in the awareness of its deep-rooted civilisation, with the added charm that it is 'our own' – meaning that the road leading to it is wide open and free of the difficulties of assimilating into an alien civilisation, however attractive. Modern Israelis who join the orthodox community feel that they are re-attaching themselves to their 'roots', i.e., their grandparents and fore-fathers, thus gaining a sense of solidity and security-in-continuity which is lacking in secular Hebrew society.

In a famous exchange between Ben Gurion and a leading rabbi, the latter argued that the secular society must give way to the orthodox, just as on a narrow road an empty cart gives way to a full one. The secular intellectuals were right to protest that their 'cart' is full too, probably fuller. However, theirs are *not the same kind of goods*. The orthodox cart, packed full, has been trundling around with the same cargo for centuries, while the goods in the secular cart are continually changed, in response to cultural fashions.

Turning its back on Jewish civilisation with its obvious diaspora nature, and seeking to strengthen its claim to Palestine, Zionism needed to hark back to the ancient, pre-exilic past. It threw a bridge across 2,000 years to ancient Judea, linking the Judean rebel Bar-Kokhba and modern Trumpeldor, the Maccabees and the pre-state fighting force Palmah, Massada and the second world war (or the Middle East conflict). This entailed not only skipping over two millennia of history, but blurring a good many historical facts about the far side. For example, that the language spoken in Judea in its last two, three centuries was not Hebrew but Aramaic; that the actual dimensions of the kingdom of Judea were a fraction of the territory claimed by the Zionists; that many if not most of the Jews lived not in Judea but all over the Roman empire. But since the purpose was to provide a local 'national' mythology to substitute for an actual local past, historical accuracy mattered little. Skipping over two millennia was also convenient for eliminating the Arabs from the picture. (The evidence of

the presence of substantial non-Jewish communities in the country throughout the ancient era has been played down.)

The 'Canaanite' movement, which drew many Israeli artists and intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, carried this trend to a more romantic extreme. This is not the place to analyse its various strands, but it was undoubtedly a concentrated version of the general tendency. Thus, for example, Israelis no longer gave their children traditional Jewish names like Hayyim, Reuven, Rivkah, Hannah, Sarah, Shimeon, Moshe, Esther, preferring biblical names that had never been current in the diaspora: Omir, Anat, Boaz, Osnat, Ido, Itai, Hagar, Yoav, Yael, etc. These had the flavour of a still earlier pre-exilic era, signifying a break with the intervening millennia and all of the Jewish past. Against this background, the attempts by the movement's leader, the poet Yonatan Ratosh, and the sculptor Danziger, for example, to hark back to the pre-Judaic, 'Canaanite' culture, the worship of Ashtoreth and Baal, etc., can be seen as a logical development. However, beyond romantic imaginings, sufficient perhaps for poetry and the visual arts, this could not fill the place of a bedrock civilisation for the Jewish settlers in Palestine any better than did mainstream offerings, such as Moshe Shamir's novel about the Maccabean king Yannai, *A King of Flesh and Blood*, and the sanctioned cult of Massada and Bar-Kokhba. (The latter at least referred to a more accessible, better documented period.) Thus the 'Canaanite' tendency illustrated the problems faced by a community torn from its organic civilisation and given nothing but mythology to replace it.

* * *

The process of abandoning Jewish civilisation and replacing it with a 'revived' Hebrew culture was dictated by pragmatic considerations as well as by doctrine. Some such process was necessary if the new community was to become a modern, complex society. Obviously the Jewish civilisation could not sustain a society which had to provide its own needs in agriculture, industry, transportation and the like. In other countries, the Jewish minority could stick to its age-old rules of ritual observation, since many of the essential tasks – e.g., the growing of food, industrial production, mining, menial services – were performed by Gentiles, i.e., by people to whom the ritual laws of Judaism did not apply. In the Jewish state – or the pre-state community – all these functions had to be carried out by Jews. Another requirement that could not be met by the Judaic way of life was the military. There is no way in which observant Jews could run armies that would not be jeopardised by the ritual rules. In fact, the demands of the Zionist reality in Palestine would have forced the process of abandonment even if it had not been consciously aimed at. Aware that the Judaic

civilisation would have to be sacrificed, Herzl, Nordau and other turn-of-the-century leaders of political Zionism proposed from the start *a secular state for Jews*, but, realising that without a bedrock civilisation their dream would be suspended in limbo, they envisioned a European 'Judenstadt' based on German civilisation, with a scattering of decorative synagogues by way of identification. Only thus could they visualise a functioning modern state.

The beginnings of the actual settlement soon dispelled these fantasies, if only because there were very few German Jews among the settlers. Indeed, most of the immigrants during the 1920s were only partially Europeanised, being mainly Yiddish-speaking Jews from eastern Europe. Moreover, the presence of non-European Jews in the country, including the solid Sephardi community and the immigrants from Yemen, not only made the establishment of a European civilisation unlikely, it also meant that something cohesive was urgently needed to mould the disparate groups into a self-conscious entity. It meant Judaism-sans-Judaism, it meant creating an Israelite, Hebrew entity, based on a mythical image of a shared origin. In short, an ersatz civilisation with a synthetic culture inspired by a romantic dream, in the midst of the very harsh realities of the settlement. This dream had to be sufficiently enticing for the Zionist Jews in Palestine to be willing to forgo their heritage along with their native languages and dialects. Artists and poets, among others, helped the process of rejection-and-invention. From the Bezalel school of romantic 'biblical' arts-and-crafts to Chernikhovsky's poem, 'The Death of Tammuz', even Bialik's 'The Dead of the Desert', the Hebraic message was clear and seductively romantic. It was amplified and popularised in the educational system, in songs, fiction, drama and journalism, it enjoyed establishment support and encouragement. A couple of generations would pass before the weaknesses and the damage began to show.

One of the early signs that the myth was crumbling was the abandonment of the soil. Cultivating the soil was one of the strongest tenets of Zionism, yet the Jewish civilisation for untold generations has been entirely urban. It was not enough to imagine biblical scenes – it was necessary to do the actual work. This entailed a very profound readjustment of the psyche, a conscious systematic rejection of the Jewish way of life as experienced through the centuries from Sanaa to Vilna, from Meknes to Lodz, from Baghdad to Paris. The image of a New Hebrew peasantry with organic roots in the soil was projected out of all proportion. In reality, even at the height of the pioneering period, the majority of the Jews in Palestine lived in urban communities, rather than in the agricultural ones that dominated the literature and arts and all Zionist propaganda, domestic and external. But in a matter of a few decades, and despite considerable incentives to the contrary, the percentage of Jews living on the land went down from about 10 per cent

to about three. A similar process has, it is true, been taking place in all developed countries, but in Israel the collapse of the agrarian life, with all that it symbolised, exposed the fragility of the artificial Zionist ersatz-civilisation.

There is no doubt that many Israelis are uneasily aware of the situation, even if they have not formulated it in quite this way. Reactions have been varied, but the response which has dominated the cultural life of the country for a long time has been a determined effort to make it into an extension of Europe. Conscious of the thinness and artificiality of the would-be Hebrew civilisation, many people strive to fill the gaps, so to speak, with cultural imports. And while the centre of gravity has been shifting from Europe to the United States, the overall tendency remains the same. There is a rather desperate air about it, and the manifestations are too numerous to mention. The accompanying contempt for non-European, non-western civilisations and cultures sometimes gives this climate a caricaturish Victorian-colonialist quality.

The building is unstable because, while storeys are added and expanded, and even lavishly decorated, it has no bedrock foundation underneath. A powerful storm may damage the structure beyond repair. A more recent symptom than the abandonment of the soil is the extensive invasion of Israeli Hebrew by anglicisms/americanisms, against which the efforts of the Hebrew Academy are useless (in any event, its strictures affect only the printed and broadcast language, which is anyhow awkward and artificial). This sense of instability in the secular-cultural community is widening the gulf between it and the orthodox community. (It is also aggravated by ongoing political-economic resentments, but this only obscures the underlying issues.)

Finally, it is worth noting that the process of replacing Jewish civilisation with Zionism not only created and dominated Israeli society, it has also affected Jewish communities elsewhere, notably in the West. Nowadays when self-aware Jews face east, it is not the ancient site of the Temple they have in mind, but rather the Knesset, Tel Aviv, the Israeli army and whatever other images represent the Zionist state in their imagination. Unstinting support for Israel has become the hallmark of 'a good Jew', just as in past generations it was the observance of ritual law. However, for the Jews in western countries this is only a quirk – the societies in which they live are firmly grounded in their own civilisations. It is only Israel which exists on a thin cultural crust in a civilisation-less limbo.

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Canada

The Black Nova Scotian odyssey: a chronology*

In 1997, *shunpiking* magazine launched a Black history supplement that was innovative; it attempted to paint the broad sweep of historical forces that not only shape the Black community but bind it within Nova Scotian, Canadian and world history. Two poignant examples: can you truly understand or appreciate the history of the Black Loyalists or the Black refugees without the contexts of the American War of Independence and the Napoleonic wars respectively?

Our continued goal is not to treat the history of the African Nova Scotian community as some artifact to be tacked on as someone's whim or afterthought. Our project was originally conceived as a counter to what we saw as the trivialisation and marginalisation of a people's history: reducing it to a few choice vignettes and events unconnected with the flow of real history. In order to gain a solid understanding of any segment of history, it is necessary to provide interpretation instead of a steady string of 'happenings'.

