



**RACE &
CLASS**

**The ancient world
and Africa**
BASIL DAVIDSON

**Class conflict and tragic vision
in an African novel**
**Britain and the international
repression trade**

Fidel's Cuba

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Number 2

The ancient world and Africa: whose roots? BASIL DAVIDSON	1
Beyond race: class conflict and tragic vision in an African novel JOHN CONTEH-MORGAN	17
The killing machine: Britain and the international repression trade PAUL GORDON	31
Asking the right questions about Cuba SAUL LANDAU	53
Notes and documents	69
UK commentary: Racial harassment, housing and community action (Unmesh Desai) 69	
Drama as a rehearsal for revolution: an interview with Alan Glinoga of PETA 76	
Book reviews	83
Robert Leeson: socialist storyteller: a review article (John Newsinger) 83	
<i>The New Zealand wars and the Victorian interpretation of racial conflict</i> by James Belich (Angela Sherlock) 89	
<i>Hidden struggles in rural South Africa: politics and popular movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930</i> by William Beinart and Colin Bundy (Busi Chaane) 92	

- Kimathi's letters: a profile of patriotic courage*
by Maina Wa Kinyatti (Nancy Murray) 94
- Long gone: the Mecklenburg Six and the theme of
escape in black folklore* by Daryl Cumber Dance
(Cedric Robinson) 96
- Black American politics: from the Washington marches
to Jesse Jackson* by Manning Marable (Louis
Kushnick) 98
- Race, class and politics: essays on American
colonial and revolutionary society* by Gary B.
Nash (Mary Ellison) 100
- They won't take me alive: Salvadorean women in
struggle for national liberation* by Claribel
Alegria (Imogen Forster) 102
- Is the future female? Troubled thoughts on
contemporary feminism* by Lynne Segal (Jenny
Bourne) 103
- Churches in struggle: liberation theologies
and social change in North America* edited by William K.
Tabb (Paul Grant) 105
- Shattering illusions: West Indians in British
politics* by Trevor Carter (Paul Okojie) 107

Books received

109

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The ancient world and Africa: whose roots?

To a television series about the history of the Africans which I lately had the good fortune to be able to present to a wide public in many countries, more than thirty countries I am told, there were of course some protests and objections. Surprisingly, however, these were fewer than I had expected. Mostly they came from persons of evidently fixed opinions who clearly knew little or nothing of the subject of the programmes, and who made up for their astonishment at being shown that Africans have a history of their own by accusing me of bias, exaggeration or sentimental frailty. A few were from white South Africans in this country or former Rhodesian settlers, foreseeably couched in the kind of gutter language one has learned to expect from such quarters. And several were from otherwise sympathetic viewers who had oddly convinced themselves that black history could be written only by a black historian. One of these even went so far, although politely, as to suggest that the series in question should have been presented by my late friend and colleague Cheik Anta Diop, who was certainly a notable historian but who spoke no English.

None of these objections has seemed to me to warrant serious argument, but there was another, far more solidly based in European culture, which undoubtedly does warrant such argument and in which, as I think, one can find some of the crucial origins of established or intellectual denial of value to the cultures of Africa. This objection, heard from a

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Race & Class, XXIX, 2(1987)

number of viewers in Europe and North America, was against a central theme in the series. This theme portrayed Egypt of the Pharaohs, Ancient Egypt before conquest by the Arabs in the seventh century AD, as a country of black origins and population whose original ancestors had come from the lands of the great interior, and whose links with inner Africa remained potent and continuous. To affirm this, of course, is to offend nearly all established historiographical orthodoxy. The Ancient Egyptians, by that orthodoxy, were not only not black – in whatever pigmentational variant of non-white that Nature may have provided – but they were also not Africans. To say otherwise must be so mistaken, one has gathered, as to be patently absurd.

But isn't Egypt, other issues apart, quite simply a part of Africa? That, it seems, is a merely geographical irrelevance. The civilisation of Pharaonic Egypt, arising sometime around 3500BC and continuing at least until the Roman dispossessions, has been explained to us as evolving either in more or less total isolation from Africa or as a product of West Asian stimulus. On this deeply held view, the land of Ancient Egypt appears to have detached itself from the delta of the Nile, some five and a half thousand years ago, and sailed off into the Mediterranean on a course veering broadly towards the coasts of Syria. And there it apparently remained, floating somewhere in the seas of the Levant, until Arab conquerors hauled it back to where it had once belonged.

Now what is one to make of this unlikely view of the case, coming as it has from venerable seats of learning? Does its strength derive from a long tradition of research and explanation? Is it what Europeans have always thought to be true? Have the records of ancient times been found to support it? As Martin Bernal has now most ably shown in his *Black Athena*,* the remarkable book about which I am chiefly writing here, the answer to such questions is plainly and unequivocally in the negative. That the Ancient Egyptians were black (again, in any variant you may prefer) – or, as I myself think it more useful to say, were African – is a belief which has been denied in Europe since about 1830, not before. It is a denial, in short, that belongs to the rise of modern European imperialism, and has to be explained in terms of the 'new racism', specifically and even frantically an anti-black racism, which went together with and was consistently nourished by that imperialism. I say 'new racism' because it followed and further expanded the older racism which spread around Europe after the Atlantic slave trade had reached its high point of 'take off' in about 1630. Was there no racism, then, before that? The point is complex and can be argued elsewhere: essentially, however, the answer to this is also in the negative. Before the Atlantic

*Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic roots of classical civilisation*. Vol. 1 'The fabrication of ancient Greece, 1785-1985' (London, Free Association Books, 1987).

slave trade, and before its capitalism, there was plenty of ancient xenophobia, fear of 'blackness', association of blackness with the Devil, and so on and so forth; but none of this was the racism that we know.

The racism that we know was born in Europe and America from the cultural need to justify doing to black people, doing to Africans, what could not morally or legally be done to white people, and least of all to Europeans. To justify the enslavement of Africans, in short, it was culturally necessary to believe, or be able to believe, that Africans were inherently and naturally less than human but were beings of a somehow sub-human, non-human, nature. That was the cultural basis, in this context, of the slave trade and of the modern imperialism in Africa which followed the slave trade. The racism that we know, accordingly, was altogether different from ancient xenophobia or superstitious 'fears of the Dark': its core and motivation were to act as a weapon of dispossession and exploitation. And its success in this dehumanising project needs no demonstration here, for it is obvious in our culture to this day.

The consequences of this need to condemn Africans as less than human – and how otherwise justify enslaving and then invading them? – have been many and various. Among these consequences, logically enough, has been a denial of the Africans' possible possession of histories of their own, and thus of common humanity with other peoples elsewhere. Not surprisingly, this denial began to be heard from eminent spokesmen in Europe as soon as Europe's modern imperialism imposed a corresponding need to structure and systematise its attitudes to overseas conquest and imperialist enclosure. In the year that France invades Algeria, for example, we find Hegel appropriately lecturing at Jena on this very subject. He knows nothing of Africa, has never been there, is oblivious to all the older sources of African knowledge that were extant then as now. Never mind: in 1830 he is able to say, in a course of lectures which were celebrated for generations after they were given, that 'the Negro ... exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state ... for [Africa] is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit ...' And one grave academic after another, one belauded explorer after another returning to the plaudits of a Grateful Nation, went on duly to explain that Africans had no history because Africans were insufficiently human. They were grown-up children who had failed to develop into adulthood. There was something missing in the frontal lobes of the African brain. They might seem to copy but could not invent, and even their copying was a masquerade. Such stereotypes filled book after book.

Then what about Ancient Egypt, universally held before the 1830s to be African, and the source of Europe's own civilising process by way of the Greeks? How could that belief be squared with the 'grown-up children' stereotypes? The questions were heard and briskly dealt with. After the 1830s Ancient Egypt ceased to be seen as part of Africa, and

4 *Race & Class*

Pharaonic civilisation ceased to be an aspect of Africa's development and initiative. As for the Ancient Egyptians, the builders of the Pyramids and of the greatest civilisation of High Antiquity, they were steadily reduced to the status of a rather feeble bunch of mystics and magicians.

This operation, consciously or not in the minds of those who made it, was the required adjunct of another. It flowed from the need – as we can see it now, the racist-motivated need – to overthrow the hitherto accepted version of Europe's civilising origin and process. This Ancient Model, as Bernal calls it, had accepted as self-evident that European civilisation, launched from Classical Greece in the sixth century BC, was essentially and inseparably though not exclusively the product of older civilisations, above all those of Egypt and Phoenicia. This Ancient Model, as Bernal is careful to insist, gave full credit to the moral and intellectual achievements of Classical Greece, but it still saw these as being initially derived from Egypt, and to a lesser extent from the centres of Phoenician civilisation. It taught that the founding beliefs of Classical Greece, like the mathematics and astronomy of Classical Greece, had for the most part come from Egypt. And Egypt being accepted as an African country, they had thus come from Africa.

Such had been the traditional view of the matter. It had been questioned by no sufficient need to dehumanise Africans, at least until late in the seventeenth century when the slave trade began to prick at Christian consciences; and even as late as that it remained a view of history which was scarcely questioned. And this was not surprising, for the Ancient Model (it is Bernal's useful term) was based on solid historiographical evidence. This evidence was no other and no less than what the historians of Classical Greece had themselves accepted as fact. Without exception, so far as surviving texts can show, every Greek thinker of the Classical Age looked to Egypt for inspiration and guidance, and accepted the cultural primacy of Egypt.

The philosophers and propagandists of the new imperialism could obviously not accept such views. They set about constructing a new model of Europe's civilising process, an Aryan Model (again Bernal's useful term). This proposed, and increasingly asserted with an intellectual arrogance perfectly in tune with the new imperialism, that Classical Greece had been the pure and original source and creator of all that was civilised in Europe: of all the arts of government and the values of freedom, of all the gods that men should worship and the teachings they should follow. These nineteenth-century proponents of racism, of racist discrimination as a systemic weapon of oppression, were thus obliged to shove whatever the ancient Greeks had thought and written about African origins right under their academic carpet, and lose it there. As Bernal says in his illuminating treatment of this operation, 'the more the nineteenth century admired the Greeks, the less it respected their writing of their own history'.

But if this newly created Aryan Model of Europe's civilising origins responded to European nineteenth-century needs, it was not, of course, entirely mistaken. Linguistic studies duly showed that the language of the Classical Greeks, as of modern Greeks, is one of a wide language family which linguists know as Indo-European: speakers of one or other derivative of 'original Indo-European' had ranged from an 'Aryan heartland', never quite fixed but supposedly in Eastern Europe or Western Asia, right across our continent to the shores of the Atlantic, the Celtic languages being those that have survived farthest to the west. It was further found to be true, moreover, that speakers of the Indo-European parent of Greek had entered Greece in large numbers at some time before the emergence of Classical civilisation. The simplicity of the Ancient Model, which had derived Greek civilisation from Egyptian and Phoenician exemplars as well as from Egyptian and Phoenician settlements in pre-Classical Greece, had therefore become clearly insufficient. Bernal deals with all this in lucid fashion and great detail, and proposes a Revised Ancient Model; this maintains the essence of the Ancient Model while accommodating the Indo-European evidence.

My brief foray here into this subject of vast complexity is concerned primarily to draw attention to *Black Athena*, Bernal's far-ranging treatment; and indeed I know of no other work of such value. Bernal asks us to follow him through difficult terrain, but the effort is well repaid. Travelling with Bernal seems to me to offer the same kind of impact, for everyone involved in the problems of race and class, as another moment held for me, long ago, when at last I reached the iron-slag mounds of Meroë and knew that everything the books had taught me about history in Africa would have to be thought anew. This is the main thing I want to say. But I also want to pursue some other points a little further.

* * *

As his title indicates, Bernal's overall objective is to re-establish the place of Egypt, and thus of Africa, in the moral and cultural development of Classical Greek civilisation in which Europe has seen, and generally persists in seeing, its founding parentage. He does this with an immense erudition, respect for sources, and notable linguistic scholarship, and I shall make no effort here to track the route he follows. As he himself remarks, any attempt to summarise 'the complications of this vast and extraordinarily ramified theme can best be described by the Chinese expression "looking at flowers from horseback"'. Even so, some of the flowers along the way are enough to make one pause and dismount.

To begin with, there is the evidence of what the Greeks themselves thought; and this is really very awkward for our racists. The Greeks all agreed upon the cultural supremacy of Pharaonic civilisation, and the ways in which they wrote about this clearly show that they would have

thought it absurd to advance a contrary opinion. Herodotus of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, for example, was born around 490BC and wrote his great world histories some forty years later. Several of his nine books, but especially the second, have much to say on Egypt and Africa, and were composed after the long sojourn in Egypt which all Greek scholars of that time thought desirable or entirely necessary.¹ And they thought this, one may remark in passing, for the most persuasive reason that Egyptian civilisation enjoyed a towering prestige and influence, and seemed of immemorial weight and value. Their grasp of exact historical chronology could not be as good as ours, but they were perfectly alive to Egypt's immense time dimension: not surprisingly, for 2,000 years had passed since the building of the Pyramids at Gizeh, or as much time – even if they knew it less precisely than we do – as has passed for us since the threshold of the Christian era. For the Greeks of the Classical Age, Egypt was where one went to learn history.

The same writers likewise took it for well-established fact that the Greeks had learnt their civilisation from the same source, and that this had come about, in some degree, because Egyptians had formed settlements in Greece in earlier centuries. Herodotus simply assumed that his readers would know this. 'How it happened', he wrote, 'that Egyptians came to the Peloponnese [southern Greece] and formed settlements there, and what they did to make themselves kings in that part of Greece, has been chronicled by other writers. I will therefore add nothing but proceed to mention some points which no one else has yet touched upon.' For example, 'the names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt'. Moreover, 'it was only, if I may so put it, the day before yesterday that the Greeks came to know the origin and form of the various gods ... for Homer and Hesiod, the poets who composed our theogonies and described the gods for us ... lived, as I believe, not more than 400 years ago.'

The philosophers and mathematicians were in full agreement. Pythagoras spent no fewer than twenty-one years in Egypt. Aristotle said that 'Egypt was the cradle of mathematics'. Eudoxus, Aristotle's teacher and a foremost mathematician of his time, had likewise studied in Egypt before teaching in Greece. Isokrates and Plato were profoundly influenced by Egyptian philosophy. Euclid, again, learned mathematics in Egypt before applying them elsewhere. And who could be surprised? For the pyramids and temples of the Nile were not built by guesswork or rule of thumb. They were built by the use of mathematical propositions which the Egyptians had discovered and proven. How otherwise could it have come about that the difference in length between the shortest base-side of the Great Pyramid at Gizeh (c2600BC) and the longest side (756.08 inches) is no more than a staggeringly accurate 7.9 inches? Herodotus and the men of his time did not know this,

but they did know that the Great Pyramid was only one of innumerable mathematical marvels to be found in the land of the Pharaohs.

Yet the Greeks of the Classical Age went further. They also affirmed that Pharaonic culture had derived from inner Africa: from the lands of the 'long-lived Ethiopians', as Herodotus wrote, meaning not the people of the country we nowadays call Ethiopia but in general the country of the blacks. This was another Greek belief that went back to the remote origins of Greek culture. Homer's *Iliad* had said it long before, when recounting the visit of Zeus and the rest of the Greek gods to the annual banquet given for all the gods by the gods of the blacks:

For Zeus had yesterday to Ocean's bounds
Set forth to feast with Ethiop's faultless men,
And he was followed there by all the gods ...

Many histories written by the Classical Greeks have long been lost to us. But another which has not been lost is the world history composed by Diodorus Sikeliotes, Diodorus of Sicily, in about 50BC.² 'Now the Ethiopians [that is, the black peoples of Africa], as historians relate, were the first of all men', writes Diodorus in his second book, 'and the proofs of this statement, they [that is, these same Greek historians] say, are manifest'. As for the people of Egypt, adds Diodorus from the same sources, they 'are colonists sent out by the Ethiopians' after, as he explains, the steady annual accumulation of Nile silt had raised the land of Egypt above the level of the waters. 'And the larger part of the customs of the Egyptians, [these historians] hold, are Ethiopian, the colonists still preserving their ancient manners'. Allowing for all the differences of conception that separate us from Diodorus, this is an astonishingly exact statement of what archaeologists now affirm: i.e., that the cultures of the lower Nile, of Egypt proper, were initially derived from Neolithic cultures which first took shape in the then green Sahara of the fifth millennium BC and earlier. Just as Egypt had been the gift of the Nile, in the splendid phrase of Herodotus, so also was inner Africa the cultural begetter of the peoples who accepted the gift. By a marvellous if infinitely diffuse process of social evolution, the cultures of the Saharan Neolithic led on to those of the Pharaonic Nile. In the amazing harvests of Pharaonic achievement that followed, there was no doubt a place for other formative elements, including several from the Near East and Mesopotamia. But the primary heritage from inner Africa seems to come ever more clearly from the archaeological record.

Yet consider the version offered for so long by our schools and universities. Here we have been presented with another Aryan Model, likewise very dear to imperialism. This has preached that any signs of past progress detectable among the black peoples must have been the fruit of outside intrusion, of northern intrusion: in a word, of 'white' intrusion. This supplementary form of the Aryan Model, so handy for

the 'civilising mission' of Europe in Africa, went into countless books and lectures. It was best enunciated in a 'scientific' guise by a British anthropologist of the 1920s, C.G. Seligman, in his *Races of Africa* (London, 1929).

Maintained as proven truth, this view asserted that a people or peoples known as 'Hamites' were responsible for any process of history that might be identifiable in Africa, because the 'Negroes' were too primitive to be able, on their own, to embark on any such process. Apart from relatively recent Semitic influence, Phoenician or Arab, Seligman taught that 'the civilisations of Africa are the civilisations of the Hamites'. And who were and are these pioneering and indispensable Hamites? No problem for Seligman: the Hamites were and are not really Africans at all. They 'are Caucasians, i.e., belong to the same great branch of mankind as almost all Europeans ...' Or again, just to make sure: 'the incoming Hamites were pastoral Causacoids – arriving wave after wave – better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes'. Seligman was following a well-beaten trail. Years earlier in 1912, for example, the German anthropologist Carl Meinhof had explained that 'in the course of [African] history' – at least he admitted that there had been some! – 'it has repeatedly happened that the Hamitic peoples have subjugated and, as a ruling people [*Herrenvolk* in Meinhof's original German], have governed dark pigmented Negroes who spoke languages different from that [*sic*] of the Hamites'.

Seligman, in fact, was reflecting the imperialist culture of his times; and this was as pervasive in academic circles as it was passionately advanced. Thus we have H.E. Egerton, when professor of colonial history at Oxford early in the 1920s, publishing a book in which he defends colonialism as 'the right way ... of dealing with the native problem'. With colonialism, he says, 'What had happened [was] the introduction of order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism'; and one may note in passing just how passionately the adjectives pile up. That was in 1922, and the same theme continued to be struck out loud and clear. So we have Egerton's successor at Oxford, Reginald Coupland, sounding it again late in the 1920s. History in Africa, with him, has to wait to begin until the arrival there of the missionary-explorer David Livingstone. 'A new chapter in the history of Africa began with David Livingstone ... So far, it might be said, Africa proper had had no history.' Ancient Egypt and All That, presumably, was 'Africa improper'? In any case, until the middle of the nineteenth century, 'the main body of Africans ... had stayed, for untold centuries, sunk in barbarism. Such, it might almost seem, had been Nature's decree ... So they remained stagnant, neither going forward nor going back ... The heart of Africa was scarcely beating.' And so it continued – and these men, after all, were the opinion-makers of their time – until well after the Second World War and the beginnings of anti-colonial change in Africa. Even then

there was a rearguard action, notably signalled by Hugh Trevor-Roper (today Lord Dacre) who, when Regius Professor of History at Oxford in 1963, found it perfectly right to provide his own version of Hegel's nonsense of 130 years earlier.