Until the 1950s, schools themselves were segregated and our communities faced quasi-apartheid. Through to the 1970s, our history was largely negated. But in the past decade and a half, the consciousness of 'African heritage' by official as well as unofficial agencies and circles is quite remarkable. While this recognition is due to the consistent and constant struggle of the Black communities and their organisations, there is yet a danger: the same racial distortions may be reproduced in a different form. The reduction of the experience of a people to a series of vignettes and stories, however well choreographed, illustrated and written, is in itself the mangling of history. It serves to use history to perpetuate racism in the guise of 'anti-racism'. The outcome can only be further efforts to marginalise people from participation in political/social/cultural concerns that affect the entire society and the body politic.

Indeed, it is our contention that Black history cannot be understood in separation and isolation from the panorama of the Maritimes [Maritime provinces]. While the Black community has its own dynamics and struggles, they are part of the rhythm of the overall struggles of the province and the region. The specificity of the exploitation and oppression of the Black community is a reflection of the overall processes that worked against the First Nations, Acadians, the Gaels and the majority of the labouring population – different in

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form and degree, but not in aim and content. The obvious corollary is that Nova Scotian history in its entirety cannot be understood unless the history of Black Nova Scotia is treated as a fundamental component. Much of our history is yet to be told or explored. However, we hope that this attempt to provide an outline or dateline will serve to raise people's consciousness, stimulate discussion and encourage sound and active historical research and writing.

If our philosophy can be summed up, then, it is the belief that people are the makers of their history and culture, not mere clay in the hands of 'systems' and their diplomaed historians and ideologists. We wish to strip of mystery, to demystify, the historical process, to understand our collective past.

* * *

The Black communities of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are of very long standing, dating back to the dawn of European colonisation in the 1600s. Through all of history's twists and turns over almost the last 400 years, these communities have remained integral to the development of life and society throughout the Maritimes and especially Nova Scotia.

The Black community remains a vital part of Nova Scotian and Canadian life. Not only has the chronic unemployment and isolation suffered by African Nova Scotian communities been and remained part of the same crisis afflicting the entire region but, from every aspect, its historical experience is inseparable from the Nova Scotian tapestry. In the teeth of racism and provocations of every kind, aimed at placing and keeping them on society's margins, Black Nova Scotians have built their own communities, participated in building the surrounding community, forged long links and sunk deep roots throughout Canadian society. This is exactly where the Black communities can be found – not on society's margins but operating as part and parcel of the everyday life of the wider community.

CHRONOLOGY

1605 – Matthew da Costa, translator and guide with the de Monts expedition, is the first known Black man to set foot in Nova Scotia.

As a guide, he must already have been here and, as a translator for contact with the Native people, he must already have made contact and learnt Mi'kmaq possibly as a crew member with one of the Portuguese ships fishing cod each spring on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland.

What placed him in the historical record at this date was a fortuitous combination of skills and availability. Even in pre-British North

America outside the Thirteen Colonies (early Acadia or New France), the principal introduction experienced by others of Black African origin was chattel slavery, as the personal private property of some of the wealthier French settlers, for example at Fortress Louisbourg.

At the same time, there was also a number of free Blacks in the local population. According to a census return for Nova Scotia on 1 January 1767, for example, eighteen years after the establishment of Halifax, there were 104 free residents of African origin (out of a total population of 13,374).

1749 – Establishment of Halifax on traditional Mi'kmaq camping grounds, led by governor Edward Cornwallis. He brings 2,544 British settlers to Nova Scotia, beginning the actual encroachment on the Acadians' lands following the English conquest of Fortress Louisbourg in 1745. Some 100 African slaves are recorded among the ranks of the founding population of Halifax.

1775 – Aiming to undermine the coalition of slave-owning Virginia planters and New England merchants waging the American War of Independence, the British issue their first proclamation offering Black people throughout the Thirteen Colonies freedom, land and economic security in exchange for joining the British cause.

1782-84 – Arrival of 3,548 free Black Loyalists, the first wave of large-scale migration of people of African origin to Nova Scotia, including a large number of skilled artisans and craftsmen. Alexander Howe, a contemporary member of the colonial Legislative Assembly, describes them not as tradesmen but, rather, as 'the principal source of labour and improvement' in an expanding colony, i.e., a source of cheap labour.

The promise of land – an average 500-600 acres per family – turns out to consist of much smaller acreages than promised, filled with scrub and other non-arable margins rejected by white settlers. Using delays and numerous other tricks, the colonial administration in almost every case legally swindles the Black Loyalists out of receiving anything close to the acreages originally promised; the average plot size ranges from one to fifty acres.

Also arriving with the white Loyalist settlers are a further 1,232 enslaved Africans (of whom twenty-six went to Prince Edward Island and 441 to New Brunswick).

26 July 1784 – North America's first recorded race riot occurs in Shelburne – spontaneously, yet not by accident. Free Black labourers within the local workforce are being paid below scale. Employers discriminating in this way incite the Black workers' white counterparts to see the lower wage-earner as their threat. This enables the local elite to maximise profits. As a further inevitable consequence, those who take this up participate in beating and driving the Black workers out of

town. This incident becomes a basis for numerous local dusk-to-dawn curfews imposed against Black people in towns and villages across Nova Scotia.

January 1792 – 1,196 Black Loyalists 'vote with their feet' against broken promises of land and social emancipation, setting sail for Sierra Leone aboard fifteen ships out of Halifax. Every obstacle is put in their path: Thomas Peters, the chief organiser of the emigration, is beaten; disinformation is spread that people would be re-enslaved in Africa, and proof is demanded that each emigrant is free of debt and not a slave. In extreme cases, the documents are falsified to ensure that people cannot leave. This reflects the colonial authorities' concern to retain the services of highly-skilled labourers at the lowest possible wage level. Many Black Nova Scotians have family links in Sierra Leone. Family names such as Hamilton and Wyse reside on both sides of the Atlantic. The Cotton Tree Project was formed to maintain these living links between Sierra Leone and Nova Scotia, by encouraging cultural and intellectual contacts and exchanges.

July 1796 – Arrival at Halifax of 550 Trelawny Maroons from Jamaica, employed under near starvation conditions to work on major modifications of the Citadel.

Now a national park, the Citadel stands as living proof of how external dictate was coordinated in practice with local interests. This fortress was the central bastion of the most strategic base on the western Atlantic rim of the British empire at the start of the 1800s, and the single most important infrastructure in Halifax at that time.

How was it finished? Using the labour of the Maroons, who had freed themselves from plantation slavery and British rule in Jamaica after waging a guerrilla war. This people established independent communes which threatened British rule in Jamaica and the British West Indies. They were offered passage to Sierra Leone. But somehow the ships first landed in Halifax.

The Maroons were then compelled to work on the construction of the Citadel. The ships proceeded to Sierra Leone only after the Citadel was completed and after the rejection by the Maroons of a British offer to remain under conditions of deprivation and subjugation in Nova Scotia. Not all the Maroons left. Some remained behind in Preston, while others settles in Boydville, now known as Maroon Hill in Middle Sackville.

1800 – Now protected by the Citadel's presence, local merchants start to engage in large-scale privateering (i.e., the organising of pirate expeditions from Halifax against American and French shipping off the coast, under a licence from the Royal Navy). The Admiralty transports the Maroons to Sierra Leone.

1811 – The Legislative Assembly establishes severe financial barriers

against Black communities attempting to organise public education. In the name of providing a single standard for 'all', its first Education Act provides that the government subsidise construction of a community schoolhouse and employment of a teacher in any community able to raise between £50 and £200 a year towards the cost. Many Black communities, unable to raise these amounts, are effectively left without public education facilities. This will be the first in a series of measures over the next 143 years which erected first *de facto* and later *de jure* segregation – separate and always unequal education.

The attitude towards educating Black people which prevailed in official circles is expressed by Lord Dalhousie. Governor of the colony at the time of the next major wave of Black immigration to Nova Scotia and later instrumental in establishing Dalhousie University, he declares: '[T]hese people ... slaves by habit as well as education, no longer live under the dread of the lash. Their idea of freedom is idleness and they are therefore quite incapable of industry.'* Education becomes available in the Black communities, principally through philanthropic efforts such as those of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The emphasis is on imparting only the barest essentials of reading and writing – no arithmetic or computational training – and obedience.

This and subsequent legislation became the building blocks for that enormous wall of prejudice and indifference which has confronted generations of young Black men and women in Nova Scotia. In 1918, a new Nova Scotia Act came into effect with very little change. The power to create separate schools was taken from the School Board commissions and given to the inspectors of the Department of Education. In 1918, all children near Annapolis and Digby had access to public school, with the exception of Blacks in Fundy.

As recently as 1994, 60 per cent of Black youth in Nova Scotia aged 20-24 had not graduated grade eleven; 30 per cent had not graduated grade ten, and 10 per cent had less than grade nine education. As for role models and mentors to school youth from among the education profession, there were only ninety-one Black teachers in the entire province, less than 1 per cent of the teaching force.†

1813-1816 – Privateering from Halifax thrives thanks to wartime conditions. These conditions also create a shortage of skilled labourers required for fulfilling urgent ship production orders for the Royal Navy. The labour shortage drives wage levels up. Geopolitically, Halifax is in the middle of a 'war within a war'. For the second time in forty years, Britain is in military conflict with the United States, striving to contain American ambitions to expand trade at Britain's

* Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Volume 112, pages 1-5.

† From data assembled for the report 'Redressing Inequity/Empowering the Black Learner', published by the Black Learners' Advisory Committee, 1994.

expense, using its status as a neutral (vis-à-vis the alliance of world powers against Napoleon). Trade and manufacturing throughout Nova Scotia are thus over-stimulated and the road system seriously overtaxed. Cheap Black labour is sought for repairing existing roads and building new ones. In a letter to Charles Morris, the surveyor-general for Nova Scotia, T. Chamberlain, a member of the Legislative Assembly, explains that a further influx of Black labourers 'would afford assistance to us towards repairing the roads, but likewise furnish us with labourers of whom we stand too much in need to make any tolerable progress in our improvement'.

Meanwhile, throughout the plantation precincts of the Chesapeake Bay area (of Maryland and Virginia), in the course of mopping up operations in the dying days of the war of 1812, British troops are freeing slaves wherever they pass. This sends streams of refugees to Bermuda and Halifax. The British purchase their freedom and passages with a £250,000 payment to the US Treasury.

After the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, much of Halifax's prosperity – and with it much of the enthusiasm to import cheap Black labourers – starts to collapse. Britain has gambled a second time, as with the Black Loyalists before, on being able to assemble a pool of cheap labour for its various colonies by promising land and freedom in a new colony to people enslaved in the US. Now this sparks a backlash.

On 1 April 1815, exactly one week after the governor in Halifax is advised that colonial authorities in Bermuda are holding between 1,500 and 2,000 freed slaves for removal to Nova Scotia, the Legislative Assembly at Halifax passes a resolution stating that 'the proportion of Africans already in this country is productive of many inconveniences; and that the introduction of more must tend to the discouragement of white labourers and servants as well as to the establishment of a separate and marked class of people unfitted to this climate or to an association with the rest of His Majesty's colonists.'

Nevertheless, the British settle this large group, later known as the 'Black refugees' or 'Chesapeake Blacks', in the rural approaches to Halifax. These settlements were on the outskirts and isolated from the larger communities but close enough to provide a steady supply of cheap labour. Like the Black Loyalists before them, the Black refugees receive less land than their white counterparts, ranging from eight to ten acres. Coupled with this small size was the poor quality of the soil. Sustaining a family on such meagre resources became a difficult struggle.

6 January 1821 – Ninety-five African residents of Beech Hill, one of the settlements outside Halifax, are deported to Trinidad, as part of a failed effort to depopulate the Black community. This effort is in response to the general economic depression in Nova Scotia.

Government assistance to Black communities is minimal, yet Blacks are a scapegoat for the economic crisis.

1833 – Formal abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.

1848 – This marks the earliest record of a property deed in the Africville area, although there may have been Black residents as early as the 1820s. In the face of massive neglect and discrimination, this community survives on a semi-autonomous basis. On the one hand, the residents pay their taxes while, on the other, no water and sewerage services are forthcoming and the municipal authorities at one point even situate a garbage dump beside Africville. In 1964, Halifax County Council voted for, and in 1968-70 implemented, the expropriation of the community in the name of 'urban renewal'. A proud and dignified community of more than a century's standing was declared an 'eyesore', placed on social assistance and moved in large numbers into housing projects at Mulgrave Park, various areas along Gottingen Street, etc. The wheel had come full circle: denied land promised in the 1780s, the Black community is now uprooted from the very soil on which it had built new life over the succeeding generations.

1854 – Founding of African Baptist Association which later became the African United Baptist Association (AUBA). This becomes the central institution of Black Nova Scotian life. The church would be the source of spiritual succour and the focus of educational, cultural, social and political activities throughout all the Black communities. In 1976, Pearleen Oliver, historian and community activist from New Glasgow, becomes first female moderator of the AUBA, epitomising the spirit of Black women and their crucial role in the community.

1857 – William Hall, a Black sailor from Horton's Bluff, NS, is awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in breaching a fortress wall in Lucknow for the British Army during the Indian national rebellion. Hall is the first Canadian recipient of the VC. Hall embodies a central contradiction of any colonial subject. Transfixed between the British command behind him and the Indian freedom fighters in front of him, Hall stays at his post, repeatedly firing his cannon until a fortress wall is breached, allowing the British troops to enter. While rewarded for his heroism, Hall eventually dies penniless and forgotten. What is often ignored in accounts of Hall's life is the striking and sad irony of one subject people being used against another.

1865 – The Legislative Assembly in Halifax authorises separate Black and white schools, thereby introducing segregated education as a matter of law. Meanwhile, in the American South, at the end of the Civil War, Reconstruction is launched. Although cut short by racist reaction in 1877, it enfranchised African Americans for the first time in many of the oldest slave-owning states.

1867 – Passage of British North America (BNA) Act lays the basis of the Canadian state.

An Act of the British parliament, it invests sovereignty not in the Canadian people but in parliament. Many reasons have been advanced and debated about the reasons for confederation. However, it is clear that this arrangement was meant to serve the interests of the British imperial government and the financiers who were eager to find a secure environment for their investments. What is also clear is that the process of confederation itself was a denial of sovereignty for the people. The BNA Act vested sovereignty in the British queen and it was her representatives who drafted and pushed through the arrangements which shaped modern Canadian political institutions. These proposals were never submitted to the people for approval for referendum, nor were elections ever held for the specific purpose of considering the final legislation. Instead, various manoeuvres and lobbying were organised to overcome the considerable popular resistance. Even when the plan did not prove wholly successful, the legislation was rammed through the British parliament and declared a *fait accompli*. The main outlines of confederation were drafted in a document called the *72 Resolutions* at the closed-door Quebec conference of October 1864.

When the details were made known, people immediately began expressing opposition – especially in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec. Opposition was vehement in Nova Scotia. There were many petitions from people in individual counties against confederation. One from the county of Annapolis proclaimed that 'no change in the institutions of this country may be made until it has been submitted to the test of public opinion'. Opponents of confederation were so numerous that the pro-union premier Charles Tupper wrote to John A. Macdonald in June 1866 that quick action must be taken because the result of the next Nova Scotian election 'would be most disastrous to Confederation and probably defeated altogether ... We must act during the present session of the Imperial Government or all will be lost'. By the time the people of Nova Scotia had a chance to express their opinions through a vote, the Act was already passed. Forces opposed to confederation won the next provincial election and dominated the federal election in the province. Despite their petitions to Britain to withdraw from the union, the Act remained in force.

Britain retained direct control over Canadian foreign policy, appointments and appeals process of the Supreme Court, etc. Moreover, it enshrined the theory of two 'founding nations' (so-called 'English' and 'French') which, at best, was factually erroneous even then, ignoring that at the time the majority of the population of the so-called English nation was Irish and Scottish, while the so-called French nation was largely of French, Irish and Native parentage. There was no acknowledgement of the First Nations or any other community, be they Acadian or Black.

Thus, the Canadian people were denied any meaningful role in the new Canadian polity. Nowhere in the BNA Act was there any mention of what individual or collective rights the people possess.

On 25 October 1992, the chickens came home to roost when a nationwide referendum on the proposed 'Charlottetown accord' decisively rejected the plan of the Mulroney government, backed by all provincial governments, to strengthen the BNA Act. During the referendum campaign, various individuals and groups in Nova Scotia, including the Black United Front, participated in sealing the accord's fate.

1883 – With the AUBA as the major organising force, the Black community formally challenges the Education Act. A petition is sent to the Legislative Assembly from the Black residents of Halifax that sets forth 'that they are coloured citizens and ratepayers of the city of Halifax, that by a minute of the Council of Public Instruction passed on December 1876 all coloured children henceforth were excluded from common school, and separate schools were established for their use, which are of an inferior grade, and in which they do not receive equal advantages with white children attending common schools, for which and other reasons as detailed in the petition; they pray that such minutes of Council be repealed'.

This sparks a heated debate in the Legislative Assembly the next year, and culminates in an amendment to reinforce the Act of 1865 – which removes these communities even further from access to proper facilities.

1898 – James Robinson Johnstone graduates from Dalhousie University, becoming the first Black Nova Scotian lawyer. He gains a reputation as a superb criminal lawyer and is actively involved in the struggles of the community.

1890s – Black workers come here from the eastern Caribbean (Barbados) and parts of the United States to work in steel mills at Sydney, forming communities in Whitney Pier, Glace Bay and New Waterford. A number are skilled exemplars of the iron worker craft. Over the preceding years, this craft had undergone extensive evolution, especially among American Black workers. They participate in the formation of industrial labour organisations and the struggles in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1970s, Winston Ruck is elected secretary of the steelworkers' local and, in 1989, becomes executive director of the Black United Front.

The double discrimination facing Black workers continues. In the 1930s, reports from the city of Halifax note that their wages average more than 30 per cent less than those of white workers and their employment is confined to low-skilled, service occupations, crafts and trades. Many occupations are deliberately closed to Black workers.

This trend continues, for instance, at the Halifax dockyards and city housing, among others.

1914-1918 – Denied equal status in military recruitment for the first world war, Black participation is restricted to menial tasks (ditch-digging, construction, etc.) in the No. 2 Negro Construction Battalion.

1918 – The Nova Scotia legislature further strengthens the segregationist and discriminatory provisions of the education acts of 1865 and 1884.

1920 – Visit to Nova Scotia of Marcus Garvey, proponent of Black nationalism and founder of the largest Black organisation of modern times, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). A UNIA branch is established in Sydney.

On a return visit in 1937, Garvey speaks in Halifax and Sydney on the conditions of the Black communities in the province; his speeches are published in *The Black Man*, the international journal of the UNIA.