* * *

Now this extension of the European Aryan Model to an entirely comparable African version – to an African Aryan Model for all of Africa-beyond-Egypt – has not been Bernal's concern in this present volume, although he is manifestly well aware of it and of its racist origins and uses. Yet it remains entirely relevant and cognate to Bernal's thesis that this African Aryan Model, as I think he will allow me to call it, has been very largely overthrown during the past thirty years or so. No serious Africanist of today would think of taking Egerton or Coupland or Trevor-Roper for a moment seriously when they speak of Africa's lack of history; and the break-through point here can probably be dated to Onwuka Dike's thesis of 1956 (*Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*), as well as, in a large archaeological sense, to Libby's demonstration of the early 1950s that the C-14 isotope of carbon can be used to provide approximately probable dates of organic materials in archaeological sites otherwise undateable.

No serious Africanist, by the same token, any longer believes in the 'Hamitic hypothesis' of progress in ancient Africa, or even in the existence, now or in the past, of any people properly definable as Hamites. By a nice coincidence of 1963, as it happens, the abolition of the Hamites – however 'Caucasoid' and 'quicker-witted' as Seligman had reassured his readers – began with the publication in that year of J.H. Greenberg's essential *Languages of Africa*,³ and has continued ever since. The Hamites were a myth: 'even the linguistic use of the term Hamite', wrote Greenberg with an authority unchallenged in this context, 'should be abandoned'. Likewise, the then fashionable term Hamito-Semitic for major languages in northern and north-eastern Africa should be dropped as misleading. For these languages Greenberg coined a new term, Afroasiatic; and this has since come into general acceptance, being also used by Bernal in this volume. Yet Afroasiatic can also be misleading for the non-specialist, though certainly less so than Hamito-Semitic, for the Asiatic element in Greenberg's classification applies only to one of the five major groupings in this linguistic family, that of the Arabic which became current in north-eastern Africa only after the middle of the seventh century. The other four linguistic elements in Afroasiatic, as Greenberg lists them, are Egyptian (extinct today), Berber, Cushitic in its five derivative variants, and Chadian: all of them, as you see, thoroughly African. But the Hamites and their Caucasoid quick wits have in any case vanished from the scientific scene.

So have other stereotypes of the racist model. The scholarship of the last thirty years and more has simply tipped them into the dustbin of exploded fantasies. This was not achieved easily or without a lot of stubborn effort; but it has now been achieved beyond any possibility of reversion to those aforesaid fantasies. It may even be claimed that this achievement is among the most significant intellectual advances of the twentieth century. Yet Bernal's treatment of this important aspect of his own subject is disappointingly deficient, being little more than an afterthought at the end of his book. No doubt he has it in mind to put this right in a later volume. As it is, reading his pages in this respect must leave one without the slightest indication of the fact that the study of African history and humanity, in many disciplines, has become the concern of manifold colleges and universities in all the continents, not least in Africa itself. One could not guess that whole libraries of books and papers are now available in one or other field of Africa-centred and Africa-directed research and debate. Bernal refers very briefly, however, only to two or three American historians apart from Cheik Anta Diop. This is, again, surprising in a writer as conscientious as Bernal, for African studies in the USA, where Bernal teaches, had also become impressively wide in their range and distinguished in their level at least by the middle 1960s, while the forthcoming assembly of the American African Studies Association, due this November of 1987, will be its thirtieth annual meeting. Valiantly toppling the Aryan Model for Europe, this sympathetic writer has not yet had time to notice that its partner for Africa has meanwhile bitten the dust.

Has bitten the dust, that is to say, among all serious students of Africa: not yet, by any means, with the non-specialised serious public and much less with any 'general public' in Europe or North America. Hence the objections to the television series mentioned earlier. The news has evidently yet to get through; but there are explanations for this outside any question of inherited prejudice. One of them concerns our almost total ignorance of the developmental relationship which came to exist between the civilisation of the Pharaohs and the peoples of inner Africa, the peoples of 'the land shadowing with wings which lies beyond the rivers of Ethiopia'.

Here is a subject from which historians and archaeologists have tended to shy away, no doubt because of the formidable influence of schools of Egyptology which have had no interest in the question and which, more or less ferociously, have resisted any 'Africanising' of their field of work. Yet it is now a subject which needs tackling if Aryan mythologies of the Hamitic sort are to be finally dismissed. Given, for example, that the origins of Pharaonic civilisation are traceable to the remote Neolithic of the green Sahara, as they increasingly appear to be, what was the manner and the movement of the civilising 'feed back' by that civilisation, in due course of its astonishing development, to the peoples

of the continental interior? Or, if peoples in western Africa possess symbols and beliefs which have been exactly parallel to those of the ancient Nile – to mention only two, the serpent and the ram – who acquired them first? Or if people in southern Africa have used headrests exactly comparable with those of Ancient Egypt, has this been mere coincidence of ‘separate invention’, or, if not, how is it to be explained?

And so on: remote African history is alive with such taunting questions, and very possibly they will never win sufficient answers. Yet it seems to me that their importance in this whole story calls urgently for provisional and tentative answers, and, furthermore, that such answers now begin to be possible. Working suppositions which I believe that many specialists now accept, or more or less accept, are that the geographical locus of all or most of Africa’s ramifying cultures lay, as I remarked above, in the long unfolding of the Saharan Neolithic;⁴ that these cultures manifestly achieved their greatest elaboration and success in Pharaonic Egypt; and that, in one elusive way or another, the consequential ‘feed back’ was shuttled to and fro but became ever more tenuous as desiccation after c2500BC severely continued in the lands to the south and west of the Nile. However one may conceive this process, what emerges today is that one has to think of all these African cultures, those of the Nile certainly included, as belonging to the same capacious arena of this continent’s history.

This is a view of the matter which is still found shocking by the orthodox. That is easily understandable because, like Bernal’s Revised Ancient Model, it calls for the radical and therefore painful re-thinking of many received opinions. It asks for the healing of more than one neurosis in the field of ‘race relations’, above all (at least within Europe, but I suspect elsewhere as well) of the neurosis which has to see black humanity as inherently ‘less’ – add any substantive that you may wish – than white humanity. Here in Britain it remains so widely spread that we shall have to work away at removing it for a long time before its fevers fall.

* * *

To that end, it seems to me, one cannot sufficiently insist that all such racist opinions and neuroses are relatively new – older than Bernal’s Aryan Model, and yet not so very much so. Shakespeare’s *Othello*, for example, was written before the great onset of racism in Northern Europe, and it is not a racist play. It is a play about sexual jealousy, careerism, and hatred of competitive foreigners; and if the Moor was certainly black, he was still the powerful and admired commander of the armies of the Venetian Republic, then the strongest of the city-states of the Mediterranean, and greatly trusted by the masters of that republic. At most, *Othello* in 1603 can be interpreted in a racist sense as

foreshadowing the coming racism of the Atlantic slave trade in Northern Europe (a racism which appeared somewhat earlier in Portugal). Yet before that? Here is one case, to round off these notes on *Black Athena*, which offers a suggestive answer.

What did Europeans think about black people before the rise of racism? How did they estimate the values of black humanity? There are countless indications in the pictorial arts. Think only of the noble portraits of the black monarch among the three kings who journeyed to salute the birth of Christ. Think of the work of the great masters of the Renaissance who painted black persons. Think of Rembrandt, Velasquez, many more. Each of them, without exception, painted black persons from the same standpoint as they painted white persons, whether either of these, white or black, were kings or merchants or ambassadors or servants. Yet none of these paintings, even so, has seemed to me to possess as much persuasive and explanatory power as a medieval statue in the Magdeburger Dom, the majestic thirteenth-century cathedral of the German city which was then the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. This is the statue of a crusader figure, sculpted life size and wearing the chain mail armour of the period.

The statue in fact is of St Maurice, patron saint of Magdeburg, made for the cathedral in about 1240. That in itself is not in the least surprising, for St Maurice was well known to the Middle Ages as a great military saint, and was in this respect the companion of St George. Whether or not he was a real historical person rather than a pious legend, he was widely revered. Said to have been martyred as a Christian legionary commander of late Roman times – for having refused an imperial order to kill one in ten (that is, *decimate* in the Roman meaning of the word) of the soldiers of another legion which had gone into revolt – St Maurice was always referred to as St Maurice of Thebes. This was the Thebes of Egypt, not of Greece, but Maurice nonetheless had always up to now been portrayed as white. Innumerable icons in the churches of Europe had shown him as being as white as any European saint.

Yet here at Magdeburg in 1240, something new occurred. Overnight, as it were, St Maurice became black. He became an African beyond any doubt: not only that, he very certainly became a Nubian, even down to the lineage cuts upon his forehead. Facing his stern and yet warmly protective gaze, you know that you are looking at a man from Nubia, a Nubian crusader in the chain mail likewise worn in Nubia then, but a Nubian, moreover, very clearly regarded as a friend and ally. Now what had happened, and why was this? Nobody as yet, so far as I know, has provided any satisfactory answer drawn from the history of those times. Within the possible limits of this essay, here is a sketch of what the answer surely ought to be.

A few years before this remarkable statue was carved – so manifestly from the life – and placed in the cathedral of Magdeburg, the Holy

Roman Emperor Frederick II had led the sixth of the Christian crusades to recover the Holy Land and Egypt from their Muslim rulers. From his point of view, Frederick managed rather good results from this crusade of 1227-9, although the Pope bitterly denounced him for not managing better; ten years of peace ensued in Palestine and a treaty with the sultan of Egypt, warfare being renewed only in 1239. In any case, it was altogether understandable that the crusade should be commemorated in the emperor's principal place of worship, the cathedral of Magdeburg. And what could be more natural, one may ask, than that it should be commemorated in such a way as to celebrate the crusaders' only religious allies in the distant lands to which they had gone? For the twin kingdoms of Nubia, due south of Egypt, were bastions of Christianity in the early thirteenth century, and had been so for more than six centuries.

These Nubian Christian kingdoms have been largely erased from memory since the fifteenth century, engulfed as they were by Islam after about 1450. But in the time of Frederick II they were an integral part of the Eastern Christian Church, and, as such, had been sporadically at war with the Saracen rulers of Egypt for more than a hundred years. What more probable, even if precise proofs are lacking, than that the Christian Nubians were in fighting alliance with the Crusaders from the West? (Very suggestive evidence to this effect is in fact available, but I will not go into it here.) What more to be expected, then, than that the crusaders of Magdeburg should wish to celebrate their distant ally? What more understandable than that the citizens of Magdeburg, re-dedicating their newly rebuilt cathedral of the late 1230s to Saint Maurice, should honour their patron saint as black, as Nubian?

This, in any case, is exactly what they did. And from then onwards the cult of this black St Maurice spread far and wide across Europe. Black icons of the saint supplanted earlier white icons. And it has seemed to me that there could be no more dramatic and instructive an illustration of the mental abyss, in the whole matter of 'white-black relations', which divided the consciousness of the Middle Ages from the racism of later times.

As it happens, there is an unnoticed English footnote to this German illustration of pre-racist attitudes to powers and persons who were black. Let me at least mention it here, for I have so far tried in vain to find a place to write about it. Medieval England, as everyone knows, shared in the continental European influence and appeal of the Crusades. Knights trekked in from the most remote fiefdoms, and in due course the churches of the period became rich in the effigies of knights who had taken part in the crusading venture. As in many other places, this is what happened in the medieval churches of remote Herefordshire in western England (where, simply to explain, I lately lived). Among these churches is that of the forgotten little parish of Brinsop.

There in Brinsop you will find a superb East Window in which the stained glass of the Middle Ages has wonderfully outlived the assaults of time. And in the centre of this thirteenth-century Brinsop splendour you will see the portrait figure of a knight in armour. About that, in itself, there is again nothing to be surprised – except that the face of the knight is as black as the face of the Magdeburg Maurice. Given the historical context, the conclusion appears so obvious as to be undeniable. No doubt: and yet Brinsop Church is not dedicated to St Maurice, much less to a black St Maurice, nor is there any mention of Maurice in any aspect of the building. The church is dedicated to St George, a very white saint, while the heraldic banner woven by nineteenth-century Herefordshire ladies, and proudly displayed in the nave, likewise portrays the saint in the window as a saint most properly white. Thus does history get stood upon its head.

Now it cannot be proved that Brinsop Church was originally dedicated to St Maurice, nor that the black saint in the East Window is an echo of the black Maurice of Magdeburg. But the contrary cannot be proved either, the records being lost; and we are simply left with the anonymous face of a black saint. So much, after all, has gone beyond recall. The churches of medieval Herefordshire, like others elsewhere, have many crusaders' effigies; seldom or never can any name be added to them. One of the finest of these effigies, as it happens, is in another thirteenth-century church at Moccas, not far from Brinsop: but to put a name to this crusading knight upon his tomb top has to be merest guesswork. One certain fact at Brinsop is that the saint in the East Window has a completely black face, even though his features have long since blurred away. Another certain fact is that the blackness of this saint, in racist times, has been utterly ignored, just as if it were not there at all.

Now a black St Maurice could in no way have shocked or astonished the congregations of the Middle Ages, as so many black icons are there to show. But in racist times any such icon became unthinkable; and the unthinkability continues. Even the devotedly conscientious Nicolaus Pevsner, in the Herefordshire volume of his monumental *Buildings of England* (Penguin 1963), has nothing to say on the subject. Having examined every feature of Brinsop Church with his always exacting care and expertise, Pevsner passes in silence over the blackness of the saint in question, and simply notes that Brinsop East Window has panels of medieval glass, depicting 'especially a St George'. St George, that is, with a black face: and yet no comment. Pevsner himself was not, of course, a racist: on the contrary, he was a refugee from racism in Nazi Germany. On this occasion he was simply reflecting, for sure unconsciously, the racist culture of the times in which he lived and in which we still live. That is why I said that racism has been a weapon, even when innocently used, to stand history upon its head.

Bernal's book is an attempt, a major attempt, to help old history back upon its feet again so that we may better understand later history and our own history. It is a profoundly liberating work because it sheers through the murk of racism, academic or otherwise, that has obscured and confused our conceptions of inter-continental history, just as racism, consciously or not, does this still. I hope that Bernal's book will be very widely read and pondered. One need not consent to everything advanced by Bernal: I do not do so myself. One can find some of his arguments insufficient, and some of his arrows wrongly aimed. His is a book to argue with as well as to agree with; and it is indeed in this sense that he tells us he has written it. But his main target: *that* he strikes with unfaltering and powerful skill.

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SPOKESMAN

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Beyond race: class conflict and tragic vision in an African novel

'Criticism is not a passage from text to reader: its task is not to redouble the text's self-understanding ... Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making ... about which it is necessarily silent.'

Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*

Twenty-five years after its publication, one of French-speaking Africa's most celebrated novels, Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure** continues to be the object of intense critical activity. A characteristic feature of some of this recent activity (Chévrier, 1984; Moriceau and Rouch, 1983; Gétty, 1982) lies in its tendency to see the novel as a metaphor of the human condition. Against the particularistic and ethnic orientation of earlier studies (e.g., Céleste, 1977; Monnin, 1982; Okafor, 1972; Désanti, 1968; Eboussi, 1964; Battestini, 1964),¹ which see it as the embodiment of an irreducible African experience, of a conflict between two unhistoric essences – 'African' mysticism and 'European' materialism – recent criticism has tended to translate the work's magic dualism into universal terms. It has grasped and explained it, that is, as part of a permanent condition that is common to all men, African and non-African alike. A recent such study concludes that the novel's main character, Samba Diallo, should no longer be seen as: 'the

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*Translated by K. Woods (London, Heinemann, 1978).

symbol of the Black world in opposition to the White world but as the embodiment of man's difficult condition' (Moriceau and Rouch, 1983, p. 80 – unless otherwise stated, this and subsequent translations, except from Kane, are mine). Chévrier, writing in the same vein, observes that:

Ambiguous Adventure largely transcends the socio-historic situation of the African confronted with western civilisation. It explores the problematic situation of contemporary man enslaved to a religion of progress which cuts him off from his roots, and pushes him deeper, each day that passes, into a consumer civilisation that transforms him progressively into an object (Chévrier, 1984, p. 109).

He identifies the novel's theme as 'the anguish of being man', and classifies it as 'a novel of the human condition'. Calin, for his part, compares it to the works of writers as different as Faulkner, Bernanos, Sartre and Aragon and sees it as 'a vital story of contemporary Black Africa and an allegory of the human condition for all men' (in Gétry, 1982, p. 94).

While these recent existentialist-type analyses have the advantage of 'deghettoising' the novel, of drawing welcome attention to its wider human significance, they also exhibit the one fundamental weakness of previous criticism: that of abstracting the work's tragic problematic from its real history, from the social and political matrices to which it is the response, and presenting it as given once and for all, ready made and timeless. Tragic experience might indeed be universal, in the specific sense of being a possible form of human consciousness. It might, in other words, be dormant in or potentially given to all men, but an awareness of it, as theorists and critics of the tragic² have forcefully shown (but as critics of *Ambiguous Adventure* have persistently forgotten) is only made possible and intensified by certain background factors.

This article proposes to analyse these much neglected background factors as they relate to *Ambiguous Adventure*. Its central theme is that, although presented and experienced in the grandiose form of a metaphysical dualism between what Gétry calls 'the world's two major philosophical doctrines: materialist rationalism and mysticism' (1982, p. 94), the tragic in *Ambiguous Adventure* is not so much the expression of some atemporal tragic sense present in all Africans (*pace* earlier studies) or in all men (*pace* recent analyses). It is, rather, the experience and the expression in literary form of a profound disorder in the Diallobé society of Senegal: that of the political marginalisation of the ruling aristocracy in that society in the wake of the French colonial conquest of Senegal. Put differently, it is the coded response to, as it were, the *reconstitution* at the level of aristocratic Diallobé consciousness, of a crisis of social, political and economic decline.

Of course, this historical dimension has continuously escaped the

attention of most critics,³ and this has led them to miss the profoundly ideological character of the tragic in the novel, to see it as the truth of the African or human conditions for all time. But if such has been the case, it is not only because the novelist himself downplays this dimension in his public pronouncements – ‘the public aspect is not absent in *Ambiguous Adventure*, but the cultural aspect is, to my mind, more important and decisive’ (in Moriceau and Rouch, 1983, p. 50). It is also because in the novel itself he actually represses it, concealing it with consummate artistry from the inattentive critic. Indeed, what one witnesses in *Ambiguous Adventure* is the unconscious, finely wrought mythopoetical transformation of the historical and, therefore, strictly temporal crisis of a given social order, into a timeless and highly spiritual crisis of all Africans and, according to recent criteria, of all men.

This quality of ‘myth of the African condition’ which attaches to the work is obtained by the novelist’s use of many techniques. These range from a deliberate imprecision of geographical detail (the story is set in the rather vague ‘country of the Diallobé’ with one of its towns called quite simply ‘L’), through a preference for symbolic characters, significantly called the Master, the Most Royal Lady, the Chief, the Knight, to an organismic presentation of Diallobé society as a seamless, harmonious whole, undifferentiated by social class. But however much Kane tries, in the hallowed Negritude tradition, to dehistoricise his society, to gloss over or repress the reality of class relations within it, evidence of their existence is stubbornly present, breaking through to the surface occasionally. But before describing these relations and their dynamic within the colonial context and the ensuing tragic consciousness to which they give rise, it will be useful to outline briefly the essential form of the tragic in the novel.

* * *

Central to the experience of the tragic in *Ambiguous Adventure* is a conflict within Diallobé society or, more specifically, within the ruling aristocracy of that society. This conflict, an abiding and almost tedious theme of most modern African literature,⁴ is between two polar opposites: ‘African’ mysticism and spirituality, on the one hand, and ‘European’ scientific rationality and materialism, on the other.