1945 – The global struggle against fascism before, during and after the second world war energises new democratic forces, including the Black communities of the Maritimes. In 1945, the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) is founded under the leadership of the Revd W.P. Oliver in Halifax. In New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NBAACP) is founded under the leadership of Joseph Drummond.

One of the first Black industrial trade unionists in the Maritimes, Drummond supports the Communist Party. This continues a trend that develops during the 1930s out of such major civil rights issues and campaigns as the Scottsboro case, which achieves worldwide publicity through communist involvement, and the social and political impact of such artists as the Black singer and actor Paul Robeson, who is blacklisted in the United States and stripped of his passport in the cold war hysteria unleashed after the second world war. Robeson sings many times in Canada. In the early 1970s, Drummond was among the first to come forward in his province in support of the new Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) – CPC(M-L).

1946 – New Glasgow police arrest and charge Viola Desmond after she defies a civic ordinance prohibiting Black people from sitting anywhere but the balcony of the local theatre. She is jailed for a night, convicted of 'disorderly conduct' and fined $20 plus court costs, or thirty days in jail. (These events are memorialised in Ian MacLeod's 48-minute documentary film, *November 1946*, reviewed in *shunpiking*, October 1996.)

Through *The Clarion* and later *The Negro Citizen*, writer, historian and activist Carrie Best of New Glasgow brings the discrimination

facing Blacks in Nova Scotia to Canada's attention.

1954 – The Legislative Assembly in Halifax replaces the Education Act, putting an end to segregated schooling in Nova Scotia. This follows the US Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, to desegregate American public education.

1964 – Halifax County Council votes to expropriate the community of Africville in the name of 'urban renewal'.

1968-70 – This is the high point of liberation struggles and anti-imperialist movements around the world, especially among youth and students. The impact is felt far and wide.

From early January to 11 February 1969, Black students protest the racism of an American sociology professor at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) in Montreal. Eventually, they stage a peaceful occupation of the computer centre, faculty lounge and other offices. In the ensuing police assault, the computer centre is destroyed. Many students are arrested, convicted and sentenced to prison terms of up to five years. This provokes a broad sympathetic response nationally and internationally, including solidarity demonstrations in Trinidad and Tobago which trigger the February 1970 uprising against the government.

In Halifax, after a visit from a Black Panther Party contingent from the US, a 'Black family meeting' takes place in the North branch library on Gottingen street – reportedly the largest political gathering up to that time of Black Canadians anywhere in the country.

The Black United Front (BUF), a new province-wide political organisation, is formed as a concrete manifestation of discussions and activity within the community throughout the 1950s and 1960s. A prominent factor conditioning subsequent development is the frustration among youth over the glacial pace of promised changes. During this period, the dispossession and forced resettlement of residents of Africville is proceeding.

Further reflecting the community's concerns about education and unemployment, in the 1969-70 academic year, a transition year programme is initiated at Dalhousie University to provide upgrading for university entrance to Black Nova Scotian and First Nations students.

During 1969-71, the Black Educators Association is formed. Starting out as the Diogenes Club in the 1960s, it later becomes known as the Negro Education Committee in 1969. Its roots stem from a group of Black educators who worked in segregated schools in the Preston area. It is an opportunity for Black educators to share experiences and promote their history as part of the curriculum they are teaching. It also becomes a study group for members of the organisation.

1971 – In October, the Canadian parliament passes the Multicultural Act of the Liberal government. This Act further enshrines the myths of

the BNA Act by specifically stating that Canada's multicultural origins date back to the arrival of the Europeans who, it is said, form groups from many cultures. It thus ignores the existence of a number of Native nations. This inaugurates a new wave of ghettoisation both of Native peoples and other national minorities, and the process of assimilation is intensified. Large-scale government funding is allocated to 'special interest' groups in a process of elite accommodation and vote banks.

1975 – The Liberal government issues its green paper on immigration policy. It concocts the idea that the Canadian people as a whole are racist, justifying this as an official policy by declaring that some may be upset by 'visible minorities' with 'novel and distinctive features'. Unemployment, housing problems and other social ills are thus blamed on immigration and 'overpopulation'. The distinction between those from the UK, i.e., white European, and those from Asia and the Caribbean with 'novel and distinctive features' indicates that the basic approach is based on 'race'.

It is not long before the term 'visible minorities' becomes official, institutionalised and introduced into the vocabulary of everyday life in Canada, creating the distinctly racist division of the Canadian people who are today described as belonging to either a so-called founding nation, an Aboriginal people, an ethnic group or a visible minority.

A joint Senate-Commons committee tours the country, including meetings in Halifax at the Lord Nelson Hotel and Fredericton, to develop a public 'debate' around this racist thesis. It faces strong opposition.

1976 – The communities of North Preston, East Preston, Cherrybrook, Lake Loon and Lake Major unite and defeat the attempt by Halifax county to arbitrarily seize community land around Lake Loon in the name of protecting the water supply of the city of Dartmouth.

1980 – Based on the racialist theses of the federal government's green paper, attempts are made to float 'White Power' gangs throughout the 1970s, marked by assaults on the East Indian, West Indian, Pakistani, Black and Jewish communities in Ontario and British Columbia. Significantly, several gangs include 'off duty' police officers, especially in Toronto. These are nipped in the bud by organised, determined opposition. The most prominent organisation formed in this period is the East Indian Defence Committee, which is founded in Vancouver in 1973 and grows to over 7,000 members. In May 1980, an attempt is made to refloat the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Although the KKK has no members in the Maritimes at that time – its sole supporter is a just released parolee from Dorchester penitentiary near Moncton – the regional media such as ATV grant its 'national leader' in Toronto some eighty-two interviews; the then attorney-general, Leonard Pace, publicly defends its 'right to speak' and organise in Nova Scotia. This

is defeated through actions in Halifax, Saint John and city after city across the country at government and media offices, rallying under a single banner. In Vancouver, the People's Front Against Racist and Fascist Violence is formed in October by some 2,000 delegates, who elect as their national leader Hardial Bains, chairman of the CPC (M-L). In Halifax, over 5,000 people endorse a petition campaign organised by the newly-formed People's Front and Tony Seed, declaring that 'racists and fascists have no rights to speak or organise'.

1983 – The Black Cultural Centre is established in Westphal (Dartmouth) in conditions of increased concern to defend the culture and identity of the community. This formation occurs amid an ongoing cultural renaissance, building on the rich trends of the past, typified by such artists as Portia White (internationally renowned contralto) and Alf Coward (prominent jazz pianist).

In the literary field, several poets, writers and actors emerged during the 1970s and '80s, notably George Eliot Clarke, Maxine Tynes, David Woods and Walter Borden. In the field of music and performing arts, various troupes are formed, including Four The Moment, Voices, The Gospelheirs and the Nova Scotia Mass Choir. In the world of film, video and TV, the 1978 series, *Black Insights* (five episodes on history, education, employment, land claims and the church), is followed by two award-winning films produced by Sylvia Hamilton: *Black Mother, Black Daughter* and *Speak It! From The Heart of Black Nova Scotia*. In the field of journalism, Mark Daye, Clarke and Charles Saunders publish *The Rap* from 1982-85. In the field of sport, an annual Black basketball tournament is launched, now in its twenty-fifth year; team names commemorate Black communities and heroes from da Costa to Joe Drummond, and teams participate from Toronto, New York and other cities.

In 1982, the Africville Genealogical Society is formed to preserve the memory of Africville, advocate equitable compensation for former residents from the government and organise annual reunions in Africville (now known as Seaview Park).

One of the more vibrant organisations to take shape is the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. Formed in 1983, it develops branches in schools throughout the Metro area, dedicated to highlighting Black history and culture as an instrument for building bridges between communities.

1986 – Corinne Sparks is appointed to the Nova Scotia judiciary. In late 1997, the landmark *R. v. R.D.S.* decision is handed down. The Supreme Court of Canada validates the use of racial context by Judge Sparks in a decision where she observes that white police officers often overreact when dealing with people of colour. The impact of this decision – recognising the existence of racism – remains to be seen.

1989-97 – In 1989 social contradictions among youth, building within Cole Harbour district high school, explode and, unfortunately, are converted by the media and Royal Canadian Mounted Police into an 'attitude' and 'law and order' issue. In 1997, there is another eruption. Once again, the issue of 'law and order' is touted as the central question and solution. Through the media, the impression is orchestrated that these events are the inevitable product of the clash of communities (with different cultures and values, so-called 'white' Eastern Passage versus 'Black' Prestons). Consequently, people become polarised and a martial atmosphere is imposed in the school. Despite the launching of an investigation and the commissioning of a special report by Bly Frank, professor of education at Mount Saint Vincent University, major concerns remain unaddressed.

Combined with trends already under way among Black educators and activists, this also accelerates the formation of The Black Learners' Advisory Committee (BLAC). After conducting and publishing its detailed study of the condition of Black Nova Scotians in the education system (1994), BLAC is absorbed into the provincial Department of Education and Culture, when the African Canadian Services Division is formed.

* * *

This chronology, by definition, could not hope to disclose all the details. Its aim has been not only to inform but, also, to provide a tool for framing further questions and seeking particular answers, or at least finding starting points. Readers may notice, however, a deliberate and concerted effort to find and assemble as many useful and interesting numerical specifics and corroborating details.

Thereby hangs a tale and an important lesson. Much of the activity and life of the Black communities is not available in the historical record. Some of the written record that did exist has been effaced. Earlier this decade, for example, at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, index cards relating to its collections on Black history were deliberately destroyed.

Much of the Black Nova Scotian historical experience has been retained only as oral tradition, and then lost as the community elders passed on. This raises the necessity to finish, in earnest, the written and audiovisual preservation of those stories, the evidence of things lived.

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Book reviews

Even the Dead: poems, parables and a jeremiad

By JEREMY CRONIN (Western Cape, Mayibuye Books/Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip Publishers, 1997).

'With the words "after" and "goes" / The question at least proves ...': Jeremy Cronin opens his verse rendition of 'Five thoughts concerning the question: "what happens after Mandela goes?"'. The programme of thoughts that follows considers such retrospective presentiments on 'after' and 'goes' as iconography (2), loss (3), party politics (4), democracy (5), and concludes with 'words that should be thoroughly mistrusted: "identity", "we have always" and "in the image of". / Not to mention: / "Crown prince".' Cronin's 'Five thoughts' is included in the new collection of his poetry, *Even the Dead: poems, parables and a jeremiad*. Set amid other verses – poems and parables – that describe 'three reasons for a mixed, umrabulo, round-the-corner poetry', or May Day commemorations in 1984 and 1986, 'Joe Slovo's favourite joke' and assorted 'troubles' with revolutionism, reformism and certain marxists, the words 'after' and 'goes' provocatively argue the complications of history that lie behind and ahead of the 'new South Africa' – the jeremiad of amnesia and truth-telling that gives the volume its title, 'even the dead'. *Even the Dead* argues on behalf of a narrative in lyric form that would retell the translations of the political struggle in and for South Africa from a national liberation movement in league with the internationalism of socialism to the new imperative of meeting the demands of globalisation and free market economies. 'Structurally adjusted amnesia', Cronin calls one such narrative in the title poem.

Even as *Even the Dead* was published, however, Cronin, who is deputy secretary general of the South African Communist Party and a

member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC, was publishing, together with Blade Nzimande, a critique of the ANC's discussion document concerning proposals for South Africa's revised political economic programme (*African Communist*, 146, 1997). And Cronin would be taken to task by conservative members of the ANC who called in turn for a questioning of the 'dual loyalties of ANC members who are also communists' (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 3 October 1997). The second half of the year 1997 was a period rife with discussion documents and their debate: the new South African government elected in historic polls in spring 1994 had been in place for just over three years; its reconstruction and development programme (RDP) had given way to a GEAR (growth, employment and redistribution) strategy; the ANC was preparing its fiftieth national conference, held at Mafikeng in December, and Nelson Mandela had already announced that he would not seek popular presidential reappointment when the next national elections were held in 1999. Indeed, Mandela's report to the conference was at once a success story and a resignation speech, the announcement of succession and a successor, and the reassignments of certain political positions and priorities of the national liberation movement as it consolidated its role as a national government. And the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was moving into its final phases, concluding grantings of amnesties and hearing the sensational testimonies from and about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, as well as the equally controversial, but rather less notorious, submissions concerning the ongoing relations between 'business and apartheid'. Both the ANC and Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) presented substantial documentation to the Commission, arguing the historic connections between capital and the racial policies of the apartheid regime. Documents, that is, proliferated throughout the last half of 1997.

Even the Dead, 'poems, parables and a jeremiad', is just as dynamic and historic a document in its own write, its own right – for it has significantly to do with both writing and rights. As the Cosatu report to the TRC maintained, 'the struggle for basic trade union rights on the factory floor' is intimately connected to the 'struggle for human rights in society'. Divided into three sections, entitled 'Explaining some things', 'Moorage' and 'Even the dead', Cronin's collection embraces in verse and prose poetry the years from 1984 to 1997, and at once lyricises their travails and travesties, epigraphises their momentum and narrates a history in the making. Cronin's first volume of poetry, *Inside* (1983), written largely from within prison, had been published the year before the chronicle told in 'even the dead' was initiated. *Inside*'s poems had told from within cell confines of the already storied struggle in South Africa – Soweto's sappers, the language of self remade in resistant mirror images; it inquired into deaths in detention and asked

after family connections that could be traced to the laying of telegraph lines across the southern part of the continent, begun in the late nineteenth century. *Inside* combined poems of personal intimacy with pronouncements of political camaraderie. Composed in cells as they might have been, the verses were also produced from the shop floor, as 'Walking on air' tells it:

> In the prison workshop, also and otherwise named [seminar room], where work is done by enforced dosage, between political discussion, theoretical discussion, tactical discussion, bemoaning of life without women, sawdust up the nose, while raging at bench 4, for a week long, a discussion raging, above the hum of the exhaust fans, on how to distinguish the concept 'Productive' from the concept ... 'Unproductive labour' ... (*Inside*, 5)

The story of John Matthews, who wasn't in Kliptown in 1995 'when the People's Congress adopted the Freedom Charter' but had been 'there the day before, he built the platform', follows, 'pieced together, here from many months, from the prison workshop'. (*Inside*, 6)

Even the Dead now again does all of this – political, theoretical, tactical discussion, life with and without women – it is a 'discussion raging', and more too, perhaps, in its tale of the struggle to make the 'too good to be true' become true ('Moorage'). A line from the same poem describes the valiant effort 'To live close to every tree you had ever planted', an effort that requires new platforms, such as that of the 'You-Dee-Eff' whereby 'nouns turned into verbs' and 'syllabised words grew from initials' and there were 'agitators lurking behind acronyms'. Other poets are called on to assist in the lettered project, as in 'A reply to Pablo Neruda':

> He instructed his tongue in the difference between we-simple
> (meaning us), and
> we-royal (meaning I).
> He came to accept that this was more than a question of grammar.

'Even the dead', the title poem, closes the volume with powerful admonitions against the collapse of amnesty into amnesia – syntagmatic or paradigmatic, CNN's globalised amnesia, the Gulf war's lobotomised amnesia, Third World structurally adjusted amnesia, Hollywood's milk of amnesia. Amnesia, 'even the dead' insists, 'has no cut-off date'.

In its voluminous and meticulously documented submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in November 1997, Cosatu concluded with the public challenge: 'we will judge South African employers on the basis of full disclosure and how they behave in the future on issues such as basic trade union rights, the closing of the apartheid wage gap and allocating resources for the training of

workers, especially African and women workers'. 'Even the dead' – the poem – begins with citations from two of Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the philosophy of history'. Part of a documentary narrative, a history of poetry, labour organising and political struggle, *Even the Dead* – the book, its poems, parables and jeremiad – is itself an enactment of another of those theses, thesis VIII, that is: 'it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency'. In other words, 'what happens' next, 'after' something 'goes'? *Even the Dead*'s poetry makes it somehow matter.

University of Texas at Austin BARBARA HARLOW

James Joyce, Ulysses, and the construction of Jewish Identity: culture, biography, and 'the Jew' in modernist Europe

By NEIL R. DAVISON (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997). 305pp. £35.

This study is far more than another volume of literary criticism on *Ulysses*, and for once the specific and general claims of the title are well served. For this is at once an exhaustive investigation of Jewish motifs in Ulysses; a biographical study of Joyce's formative experience of nationalism and ethnically-founded prejudice, and also an intricate examination of anti-Semitism and negative stereotypes of Jews circulating from the 1880s until the early 1920s.

Davison has woven together a variety of themes in what is throughout a highly readable text. What results is an impression of the complexity of Joyce as an artist and individual, but also the complexity of attitudes towards Jews embedded in European culture during this period: an era which witnessed high imperialism, the Boer war, nationalist tensions, the Dreyfus scandal and early forms of fascism. As a medium to explore these issues, Joyce is an ideal subject. A pioneer of high modernist form, he was aware of the academic racism manifested in works by Christian Lassen, Ernest Renan and Silvestre de Sacy which circulated in European intellectual circles. Yet with the artist's talent for assimilating and interrogating a broad experience, he was equally fascinated (and repelled) by popular manifestations of anti-Semitism such as 'the Jewish nigger'.

From his early and secondary education at the Jesuit-run school Clongowes and later Belvedere, Joyce was introduced to positive Old Testament images of the Hebrew patriarchs which were emphasised by the school as images of martyrdom prefiguring the crucifixion. At the same time, he was reading the ambiguous Jewish representations in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *The Merchant of Venice* which combine stereotypical anti-Semitic images with more positive acts by Jews (in the repetition of another old image, 'the Jew's daughter'). By Joyce's

time at University College, Dublin, these images had coalesced with his dislike of the heavy paternalism of the Catholic Church, partly fostered by his father's nationalist politics. John Joyce, an ardent 'home rule' nationalist, blamed both the church and the nationalist movement for turning against Parnell who, significantly, in Irish nationalist imagery, was often depicted as an Irish Moses.

Armed with this complex of impressions, Joyce observed as the two great political upheavals of his university years unfolded: the Dreyfus scandal and the Boer war. During 1898, Dreyfus's 1894 conviction was publicly challenged in France and, by his second trial in 1899, the affair had become an international *cause célèbre* and had led to anti-Semitic riots on the Paris streets. The common perception of Dreyfus as a Jewish conspirator against the Christian state (a view supported by the Catholic Church in France) unleashed a spate of virulent anti-Semitism perhaps not matched for its institutional and popular embeddedness until the rise of Nazi Germany. Joyce read Zola's robust defence of Dreyfus – *J'accuse* (1898) – and followed events closely in the Dublin-based *Freeman's Journal* and *The Times*.