Embodying the first term of the polarity in the novel is the Master, Thierno. The religious leader of the Diallobé and keeper of their ancestral values, he believes that man’s most noble pursuit is the mystical quest for communion with God and he sees in death the definitive means by which this union can be achieved. For him, western education, equated rather summarily in the novel with scientific rationalism, is the enemy to be resisted. To allow it to take root in his view

is to encourage a this-worldly attitude in his people, to unleash in them a desire for material objects that will militate against their spiritual well-being and cultural integrity. He explains: 'If I told them to go to the new school ... they would go *en masse*. They would learn all the ways of joining wood to wood which we do not know. But, learning, they would also forget.' The search for salvation from this world and its distractions through monastic retirement and an incessant declamation of the holy word – such then is the fundamental value that the Master seeks to uphold.

But if Diallobé society is aware, in the person of the Master, of the dangers posed to its cultural integrity by the new scientific spirit, it is no less aware, in that of the Most Royal Lady, of that spirit's advantages and of its irresistible pull over its members. An articulate interpreter of the new mood of her people and a valiant defender of modernisation, she believes that her community's priority of emphasis and locus of proper concern should be the needs of this world: '... I believe that the time has come to teach our sons to live. I foresee that they will have to do with a world of the living, in which the values of death will be scoffed at and bankrupt.' An inordinate concern with spiritual pursuits, she argues, has not only led to increased material poverty for the Diallobé and subjugation to a technologically superior nation (France). It is actually threatening the continuation of their very existence as a people. She tells her brother, the Chief: 'Give them the weight [i.e., western education] my brother. Otherwise I declare that soon there will remain neither person nor thing in the country.' To the Most Royal Lady, then, it is imperative that the Diallobé be made to acquire western education, if only for reasons of enlightened self-interest – reasons which include the acquisition of the secrets of French power to the point where they could be used against the French themselves. Recognising that cultures must adapt or die, she argues for adaptation and reform.⁵

Mysticism or materialism, religion or science? Such then are the terms of the alternatives facing Diallobé society. Either it accepts western education and the idea of material prosperity and dies spiritually, or rejects it in the name of cultural integrity, and dies physically through continued poverty, enslavement and ill health. It is in this society's awareness of its inability to reconcile these mutually exclusive opposites (an inability played out in the person and experience of the hero, Samba Diallo) that resides the tragic in *Ambiguous Adventure*.

Now, recent critics have been quick to point out, this version of tragic experience which portrays man as a divided self, as being in the throes of radically conflicting impulses, and more,⁶ as spiritually disoriented in a world without a religious transcendence, as an exile, an object in a world of objects, this version of tragic experience is not in the least peculiar to *Ambiguous Adventure*. Some of them (such as Gétry, 1982; Battestini, 1964, and Gorée, 1965) give the example of Pascal, who is

often quoted and referred to in the novel, and whose *Pensées* is the hero's favourite text and the subject of a long discussion with his father, as the example of a non-African author who treated the same problematic three centuries earlier. Others still (for example, Mouralis, 1981, and Anozie, 1970) see in *Ambiguous Adventure* an African variant of the 'absurdist' and the existentialist preoccupations of post-war French writers like Camus. In short, they see it as transcending historical times and place, as being universal.

While these correspondences are real (and, indeed, a case can be made very easily for a Pascalian and existentialist dimension in *Ambiguous Adventure*),⁷ they do not establish the ahistoricity of Kane's tragic vision. What they do, if anything, is suggest a parallel in socio-historic contexts between his work and that of his French counterparts.

The context most often advanced, when an attempt is made at all to *account for* and not just *describe* Kane's tragic vision, is cultural. Taking their cue from the author's pronouncements on the subject and from his characters' self-analyses and perceptions, most critics have advanced the crisis of religious belief in Diallobé society, subsequent upon the introduction in it of western scientific education, as the key factor in the rise of a Diallobé tragic consciousness. The Islamic faith of the Diallobé, these critics explain, was not just a set of mystical doctrines or an abstract theological system far removed from real life. For them, it was a lived experience. Islam satisfied their spiritual yearning for contact with God. It sanctified and enclosed all the occasions of their lives in sacrament and ritual. It gave meaning to their lives.

By undermining it, these critics argue, western education did not just destroy a system of beliefs. It destroyed, more importantly, the sense of psychological wholeness and security which these beliefs provided. It left Diallobé man unprotected against what Nietzsche calls in *The Birth of Tragedy* 'the horror and absurdity of existence', a ready prey to Pascalian *angst* and tragic experience; a victim, in Samba Diallo's words, of despair:

Our ancestors were more alive. Nothing separated them from themselves ... They had God within themselves, they possessed the world. We are losing all that, little by little, in despair.

In former times, the world was like my father's dwelling: everything took me into the very essence of itself, as if nothing could exist except through me. The world was not silent and neuter. It was alive.

While the cultural explanation of Kane's tragic vision is not wrong, it nonetheless remains most incomplete and of limited heuristic value. This limitation derives from its inability to see that the religious crisis in Diallobé society is the expression of a far deeper crisis that is crucially social, political and economic in nature. For Islam in the Fouta Toro, home of the Diallobé, and setting of the novel (as, indeed, in many

traditional societies of tropical Africa), has not always been the religion of the area and, when it came, was not just pure, exalted spirituality – although this is the only dimension that Kane and most critics of his novel seem to be aware of and anxious to promote.

In these hierarchically demarcated, quasi-feudal and theocratic states (and *Ambiguous Adventure*, in spite of itself, brings out this dimension very well with its clear divide in social ranks between, on the one hand, an articulate ruling aristocracy responsible for priestly duties (Thierno), politics (the Chief) and the defence of the realm (the Most Royal Lady),⁸ and, on the other, a passive class of commoners made up of free peasants and slaves organised in occupational guilds and backbone of the economy)), Islam plays an important function. It is the main principle of legitimisation of political power, of the domination of the ruling aristocracy over the lower classes.

And the Master in *Ambiguous Adventure* is not unaware of this. In a remarkable moment of insight and self-questioning, he admits towards the end of his life, in a discussion with the Chief, to the political uses of religion, and wonders whether he had not been unwittingly party to such uses himself:

God was my great treasure-trove. I suggested by my attitude that it was He whom I am defending. But, I ask you, can God be defended from man? ... The truth is, Oh God, that there are always cunning men to make use of Thee. Offering Thee and refusing Thee, as if Thou has belonged to them, with the aim of keeping other men in obedience to them!

This legitimising role is confirmed and brought out clearly and repeatedly in the analyses of various historians and sociologists of Islam in tropical Africa (such as Coulon, 1983; Trimmingham, 1964; Oliver and Fage, 1966, and Froelich, 1962). Froelich, for example, writes:

Black Islam was tolerant but it legitimised both the power of the king over his vassals and holy wars against pagan regions which took the form of fruitful raids during which slaves captured were sold off to the Magreb (p. 28).

Christian Coulon also observes that:

... in general, African Islamic societies are hierarchically structured and religion in them legitimises and organises the power of those at the top of the social hierarchy ... Islamic teaching ... ensures the adherence of the general mass of the population to an unequal social system and its inherent values (p. 93).

He gives the specific example of the Fouta Toro where, he explains, 'the ideology of social hierarchy is closely linked to that of Islam' (p.94),

and where:

[The] upper class justifies its superiority by its knowledge of religion and the sense of mission which this confers upon it in the eyes of the lower castes whose religious understanding it considers problematic (p. 94).

But Islam did not only legitimise the political power of the ruling clans of the states of the western Sudan, whose religion it became in the Middle Ages and remained for centuries. It was also a factor of wealth. Indeed, its very adoption by these clans in the Middle Ages was prompted, as some historians have shown, by political and economic reasons (Oliver and Fage, 1966, and Trimmingham, 1964). While the majority of their subjects held on to their traditional African religions, these ruling clans turned Muslim, sometimes only nominally, to protect and increase their share of the trans-Saharan trade now controlled by North African Muslims, and to earn the goodwill of the latter's government. The art of writing, which the new religion also brought with it, not only further cast these clans apart as the practitioners of an esoteric and socially prestigious skill, it also enabled them to administer their states and wealth more efficiently, thereby reinforcing their political and economic power.⁹

From the historical information above, an important conclusion follows. And that is, that the weakening of Islam by western education did not only issue, as the culturalist explanation goes, in the destruction of a religion and the sense of psychological well-being which it provided. More fundamentally, it led to the dislocation of the ideological foundations of political, economic and social power in societies such as that of the Diallobé of the Fouta Toro region of Senegal.

* * *

Viewed from this angle, it becomes clear that the conflict in *Ambiguous Adventure* which is genuinely experienced by most Diallobé and forcefully presented by Kane as one between two types of education – the Koranic and the Western; between pure spirituality and secularism (the universalist antithesis of recent criticism) or noble African mysticism and decadent western materialism (the particularising polarities of Negritude-inspired analyses) is, in fact, only partially so. At a more basic level, it represents a social and political conflict between a vanquished Diallobé ruling aristocracy – which, unconsciously, uses Islamic spirituality to consecrate its power – and an imperial and republican France, heir of the century of Enlightenment and daughter of the 1789 Revolution against monarchic absolutism, religion and aristocratic privilege – which seeks to despiritualise and ruin this power, as it did that of the monarchy in France through the more

successful secularist and scientific values of its school.¹⁰ And the Most Royal Lady is not mistaken about the political functions of Koranic and western education when she notes, in the case of the latter, that beyond its secularist credo, it legitimises the new French dispensation: 'it makes conquest permanent . . . It is bound up with a new order'; and '[it is] the new form of war which those who have come are waging'.

Of all the Diallobé in authority, she is alone in demonstrating a global understanding of the conflict that is wrenching her society asunder, in seeing that in all its conscious dimensions, be they spirit versus flesh or Koranic versus foreign school, this conflict is doctrinal but also, and perhaps above all, social and political. The historical consciousness which the Most Royal Lady exhibits accounts for her different appreciation of the drama unfolding in her society. Most high-ranking Diallobé view it in cosmic terms. It is a natural catastrophe, hence their obsession with and predominant use of the imagery of death and decline. It prefigures the end of *the* world:

On the horizon, it seemed as if the earth were poised on the edge of an abyss. Above the abyss the sun was suspended dangerously. The liquid silver of its heat had been reabsorbed without any loss of its light's splendour. Only, the air was tinted with red, and under this illumination the little town seemed suddenly to belong to a strange planet.

She, on the other hand, sees it as the end of *a* world, and rejects the conflation of social and natural processes – with its intimations of an insuperable fatality at work – which the parallel between the struggles of the dying sun to stay bright, and that of the Diallobé to stay alive is meant to establish. This perception of the crisis as social and not metaphysical enables the Most Royal Lady not only to escape the sense of impotence and despair which it induces in others, but also to envisage a strategy to overcome it.

Not surprisingly, this strategy is not cultural – a tighter embrace of Islam – but political: a repossession of the power lost to the French by Diallobé society or, more specifically, by her social group. I specify 'her social group' because the Most Royal Lady never loses sight of its leadership role in pre-colonial Diallobé society. And, indeed, as Tidjani-Serpos has shown (1977), it is with a clear view to restoring this role in a future independent Diallobé state that she advocates a clear lead for it in education by the sending to the foreign school (that repository of the secrets of French power) *first* its children and only later the others. In her words:

The foreign school is the new form of war which those who have come here are waging and *we must send our élite there. If there is any good to be drawn from it, they should be the first to acquire that* (emphasis added).

The interesting question of whether, in colonial Africa, the course of action she advocates was followed by the traditional ruling groups is beyond the scope of this article.¹¹ Two things do stand out, however. The first is that, within the universe of the novel, her strategy comes to naught. For Samba Diallo, her great hope – Samba Diallo the young man who, she reckoned, would learn the ways of the white man to liberate his people – does not return from Paris to lead a nationalist fight for Diallobean independence. Instead, he comes back confused and disoriented. In the end, he is murdered by a member of that ultra-traditional wing of the nobility (the lunatic fringe, one is tempted to say, given that his murderer is indeed a mad man), which refuses all compromise with the West and, in any case, sees none possible.

But if the Most Royal Lady fails, and with her the reformist wing of the nobility, the ultra-conservative faction does not succeed either. In addition to losing political power to the French, and losing the possible nationalist leadership with Samba's death, it also loses the only source of power left to it within the colonial context: that of religious leader of the people. This last event happens in the second chapter of Part 2, when, for want of a worthy successor from his social rank, Thierno's turban as spiritual head of the Diallobé passes over to the non-aristocratic Demba.¹² This is Samba Diallo's onetime classmate in the Koranic school. A character whom, we are told, 'was envious' of Samba's patrician origins, who is described by Kane as 'this peasant's son', and characteristically by the Most Royal Lady as a '*cuistre*', that is, an ill-bred cur.

The two forms of resistance to French colonialism worked out by the noble Diallobé society thus fail. Thierno's, which advocates a retreat to spiritualism and intangible values, is no more successful than the Most Royal Lady's, which affirms the need to use French 'arms' to fight against the French. So, dispossessed of temporal power by the French and spiritual power by Demba and his social group, the historical tragedy of aristocratic Diallobé society is complete. It is against this background that, in the last chapter, the mystical experiences of Samba Diallo, the very embodiment of this society, assume a new social significance.

This controversial chapter has usually been considered uniquely from the artistic and religious points of view. How, critics mindful of the art of the novel wonder, can the author contrive such an artificial end to his work?¹⁴ After ten chapters of lucid analyses and prose in which he shows the hero's dilemma to be insoluble, he suddenly springs up, they object, with a mystical solution hitherto discountenanced and clearly shown to be inadequate. In other words, they argue, Kane's failure to explore to its limits the only logical and aesthetically satisfying solution within the terms of the novel – unrelieved mental or physical destruction – lends a *deus ex machina* air to chapter 10.

But at this point, critics mindful of the religious dimension of the work intervene. They see in the objections of illogicality and artificiality levelled at this chapter evidence of the inability of the rational intellect to comprehend the mysteries of God's ways. Questions of faith and religious belief are not subjects of rational demonstration and proof – a fact which they see Kane as underscoring consciously by the discontinuity, unacceptable to a pure rationalist, between his mystical conclusion and his artistic statement, and which Samba Diallo himself ultimately comes to realise. For it is only after he agrees, on the promptings of the voice from the beyond, to reject reason – seen as being concerned only with the ephemeral ('I have thrown it out like a tentacle') – that he actually rediscovers God. So that what looks like an artistic flaw is, in fact, a conscious assertion of religious truth, an illustration of the Tertullian maxim: 'I believe because it is absurd'.¹⁵

But both the artistic and religious explanations are open to criticism. While the first does not sufficiently interrogate the significance of the 'artificial' chapter 10, the second, somewhat paradoxically, over-rationalises it, seeing in this very artificiality evidence of a higher truth. My point of view is different. Chapter 10 is indeed an artistic failure. But it does not establish a religious truth either. What it does reveal, however, is an interesting conflict in the author – a conflict between Kane the believer, the apologist of Islam who, unable to accept his own analyses of its demise, artificially asserts its triumph, and Kane the artist of the tragedy of aristocratic Diallobé society, who sees neither a political nor a religious solution to it.

Put differently, chapter 10 is the response of a man who, acutely aware of, yet unable to accept, the triumph of science over religion in his community, proceeds to devalue the temporal world of the former, *now* seen as ephemeral and the locus of the suffering, in the name of the eternal bliss in the world beyond. But in so far as the devalued temporal world which Samba joyfully leaves is also now controlled by the French in concert with Demba and his social group,¹⁶ the chapter's mystical solution can be read as a flight from painful social and political reality; as the conversion of a political defeat into a spiritual triumph. While this 'triumph' to my mind smacks very much of a consolation, it nevertheless remains a very human and psychologically understandable response to a predicament that it is in the nature of human societies to experience.

In this article, I have been concerned not so much with an analysis of the content and artistic execution of the tragic vision in *Ambiguous Adventure* – a lot of excellent work already exists on this – as with a discussion of the very conditions of its possibility. Against the facile universalism of recent criticism which obscures the particular tensions that helped create this vision, and the ahistorical ethnic particularism of earlier studies which see it as the expression of a timeless African, if not

Black, condition, this article has tried to root the novel's tragic vision in the social history of Diallobé society. More specifically, it has attempted to go beyond the metaphysical and universalist terms in which this vision is formulated and experienced, to unearth and restore to the surface the repressed and buried reality of its history. To explain, paraphrasing Eagleton, those social and political conditions of its making about which it, and most critics, are deliberately silent or quite simply unconscious.¹⁷

Notes

- 1 I am not, of course, erecting rigid barriers between a recent and earlier criticism of *Ambiguous Adventure* exclusively devoted to an analysis of the novel as myth of the human and African conditions respectively. The two concerns are usually present in both types of criticism, although in general terms it remains true that the major preoccupation of recent critical work on the novel has been to bring out its universal aspects.
- 2 For a well-known example of a sociological theory of tragedy and its application to a specific author, see Goldmann (1977).
- 3 A notable exception is Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos (1977, pp. 188-206).
- 4 The most eloquent expression of this theme in modern African literature is in the poetry of Leopold Senghor and the plays of Wole Soyinka. For its theoretical formulation by both authors, see Senghor (1965), Soyinka (1976). For a penetrating critique of this theme, see Geoffrey Hunt (1985).
- 5 This point of view defended by the Most Royal Lady constitutes the burden of the arguments of the New School of African philosophers — see Paulin Houtondji (1983, pp. 33-70), Marcien Towa (1971, pp. 23-59) and Kwasi Wiredu (1980, pp. 1-51). For these theoreticians of change, as for her, the time has now come when the Negritude-inspired quest for an irreducible African essence and originality must cease; when the adulation of the old African order should give way to an approach to that order that recognises both its strength and, above all, its great shortcomings. The prospect for any eventual and meaningful development, they argue, does not lie in the preservation at all cost of traditional culture, but in the appropriation through western education of that tool, scientific culture, through which the West was able to subjugate Africa. Like the Most Royal Lady who tells her people: 'What I am proposing is that we should agree to die in our children's hearts and that foreigners who have defeated us should fill the place, wholly, which we shall have left free.' Towa argues passionately that: 'To assert and to be one self, the self has to repudiate itself, its essence and its past; it must aim at becoming like the other, similar to him and therefore uncolonisable by him' (p.42). An obvious objection to Towa's argument, of course, is that one cannot at once become like the other and at the same time remain and assert oneself.
For a preliminary discussion of these issues, see Abiola Irele's introduction to Houtondji (1983).
- 6 For a full description of the other manifestations of the tragic in the novel, see Jean Gétty (1982, pp. 27-31, 63-77) and Annie Moriceau and Alain Rouch (1983, pp. 52-3).
- 7 *Ambiguous Adventure* in a sense is the exploration in African terms of Pascal's problematic in *Pensées*, rediscovered and rendered popular in recent times by Existentialism, of the tragic meaninglessness of life (for the believer) in a world from which God has absconded.

The hero's world in Part Two of the novel (the section that covers his stay in what

he describes as the mechanistic West), like that of the un-believer described in *Pensées*, is no longer resonant with meaning. It has become an inalterable other from which he feels estranged, neuter and to use his memorable Pascalian expression 'silent'. He contrasts his life in Africa (Part One of the novel) where, to echo the second movement of *Pensées*, he was happy with God and his wretchedness and misery without Him in the West, in the following terms: 'I have lost a privileged mode of acquaintance. In former times the world was like my father's dwelling: everything took me into the very essence of itself, as if nothing could exist except through me. The world was not silent and neuter. It was alive ...'