Despite efforts in *The Times* to represent the anti-Semitism unleashed by the Dreyfus scandal as a particularly French problem, the Boer war had nurtured an equally prejudiced conspiracy paranoia on the English shores of the Channel. This depicted 'Jewish business practices' backed by an international financial network as an 'Asiatic' plot eating away at the fabric of empire from its very heart. Since the earliest origins of the Boer war, liberal British voices saw such a network of Jewish financiers as provoking the war. Their counterpart in Ireland was furnished by a former friend of Joyce, Oliver Gogarty, whose series of articles for Sinn Féin entitled 'Ugly England' he reviewed. The second essay accuses the Jews of London and Dublin of conspiring economically to control both cities and, ultimately, the empire. Indeed, one finds the leader of the Sinn Féin movement, Arthur Griffiths, defending the instigators of anti-Jewish action in Ireland and, in response to the Dreyfus affair, observing that 'all Jewry [was] seeking to ruin France'. Joyce's reaction to such rhetoric was to call it the 'pap of racial hatred'.

Davison really must be congratulated on the accomplished way he traces the interconnections between economic, racial, imperial and national anxieties that lay behind this anti-Semitic hysteria, as well as the older Jewish myths that are redeployed to serve new ends. But more than this, he demonstrates convincingly through his biographical analysis how these discourses affected Joyce's intellectual development and aesthetic sensibility. By the time Joyce had begun his self-exile in Trieste, he had accumulated a considerable knowledge of nationalist and historical anti-Semitism, which influenced his own philosophical investigations.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Joyce encountered Matthew Arnold's

dichotomy between Hebraism and Hellenism. Little concerned with the political realities of life for Jews in Europe, Arnold theorised that Hebraism equates to the puritanical fervour of British christianity which 'sets doing above knowing': rules and rituals which foster devotion and self-control, above all, obedience to God. Contrary to this, he posits Hellenism as the creative urge, of ideals and innovation. Arnold's motive was to claim that a revitalised Hellenism was needed to balance a restrictive Hebraic tendency that had gained the upper hand in British culture, thence revitalising the British empire. Such a programme to an Irishman could only be ambivalent; but Joyce was enticed by the sense of balance that Arnold's work seemed to call for at a more general level. Indeed, it was in such spirit that Joyce called for the Hellenisation of Ireland, in the sense of being open to European ideas to counter the nationalists' narrow conception of ethnic and cultural Irishness.

From Nietzsche, Joyce was to find a very different view of Jewishness in European history. Davison takes great care to establish Nietzsche's own revulsion to anti-Semitism which provoked the anger he showed towards his sister's marriage to the proto-fascist Bernhard Foster. Indeed, Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* observed that Nietzsche was one of the few philosophers to recognise the important role played by emancipated Jewry in Europe, an 'inter-European, non-national element in a world of growing or existing nations'. As Davison suggests, Joyce was already strongly adverse to the parochialism of nationalism and what he saw as a conservative church. His ideal of the 'European' transcending such limitations both intellectually and aesthetically drew upon the Hellenising impetus he found in Arnold which, under the influence of Nietzsche's work, became positively focused on the cosmopolitan figure of the Jew. By the time Joyce began to mingle with a real Jewish community in Trieste, the experiential and creative foundations had been laid for the complex characterisation of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*. It is only after exhaustively tracing Bloom's gestation in Joyce's mind that Davison concludes his study in a penetrating reading of the novel which identifies each nuance of Joyce's engagement with contemporary nationalistic, racial and religious constructions of Jewishness.

In a short review it is impossible to do justice to the level of scholarship which Davison demonstrates here, while retaining throughout an essential accessibility. Equally valuable to students of Joyce as well as European culture and history of this period, it is by no means closed to the more general reader. Davison produces an extremely persuasive argument for the myriad sources and experiences which culminated in the characterisation of Bloom, and the creative impetus for *Ulysses* as a whole.

University of Sussex LAWRENCE PHILLIPS

contiguous with the imperial centre. It was not unusual to go there. Pushkin and Lermontov each wrote poems entitled 'Prisoner of the Caucasus', and a simple children's story by Tolstoy with the same title provides the plot of Sergei Bodrov's recent film, *Prisoner of the Mountains*, set in an unspecified modern conflict (and started before Russia invaded Chechnya in 1994). A beguiling but idealised treatment, its reception here reminded me how few reference points we have for the Caucasus or Central Asia. They are mainly works by establishment figures, like Lord Curzon (*Russia in Central Asia in 1889*, on the Russian slaughter of the Tekke Turkmens at Gök Tepe), or Sir Fitzroy Maclean, on the cities of the Silk Road in what became Uzbekistan.

Crucifying the Orient is a valuable corrective, very much a post-Soviet book. From early debates between Pan-Slavism and a vision of Russia 'more European than Europe', through the recurrent tendency for Russians to project on to their 'others' the negative 'oriental' characteristics imputed to themselves, to her critique of Soviet cultural and linguistic policies on the 'nationalities', Sahni imposes new perspectives. Reading her chapter on 'The praxis of marxism' may represent what someone called 'a victory of reviewer's conscience over wisdom', but she powerfully indicts the hubristic violence of projects like the forced growing of cotton and the environmental damage it caused. Her final section, 'Reawakening', with its interesting account of the Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov's controversial 1975 book *AziYa*, lacks only an adequate account of contemporary gender issues to balance her critique of their treatment by Soviet writers like Platonov and Paustovsky. (It was recently reported, for instance, that bride abduction persists in Ingushetia, where there are attempts to make it legal.) Today, the people of Semipalatinsk in Khazakhstan, Dostoevsky's place of exile, are facing the effects of forty years of nuclear tests, and Britain has received uranium from Georgia for reprocessing. Kalpana Sahni's book opens the door to a region with which we, too, are connected.

London IMOGEN FORSTER

Dangerous Men: the SAS and popular culture

By JOHN NEWSINGER (Pluto Press, London, 1997). 160pp. £10.99.

Speaking to the *Andersonstown News* (a West Belfast weekly newspaper) when this book was first published, John Newsinger predicted that *Dangerous Men* would be the only book on the SAS not to be a best seller. This was not a self-deprecating remark about the quality of his own research and text. It was a comment on the emergence during the 1980s of an industry around the exploits of this élite death squad of

Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia

By KALPANA SAHNI (Bangkok, Thailand, White Orchid Press; Oslo, Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1997). 344pp. $39.00.

A Moscow museum in the late 1980s: soldiers from an Asian republic, their hats as big as dinner-plates, doggedly trail through the massed treasures of Russian art behind girls in flower-print *shalwar kameez*. This book explains how they all came to be there. Its richness of text and illustration might seem daunting, did it not so vigorously re-centre knowledge about a vast sector of the figmentary 'Orient' in its relations with pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and its successors.

Kalpana Sahni makes us work hard. Most of her sources are Russian, and much of the imaginative literature she discusses is probably unfamiliar to many like me with an interest in this type of study. Gogol's *A Government Inspector* eclipses his *Taras Bulba*, in which the Dnieper Cossacks kill Jews, Poles and Tatars, a generic name still carrying a charge of racial insult. Tolstoy means *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* rather than *The Cossacks*, an early story in which he rejects exoticism for a sober depiction of Russia's military auxiliaries (the 'Terek' or 'Greben' Cossacks of the Caucasus), who have a certain empathy with the people they are used to repress. Tolstoy confronts Russian atrocities, and his last fiction, *Haji Murad*, in which a dissident associate of the freedom-fighter Shamil, defeated in 1864, surrenders while retaining his dignity, like the wild thistle to which he is compared, is an exposé of Tsarist policies. Shamil, however, remains an 'oriental despot', morally comparable with his enemy Nicholas I. The spiritual anguish of Dostoevsky's characters covers his pathological xenophobia, hatred of Islam and support, in spite of penal servitude and exile, for Russian expansionism and chauvinistic Orthodox Christianity.

It is difficult to apprehend Russia's conquest of the region if we are also ignorant of figures like General Yermolov, legendary veteran of the Napoleonic war, Jacobin hero to the Decembrists and the romantic poets Griboedov, Pushkin and Lermontov, and brutal coloniser of Georgia, Chechnya and Dagestan. Sahni sharply exposes the gap between the adulation of Yermolov by the writers, who had first-hand knowledge of his campaigns, and the savagery of Russian repression, in passages that foreshadow her later treatment of the Stalin era. She also establishes the centrality of the Caucasus for Russian artists as a site of the 'sublime', the remote and the picturesque. Comparable with images of Africa or the Alps in the west European imagination as settings for danger, adventure and self-discovery, unlike them it was physically

the British army, an industry characterised by a largely uncritical celebration of the 'last symbol of British national virility'. No mainstream publisher has failed to succumb to the profits to be made from popularising SAS daring and endurance. But the industry extends beyond memoir to film, video, TV programmes, handbooks, history and, of course, fiction, and all these media contribute to the blurring of the real and imaginary, to the construction of the 'myth of the SAS'.

Newsinger's aim is both to scrutinise the myth and to assess its significance as a cultural and political phenomenon. This is an important and long overdue project, and it is accomplished here through a detailed examination of published sources. It has taken time to establish the SAS myth. In the early days, the myth relied on secrecy, racism and an English public school, class-ridden notion of war as adventure. In fact, the SAS's early operations in the Middle East during the second world war were a disaster and in the European 'theatre' the SAS were relatively unimportant. At times SAS units were fighting alongside communist resistance groups (in Italy and France), but they also fought against the communist-led resistance group ELAS (in Greece). In the post-war period of decolonisation, the SAS impact was also dubious, Newsinger argues. The defeat of the communists in Malaya owed more to the enforcement of the Briggs Plan to 'resettle' the rural Chinese population, using vast numbers of troops, police and an array of draconian laws, than to the SAS. The regiment moved on to Oman, Borneo and Yemen, and the verdict is generally the same. Wars of whatever kind are generally won by overwhelming force rather than by small specialist units, although military analysts do not agree among themselves on this point, and the views of those who had reason to fear the SAS are not readily available in the English language.

In the 1970s, the role of the SAS was recast as one of defending Britain against 'terrorism', whether the threat came from the IRA or Palestinians. Aside from reclaiming the Malvinas Islands and the Gulf war, the SAS has continued with counter-terrorism, although, in keeping with 'marketisation', the regiment has become a valuable export both formally and in terms of individual members selling their skills to other states, private armies, the arms trade or protecting the property and lives of the rich. Newsinger provides a number of examples of SAS soldiers, trained in counter-terrorism, becoming accomplished terrorists themselves, as reactionary mercenary forces sought to resist political change, especially in southern Africa. But it is in relation to the conflict in Ireland that most has been written, but perhaps least revealed, about the contemporary SAS.

What is most disturbing is that, in the context of the Irish conflict and presumably others as well, publishers are so ready to reproduce lies about specific operations when they must know the facts have been shown to be otherwise. The Gibraltar killings provide glaring examples

of this in a number of books, but less notorious cases litter the literature, such as in Gulf war hero de la Billière's *Looking for Trouble*. De la Billière was director of the SAS between 1978 and 1984, a period of relative quiet for the regiment as it transferred its skills to the RUC's E4A hit squads. From late 1983, shoot-to-kill operations began in earnest, with the SAS killing ten people over the next fifteen months. But for the first five of de la Billière's years as director, the SAS killed no one in Northern Ireland, except, that is, at the very start of the period. They killed a 16-year-old youth who had discovered an arms cache in a graveyard and reported it to his father, who in turn informed the RUC. The youth returned to the graveyard the next day, only to be shot dead by the SAS. De la Billière insists that the youth 'was clearly IRA' against all the evidence to the contrary. But the prize goes to Paul Bruce's (real name Paul Inman) *Nemesis File* which claims that the regiment was killing Catholics and IRA suspects by the dozen in 1971-2, secretly disposing of the bodies. Odd that no one missed the dead, and odd that this sounds much like recent Unionist claims that, during the Bloody Sunday episode (in which the British army shot dead fourteen civil rights protesters), the IRA smuggled away and secretly buried some of its 'armed' members.

But what *is* the cultural and political significance of all these 'big boys' books', not forgetting that women have started to contribute to the genre lately? Clearly, there is a legitimating function accomplished by many of the books – they serve directly to reinforce official versions of military causes and conflicts, to demonise enemies and to lend a mystique to specialist intelligence and death work. And, of course, they contribute to a (not very far below the surface) 'popular racism' and to the (de)coloniser's view of history. But who reads this stuff and what do they do with it? Is 'civil society' really becoming more 'militarised' in the sense of the exercise of military power and styles of authority?

As always, you want more from a good book. In the case of Newsinger's, it would be useful to know more about the commodification of military 'secrets' and exploits. How many do these books sell and what is the scale of this industry when put alongside Mills and Boon or the detective novel? Inevitably, and especially when it comes to military matters, there are occasions when the interests of publishers are at odds with those of the state, conflicts which are not always containable under the albeit modernised, but still archaic, D-notice system. As Newsinger himself points out, some of the memoirs have landed the authors themselves in considerable trouble with the Ministry of Defence – de la Billière is even banned from visiting the SAS HQ at Hereford. Also, there has been some infighting, with some authors being barred from the regiment's favourite London club. There is now a concerted attempt to reimpose secrecy on the regiment's antics, just in case too many cats get out of the bag. What the new

balance between the political need to justify military action and the commerce of military faction will look like remains an intriguing and underexplored question. Meanwhile, Newsinger has helped to fill a gap in British post-war military history.

The Queen's University of Belfast MIKE TOMLINSON

Viramma: life of an Untouchable

By VIRAMMA and JOSIANE and JEAN LUC RACINE (London, Verso, 1997). 312pp. £14.00.

Rural labourers, poor women, Untouchables, the 'wretched of the earth': their lives are discussed, their votes counted, and their practices theorised by academics in ivory towers. They are subjects of study and politics but rarely approached as human beings.

Viramma: life of an Untouchable is an oral history, told by Viramma herself, a Pariah (English/Portuguese/French rendering of Paraiyar: the largest caste of Dalits in Tamil-speaking areas) woman, singer, mother, midwife and agricultural labourer in Tamil Nadu, southern India. It is an insight into the joys and struggles of her life without the filter of academic theory. The difference is that between autobiography and anthropology, the former a story of a life, the latter a study of lives, almost always observed through an outsider's eyes. The result is astounding. Through a single woman's eyes, we see a world of births, deaths, markets, poverty, theatre, masters and slaves and husbands and wives, told with the passion and nuance of one who has lived the experience rather than mere observations and theories. The work is a personal story of how one women experiences the cross-cutting influences of caste, class, rural life, gender, myth, politics and religion.

Some of Viramma's most poignant stories explain her community's interactions with upper-caste people and with the state. Viramma was asked by her employers of the Reddi caste (high caste landowners of Telugu origin) to breastfeed a child of their house: 'I used to take him to the *ceri* and I fed him like my own child. If I'd cooked beef, I gave him some. He liked the taste and he'd ask for it. And now he's a man, he doesn't respect me and if I'm at his house, in the courtyard, he says to me "Aye! Stop there, you! It smells of Pariah here!"' These interactions beg comparisons with master-slave relationships in the Americas and the rest of the world. On another occasion, a

> civil servant was sitting at a table near the window. When he saw me walking past, he signalled to me to come in. I said to myself that he was a top man, a Sir, a civil servant, and that I should stop out of respect. Maybe he wanted me to sweep the pavement or the

> courtyard. I went into the room, covering my back with my sari and putting my palms together respectfully. And what did I see when I raised my eyes? His dick! A fat dick! He was holding it in one hand and he had money in the other. I screamed. I was trembling all over and I didn't know how to get out of the situation.

Her stories have been reported countless times in newspapers, but none have the same personal insight or impact.

Viramma explains how she and members of her community have been treated in state hospitals, by political parties, police officers and employers and the ugliness and brutality of these interactions. But her story is much more complex than that; it encompasses the games of her childhood, the pain of her first period, the sweetness of her marriage, her hopes for her children, her beliefs in Irsi Katteri, the foetus-eater, the Seven Virgins, dharma. It is all told without the observer's fascination of novelty; they are part of her daily life, as is internalised oppression. 'Look, the government does lots of things for the Haryans. Now there are Pariahs, as I've already told you, in the *ur*, and even pig-keepers, but that doesn't mean they'll be allowed to walk on fire! We wouldn't even think of walking on fire in our dreams, Sinnamma! We know perfectly well it's impossible. We're not clean enough for that!' However, this conviction never seems to prevent Viramma from fighting for recognition of her humanity in public and private realms, and from regarding the caste-society with a certain amount of humour and even derision.

The book is the result of ten years of conversations between Viramma and Josiane Racine, a researcher on popular culture from Tamil Nadu. Nearly all of Racine's input has been ejected and edited to create a flowing narrative, rather than an interview. Racine's presence is only obvious through Viramma's addressing her as 'Sinnamma', an epithet of respect, reflecting Racine's middle-class background. The reader wonders where and how Racine has directed the telling of this tale through a decade-long relationship, but the effect is a powerful story in Viramma's voice. Moreover, Viramma's story escapes any simple categorisation as an example of 'Dalit thinking' or a 'psychology of the oppressed'. Her voice tells of a human experience; what the reader emerges with is a self-portrait of an individual whose perspective is singular and opinionated but whose experience can be generalised to other poor women, Dalits or slaves.

London MALINI SRINIVASAN

Tribute to Martin Carter, 1921-1998

Requiem for Martin
Martin, the exit of death
led you down Streets of Eternity, softly
like the falling tide
that leaves Guyana's foreshore burnished with sunlight
jeweled with crabs, curlews, pikers
and sea gulls married to the wind,
but the tide will rise again
in restless rhythms of awakening
And those who *'bend down listening to the land'*
will forever hear you singing,
'I come to you with a particular gladness...
I come naked as a stone, or a star...'

* * *

I met Martin Carter at the Jagans' home in Kitty in 1949. It was during a dry, summer season when trade winds cooled the Georgetown nights and dray carts with lanterns swinging like lazy pendulums plodded along the sea-wall road on their way to the city markets. I had returned home to Guyana for the first time in nearly six years after studying in the United States. On that historic night I met Cheddi and Janet Jagan, Martin Carter and Sidney King (Eusi). Martin was tall, brown as a seasoned mora nut, his hair wild and curling, and he had large Diego Rivera eyes that seemed specially designed to scan far horizons and long elegant limbs that were at ease with themselves. And when he spoke, it was as though his tongue softened syllables in chosen words before he uttered them. There was an easy camaraderie born of shared convictions and pristine dreams of Guyana's liberation from colonial rule, binding this group together. The nickname of 'Show-boy' that youths in Accra had given Nkrumah would have fitted Cheddi Jagan equally as well, because Cheddi was dark, handsome with flashing eyes and thick patent leather hair, curling at its outer extremities. He and his wife Janet had just returned from street corner meetings in Georgetown that night and, once he was at home, his restless energies were reined in. But those eyes of his, looking at you, summed you up, even in moments of repose, and left you in no doubt that he was a born leader, that the passion for justice burning deep inside his fierce heart would never be extinguished.