- 8 It is also this rank that supplies the only individualised characters in the novel. The others are either described as 'Mbates', that is slaves, or referred to by their castes. When they appear, it is as a group and even then it is to receive orders, such as when they are told by the Most Royal Lady that they could now send their children to the European school (Chapter 4, Part One).
- 9 On this last point, see Jack Goody (1971, pp. 455-66).
- 10 This historical situation bears a strong parallel, in at least three important respects, to that of Pascal's seventeenth-century France; and it is perhaps in this and not in some assumed ahistorical tragic cast of mind on Kane's part that the oft-quoted spiritual affinity between the two authors should be sought. In both cases, the political powers of a feudal aristocracy were being severely curtailed — in France by an increasingly centralised monarchy which sought to reduce the independence of various feudal overlords, and in Senegal, home of the quasi-feudal Diallobé, by an Imperial France intent on abolishing their powers and bringing them directly under French law. (On this issue as it relates to France and Senegal respectively, see Goldmann (1977) and Crowder (1967, pp. 9-20).

Another common feature of both societies is that the foundations of aristocratic power — tradition, authority and especially religion (Catholicism in one and Islam in the other) — were being systematically eroded and destroyed by the new Enlightenment/colonial spirit of individual inquiry, science and reason. Finally, in both cases, a feudal economic order, founded on tributes, taxes, special levies and (in Diallobé society) on slavery, was breaking down and giving way to capitalism. Of course, these transformations were gradual in France, the result of endogamous factors. In Diallobé society, like most African communities, on the other hand, they were sudden, externally imposed by colonialism. Sudden or gradual, however, what one witnesses in both societies is the crumbling down of a theological universe and the emergence of a scientific order and ultimately of a secular, non-feudal state. The preoccupation with homelessness, conflict and alienation and the search for mystical unity in *Ambiguous Adventure* and *Pensées* is the response of sensitive minds in both societies to the loss of a stable and ordered universe in which, in Samba Diallo's words echoing Pascal, 'The world was not silent and neuter. It was alive ...'

- 11 Although it is difficult to talk of a homogenous response across Africa to western education, it remains on the whole true that there was a general reluctance among traditional élites to send their children to western-type schools. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule — the Peul being the most notable. On their responses, see Coulon (1983, pp. 88-119).
- 12 Demba's consecration is the culmination of a long struggle between the two social ranks in Diallobé society — a struggle that is symbolically represented in the novel by the physical fights between the 'patrician' Samba and the 'peasant' Demba. It is all the more significant socially when it is remembered that in the highly structured Islamic society of Diallobé, the post of teacher or spiritual guide which Demba has now got is usually reserved for 'a small minority drawn in most cases from the society's ruling groups' (Coulon, 1983, p.92). On Islamic education, its structure and methods as an important factor of social reproduction, see Coulon (1983, pp. 88-119).

- 13 'Cuistre', used in the French original (*L'Aventure Ambiguë*, Paris, 1961), is mistranslated by Katherine Woods to read 'a man who has no feeling for background'.
- 14 See, for example, Albert Gérard (1961, p. 449) and Roger Mercier (1965, p. 31).
- 15 For a discussion of the chapter's religious dimension, see inter alia Hassan El-Nouty (1974, pp. 475-87), Lemeul Johnson (1980, p. 36), Jeanne Lydie-Gorée (1965, pp. 186-7) and Chartier (1974, pp. 15-25).
- 16 By changing the timetable of the Koranic school, the moment he is made *tierno*, to enable all the children who so desire to attend the foreign school, Demba contributes to the consolidation of French power in Diallobé society. But the urgency with which he effects this change is also proof of his desire to make the opportunities brought by the new dispensation available, this time, to all ranks of Diallobé and not just, as the Most Royal Lady advocates, and as was the case historically, when Islam first came to tropical Africa, to the nobility.
- 17 See Terry Eagleton (1986, p. 43). For a discussion of the notion of a political and social unconscious, see Jameson (1983).

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The killing machine: Britain and the international repression trade

Britain, if it has any international standing at all now that the sun has long set on its empire, is commonly seen as a sub-imperialist power, an agent of the United States, its unsinkable aircraft carrier, a base for its missiles, for its planes to bomb Libya, a supporter of its invasion of Grenada, of its hostility to the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, a supporter too, albeit hesitant, of its adventures in the Gulf and a supporter of American attacks on international institutions such as UNESCO from which it withdrew in the wake of US withdrawal.

But this view, although true, masks the extent to which Britain is involved actively in Third World repression in its own right. While the role of the United States in this respect is obvious and that of Israel increasingly important and increasingly recognised, the role of Britain remains relatively hidden. Yet, Britain is a major supporter of repressive regimes throughout the world, arming them, training their police and military, supplying them with personnel and bestowing on them the benefits of years of its own experience of repression in the colonies. Marcos' Philippines, Zia's Pakistan, Pinochet's Chile, Stroessner's Paraguay, Khomeini's Iran, Jayewardene's Sri Lanka and Ozal's Turkey: all countries engaged in the systematic suppression of internal political opposition and dissent, guilty of torture and wholesale killing: all beneficiaries of British military equipment and expertise. This article looks at some of the ways in which Britain carries out its self-appointed role as a leading source of counter-insurgency expertise and technology.

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The international repression trade

In 1986, Britain joined the top three arms exporting countries in the world, behind only the United States and the Soviet Union, selling some £5 billions worth of military equipment, about three-quarters of which was destined for countries in the Third World.¹ But Britain occupies an even higher place in what has come to be called the international repression trade, hidden in the arms trade as a whole. After the United States, Britain is now the world's leader in the development, manufacture and export of military, paramilitary and other equipment employed directly by authoritarian regimes around the world to suppress dissent and opposition. This includes virtually anything described under the heading of 'internal security' equipment, ranging from armoured personnel carriers and water cannon to police weapons, torture devices and prison equipment. On the basis of this minimal definition, the international repression trade is estimated to account for anything between 10 and 20 per cent of the global arms trade.²

But this minimal definition is insufficient, for such 'hardware', the material equipment of repression, requires, if it is to be of any use, both 'software' and 'liveware', that is the techniques of using and maintaining such equipment and the personnel needed to train others in its use and maintenance.³ But even this is insufficiently comprehensive. A definition of the international repression trade must also include the sale of any arms to repressive regimes, even if they are not designed for internal use, for not only is it impossible to predict how a regime will use the weapons it buys – the Shah of Iran brought his British Chieftain tanks on to the streets of Tehran, while the Chilean junta turned a British training ship into a torture centre – but every arms sale or provision of advice or training carries with it implicit approval of the regime to which it is being supplied. Not only that, but arms sales to repressive regimes contribute directly to the continuation of such regimes through what has been described as the 'militarisation/repression cycle'. The essence of this thesis is that arms sales to governments maintained in power by the armed forces tend to accelerate their militarisation, since in such countries resources are increasingly diverted from social needs, such as agricultural and industrial development, health care, education and housing, to pay for arms and other military equipment and the necessary maintenance and training. The increased military capacity, in turn, heightens the ability of the regime in question to suppress political dissent and opposition and, as such repression engenders further protest, even more resources are poured into the means of repression – and so on and so on in an ever increasing spiral of revolt and counter-revolt. In addition, high military spending can have a serious inflationary effect, lowering the standard of living for the mass of the population and ensuring a steadily increasing foreign debt.

In short, the global arms trade keeps the poor countries of the world poor and helps to ensure the subjugation of their civilian populations. The international repression trade must, therefore, be taken to include not just the sale of equipment intended for internal repression, or the training of personnel in the use of such equipment and the techniques of internal repression, but also the sale of any military equipment to governments maintained in power by armed force.

Britain has sold and continues to sell arms to numerous such regimes throughout the world and, in addition, provides extensive military or police training. It must be emphasised, however, that information is extremely sparse. Unlike the United States for example, Britain manages to keep its role in the arms trade in general, and the international repression trade in particular, relatively secret. British governments consistently refuse to release details of individual arms sales, sales to particular countries, or the nature of training or assistance, divulging only bare lists of the countries to which Britain has exported equipment or negotiated training contracts. From the information which is provided we do know that in Africa British arms customers since 1979 have included Algeria, Cameroon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria and Kenya. In Asia buyers have included Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Korea and Thailand. In Central and South America British arms have been sold to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay. And in the Middle East Britain has sold to Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Syria.⁴ In 1985, the last year for which information is available, no less than 102 countries imported British military equipment including Brazil, Chile, Bangladesh, Grenada, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Sri Lanka and Turkey.⁵ (In addition, numerous countries, including Argentina, India, Malaysia and the Philippines, also produce their own armaments under British licences.) The sale of arms to such countries or the provision of advice or training to their military or police forces carries with it implicit approval of the regimes involved.

The main reasons for Britain's leading role in the international repression trade lie not just in its leading role as a supplier of arms generally, but are to be found in its own history of repression of opposition in the colonies and, in particular, in the research and development of a 'new technology of repression' in the current war in Northern Ireland.⁶ This experience has given Britain considerable status in what Jan Pieterse has described as a 'pool of imperialist counter-insurgency expertise and technology' involving, in addition to the United States, Israel and South Africa.⁷

Counter-insurgency in the colonies: a brief history

The key to Britain's pre-eminent position in the international repression trade lies in Britain's extensive experience in fighting nationalist and other rebels in its colonies, particularly since 1945. Britain's major counter-insurgency campaigns since then have included:

Palestine 1946-48: Britain, which held the mandate for Palestine, fought a campaign against Zionist insurgents seeking to establish a separate Jewish state, particularly the Irgun Zvai Leumi (led by Menachem Begin, later to become Israeli premier) and the Lohamei Heruth Israel or 'Stern Gang'. The campaign, which ended with the withdrawal of the British in 1948 and the first Arab-Israeli war, witnessed the use by the British forces of 'special operations' squads charged with the infiltration, arrest and physical elimination of Zionist insurgents.

Malaya 1948-60: This lengthy campaign against nationalist insurgents was never referred to by the British as a war but always as the 'Emergency' and the nationalist insurgents were never rebels, revolutionaries or even nationalists but always 'bandits' or, more commonly, 'communist terrorists' or 'CTs'. This was not a semantic point: to have defined the situation as a war would, as one Colonial Secretary pointed out, have meant dealing with prisoners under the various international conventions 'which would not allow us to be as ruthless as we are now'.⁸ The use of special powers by the British forces was extensive: detention without trial was widespread, some 35,000 people were interned, while 15,000 were deported under emergency regulations. Collective punishments were commonplace and there were, according to an historian sympathetic to the British army, 'on at least two occasions ... cold-blooded massacres of innocent civilians. Reprisals of lesser severity, and a high level of casual violence by both troops and police ... effectively camouflaged by the government'.⁹ The 'Emergency' was eventually lifted in 1960 after the formation in 1957 of the Federation of Malaysia.

Kenya 1953-60: As in Malaya, martial law was never declared in this war against the Land Freedom Army (derogatorily referred to as the Mau Mau), although certain designated 'Prohibited Areas' were put on an open war footing where bombing was permitted and the use of weapons unrestricted, presaging the 'free fire' zones created by the United States in Vietnam. In other 'Special Areas' a range of restrictions was enforced including the use of the death penalty, proscription of the Land Freedom Army (LFA) and extensive use of detention without trial. (In one 'cleaning up' operation in Nairobi in April/May 1954, 17,000 Gikuyu tribespeople were arrested and interned.) The arrival in 1953 of Captain Frank Kitson, as one of two District Military Intelligence Officers responsible for integrating police and military intelligence work, and later to be one of the most prominent British counter-insurgency

theorists, also meant the use by the British of 'pseudo gangs' of surrendered LFA fighters and disguised Europeans who would operate in LFA-controlled areas to trace the movements of and make contact with active units. But, 'at least as important' were the new techniques of interrogation developed by Kitson, techniques which were 'intimidatory' but 'nominally non-violent'.¹⁰ Although the LFA was militarily defeated, Kenya moved to independence in 1960 under Jomo Kenyatta.

Cyprus 1955-59: The struggle for independence led by EOKA was militarily defeated, although political control was eventually handed over to Archbishop Makarios. The British campaign saw the use of both water cannon and CS gas.

South Yemen 1963-67: This guerrilla war ended with the withdrawal of the British and the transfer of power to the National Liberation Front. According to Halliday,¹¹ this was the only post-war counter-insurgency operation in which a guerrilla movement challenged the terms the British had laid down for decolonisation and won against determined British opposition.

Borneo 1961-65: Euphemistically described by both parties, Britain and Indonesia, as the 'confrontation', this campaign against guerrillas backed by Indonesia's President Sukarno left 2,000 Indonesians dead, compared with only nineteen British and forty Gurkha troops. The 'confrontation' ended with Sukarno effectively deposed by a military coup in 1966.

Northern Ireland 1969 - : Britain's (and possibly the world's) longest running counter-insurgency campaign which has seen internment without trial, the extensive use of special powers by the police, military and the courts, the deployment and testing of repressive technology in the form of water cannon, CS gas, plastic and rubber bullets, a 'shoot to kill' policy by the security forces, widespread surveillance of the population and the use of torture against prisoners. By April 1987, around 2,700 people had been killed, either by the British security forces or by paramilitary groups.

But British soldiers have not just fought against liberation movements in British colonies. They have also on a number of occasions over the last twenty years been loaned by British governments to foreign states to assist in the suppression of armed opposition. On such occasions, they have, in effect, acted as mercenaries.

In Oman in 1957-59 British troops were engaged by the Sultan to fight against nationalist tribes backed by the Soviet Union, China and Egypt who were fighting in the north of the country. It was British troops who brought the rising to an end when the guerrilla stronghold was stormed by SAS troops in January 1959.¹² British troops returned to Oman in 1965 to help put down the uprising by the Revolutionary Front in the southern province of Dhofar. With the assistance of troops

from Jordan and Iran, the British had recaptured most of the province by the end of 1975.¹³ In Vietnam, British SAS personnel served with the US Special Forces, usually after secondment to the Special Forces base at Fort Bragg where they were then inducted into the American army. Any official involvement in the war could then be denied by the British government. In addition, individual officers served with the Australian and New Zealand SAS units in Vietnam, while British training was provided for US troops in Borneo and for South Vietnamese troops in Malaysia.¹⁴ (This use of troops and provision of training was, of course, in addition to the extensive assistance given to the US by Britain in the form of transit facilities, equipment – including napalm – and electronic eavesdropping carried out from Hong Kong.) In the 1970s, the British SAS was reported to be operating with the Shah of Iran's Special Forces fighting against Kurdish rebels.¹⁵

This brief history of British counter-insurgency operations, of which these are only the main examples – one military historian¹⁶ cites a further twenty limited 'policing operations' in British colonies between 1946 and 1965 – demonstrates Britain's extensive experience in a number of important respects. Among these are the use and development of weapons and other equipment such as water cannon and CS gas which were first used in Cyprus and which were to be more fully developed in Northern Ireland; the development of interrogation methods which were to be refined to the sensory deprivation techniques used in Northern Ireland; the use of infiltration of the opposition and, in particular, the use of 'counter-gangs' as pioneered by Wingate in Palestine and developed by Kitson in Kenya; the development of propaganda – it was Sir Gerald Templer, the Military High Commissioner in Malaya, who coined the phrase 'hearts and minds' which was to be heard in virtually every counter-insurgency war thereafter; and the use of 'special forces', autonomous military regiments like the Special Air Service (SAS), specialising in counter-insurgency and unorthodox warfare. Such experience was to lay the basis for the emergence in the 1960s and 1970s of a distinctive 'British school' of counter-insurgency theory.

The British school of counter-insurgency

If the theory and practice of guerrilla and revolutionary warfare is largely the contribution of the Third World (Mao, Fanon, Marighela, Giap and others the theorists, China, Algeria, Vietnam and many, many other places the scenes of the practice), then the theory and practice of counter-insurgency – counter-revolution – is to a significant degree the contribution of what was once the world's major imperialist power, Britain. The product of decades of fighting the kind of counter-insurgency campaigns just described, the 'British school' of counter-insurgency theory emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and has

played a major role in securing for Britain its pre-eminent position in the global counter-insurgency business.

The tenets, precepts and prescriptions of this 'British school' have been laid down in the writings of a number of British military personnel. Of these the most important are Kitson, a veteran of the British campaigns in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus and Northern Ireland, who was also involved in the planning of the SAS Oman operation in the 1960s and eventually became Commander in Chief of the United Kingdom Land Forces; Thompson, who was senior defence ministry official in Malaya from 1957 to 1961 and headed the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam before being appointed as a special consultant by President Nixon; Paget, who served as a colonel in Aden; Deane-Drummond, who commanded the SAS in Oman in the 1950s; and Clutterbuck who served in both Palestine and Malaya.¹⁷ With the exception of Thompson, these were all men who had served or, in Kitson's case, were still serving in the British army and had been directly involved in counter-insurgency operations. They were to be joined in the 1970s by a growing number of academics and journalists who, responding to the political, economic and industrial upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s and perceiving a threat to society as they knew it, sought to alert the British state to the nature of this threat.

Of particular importance in this respect was the Institute for the Study of Conflict (set up in 1970) and those associated with it such as Brian Crozier, ISC's founder who also managed a news agency, Forum World Features, which had links with the US Central Intelligence Agency; Robert Moss, a speech-writer for Margaret Thatcher; historian Geoffrey Fairbairn; and political sociologist Paul Wilkinson. The Institute, whose council members have included both Clutterbuck and Thompson, has taken a keen interest in the problems of 'subversion', cold-war politics, revolutionary warfare, counter-insurgency and urban terrorism, publishing reports on a wide range of countries and national liberation or guerrilla movements including Northern Ireland, Uruguay (at the time of the Tupamaros urban guerrilla activity), Israel and the Palestinians, Chile, Portugal and numerous Third World countries. Through its close contacts with senior echelons of the civil service, military and the police, the Institute has also sought to propagate its views through lectures at such establishments as the Royal Military College of Science, the National Defence College and the Police Staff College.

The military writers in the British school of counter-insurgency are mainly concerned to recount the history of British campaigns and to draw lessons from this, sometimes, as in the case of Deane-Drummond and (especially) Kitson going further to set out precise military and police tactics and strategies. This is particularly true of Kitson's best known work, *Low Intensity Operations: subversion, insurgency and*

counter-insurgency, published in 1971 with a complimentary foreword by the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Michael Carver. Kitson expressed the purpose of his book clearly. It was 'to draw attention to the steps which should be taken now in order to make the army ready to deal with subversion, insurrection, and peace-keeping operations during the second half of the 1970s'. The army, Kitson argued, had to be prepared to deal with insurgent movements long before the stage of a violent uprising was reached and he outlined three phases in the development of subversion, laying down the tasks for the military and civil powers in each. In the first, preparatory stage the key tasks are the collation and analysis of intelligence, combined with the moulding of public opinion against any emergent popular movements. In phase two, a non-violent phase, the police must contain demonstrations, civil disobedience and any 'limited acts of violence', while attempts are made to isolate any 'leaders' from the 'masses'. In this phase, Kitson said, 'conditions can be made reasonably uncomfortable for the population as a whole, in order to provide an incentive for a return to normal life and to act as a deterrent towards a resumption of the campaign'. In the final phase of armed uprising, special military forces would have to infiltrate the insurrectionists and eliminate them, at the same time mounting psychological operations which would discredit the insurgents.

The civilian counter-insurgency theorists are, like Kitson, concerned to ensure that phase three, of open insurgency, is never reached and, like Kitson, they posit the idea of a continuum in the development of insurgency. Although this continuum culminates in guerrilla warfare or armed uprising, it begins not just with non-violent protest but with perfectly legitimate political activity, such as strikes and mass demonstrations. This 'stageist' view of the development of insurgency leads the various counter-insurgency theorists to be ambivalent, at the very least, in their attitudes to traditional liberal-democratic rights and freedoms if the stage of insurgency proper is never to be reached. It is not surprising then that the various counter-insurgency theorists have devoted considerable efforts to studying and identifying what they regard as subversive elements in democratic societies. They have, therefore, written extensively of Chile under the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, developments in Portugal after the overthrow of fascism in 1974, left-wing parties in Western European states, 'Marxist and radical penetration' of higher education in Britain, and trade union militancy.

The civilian counter-insurgency writers are not just concerned to analyse the problem as they see it. Like the military theorists they propose solutions, ranging from greater co-ordination of anti-terrorist planning, manipulation of the media, 'psychological operations' to discredit popular movements and insurgents, driving a wedge between

them and any popular base, to the open advocacy (by Crozier and Moss) of the 'authoritarian solution' as a last resort.

The British school of counter-insurgency theory, whether in its military or civilian guises, is based on a virulent strain of anti-communism combined with a conspiracy world-view which sees the hand of Moscow, Beijing or Havana behind every revolution or rebellion and, ultimately, behind all that they deem 'subversion'. It combines a set of theoretical and analytical principles with clear practical solutions, ranging from measures to be taken by the government, judiciary and police in the early stages of conflict or protest, to precise military tactics and strategy at a more advanced stage. Here, in this combination of ideology, theory and practice, backed up by a largely successful history (at least in military terms) of counter-insurgency, lies the appeal of the British school of counter-insurgency for regimes facing rebellious, insurgent or merely actively dissenting populations.

Training for repression

In addition to providing troops to foreign governments to fight counter-revolutionary wars and to providing a theoretical and practical base for counter-insurgency campaigns, Britain makes available its expertise in the counter-insurgency business and contributes actively to repression in the Third World by training the armies and police forces of numerous countries. Military training, whether carried out in Britain or abroad, is organised through a Directorate of Military Assistance which is based at the Ministry of Defence, and whose promotional literature is distributed to the many countries which come shopping for arms at the bi-annual British Army Equipment Exhibition. The Directorate offers a range of 'services' including consultancy visits, short and long-term in-country training teams of British officers, the loan of service personnel, UK-based training, support for defence sales and unspecified 'professional advice'. A key role in this promotion of British expertise is also played by defence advisers and military attaches at British embassies and high commissions abroad. Between 1984 and 1986 the efforts of such people ensured that personnel from nearly 90 countries received military training in Britain – including Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Tunisia and Turkey. Virtually all of these countries are named in Amnesty International's 1984 report, *Torture in the Eighties*,¹⁸ as having practised torture, or are otherwise known to engage in the systematic repression of political opposition. Indeed, of the sixty-six countries mentioned in the Amnesty report, more than half (thirty-seven) had sent personnel for military training in the UK between 1974 and 1981.¹⁹

British governments have consistently refused to introduce controls to ensure that training in military and security matters is not given to personnel from countries where it has been shown that abuses of human rights occur. The present government has maintained that it takes 'full account' of the human rights situation in the countries concerned when deciding whether to offer military training, and government minister Timothy Renton claimed in 1986 that, 'We would not agree to train people if in our judgement this was likely to contribute to violations of human rights.'²⁰ Such sentiments have not prevented British involvement with countries whose regimes are widely known to be engaged in systematic internal repression. In 1977, for instance, Britain set up a military staff college for the Bangladeshi government at a time when the Bangladeshi army was engaged in the elimination of the non-Muslim minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.²¹ More recently, the government admitted in 1985 that it had offered training facilities to El Salvador after Honduras had barred Salvadorean officers from attending US training courses in Honduras.²² The first officer cadet from El Salvador was scheduled to begin his training at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in January 1987, an opportunity which clearly pleased the El Salvador government whose defence minister told a visiting delegation from Britain that the training of his troops by Britain was a sign of government approval.²³

The British government consistently refuses to disclose details of the nature of the training provided to foreign military personnel, saying that such details are matters of confidence between the governments concerned. In 1986, however, a former Ugandan UNLA officer was quoted as saying that the British military training team in Uganda had been composed of officers specialising in 'counter-insurgency tactics'.²⁴ Despite such claims, the government refused to give details of the training provided but continued to maintain that its training did not contribute to any escalation in human rights violations. In the same year the British government admitted that military training was provided for some armed forces personnel from Chile but said that places were not allocated to Chileans on courses covering 'internal security' techniques. Despite this denial – which confirms the existence of 'internal security' courses – any military training provided is clearly of use in 'internal security' since the Chilean army has little else with which to concern itself.²⁵

In addition to providing training for foreign military personnel, Britain also supplies numerous 'military advisers' to foreign regimes. In 1981, there were 750 such advisers serving abroad including teams of 100 in Brunei, Kuwait and Oman, with smaller groups in countries such as Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Bahrein, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. A further 150 Royal Air Force personnel were also abroad in a similar capacity, mainly in the Gulf.²⁶ In the same year British troops

were on loan, secondment or exchange to Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.²⁷

Not only does Britain provide military training and advice, it may even pay for it through its UK Military Training Assistance Scheme. Although client states are normally required to pay their own way, it is clear that where a country is regarded as being in a region of 'strategic importance' or where there is a large potential market for British military equipment, the UK may pay up to 90 per cent of all training costs. In such cases, military assistance is regarded as a relatively inexpensive instrument of British foreign policy, replacing the need for a British 'presence' around the world and providing 'insurance' against any need for intervention through the training and equipping of friendly forces.

Similar political considerations lie behind the extensive involvement of Britain in training foreign police officers and forces. A 1971 Foreign and Commonwealth Office memorandum made it clear that such training was a contribution to political stability.²⁸ Between 1975 and 1979, 868 officers from seventy-one countries received training in Britain. The countries included Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Iran and Uruguay. In the same period, the Metropolitan Police and eighteen other regional police forces sent advisers to nineteen countries including Turkey, Kenya and Mexico. More recently, police training was provided by Britain, abroad and in Britain itself, to eighty-eight countries in 1985 and sixty-nine in 1986. These countries included Bangladesh, Brunei, Ethiopia, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan and Grenada.²⁹ In Oman, where both the internal and external intelligence services are headed by former British personnel, a command course for senior officers at the Royal Oman Police Academy was set up in 1985 by a man who had previously headed the Aliens Deportation Group of the Metropolitan Police and had been assistant director of the Overseas Command Course at the British Police Staff College Bramshill.³⁰ Numerous police forces in Britain have also provided training to Sri Lankan police officers, but the government has refused to say what such training consists of and has refused to confirm or deny that Sri Lankan and British police have discussed collaboration in 'anti-terrorist' activity. And in Grenada, after the invasion by the United States, the British government gave the authorities £500,000 to redevelop a police force, and former colonial and British officers were sent to the island to train personnel and to assist in the creation of a paramilitary Special Services Unit.³¹

There appear to be no formal restrictions on the countries to which Britain provides police training. During the 1974-79 Labour government the overseas development minister adopted a system of ministerial vetting, refusing to allow police officers into the UK if they came from

countries which had a bad record of human rights or if the individuals concerned were training for paramilitary or security branch work, but even this limited discretionary system was abandoned when the Conservatives took office in 1979.³²

As befits a country where 'free enterprise' is encouraged above almost all else, Britain can now offer a substantial and growing private sector in military and police training. Some of this is simply included in contracts for the supply of equipment, as in Cable and Wireless's 1978 £200m contract to provide a computer for Saudi Arabia's national guard, but other companies offer specific training 'packages'. The SAS Group of companies in its promotional literature offers training as well as hardware, promising a 'comprehensive service to meet modern military and police internal security, support and training objectives ... [to] assess, plan and implement training and support programmes for a wide range of operational requirements'. SAS Group staff include, of course, former British armed services personnel and can provide already prepared programmes in riot control – basic, advanced, or special anti-riot unit courses, 'close protection' for bodyguards, and courses for police dog teams and river patrols. Another firm, J. Donne Holdings, has offered courses in 'silent killing' and 'advanced sabotage' and again employs ex-services personnel. Other firms working in this area include the Oxford Training School which offers 'military and para-military training services'; Falconstar, a company run by former SAS and Guards officers, which was hired in 1982 to run training for Ugandan police 'special forces' who were widely believed to be involved in torture and killing; Helicopter Services Ltd which in 1985 was reported to have a contract to train members of an (unnamed) Middle East country's air force in helicopter flying; Hall and Watts (Defence Sales) which employs former SAS and other military personnel and which negotiated a 1986 contract to create a new elite military battalion in Mozambique; Defence Systems Ltd which sent personnel to Uganda in 1985 to teach low level tactical flying to UNLA helicopter gunship crews; and AMAC which in December 1984 was shown to have been negotiating with Libya for a forty-four week training course for seventeen government security personnel, training which was to have included kidnapping; poisons, bugging, explosives and killing techniques. The contract, reportedly worth £2.5m, fell through after the killing of a British police officer outside the Libyan Peoples Bureau. The training was to have been carried out in Britain, near Heathrow Airport, and one of those involved in the scheme claimed that the contract had been given unofficial approval by British intelligence who hoped to pick up useful information about Qadhafi and Libya from the trainees.³³

But the most notorious example of military training provided by the private sector in Britain is that of the involvement of KMS Ltd in Sri Lanka. In 1984-5 KMS negotiated a contract with the Sri Lankan

government to train a special task force of police commandos to assist in the campaign against Tamil separatists. According to press reports, the Sri Lankan government had originally approached the British government seeking the secondment of a unit of the SAS but Britain had refused, not out of any principled opposition to the widespread killing, torture and harassment of the Tamil minority on the island, but out of fear of offending the Indian government which backed the Tamils. The contract went instead to KMS, and twelve men, including an ex-SAS colonel and adjutant, travelled to Sri Lanka. The KMS personnel later walked out on their £20,000 a year contracts when the special task force which they were training began to run out of control and was clearly engaged in the indiscriminate killing and torture of Tamil civilians. According to one KMS employee, a former British regular soldier, the training supplied by KMS had been little different from that supplied by the British army.³⁴ Although it has been denied by the British Foreign Office, it has been widely claimed in the British press that KMS secured the Sri Lankan contract through the British government, and it was also claimed that Britain's external intelligence service, MI6, had endorsed the contract in an attempt to bolster the Sri Lankan government against attempts by the Soviet Union to gain naval facilities on the island.³⁵

Mercenaries

In addition to waging its own counter-revolutionary wars and assisting other countries through the lending of British troops and advisers, Britain has also contributed to counter-revolution and internal repression through the involvement of British mercenaries. Almost invariably, such mercenaries are former regular soldiers who have learnt their 'art' and craft from the British state.

The involvement of British mercenaries abroad is considerable. In the 1960s, for instance, Colonel Jim Johnson, a commander of 21 SAS from 1960 to 1962, organised a mercenary force to fight the republican regime of the Yemen, recruiting as field commander Colonel David Smiley who had previously led the SAS in Oman. The campaign was of some significance to Israel which supported the mercenaries in that, when the 1967 six day war broke out, Egypt, which backed the Yemen, still had troops and tanks committed to the region.³⁶ In 1970, the founder of the SAS Colonel David Stirling was engaged by several wealthy Libyan exiles to mount an operation aimed at deposing Colonel Qadhafi and the reinstatement of the monarchy. The 'Hilton Assignment', as the plan became known, was to have involved a raid on Tripoli prison and the freeing of 150 political prisoners in the hope that this would spark off an uprising against the regime. The plan was aborted under pressure from both the CIA and MI6, both of which at that time saw in Qadhafi a potential ally.

But the most notorious involvement of British mercenaries occurred in 1975 and 1976 when a number of British mercenaries were recruited to fight in Angola against the new MPLA government. At the end of a disastrous operation, four were executed and nine others sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.³⁷

The fate of the Angola mercenaries did nothing, however, to deter others. In 1976 there were numerous reports in the press that the Rhodesian army was trying to recruit British soldiers to fight against the guerrilla forces of ZANU and ZAPU³⁸ and there were reports too that British regular soldiers were actually fighting with the infamous Selous Scouts and the Rhodesian SAS.³⁹ The same year saw the killing by the Palestine Liberation Organisation of British mercenary Robert Thacker in Beirut. The following year British mercenaries, again led by former British SAS officers, were involved in an abortive plan to assassinate President Eyadema of the west African republic of Togo. More recently, British mercenaries, including people who fought in Angola, have been arrested in Pakistan en route to Afghanistan, have been organising guerrillas fighting Surinam's Libyan-backed leader, Desi Bouterse,⁴⁰ and there have been reports of others working in the Philippines with supporters of ex-President Marcos.⁴¹

Evidence has also emerged from the 'Irangate' scandal of the involvement of British mercenaries in support of the contras fighting in Nicaragua. According to reports, CIA director William Casey made an indirect request to the British government in 1985 for up to forty-eight SAS troops. The request went through KMS Ltd, a company widely known in military circles as '24 SAS', the fourth SAS regiment, because of its links with the official regiments and its employment of ex-services personnel. The request was turned down.⁴² Around the same time, a former SAS officer, employed by another firm, Falconstar, received a request to help train the contras and in early 1985 two other ex-SAS officers employed by another company, Intersec, flew to the US for talks. Finally, in mid-1985, two six-men teams were flown out by KMS to train the contras.⁴³ The group included Michael Borlace who had previously fought for the Smith regime in Rhodesia and had been one of the KMS personnel sent to Sri Lanka to train police commandos there.⁴⁴ A former US air force officer, Robert Dutton, who gave evidence to the Iran-contra congressional investigation panel, claimed that KMS offered to do more than just train contras and had planned both to blow up Nicaraguan government helicopters and to fly supplies to rebels inside Nicaragua.⁴⁵

The British government has consistently claimed that it can do nothing to hinder the recruitment of mercenaries or to stop them leaving the country to fight abroad, even though it seems clear that British law makes it a criminal offence for British subjects to take part in hostilities between countries with which Britain is not at war.⁴⁶ But the

responsibility of the government goes deeper than this failure to do anything. It lies too in the close links which it maintains with a number of 'security' firms and their leading personnel. KMS, for instance, has been engaged by the British government in the past, once to provide protection for the British ambassador in Uruguay,⁴⁷ and it has been widely reported in the press that the contract to train the contras was arranged through the government.⁴⁸

Internal repression – the hardware

Most British repressive technology is made in the private sector and British companies are responsible for the manufacture of a wide range of equipment devised for, or suitable for use in, counter-insurgency operations and internal repression. Such equipment includes:

Riot control vehicles: AMAC manufactures the AMAC 1, described by its makers as the 'ultimate riot deterrent', which can accommodate a water cannon and has an outer skin which can be electrified with up to 7,000 volts. The vehicle was to have been shown at a British Army Equipment Exhibition in 1984 but this fell through when workers at the exhibition objected, not out of principle, but because the AMAC stand had been built with non-union labour. Leaflets and videos of the AMAC 1 in operation were still available for interested customers. In the same year it became known that Chile had been negotiating with AMAC to purchase forty of the vehicles, a deal which fell through once news of it leaked out.⁴⁹

Water cannon: As noted above the AMAC 1 can be equipped with a water cannon, but AMAC also build a water cannon on its own, the AMAC 3 'water dispenser' which can give coverage round 360 degrees from four dispensers. Chubb Fire Security also manufacture a water cannon.

Armoured personnel carriers: GKN Sankey make the AT 105 armoured personnel carrier specifically for internal 'security' operations and can provide a special model for police 'task forces'. In its promotional literature GKN claim that the AT 105 is the first British vehicle specifically designed for internal security use and has been developed using the 'experience gained in Northern Ireland operations'. The AT 105 can carry ten people and can travel at up to sixty mph on flat tyres for sixty miles. Optional extras include a machine gun mounting, riot gas dischargers, searchlight, barricade remover and crowd control speaker system. In 1977 it was reported that GKN were planning to sell fifty AT 105s to the government of Malaysia and a further 200 vehicles to the Marcos government in the Philippines.⁵⁰ Hotspur Armoured Products also manufactures an armoured landrover, the Sandringham 6, which was shown at the British Army Equipment Exhibition in 1980.

This is a standard landrover which has been armoured and equipped with sirens, a public address system and gas grenade launchers.

Internal security vehicles: Alvis manufactures a range of vehicles including light tanks, armoured command vehicles and armoured cars and have sold to Abu Dhabi, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. These and other countries have also bought Daimler's Ferret vehicle. Shorland's armoured car has been sold to Argentina, Libya and Thailand.

Anti-riot equipment: Firms such as Avery, the SAS Group, Schermuly, Webley and Lawrence, Scott and Electromotors manufacture a wide range of 'anti-riot equipment' including anti-riot guns, gas and grenades, and rubber and plastic bullets. The SAS Group ('we lead the field in all aspects of internal security and counter-insurgency operations') sells a range of its products to sixty-five police and military authorities. It displayed electric shock batons at the British Army Equipment Exhibition in 1982 and its advertising brochure for this has been translated into Spanish. Numerous torture victims from Chile have claimed that they were tortured using such shock batons. The Royal Ordnance plc, wholly owned by the British government, offers the ARWEN 37 riot gun which has been advertised under the caption 'Today's rioters and hijackers require law enforcement agencies to react rapidly'. The gun can fire plastic bullets or gas grenades carrying five rounds at a time and firing on a revolver principle, thus making it much more dangerous than traditional riot guns which can fire only one round and have to be reloaded after each firing. Schermuly advertises its product with the caption, 'How can you stop a riot without starting a civil war? Use the Schermuly anti-riot gun' – a slogan which shows the importance of presenting an innocuous, indeed beneficial, image as a selling point.

Body armour and shields: These are manufactured by companies such as Bristol Armour, Bristol Composite Materials, Carleton Russell, PDI, Racal, the SAS Group and Triplex, better known for its car windows.

Restraints and truncheons: The Birmingham-based firm of Hiatt and co, a major supplier of shackles to the slave trade in the nineteenth century, still manufactures handcuffs; the company also offers truncheons including a 'speciality riot baton' which comes in sizes from twenty-five inches to four feet.

Perimeter protection and surveillance: Firms such as Chubb, J. Donne Holdings, Plessey, Shorrock, AD Industrial Electronics, Barr and Stroud and ITT offer an extensive range of alarms and video surveillance systems.⁵¹

Such is the wide range of equipment which British manufacturers can and do offer for the control and repression of dissident populations.

Repressive technology: control or promotion

There are few restrictions on the manufacture and export of such repressive technology in Britain, the 'hardware' of the international repression trade. The Export of Goods (Control) Order of 1978 (amended in 1985) does provide, it is true, a system of export licences and gives the government of the day power to prohibit the export of particular items, but this applies only to military or paramilitary equipment and not to items which have both civilian and military applications, for instance computers or communications systems. This loophole has been used to permit the export of equipment clearly intended to be used for the purposes of internal repression. In 1978, for instance, ICL sold South Africa the 2900 series of computers which were needed to automate the pass law system, while Ugandan dictator Idi Amin's security forces were supplied with PYE VHF radios, land rovers from BL, Vauxhall trucks, and night vision and telephone tapping equipment from Security Systems International, all of which was no doubt useful in the wave of repression in Uganda before Amin's downfall in 1979.⁵²

Nevertheless, despite this loophole, the Export of Goods Order clearly gives the government extensive power to control the repression trade since it can prevent the export of any item simply by refusing an export licence. Such licences are rarely refused and refusal is likely only where considerable pressure is brought to bear. Thus in 1984 the government did respond to pressure from human rights bodies to stop the export of manacles and shackles to Kenya, but not before government minister Norman Tebbit had complained that 'if this country did not export them someone else would'.⁵³ Despite the ban, Amnesty International later reported that leg irons and punishment canes were still being supplied to the Kenyan prison authorities, the difference being that now the leg irons were being called 'footcuffs'.⁵⁴ And before that, in January 1983, the government refused to say whether *or not* it would ban the export of electric shock prods to the Republic of Korea where Amnesty International had reported the extensive use of torture. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher responded to a request from Amnesty for closer government supervision of exports of security equipment and training by saying that this would 'exert an excessive degree of control over our exports, adding greatly to the burden of government ... and of British exporters at a time when our export industry already faces serious difficulties'.⁵⁵

The government's reluctance to prohibit or control the export of repressive technology is scarcely surprising given the importance of arms sales to the British economy. Indeed, far from controlling such exports, the government itself devotes significant resources to promoting the sale and export of repressive technology, particularly through the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO). Originally called the

Defence Sales Organisation, this was set up by the Labour government in 1966 within the Ministry of Defence explicitly to capture a larger share of the arms market for Britain. As then Labour Defence Minister Denis Healey put it: 'We must take what practical steps we can to ensure that this country does not fail to secure its rightful share of this valuable commercial market.'⁵⁶ The DESO, which now employs about 250 staff and has an annual budget of £3m, has a fourfold role: to stimulate interest in British equipment, to arrange government to government sales (mainly of equipment manufactured in Royal Ordnance factories); to assist in sales from private companies to governments; and to ensure the 'export potential' of newly-developed British equipment. The DESO identifies potential customers from surveys and from information obtained by the 350 or so military attaches attached to British high commissions and embassies around the world. Actual marketing is carried out by four marketing directorates covering the following areas: Arabian Peninsula and Pakistan; Africa, the Levant, Iraq and Iran; North America and Asia excluding the Middle East and Pakistan; Europe, Israel, Cyprus, Turkey, NATO and South America. These are clearly not natural geographic areas and appear to be based upon political and military considerations, probably to avoid possible opponents being dealt with by the same directorate. (Although Iran and Iraq are covered by the same directorate, they are dealt with by different staff members.)