Sidney (Eusi), tall ascetic, speaking so softly, you had to lean forward to hear what he was saying, looked like a black Jesus and carried an aura of gentleness around with him, but you sensed that there was an implacable resolution at the core of that gentleness. Janet, dwarfed when she was standing beside Martin and Sidney (Eusi), had a beauty and a passionate sense of commitment that set her apart from the rather plain and quiescent females that the colonial proconsuls more often than not chose as wives. It did not take me long to discover that this group had brought something new to Guyanese politics – a new and ineluctable dedication to the cause of colonial freedom, an innate modesty and a profound respect for the people. Our conversation that night centred on the Political Action Committee bulletin, and how it could be improved. That was half a century ago – a blink of an eye in historical time. Marx once said that history always repeats itself, the first time is tragedy, and the next farce. Today, there are those who seem to be making every effort to prove Marx right.

* * *

'In the cold earth, in the cold, dark earth, time plants seeds of anger ...' Martin sang out in his *Death of a Slave* and, in dignifying the martyrdom of an anonymous slave, he was also according a new kind of dignity to countless Guyanese heroes and heroines down the centuries – the forgotten ones who had come from all walks of life and from far corners of the earth. They had come and mingled with the people of the First Nation – the Amerindians.

The Jamaican poet and novelist Andrew Salkey said, in the preface to one of the anthologies of poetry he edited, that writers, artists and musicians make sense of our unique and complex Caribbean experience of life, and shed new light on our society. Martin Carter's poetry, therefore, is like the sheet lightning that illuminates dark Guyanese skies at the beginning of the rainy season. This analogy is very apt, because great poetry *is* like lightning, and lightning is never timid. It flashes and sheds light in the midst of darkness and great turmoil in the heavens.

Martin Carter is, in a very profound sense, the poet of Guyana's awakening, a Guyana that was rousing itself from the cruel torpor of colonialism, slavery and the imposition of indentured labour. It was a country whose population was slowly disappearing since, as late as the 1930s, the death rate had begun to exceed the birth rate. But louder than bugles at reveille were voices of hope and affirmation, echoing the rebellious ones of ancestors who had fought and died for our freedom. Cheddi Jagan's lone voice in the Legislature in the 1940s, defying the might of the British empire, was a call to arms that Martin Carter and the brightest, the best of his generation, answered.

Sugarcane and slavery! Sugarcane and indentured labour! What George Lamming described as 'that mischievous gift, the sugarcane', bequeathed to our society its deformities, its epic of resistance, survival and affirmation, its images of itself that its writers and artists would create. Walter Rodney would later point out in his *History of the Guyanese Working People* that human labour 'humanised' the Guyanese coastal landscapes when, for every square mile of land empoldered, thirty-six miles of canals were dug and a hundred million tons of earth removed.

Martin Carter's poetic voice spoke to us across the real and imagined divisions of race, class, caste and religion, and it spoke with an amazing tonal range and resonance. There were his pamphleteering *Poems of Resistance* and his *Poems of Shape and Motion.* There were also what I call his 'poems of reflection'. Here are two very revealing excerpts from his poems of reflection. The first is from his poem 'Cuyuni' and the second from 'If It Were Given':

> *... far from the noise of language*
> *where gods still live and brood on thrones of rock*
> *If it were given to me*
> *I would have had a serious conversation*
> *with the fertile dial of the clock of the sun.*
> *But then, I admit, I would have had to change the language*
> *of the dead.*

Jules Michelet, the greatest of French historians, tells us that at certain moments in history people throw up leaders who can articulate for them their innermost longings, their hopes and aspirations, and Guyana produced more than its fair share of these voices. But, during that heady period when the British colonialists were playing their old game of divide and conquer, they were also busily seeding animosities and contumely between classes, races, castes, between city-dwellers and folks in the countryside, encouraging Indian nationalism in Guyana while jailing and persecuting Indian nationalists in India.

It was in the midst of this social, political and psychological confusion that Martin Carter's poetic vision evolved through three stages. First, there was his British colonial education, with its overtones of a nineteenth-century English public school, emphasising the classics and passing examinations that were set in the 'Mother Country', and which had little to do with Guyanese life or Guyanese realities. One Senior Cambridge examination question in English literature asked students living in equatorial lowlands to write an essay on 'A day in the snow'. It was at this historical nexus that Martin sang out in his poem 'University of Hunger',

> *I come to you with a particular gladness*

But he also told us in another poem,

> *I come to the world with scars on my soul*
> *wounds on my body, fury in my hands*
> *I turn to the histories of men and*
> *the lives of peoples...*

He took the title 'University of Hunger' from Maxim Gorky's *My Universities*, a series of autobiographical sketches of this Russian writer's wanderings across vast stretches of his country before he finally settled down to write. What is significant about this poem, which begins with cadences akin to music,

> *The University of Hunger is the wide way*
> *The symphony of man is the long march...*

is that, in order to find an authentic Guyanese voice, Martin Carter, like some of the finest intellectuals of his generation, had to go through a period of de-schooling, since the narrow, constricted British colonial education could, otherwise, have burdened them with a legacy of what Austin Clarke described very aptly as 'growing up stupid under the Union Jack'. The intellectuals of Martin Carter's generation, searching for new Guyanese identity, began re-examining the roots of their own culture and, at the same time, they went on journeys of exploration into the world of ideas, and particularly those ideas that the colonial rulers tried to suppress with their all-encompassing laws against 'sedition'. They turned to neglected reservoirs of our culture and began seeing the Amerindian culture, the transplanted African, Hindu, Muslim and European cultures through new eyes. They read works of history, philosophy, political economy, and this included works by Marx, Engels, Hegel, Rilke, Cauldwell, James (CLR), Spengler and Martin Buber. And, the creative spirits among them also read modern American, Russian, French and Latin American literature. And yet, Martin Carter was, in a very real sense, a home-grown poet. Apart from brief sojourns abroad, he lived in Guyana most of his life. Shelley tells us that poets hold up gigantic mirrors in which a society can see creative reflections of itself, and Martin Carter, in the five decades of his adult life, held up a mirror in which Guyanese society saw unique images of itself. The light and shadows in the mirror of his words heightened the images of what we are as a people. He took words from our everyday speech, our oral tradition, mixed them in a crucible of his imagination, and when he gave them back to us, they were touched with magic. His creative alchemy made those words etch themselves on the palimpsest of our minds indelibly.

> *I do not sleep to dream but dream to change the world.*

And then there was his deeply moving eulogy to the Enmore martyrs:

Enmore, five years after,
and yet my city had no heart...

Martin Carter's political awakening marked the second stage in the evolution of his poetic vision and he became our first important revolutionary poet, and what he did as a revolutionary poet was this: he used words, images, incendiary ideas like etching knives to tear across minds caught up in a dreaming torpor.

I come from the nigger yard of yesterday
leaping from the oppressor's hate and the scorn of myself...

I take again my nigger life, my scorn
and fling it in the face of those who hate me

He crafts words, images, symbols, ideas and throws them back at us:

jumping shadows...
the combustion of my days...
morning locked against the sun...
houses tight with sickness...
oceans of memory sinking in the sand...
the prostrate coughing hour...

What fantastic images these random lines from his poems conjure up! Quite inadvertently, he was creating a new language, one with words that we could speak aloud and listen to inside the mind's ear at the same time. And this takes us to the third stage in the evolution of Martin Carter's poetic vision, when he abandoned rigid ideologies during a tempestuous period in which Guyanese society was acting like a scorpion trying to sting itself to death. It was a time when the pristine dream of independence from colonial rule and freedom for all had turned into a nightmare of internecine strife and repression, when the posturings and grotesqueries of a neo-colonial dictatorship had become the order of the day.

'This I have learned,' Martin Carter had cried out with a prophetic voice,

today a speck
tomorrow a hero
hero or monster
you are consumed...

For decades, Martin Carter, instead of leaving Guyana as so many others had done, remained and protected himself behind a shield of cynicism. But in the midst of social and political strife and a dictatorship that used murder as an instrument of policy for the first time since the epoch of slavery, his poetic voice rang out like bells of the Angelus, and he sang for us in his *Poems of Shape and Motion*,

I was wondering if I could shape this passion
just as I wanted, in solid fire...

I was wondering if I could make myself
nothing but fire, pure and incorruptible...

I was wondering if I could find myself
all that I am in all that I could be...

And then, later, much later, as though penning a prologue to a requiem he wrote,

The birds are swift
and the skies are blue like silk...

Great poets have a mighty fire inside them that can take words as brittle as charcoal, and turn them into diamond, and this is exactly what Martin Carter did, and in doing this, he left us a fitting obituary, for one of the great revolutionary poets of his generation,

Death must not find us thinking that we die...

As our foremost revolutionary poet, Martin Carter's peers are Hikmet, Neruda, Mistral, Vallejo, Roger Mais, Andrew Salkey – the list is open-ended – we must not allow his legacy to perish because of our indifference. He led us down paths of hope and despair but his profound humanity, his courage, his passion for truth, the sheer power of his talent dimmed the despair and brightened the hope.

West Chester, PA JAN CAREW

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