The DESO also organises an important meeting point for suppliers of repressive technology and potential customers through the annual exhibitions of British military equipment. The British Army Equipment Exhibition and the Royal Navy Equipment Exhibition, which are held in alternate years, illustrate the extent of government support for this private industry. Although exhibition space is paid for by equipment manufacturers, the venues of the exhibitions are always military bases, and equipment on show is demonstrated by service personnel. Attendance is strictly by invitation only and the public and press are excluded. The government also refuses to make known the countries invited or attending, although this information is usually leaked. It is known that in 1984, for instance, eighty-six countries were invited to send representatives to the British Army Equipment Exhibition. Of these, thirty-four had been named in Amnesty International's report, *Torture in the eighties*. Those attending included internal security force representatives from Cameroon, Gambia, India, Oman, Thailand, Trinidad and the United Arab Republic, while other representatives attended from countries such as Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, Israel, Paraguay, Sri Lanka and Turkey, all countries with appalling human rights records and currently involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in the repression of internal dissent. (Taking its cue from the British Army Equipment Exhibition, the repressive technology industry has organised its own promotional exhibition. In 1985, an exhibition 'EXPO FORCE 85' was billed as an

opportunity for British suppliers to promote security equipment to police and government security forces. A number of the exhibitors had also shown at the British Army Equipment Exhibition in 1984 and, as there, the public was excluded, although Amnesty International observers reported seeing hand guns, redspot aiming devices, computerised surveillance equipment and various 'training' packages.)⁵⁷

In addition to organising the official exhibition, the DESO also promotes the sale of British repressive technology through the publication of an annual catalogue of British defence equipment which is distributed to military attaches and other representatives of buying governments, while a defence sales bulletin is regularly distributed to British military attaches and others.

But DESO is not the only British government agency involved in promoting and selling repressive technology to foreign governments. In 1976, for instance, it was reported that the Crown Agents were desperately trying to save a £100m deal to sell a national communications system to the Iranian police through its subsidiary Millbank Technical Services (now called International Military Services)⁵⁸ and in 1982, the Crown Agents were the conduit used by Kenya to obtain 2,500 pairs of handcuffs which were delivered just before the coup.⁵⁹

Conclusion

What lies behind Britain's extensive involvement in the counter-insurgency business, its active support of regimes which deny human rights, which carry out genocide, torture political opponents, make them 'disappear', its leading role in the international repression trade? The answer would appear to have a number of components. In the first place, the manufacture and export of arms is of considerable importance to the British economy. Not only do arms exports earn Britain some £5 billion each year, but an estimated 500,000 people in Britain owe their livelihoods directly and indirectly to the arms trade. Since the 1960s at least, when the Defence Sales Organisation was set up, governments have consistently stressed the importance of the arms trade to the British economy and have devoted considerable efforts to ensuring that Britain obtained what was seen as its 'rightful' share of this lucrative market. This trend has intensified since the Conservatives came to power in 1979, with any pretence of morality increasingly abandoned as was clearly indicated by the ending in 1980 of the embargo on the sale of arms to Chile.*

*This is not to exonerate the record of Labour governments. Although the embargo on arms to Chile was imposed by Labour, the sale of arms to the Shah of Iran continued, as did the export of equipment to Uganda's Idi Amin.

But bare economics, though important, are not a sufficient explanation for Britain's role in the international repression trade. Arms sales and the support given by Britain to other countries through the supply and training of personnel also have an important strategic function. Just as the United States had to recognise, post-Vietnam, that armed direct intervention as a means of foreign policy enforcement might fail in the face of a protracted guerrilla war where the enemy had a secure popular base, so Britain has had to recognise, post-imperium, that foreign policy goals cannot be secured either by direct intervention (except in the absurd, albeit tragic, case of the Falklands adventure) or by the kind of covert operations which were mounted against 'unfriendly' governments in the dying days of empire.⁶⁰ The *realpolitik* of the post-imperialist era suggested a different strategy, one which would not alienate world opinion as happened to Britain over the Suez invasion or lead to opposition at home as happened to the US over Vietnam, and which, moreover, might actually succeed where the old policy had failed. This strategy is that of 'low intensity conflict' which, as the term suggests, owes not a little to the British idea of 'low intensity warfare' outlined by Kitson.⁶¹ Low intensity conflict involves the support and maintenance of client states or friendly regimes to act as buffers against the spread of communism and which will themselves, with external aid, wage war on any movements seen to threaten the stability of the region in question. Where the object is to get rid of a hostile government, as in Nicaragua, low intensity conflict involves aid to anti-communist insurgents. And while implementation of low intensity conflict involves direct US military activity, this is 'above all in the form of assistance to indigenous forces, of government or opposition, and of small Special Operations Forces and covert operatives'.⁶² Direct military involvement on any scale is to be avoided. In short, low intensity conflict is 'the most appropriate means of dealing with the kind of challenge posed by third world conflicts'.⁶³ As a result of such a strategy, the Third World as a whole has been turned into a global battlefield, and the late twentieth century has become an era, not of world war but of world wars, waged by the superpowers but without their direct involvement.

Britain must be seen as a junior partner in the implementation of this new US foreign policy strategy, sharing the Americans' hostility to social revolution or even much social reform and seeing, like the US, the hand of international communism behind virtually every popular social movement. Britain's main clients in the international repression trade are regimes which are violently anti-communist, generally well-disposed to the anti-communist western bloc, and strategically placed to ensure the military hegemony of the United States in its chosen areas: Somalia, Sudan and Kenya in Africa, Oman, Saudi Arabia and other states in the Gulf region, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and others in south-east Asia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Honduras and Paraguay in south America.

The existence of such regimes, which are not only friendly to Britain but increasingly dependent on British aid and British arms, is not only a more effective instrument of British foreign policy but ensures a ready and lucrative market for British exports in the shape of arms. In such a world, the morality – of arming, training and supporting regimes which murder and torture their opponents, which illegally occupy territory, which practice genocide, which subjugate their populations, is simply irrelevant.

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Asking the right questions about Cuba*

In science lab or in formulating US policy towards Cuba, posing the wrong premises and asking the wrong questions will lead to a skewed focus on the issue. The closer one is to the issue, the more difficult it is to gain objectivity. And Cuba, analogous to a physician trying to diagnose an ailment of a family member, is so close to the United States that the policy-makers have been unable to see it objectively.

Ironically, as US officials have tried to destroy the Cuban revolution and have declared it a failure – or worse – the revolution holds a strange aura of success with much of the Third World. Countless visitors to Cuba from Latin America, Africa and Asia see one of their own kind succeeding in the face of an almost thirty-year campaign to destroy the experiment from the world's mightiest power and Cuba's closest neighbour.

The visitors from distant places see Cuba in relation to its past of underdevelopment, and its present as an attempt to overcome the colonial legacy. US officials and a group of prestigious scholars see the revolution through a fearful prism, as a threat to US security. Thus, they ask the wrong questions and adopt methods that do not promote healthy inquiry or learning.

The first wrong question concerns Fidel Castro and his intellectual origins. Was Fidel Castro a Marxist from his student days on, a fact that

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he concealed from his own movement and non-Marxist well-wishers around the world? Did the Cuban leader secretly believe in a Leninist party and state model while still a university student?

A second sterile question is: who 'lost' Cuba? Several books postulated that Cuba's revolutionary trajectory into the Soviet orbit would have and indeed should have been avoided if only US policy-makers had removed their blinders. The debate over how to treat revolutions in general and Cuba's specifically continues to this day.

A third misleading query was posed by journalist Tad Szulc. 'The fundamental question concerning Fidel Castro, the 1959 revolution, and Cuba's transformation into a Communist state', he asks, 'is naturally whether this whole experience was logically dictated by Cuban history or represents an extraordinary political aberration primarily instigated by his own overwhelming personality.'^{*} Revolutions are by definition aberrations, and the Cuban revolution could not have occurred without the unique character of Fidel Castro.

The questions Szulc and other scholars have avoided are: did there exist in the 1950s genuine revolutionary thought in Third World countries that was not connected with Marxism-Leninism? Is there today a material road that would allow small Third World peoples to enter the course of history – other than receiving direct Soviet aid and the influence that inevitably comes with it? Indeed, is there a language, a vocabulary available for revolutionaries that is not Marxist-Leninist in derivation? In the 1980s, can revolution, seen as gaining independence or a homeland, be separated from the question of economic transformation?¹ This alternative set of questions goes to the heart of the reality faced by Cuba's revolutionary leaders. They also allow scholars to consider Cuba in terms larger than ideology.

Fidel's ideology

In 1968 Fidel Castro explained to me that as a university student his first reading of the *Communist Manifesto* deeply impressed him, and that he first read and understood Lenin's genius while in prison at the Isle of Pines in 1954. But Fidel was also somewhat of a Jeffersonian who believed in the moral right of an oppressed people to make a revolution,² a Martiano who saw that only revolution could open Cuba's path to the mainstream of the historical process, as well as a fan of C. Wright Mills, whose *Power Elite* provided him with immense insight into the nature of US politics.

Castro also read Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he found

^{*}Tad Szulc, *Fidel: a critical portrait* (New York, Morrow, 1986 and London, Hutchinson, 1987).

illuminating. He studied the lives of Martí and Bolívar, the men with whom he most directly linked his own life. Castro devoured the writings of Martí and the Cuban historians that wrote of the independence wars of the 1860s and 1890s, from whom he sought insight into the nature of the political and military mistakes of de Cespedes, Agramonte, Maceo and Maximo Gomez – in other words, Cuban history became a guide for Castro for his own successful revolution.³

The key to victory, he understood from his reading of history, was national unity, a formula that coincided with Marxism-Leninism as practised by Soviet leaders. The fact that he was a Marxist and a Leninist, however, did not make him different from most other Third World nationalist revolutionaries. Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and the leaders of many of the African revolutions were also Marxist-Leninists.⁴ This revolutionary ideology offered not only the mobilising rhetoric for anti-imperial campaigns, but a language for achieving social and economic justice within the emerging new nation.

How can a revolution occur in contemporary Latin America, Africa or Asia that does not address the need to transform the economy, the issues of class structure and the distribution of wealth? Indeed, Jose Martí had confronted these issues in the 1890s, and along with them strategies for realising revolutionary change. Martí, however, did not have the communist issue to contend with, but he, like Fidel, had to confront the anti-revolutionary colossus of the North, and therefore had to proceed covertly both in terms of forging a revolutionary organisation and in only partly revealing his substantive agenda.

Fidel has often quoted Martí that 'to achieve certain things they must be kept concealed; to proclaim what they are would raise difficulties too great to attain them in the end'. And Castro knew from the late 1940s what kind of changes he thought were necessary for Cuba – even though he continued to work through the traditional political party structure until Batista's 1952 coup made it impossible to do so, and thus freed Castro to begin his revolutionary career.

A revolutionary is a driven person, one whose need is transformed into a way of life, an all-consuming energy to play a key role in the alteration of his or her people's destiny. The successful revolutionary cannot afford to be dogmatic, inflexible or, at times, pragmatic. Success stems from the ability to judge the possibilities of ebbing and flowing class coalitions, and thus being able to manipulate them towards the goal. At this, Castro was and is a master. However, his political compromises during and immediately after the insurrection led to the charge that he had betrayed the revolution because at different stages he had agreed to concessions that he deemed useful to furthering the struggle against Batista.

Castro made pacts with elements that he knew were his enemies as well as with some that developed into foes of the revolution as he took it

into the Soviet orbit. The basic fact about Fidel Castro was his determination to carry out a social revolution. This prescribed who would be friends and enemies. Castro knew that the old and corrupt politicians like Carlos Prío and members of the old political parties had no interest in pursuing transformations of economic and political life inside Cuba. And his political alliances with such people were necessarily temporary. Likewise, other propertied groups would inevitably charge Fidel with betrayal, for he was determined to change the property system.

According to James O'Connor, Cuban capitalism was under- and over-developed. Underdeveloped, in that it could not employ modern technology, nor free itself from the US fetters; overdeveloped, in that it had used up the investment possibilities on the island itself, and had rationalised the island economy so as to adjust to a permanent dependency relationship.⁵

Castro's father, Angel, provided Fidel with the most immediate experience of Cuban dependency. A middle sized peasant owner, or *colono*, Angel Castro had his own sugar quota, which was determined by the association of *colonos*, which had struck an agreement with the large and small sized sugar growers, who, in turn, had received their authorisation from the Cuban legislature and president, but only after the US Congress had set forth the yearly Cuban sugar quota.⁶ Other sectors of Cuban agriculture were also rationalised to remove any vestige of Adam Smith's invisible hand, because the visible hand of the outsider, the United States, determined the options for Cuban capital, and thereby for labour as well. Cubans could not invest in productive enterprises that might compete with US imports.

The point that is missed when writers refer to the natural or aberrational courses of Cuban history is that for Cubans to re-enter history with some semblance of national identity, they could not continue in the same relationship with the United States. The question for Cuba was not capitalism or socialism, but how to forge its own economy.

Nor was sugar land a source for surplus capital, since the quota was artificially set and should the Cubans sell 'too much' on the international market, they would both drive the price down and anger the US growers who also had to sell on that market. So the Cuban investor put capital into non-productive sectors, real estate and tourism. Tourism, replete with gambling, meant heavy Mafia influence. Havana in 1958 was not only the largest market for Cadillacs, but the sex and abortion capital of the western hemisphere. No wonder so many Americans remember the 'good old days when Cubans were happy and carefree'.⁷ This was not an economic route to healthy nation building, since it ensured that future Cuban generations would work either as cane-cutters or servants, but it was the one that existed when Fidel's forces marched triumphantly into Havana on 2 January 1959. Cuba had no national economy – a key fact that its critics ignore. Rather, Cuba was an

extension of the US economy, without the privileges attached to statehood.⁸

Castro knew that he would have to face the power of the United States. He had removed the Batista violence machine, which, like other dictatorships in the Caribbean and Central America, had stood as a sort of US-backed Cuban Maginot line against revolution. But behind that buffer was the US government, the traditional peace-keeper in the Caribbean and Central America.

As the US became the seat of world counterrevolution, in the post-Second World War era, responding in hostile Pavlovian fashion to the ringing of the revolutionary bell, what power could respond to the needs of fledgling revolutionary states so as to assure them minimal security?

In 1959 the USSR stood as the only veritable insurance company for those viable Third World revolutions that needed fuel supply, weapons and basic survival aid. As Latin American revolutionaries and reformers have learned for a century or more, there is no possibility of achieving national independence without cutting the dependency ties to the United States. Not only did US companies own the best sugar-growing and cattle-grazing land in Cuba, they also owned goodly shares in the mines, utilities, hotels and casinos, real estate, TV and newspapers and, most important, the lines of credit that controlled Cuban foreign trade. Cuban spare parts came from US factories, Cuba's railroads were gauged to US standards. In the United Nations and the Organisation of American States, Cuba voted 100 per cent with the United States. Cuba was an informal colony of the United States. President Batista, the story is often told, was referred to as 'the second most important man in Cuba, behind the US Ambassador'.

The US government does not make it easy to break such a dependency relationship, and it forced upon Cuban leaders, and subsequently on Nicaraguans as well, a limited set of options: surrender to US demands or turn to the Soviet Union.

Castro was familiar with the noble arguments of the 1776 Declaration of Independence, and revolution in Latin America is accompanied by a US, not a British-sponsored counterrevolution. Recognition of this oft repeated phenomenon should end the sterile argument about whether or not the US reaction to the Cuban revolution in 1959 and 1960 drove Castro into the arms of the Soviets, or whether Castro had always intended to go in that direction. The United States had destroyed the Cuban revolution of 1898, and had intervened several times afterwards to prevent Cuban self-determination. One could argue that acts that ranged from the passage of the 1901 Platt Amendment, which gave the US the right to send troops to Cuba, to the spectacle of American sailors urinating on the statue of Marti in 1949, and the CIA-sponsored coup to overthrow a reformist Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954 had

already determined the political character of Fidel Castro and many of the revolutionaries who joined him at least five years before the guerrillas marched triumphantly into Havana in January 1959.

The betrayer of the Cuban revolution has historically been US government power, not a Cuban. To the extent that the United States intervened in Cuban affairs, from the 1890s through Batista's regimes and into the post-1959 Cuban scene, it was the element that forced internal decisions. By carrying out Cuban revolutionary policies, Castro brought about the response of the United States, which in turn led to the chain of events that forced Cuba to turn to the USSR. By 1960 Castro, the determined revolutionary, had no other options.

The so-called capitalist alternative, the multinational corporate creations like South Korea or Taiwan, does not fulfil the rudimentary demands for national identity or economic justice. It offers neither democracy, nor the satisfaction of popular needs for a sense of national self-realisation. US-based multinational corporations invested capital in places where large and docile labour forces would be assured by repressive and often military-run governments. These firms pay little or no taxes and have no environmental responsibilities, nor are they contractually obligated to maintain their factories on health and safety standards set in the United States or Europe.

The Soviet model, however, allows for the development of nationalist thought and culture, but directs the economic and political course of socialism around the the only paradigm known by the leaders of the Soviet Union – their own. The revolutionary leaders who decide on policies that then affect their nation for many decades must do so on the basis of a class loyalty, not on fidelity to forms of government.

The betrayal theory of the Cuban revolution – that it had been a middle-class revolution designed to bring about the restoration of traditional liberty, not one-party socialism – first put forth in articulate fashion by Theodore Draper, and since repeated countless times by the disillusioned, down through Tad Szulc, Carlos Franqui and the recently released Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo,⁹ is based on an assumption that a Third World revolutionary leadership can and should adhere to ideal US standards of civil liberties, even when it is attacked by the US government with force and violence. The betrayal focus omits or plays down internal class struggle, and the role of the United States in that internal battle for both control of social wealth and cultural hegemony.

Castro's goals were the restructuring of the Cuban social and economic order so that the structural poverty that engulfed the majority could be eliminated. To accomplish that, a Cuban nation had to be built, based on real sovereignty and national unity. To the revolutionary leaders, democratic forms had long obscured the substance of democracy, or real equality. Such a transformation of the economy would not only strip wealth and power from an owning class, but would

necessarily entail extreme hardship for the working and peasant classes as well.

Castro insisted on unity because that was the sine qua non for the kind of political faith required to endure the difficult transition period. To allow for the democratic forms to operate as they had at certain points in the Cuban past would have necessarily meant that the Cuban people would have been subjected to a torrent of conflicting, confusing and indeed obfuscating information, images, rhetoric from the media and the rhetoric of traditional political campaigns. In addition, the political faith required to make the leap towards a new system would have been further undermined by CIA-directed propaganda efforts, which, Castro believed, would become a front for a US-backed covert war.

The small Cuban class that owned great estates and productive property derived their power from the assumption that the United States would not permit a genuine revolution to take place. They had assurance of this from the past interventions or threats of sending troops every time a Cuban leader even hinted at plans to redistribute wealth. And US entrepreneurs, ranging from presidential advisers to Mafia leaders,¹⁰ could be expected to fight with any means at their disposal to retain their holdings.

US and Cuban businessmen had substantial control over Cuban media, which they used to attack the revolutionary government. They used civil liberties arguments, about which they had cared little in the past, to cover their true concerns about property. Democracy, for the Cuban- and US-owning groups, meant the opportunity to challenge the revolution in order to preserve their way of life, not to better the lives of the vast majority.

By preserving the forms of democracy, Castro would have in effect vitiated the substance. Those who held power from the 1890s through the Batista years had little interest in ending the state of dependency with the United States, and absolutely no inclination to channel their wealth to the services of the majority. This was the essence of the class war that confronted Castro by spring 1959. It cast its shadow over the way of thinking about democratic forms, one that has remained into 1987.

Those who state the betrayal theory argue that the revolution was first and foremost about democratic forms of government and guarantees of rights and liberties, but do not see as primary the issue of property ownership and its relation to political power. Huber Matos, for example, represented certain propertied interests. Franqui, however, appears to be more of a victim of internal power struggles than a man who stood for property. Franqui did not defect until the late 1960s.

Some of the participants obviously believed that social revolution, which redistributed property and social wealth, could coexist with the

kinds of political freedoms and democratic forms that characterised capitalist societies in which wealth and social property is unequally distributed. Castro, as Szulc makes clear, had few illusions about the compatibility of bourgeois democracy with egalitarian socialism. Some of the left-wing critics ask whether or not Castro did not destroy socialist freedoms – as put forth by Marx and even Lenin – as well as bourgeois forms.¹¹

Such betrayal arguments downplay class struggle and often ignore the question of what options are open for revolutionary leaders. They see power in terms of possibilities, not limits. Can a revolutionary leadership ensure the survival of nation and revolution without Soviet aid? Is there a realistic scenario in which the United States would allow revolution for genuine independence and sovereignty to develop in the Caribbean or Central America? Could a European Social Democratic consortium provide the economic stake and the professional expertise to a revolution that would allow it to escape from the narrow choices? These are the questions with which the people in power have to deal. In order to revise their Leninism, to modify notions of international class struggle, actually to make a revolution that is not caught directly in the East v West conflict, some alternative route for development must be made available.¹²

The betrayal theorists do not address these issues. Nor do they analyse the nature of the Third World state in the transition period from colonial to post-colonial status. The fragility of a Cuban economy, without the United States as supplier, banker, provider, marketer and owner, meant that Cuba would have to look elsewhere for support.¹³

The United States has stood like an angry ogre over Cuba, as it stands today over Nicaragua or any other nation that threatens to place its territory and labour force outside the free access zone that the US state has controlled for nearly a century. This is the reality that Third World revolutionaries must confront when they reach national power. In other words, the word revolution should not be spoken without the word counterrevolution. Yet, critics have offered precious little synthesis for political leaders.

The United States has provided Cuban history with a goodly percentage of its political culture by virtue of its power and aggressiveness. For, whatever the Soviet Union is claimed to have done to Cuban society, it has not landed troops to occupy it, nor made vast profits from Cuba's labour force or resources. The United States still claims that Cuba owes several billion dollars to its companies. The Soviets, should Castro order them out tomorrow, would have no claim, since they own not an inch of Cuban territory, nor any enterprises in Cuba.

To understand the nature of Third World revolution, one must begin with the material realities, just as revolutionary ideology is based on materialism. The old colonisers have fashioned skilful writers to present

what sound like reasonable humanitarian cases against besieged Third World revolutions.

How to judge, then, historical processes that are ongoing? What criteria to apply to the Cuban revolution, that would allow us objectively to say success or failure?

Judging the Cuban revolution and Fidel

The traditional measurement cliches should be stated: Cuba has done superbly in fashioning its educational and health system. The basic substantive rights outlined in the UN Human Rights Covenant are met. These include retirement guarantees, food, medical care, the right to a job, and so on.

The dicey area for Cuba, and all socialist revolutions, is in the procedural arena, which also affects the quality of life. Cuban apologists have argued that it is the counterrevolution which has forced this behaviour on the revolution. This has some basis in fact, as with all cliches, but leaves the debate in limbo. The substantive accomplishments have come at great sacrifice, but the procedural stagnation has not balanced those gains; rather, it has produced institutional sickness in Cuba's socialism.

The origin of socialist repression derives from the counterrevolutionary process. The very instrument designed initially to protect the revolution transforms itself into the fetter on revolutionary progress. Once forming and empowering a secret police – the red terror to stop the white – the people of a socialist nation lose their rights as individuals. Revolutions thus look wonderful for the masses, and indeed the masses of Cuba enjoy Fidel's speeches to this day, but individuals' rights remain in a grey area, and law bends itself to national security notions, much as it does in the capitalist democracies when state prerogatives are challenged.

The Cuban security apparatus has ensured the survival of the revolution, but Fidel himself might not be so satisfied about the quality of the process that he has nurtured from its outset. His critique of the revolution, which he made at the last Party Congress in 1986, focused on bureaucracy, absenteeism, shoddy work habits, corruption, the lack of democracy – in other words, the quality of life that state institutions dictate for the society.

The Cuban revolution promised a new society of equality, social justice and intellectual freedom. Cuban socialism would differ from the East European and Chinese models by allowing freedom of speech and would not allow the state security people to determine the limits of expression. That was what Fidel told Jean-Paul Sartre and C. Wright Mills in 1960.¹⁴ Throughout the mid-1960s Castro promised to strive for

exciting, albeit utopian, goals, a society without money, a place where the university was everywhere and where each citizen was a student and a professor. And, miraculously, the USSR continued to provide the material aid to such a heretically led society. Few probed beneath the surface and asked why the USSR felt obliged to support Cuba so generously when its leader advocated armed struggle, a strategy the Soviet Union denounced as infantile. Anti-communist intellectuals accepted that the Soviet Union would behave like an insurance company for Cuba, without questioning the cost of the premium. Through 1968 it appeared that Fidel somehow maintained his independence.

European and US intellectuals who visited Cuba in the early years of the revolution quoted Fidel's statement about culture in the early 1960s: 'Within the revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing.' And Cuban culture did develop inside that enigmatic formulation. A formidable film industry grew, producing exciting movies in form and content. Barely known poets, novelists and playwrights became world famous; painters, dancers and composers had state subsidies for their work, which was shown in Cuba and throughout the western and eastern worlds.

By early 1968 Havana had become the literary capital of the Spanish-speaking world. And Fidel himself greeted intellectuals and artists from all over the world on the celebration of the ninth anniversary of the revolution's triumph. European, North and South American literati wine and dined and rode in chauffeur-driven limousines, opining on all subjects. The infatuation did not derive from an understanding of the dynamics of Cuban politics, but from a naive sense that Fidel had finally produced a picture-book revolution, egalitarian and romantic internally, as well as anti-American and implicitly also anti-Soviet.

Then, in August 1968, the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia. In July Fidel had talked about the 'deformations' of Soviet socialism as we rode through bumpy dirt roads in the Sierra Maestra. He spoke angrily about the Soviet leadership's conservatism, their fear of revolution abroad, their heavy bureaucracy, their lack of democracy, corruption. He cited Herbert Marcuse's critique of Soviet socialism as insightful and swore that Cuba would never travel that road. Some of the blame for Che Guevara's death in Bolivia, some eight months before, he laid on the Moscow line as carried out by the 'traitorous Communist Party of Bolivia'.¹⁵

One month later, Fidel, in an empty TV studio, delivered his speech supporting the Soviet Union's action. Although he denied that any legal or moral reasons could justify the Soviet invasion, he nevertheless backed the move on the grounds that the imperialists would have taken control had Brezhnev not acted, and that not one inch of socialist territory could be allowed to return into imperialist hands. He argued the point toughly and passionately, but the facts of the case did not support his

conclusion. In the test case of the decade, Fidel had sided with the corrupt, bureaucratic, even anti-revolutionary leadership of the USSR, not with the Czech rebels and the anguished western radical intelligentsia that supported them because they saw the developing Czech scenario as a chance for a decent and democratic socialism to develop in eastern Europe.

The support that Castro had won from non-communist European intellectuals and from some American ones as well dissipated. How could he have betrayed them? A month later, Castro angrily and rhetorically asked: 'How much support have they ever given to Cuba? How much wheat, oil, arms? How many of them have ever tried to mobilise the masses to support the revolution on the streets of Paris, Rome, London and New York?' The Soviets, he said, for all of their deficiencies, had never denied nor even threatened Castro with the denial of survival materials.

Ironically, some of the very intellectuals who had considered Castro's Czech speech a betrayal continued to offer full support to Ho Chi Minh, whose reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia echoed the Brezhnev line and did not even offer the modifiers that Fidel put forth. Somehow it was not expected of Ho; he had not raised high their hopes that a western intellectual paradise could be built in Vietnam.

Indeed, Fidel did raise those hopes and he therefore had to pay a price for dashing them against the rocks. He encouraged or at least allowed state security to lock up a poet,¹⁶ and thus to define revolutionary law. Since then, he has reversed some of the jailings of intellectuals and homosexuals. But this kind of *personalismo* hardly assures a citizenry. Twenty-eight years after the revolution has established itself, the argument that free speech and assembly would allow the counterrevolutionaries a forum that would work against the interests of the majority does not ring with compelling truth. There is no alternative inside Cuba to the present government. The bourgeoisie did return to Cuba for family visits, beginning in the late 1970s, showed their affluence, proselytised for their way of life under capitalism and even brought with them large amounts of consumer goods that were new to Cubans, like VCRs and other electronic gadgets. The exposure to a more affluent life did have an impact on a segment of the society, but the vast majority showed little interest in emigrating to the United States.¹⁷

By the mid 1970s Cubans had debated and adopted a criminal and civil law code and a constitution, which proclaims that citizens have rights. The problem with socialist regimes is precisely over this issue — the enshrined freedoms on the one hand, and the practice of repression on the other.

The Cuban population is aware of its basic rights and freedoms and the long years of sacrifice required to get them. But do the much discussed constitution and codified laws offer real protection for the

citizenry, if state security agents were to decide that an individual is counterrevolutionary? Few Cubans really know. The law has not been tested against the unofficial powers of state security and the Good Old Boys who still retain power in and around it. In some cases, the law has prevailed over the unofficial policies set by the police. Recently, a lesbian couple was granted custody of an orphan, and homosexuals won a case in court over their rights to keep jobs.¹⁸ In Cuba today a recognised artist can announce that he is a homosexual without fearing that he will lose his job or become a pariah. Yet, there is no opposition politics, or printed social debate. And those who take steps to create political space find themselves in difficulties.

This is not to accept the Armando Valladares line, that Cuba is a dungeon with systematic torture of political dissidents,¹⁹ nor the fashionable negativism that intellectual life in Cuba is dead as a result. Cuba produces more intellectual creativity than most of the Spanish-speaking countries and infinitely more than the US models like South Korea or Taiwan. Despite this intellectual accomplishment, there is less than the perfect atmosphere in which artists or political aspirants can exercise imagination.

After almost thirty years of revolution Cuban society is still emulated throughout the Third World. Not to see barefoot children with bloated bellies, not to see parasite-infested beggars and waifs in the cities and countrysides is a rarity in much of the Third World. Cuba can boast that its kids now finish ninth grade, have low infant mortality rates, good teeth, long life expectancy, etc. There is still the inconvenience of having to line up to buy scarce goods, but, compared to the Dominican Republic, where money is rationed so as to deny the poor the most elementary needs, Cuban distribution problems are minimal compared to their Third World neighbours – and most Cubans know it, appreciate their good fortune, and, if they forget, they are constantly reminded that the revolution has made this new society so as to meet their basic needs.

Why, then, is there no serious political discussion, with differences expressed, in the press or television on issues of economic and foreign policy? The Cuban media remains narrow and inflexible in its political line. Why cannot *Granma* or *Juventud Rebelde* publish the Central Committee debates? Or is even the Central Committee intimidated by the power and paternalism of the revolutionary leaders?

In lieu of other political parties, this appears to be one way to open Cuban political discussion to the wider public. It is not just Fidel's whim that keeps the society closed to political discussion about foreign and national economic policy, and maintains political participation for an elite; it is part of the dynamic of a model that was chosen twenty-six years ago, when it offered salvation from US attack. The Soviet-style Communist Party model was the premium paid for an insurance policy,

and today that imported model – not necessarily Lenin’s – is institutionalised. The model came under the rule of Leonid Brezhnev, whose regime was characterised by bureaucracy, rigidity and corruption. The Communist Party model of the mid-1960s, when Cuba imported it, was a far cry from Lenin’s notion, and even from Nikita Khrushchev’s. Nevertheless, it has served Cuba during the difficult transition from a dependency of the US economy into its current stage of developing partner inside the Socialist Bloc economy.

It would take all of the monumental will that Tad Szulc and all others who have known him attribute to Fidel to undo the negative features of this model, which have been both caricatured and portrayed accurately ad nauseam in the western media. He would have, however, ample support from those Cubans who feel the stultified climate in their everyday life and work, and are sick and tired of the already crusty bureaucracy and the petty corruption. These new citizens are products of the revolutionary education itself, members of the militia to defend the country and hardly vulnerable to whatever counterrevolutionary messages would surface in a freer atmosphere.

Fidel, the greatest figure in Latin American history since Bolivar, the object of jealousies and restricted ideologies, also possesses the courage to make a major effort to open a society that he helped to close as a means for revolutionary survival. ‘Courage’, Fidel told me in 1974, ‘is changing your mind, reversing your policy after you’ve made a real investment in it.’ He was talking about John F. Kennedy, and his belief that the young president had changed his mind shortly before his death about the issues of the Cold War, and was about to pursue a peace policy. Indeed, Castro believed that Kennedy was assassinated because of his courage.²⁰

The revolutionary heritage that begat the Cuban revolution, and formed the thought of Fidel Castro, is also a democratic heritage. There is no necessary contradiction between socialism and democracy, either in the Soviet Union or in Cuba. It has been the structures of their Communist Parties, their inflexible understanding of democratic centralism and the refusal to drop the cultural legacies of paternalism that have brought Cuban society into its present condition: a model welfare state for the Third World, including a large educated population, without the compatible entry for full political participation. Just as the United States postures with a Cold War rhetoric that not longer coincides with reality, so too does Cuba’s national security apparatus, built to defend the revolution against the mighty Yankees, reflect an elitism and a rigidity of more fragile times. The Cubans are now a smart and a healthy people; they are grown up, and can be ‘trusted’ by their leaders.

Castro has been in power over nine times longer than Kennedy, more than enough time for a judgement. Yet policy-makers and scholars alike continue to ask the wrong questions and thus to measure the Cuban

revolution by a rod that doesn't read its features. The United States did not have the power to 'keep' Cuba, nor did it have a model for Cuban transformation into nationhood.

The judgements on Castro will take into account his ability to survive the terrible wrath of the United States. His revolutionary test may well be not only the material quality of life the Cuban citizen enjoys, but the extent to which real democracy can overcome the paternal tradition, which clung to the Cuban Communist Party in the transition from a US colony to a member of the Soviet Bloc economy.

Ideological posturing about moral incentives played a role in the early stages of the Cuban revolution, when the image of 'Che' Guevara as a romantic 'new man' motivated people to work harder, sacrifice and struggle. The Cuban revolution is now almost thirty years old and appeals to the Cuban people to give more can only succeed if they themselves become meaningful participants in the society they are to make. The paternalism of the Party elite with their relative material wealth is hardly a reason for the Cuban worker to fall for ideological cries for more sacrifices. Will Castro make the move that Gorbachev made in the Soviet Union, and instead of pushing only the ideology of sacrifice turn to genuine democracy as well?

After almost thirty years, there is a valid question: why hasn't Cuba achieved meaningful democratic forms? That question — not whether Fidel was or wasn't a secret Marxist-Leninist — must engage socialists in Cuba and elsewhere. The substantive rights exist and the citizenry is educated and healthy. What is there about the model of government, then, that prevents the ruling circles from extending political trust?

References

- 1 The Iranian revolution might be seen as an exception in that it seeks a restoration of an ancient order. Movements like the mainstream PLO or IRA have remained more narrowly nationalist in orientation, but have openly Marxist wings that address the class issues as well.
- 2 To the extent that Jefferson was the first modern nationalist revolutionary, Castro, like his African, Asian and Latin American contemporaries, believed in the right, indeed duty of the people to revolt, so as to establish independence — a basic route with which to enter the course of history.
- 3 In 1974 Castro told Frank Mankiewicz, Kirby Jones and myself that he was also a sea story aficionado, and that he had just read *Jaws*. 'Quite a thriller', said Mankiewicz. 'More than that,' Castro added, 'it is an excellent critique of capitalism.' He then explained to us how *Jaws* illustrated capitalism's values, in that the town merchants prevented the honest police chief from closing the beaches. My experience with Castro in the course of making three films with him confirms the view that he integrates all his experiences into a revolutionary *weltanschauung*, one that always affirms a positive view of human nature.
- 4 The exceptions — like Gandhi, for example, who combined his principles of national unity with non-violence — did not offer a viable route for most nations to get out of colonial or dependent status. The Second World War became a crucial factor for

Indian independence, since Great Britain was so depleted by it and could hardly afford to maintain a colonial government in territories as large and populous as India. Nationalists like Nasser of Egypt and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya were anti-imperialists, like Castro, but precisely because their ideology stopped short of the class analysis, they could not promote lasting social revolutions. With hindsight, it is fairer to call them independence leaders, in the Jeffersonian tradition, rather than revolutionaries.

- 5 Two works, Robin Blackburn's essay in *New Left Review* (no. 21, 1963) and the deeper study by James O'Connor, *The Origins of Cuban Socialism* (Cornell University, 1970), deal with the hidden dynamics of Cuban history — the legacies of dependency that went beyond sugar quotas and, in fact, determined the life styles and possibilities of the Cuban people.
- 6 Each year the US Congress agreed to buy a specified quantity of Cuban sugar at a fixed price. This meant that Cuba would have a guaranteed market for half or more of its sugar crop. The remainder could be sold to the world market at a fluctuating price. The arrangement appeared beneficial to Cuba, but, in fact, it was a deal that put the island into bondage. Cuba could not risk selling too much sugar abroad, and thus lowering the price, since this would anger Florida and Louisiana growers whose Congressional representatives could reduce the amount and price by threatening to filibuster the quota bill. The yearly quota also put the rest of the Cuban economy into a straitjacket, since no sector of the Cuban society could afford to alienate any US interest for fear that the sugar quota would be reduced.
- 7 A popular Cuban saying in 1968 was '*Como quiera que te pongas, tienes que llorar*' (No matter what you do, you end up crying).
- 8 James O'Connor, op. cit.
- 9 Theodore Draper, *Castroism: theory and practice* (Praeger, 1965). Szulc and Franqui, op. cit. Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo was a member of the revolutionary guerrilla force that fought in the Escambray Mountains in Central Cuba. He became disillusioned and charged Castro with betrayal, left Cuba to join the counterrevolution in the United States and was subsequently arrested in Cuba in 1963. He was released in 1986 when Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez intervened personally with Castro on his behalf. Huber Matos, who was commander of Camaguey Province until he resigned for ideological reasons in October 1959, also holds that Castro betrayed the Cuban revolution. Matos was released after serving twenty years in prison.
- 10 Adolph A. Berle, for example, was a member of FDR's 'Brain Trust' and served President Kennedy as an adviser, and was also a major shareholder and executive in the American Sugar Company, which was expropriated in 1960. The organised crime syndicates owned hotels and gambling casinos in Cuba, which were used both to make immense profits and to launder other dirty money.
- 11 Socialist literature makes clear that freedom of debate is vital to the existence of just order, and Stalinism as practised in the USSR during the Stalin and post-Stalin periods, up till recently, does not meet the most rudimentary criteria for socialist freedom. But, on the other side, counterrevolutionary or previously passive elements become active partisans for free speech and press, when the issue of property redistribution begins to take place. While civil liberties are a co-equal partner with substantive human rights, they should not become a facade to mask the issues of class struggle that take place in revolutionary times, like those in Cuba in 1959-60, or in Nicaragua today.
- 12 Given the lessons of Cuba, the results of adopting Soviet-style models and fitting them together with Cuban conditions, can the Sandinistas re-route their revolution? The Soviets also have learned from the past and may also be more flexible. The question is whether or not the European Social Democrats can muster the will and courage to help defuse the Cold War conflicts in the Third World, which are handled at 'low intensity' by the United States, but are charged with greater peril.

- 13 China, with whom the Cubans flirted briefly after the disillusionment with Khrushchev following the 1962 Missile Crisis, proved to be unreliable and far more bossy than the Soviet Union. The European Social Democratic leaders became prisoners of their own central banks, usually right after their electoral victories, and have not acted in concert to help Third World revolutionaries or even reformers. In 1980 they failed to respond to Michael Manley, a member of the Socialist International, when a \$50m aid package might have helped him win re-election in Jamaica. Allende also was unable to get alternative funding to help him carry out an experiment in Chilean democratic socialism.
- 14 Mills and Sartre both wrote polemics defending the Cuban Revolution. *Listen Yankee* and *Sartre on Cuba* (both published by Ballantine Books, New York, 1960).
- 15 The Bolivian Party had not only been ideologically opposed to Che's revolutionary guerrilla mission, but had taken steps to thwart his recruitment of Bolivian combatants and supply needs.
- 16 In 1971 poet Heberto Padilla was arrested and held without charges for some thirty-eight days. Upon his release, Padilla spoke to the Cuban Writers' Union. He denounced himself and a few other Cuban writers as counterrevolutionary, heaping upon them phrases used in the Soviet purge trials of the 1930s. Either Padilla was presenting a farce in bad taste, or he was acting as a voice for Stalinist elements of state security. Charges made by Padilla's friends abroad that he had been tortured appeared to be untrue; nevertheless the arrest of the poet and the subsequent spectacle at the Writers' Union further damaged the already bad image of Fidel in non-communist intellectual circles.
- 17 In 1980 some 125,000 Cubans left in small boats for Florida. Castro allowed them to leave after President Carter declared them welcome. Castro shut down the exodus before all those who desired to leave had done so, mainly because Carter began to complain that among the refugees were recently released prison and insane asylum inmates. The CIA estimated that perhaps as many as another 250,000 Cubans would have left had the door remained open. This contrasts with a Cuban estimate of about another 50,000.
- 18 Several hundred Cuban gays had been fired by a Cultural Ministry official and were reinstated after a judge declared that firing based on sexual preference was unconstitutional.
- 19 Amnesty International and America's Watch do not have any certain cases of human rights violations (that is, imprisonment for political ideas, imprisonment without trial, or systematic or routine torture). The OAS Human Rights Committee also has not documented any such cases. All three complain that Cuba does not allow systematic monitoring. The Cubans claim that the OAS expelled them in 1962, but have not ruled out inviting observers and investigators from Amnesty and America's Watch. The claims by Valladares and other former prisoners of imprisonment for ideas and systematic brutality have not been proven. Valladares appears to have included in his book every prison horror story known as if they happened to him. The Cuban government did demonstrate that Valladares simulated paralysis while he was in prison. Aside from a surreptitious video tape that shows Valladares leaping from his wheelchair in the hospital bathroom and doing exercises, the leading Cuban orthopaedic specialist and a team of experts from the Medical School examined him and found no organic cause for paralysis and concluded that he was faking. When Valladares was freed, TV news cameras showed him walking normally and even running as he disembarked from the airplane.
- 20 Castro quoted from Kennedy's University speech to illustrate the point, but offered nothing beyond that. He said he was convinced that Kennedy had decided to reverse the bellicose posture of his early years and pursue a more mature foreign policy. 'The Kennedy that was assassinated in Dallas in 1963', he said, 'was a much more mature man than the one who was inaugurated in 1961.'

Notes and documents

UK commentary

Racial harassment, housing and community action*

There seems to be a view, emanating from the intellectual rump of the black community, that working through existing structures and institutions of local authorities somehow compromises black militancy and/or black politics. For those of us who work on the ground, however, and need to tackle the everyday problems of housing and around housing for our people, it is a practical necessity to use the tools of the system to fight the system with, while at the same time avoiding the propensity for corruption that such a course of action involves. And, for that reason, we need to be both responsive and responsible to the black community, even as we mobilise them to put pressure on local authorities to fulfil their obligations.

With this in mind, I would like, in my talk today, to go beyond the study of legal remedies for racial harassment, already touched on, and look at it from the community perspective. Firstly, legal remedies to racial harassment have in-built limitations. It has been the experience of black communities and of anti-racist activists around the country that until and unless cases are backed up by popular campaigns, they inevitably end up in failure in court and, even more importantly, in a failure to publicise the issue of racism.

The second reason why community perspectives are important in strategies to combat racial harassment at an institutional level relates to the whole question of the political will and ability of local authorities to formulate and implement such policies. Six months of working in a

*Revised and updated version of a talk given at the LAG/IRR Conference on Legal Remedies to Racial Harassment, London, 26 June 1987.

local authority has, more than ever, convinced me of the need to have solid community organisations which propel local authorities into correct policies and practices.

Thirdly, with the increasing Thatcherite attack on the power and finances of local authorities, and the consequent preoccupation with their own survival, issues like racism and racial harassment are going to be of secondary importance. And that will be true of left-wing authorities too, and even those that pride themselves on being radical socialist councils.

The fourth – and the most fundamental – reason is the number of racist attacks. What we get with official statistics, which even the Home Office admits is a gross underestimate of what really goes on, is that in 1984 we had 7,000 cases reported, and by June 1985 we had already reached that same number for that year. But the information that we are getting through Anti-Fascist Action, through monitoring groups around the country, through the CREs and their monitoring systems, through bodies like the Institute of Race Relations and so on, points to a much higher figure and paints a frightening national picture. And it's not just the number of attacks that is significant, but the organisation behind those attacks, the way those attacks are carried out, and the sort of weapons used in those attacks. And for me the most frightening thing is that attacks are taking place in areas that have no solid black communities, where there are no groups of anti-racist activists to monitor the situation, where there are no community organisations whatsoever – the small towns in the Midlands, the small towns in Scotland – where all sorts of weapons ranging from air rifles to catapults have been used in attacks against black people. When you start collating all the statistics at a national level, I think we are talking of attacks in the region of 50,000 to 60,000 per year.

I want to use the area with which I am most familiar – Newham – as a case study in terms of how we actually see two key agencies – the local authority and the police. I want to look at those two agencies from a critical viewpoint of our experiences as a black community, but, more importantly, in terms also of what we learnt and how we attempted to organise, and the sort of relationship we tried to create with the local authority.

Let me start with the police. A lot has been written about the police response to racial harassment and standard police practices in dealing with racial attacks. What we found – from our monitoring since 1980 – is a police response that does not recognise the factor of racism. There is still, on the beat, the tendency to equate racial harassment with domestic disputes. We are dealing with a case right now in Newham where a family is being systematically attacked, day in, day out. It is the only Asian family in that particular street, the only family to be attacked, and the pattern of harassment is the same – groups of young kids

hang around outside the house and carry out these attacks in the evening. They shout racist abuse, spit, pull the women's saris, throw stones, smash windows. Yet the local home beat police officer persists in treating this as a dispute between neighbours. And this is the area that has an organised Racial Incidents Squad set up by the Metropolitan Police.

The second police response is to advise victims to take out private prosecutions, which both for legal and for practical reasons is something that cannot really be done. Police are unwilling to use the full range of legal powers available to them. The third response is what I would call the BBC approach – looking at both sides of the question, the impartial approach to racist attacks, equating the victim and the criminal. The most famous examples are such cases as those of the Bradford 12, where twelve Asian youths who wanted to protect their community from racist attacks were charged with conspiracy to cause explosions; the Newham 8, school students who resisted attack from plain-clothes policemen believing them to be fascists, and were charged with affray and assault, and the Newham 7, who confronted organised racists and were charged with conspiracy and affray. But there are dozens of other examples where self-defence against racist attacks is equated with the attack itself. Or they are treated as gang warfare.

It's important to look at the police thinking that underlies this response to racism and racist attacks. And, of course, rank and file police thinking is different from the highly educated, highly articulate and increasingly media-conscious flannel of senior police officers. The rank and file view is, for me, best illustrated in an editorial from the *Police Review*, the magazine which represents the views of most rank and file police officers. This editorial, entitled 'The "truth" of "racist" attacks', consists almost entirely of the opinions of a station sergeant from an area where the police had come under criticism for failing to protect the black community from racist attack. According to the sergeant, 'Asians expect more than we can give'. Ordinary criminal attacks are transformed into racial incidents, and the black victims 'get all the attention while other victims get too little'. Attacks were either trivial or the result of caste or other internal conflict. There are 'a lot of factors within the Asian community that make it convenient for them to make allegations of racial motivation when it's simply caste or money at the root of the problem'. And that's the *Police Review* of 8 November 1985, three months after a sustained press campaign drawing attention to racist attacks against black people in East London, and a month after Kenneth Newman came on television in the full splendour of his uniform to tell us how worried he was about racist attacks.

I make no apologies for being very hard on this particular point because policing in terms of racist attacks has not improved one bit where it counts, out on the streets. It is very important that we stress

this, forcefully, to local authorities to make sure that it is taken into consideration when they formulate their plans to combat racial harassment.

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So much for the police. The second agency I want to look at is the local authority. But before that, I want to take up a point made in discussion earlier, when someone said that local authorities were confusing, sometimes deliberately, racial harassment with other forms of harassment. The important point for me is that when you are talking about racial harassment you are actually talking about a sustained campaign organised or carried out by young people (and the not so young as well), almost daily. No other community or section of society, I would submit, actually has to live that sort of harassment; that is the distinguishing factor between racial harassment or terror and other forms of harassment. That's not to belittle other types of harassment, it's all important – it's not much fun if you are a white pensioner and you get attacked, and it's not much fun if you're a black pensioner and you get attacked. But I think at the same time one has got to stress the special factor of racism that underlines black harassment. We were faced with a situation in Newham in 1982, before the new left Labour administration took over, where there was no recognition whatsoever of racial harassment. When it is not even recognised, then how on earth can you expect an authority to start formulating strategies to confront the problem? This is a borough which has the highest number of recorded racial incidents in the whole country and which has a long and systematic history of racial terrorism against the black community.

In looking at the local authority, I want to concentrate particularly on the housing department, simply because most of the reported cases take place in and around estates. Also, to be attacked in one's own home is, I think, psychologically more devastating. I remember in 1982, when I first came to Newham, the case of an Asian family who were homeless and who had been offered accommodation in Canning Town. When they went to look at the flat, there was a reception committee waiting for them – draw your own conclusions as to where they had got their information. And it was made clear to the family in no uncertain terms that, if they moved in, they would be burnt out. In fact, they would have been attacked there and then, if it had not been that the minicab which had brought them was still waiting for them. So the family went back to the housing department and said they weren't prepared to move into that particular house. The housing department then claimed that the family was refusing a legitimate offer and, as such, would have to go to the bottom of the waiting list. After about two or three months the family eventually came to the Newham Monitoring Project. So we took

the case up with the council. We were told that there were no recorded cases of racial harassment in this particular locality (E16). And this is an area which has been shown to have the highest number of racist attacks in the country! Eventually, we did manage to get that particular family rehoused, but that was the extent of the problem that we faced.

The same situation obtains also in the schools. Quite often we tend to ignore the responsibility of the local authorities when it comes to the schools. The sheer number of attacks in and around schools – with headteachers refusing to acknowledge the existence of such attacks, denying the racial motive in incidents, equating racial attacks with playground incidents, with bullying and so on, because they are worried about their careers or making sure their reputations are kept intact – are all matters which should concern the local authorities.

So much for the local authority. How then did we ourselves actually start confronting these problems? At the end of the day, whether you have large organised black communities or small black communities, organising is, of itself, crucial. That's the way we go forward in terms of relating to people and to local authorities, and making them relate to us, even if they don't want to. We decided that compiling accurate records was very important. We conducted a three-month survey in the Plaistow area of Newham. In three months we documented eighty serious cases of on-going racial harassment – when I'm talking of serious cases I am talking of things like windows being regularly smashed, homes being systematically vandalised, arson, etc. The day-to-day incidents, like abusive language and so on, people didn't even bother reporting to us. And in three months we managed to tabulate what the local authority had ignored for twenty years. I think that's the first lesson about community organisation and the need for local authorities to relate to community groups – that people will turn to those particular groups simply because they have more confidence in them, can relate to them.

We decided it was important to challenge the housing department's procedures, and the first battle was actually to get a policy on paper. That involved a combination of tactics – using the local press, families threatening the council with occupations when it was not prepared to rehouse people who had suffered racial attack. Eventually, those sort of grassroot tactics, combined with working through existing political channels and conscientious council officers who felt that they had to do something about racial harassment, made the local authority agree to a series of meeting with us over the course of one year through which a comprehensive, anti-racist, housing policy was developed.

The question then was how to put that policy into practice, a problem we still haven't entirely solved. This is again where community perspectives are important, because we have been able to pinpoint cases with specific implications, identify the issues those cases throw up, run campaigns around those issues and actually pressurise the authority to put

its policies into practice. One example of that was the question of the eviction of a white family, the McDonnells, who over a period of more than two years persistently harassed their Asian neighbours, continually threatening and abusing them, vandalising their homes and on one occasion breaking in. Newham carried out the first eviction on those grounds in this country. How that eviction was carried out and the factors that led to it are important, and should be analysed. Newham council did not suddenly go very left-wing or whatever. Behind that eviction was a year-long campaign by community groups who gathered information, lobbied council committee meetings, helped to get the black tenants in the area together to challenge the white-dominated tenants' associations and get them to take up the issue of racial harassment. And it was this combined community pressure that actually led to Newham council carrying out that particular eviction.

The other lesson to be learned from that particular eviction was that there were times when the council began to get cold feet; their political will needed firming up; they were scared of what they called the 'white backlash' in electoral terms. Nor can one dismiss the whole business of the community education that needs to be done. That particular community in that area – I'm talking about the white community here – has suffered from years of neglect by the local council. We went into the area, pressurised the council into giving us the resources to print leaflets and so on, made sure the education literature went out through the council housing officers, made sure that almost every single resident in that area knew why that eviction was being carried out, and that it was actually the McDonnell family who, through their actions, had evicted something like a dozen Asian families from the block. The end result was that not only was the eviction successful but there was very little 'backlash' from the white community.

Our experience of racial harassment is that it is not where communities are organised and are strong – numerically and otherwise – that there is a problem, it is the cowardly attacks on isolated families. We know who those attackers are. We know their names, we know where they are staying, we know their jobs and where they work, we know the pubs where they drink, and so on – we could go and deal with it in our own way. But that's not the solution because we're not going to be there twenty-four hours a day to then provide protection to the family who, inevitably, will suffer repercussions. And if you live in areas like Canning Town – they are hard, nasty areas to live in – in a sense, it is a futile tactic. The answer is to have a targeting policy; the local authority has got to have the will to put black families, in numbers, on the front-line, so to speak, have a targeting policy that means that black people are there in strength to stand up to racial harassment.

Some other points I want to dwell on. Firstly, there is the whole question of a Racial Harassment Bill. It has been suggested that what we

need is a Racial Harassment Bill; that there is not one has, quite often, been used as an excuse for inaction. When this argument was used before the election, a lot of us did point out that it all depended on a Labour government coming to power – if they ever do come to power, there's at least another five years to wait, or may be even ten – and we simply can't afford to wait around for legislation. But this is also something that the police use as an excuse, that they don't have sufficient criminal powers to deal with racial harassment. Yet the existing criminal legislation is adequate to deal with racial harassment. Breaking a window, whether it is done for racial motives or criminal motives, is criminal damage; spitting at someone is threatening behaviour, whether it is done for racial motives or otherwise. There is no reason why local authorities or the police can't use existing powers to carry out prosecutions. It comes down to a question of political will and determination, but it comes down to a question of community organisation also, to make sure that the political will is there.

Another worrying development that a lot of local authorities are getting drawn into is the idea that special squads need to be set up to deal with racial attacks – racial harassment squads. The first such squad has been set up in Newham and Tower Hamlets – Area 2 of the Met. And now what is happening in practice is that ordinary police officers, who never wanted to deal with racial harassment in the first place, have got an excuse for not doing so. They can say 'it's not our job, it's the job of the racial harassment squad'. But what we say is that if racial harassment is to be considered just like any other crime, then it's got to be part and parcel of every day policing.

The third point is the whole question of multi-agency panels to deal with racial harassment. It might seem a good idea on paper that there should be panels of council housing officers, social workers, youth workers – the whole paraphernalia of local government – together with police officers, but the crucial question is, what powers do these panels have? In Newham the effect has been to marginalise groups like Newham Monitoring Project. We are the thorn in their side, not the National Front or the ordinary racists. The general point is that these panels can actually be used to justify police negligence, to justify police inaction and also that they turn out to be tea-and-coffee chats and a substitute for real action.

I've not dealt in this talk with the police so much because I am pessimistic about our ability as a monitoring group, as a community group, to influence policing in any fundamental manner. With the local authority we have got somewhere, and we are now trying to get the local authority and its different departments to get some sort of policing perspective attached to their racial harassment policies.

I'll give a small example from Newham where they have been forced to recognise the policing dimension. There was a woman in Newham

who was moved from Stratford to Canning Town because of racial harassment. We told her what Canning Town was like – but a brand new house, garden, all that – she said, ‘Okay, I’ll put up with it’. After three months she came to us and said, ‘I can’t stay there any more, I want to get out’. We did get her a transfer, but then we used her case to write to the Director of Housing to point out to him that no matter how perfect your department is, no matter how much goodwill there is, no matter how dedicated you are, if you don’t get the police to respond – the people who are meant to be protecting us – then other policies will end in failure. That this woman had to be moved out of Canning Town was a signal defeat for the council’s policy of not tolerating ‘no-go’ zones.

We live in hard times, but they’re going to get harder, and what that demands is a harnessing of all the community’s resources towards a fairer and more just society.

Newham Monitoring Project

UNMESH DESAI

Drama as a rehearsal for revolution

Since the late 1970s, when the various peoples’ organisations of the Philippines began to recognise a need for new cultural groups to hasten the process of politicisation against the Marcos regime, there has been a cultural flowering in the Philippines. Central to that outpouring has been theatre – an extremely popular means of cultural and political liberation, and the most viable medium of social protest because it is one of the few that cannot be captured in film or print or by the military.

One of the many organisations that has spearheaded the struggle for a new Filipino national identity is the Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA) which, through its affiliated organisations, has brought creative drama to Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. Describing themselves as cultural workers, standing alongside the industrial and migrant workers, farmers, fishermen, students, teachers, professionals and indigenous national minorities of the Philippines, the members of PETA, together with the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, organised the first People’s Cultural Festival in 1983. This, MAKIISA 1, brought together literary, visual and performing artists as well as artists from the mainstream to assess the state of the arts and to forge the basis for unified opposition to the authoritarian regime of Marcos. In 1987, to celebrate their new freedom and to bring heart to the many migrant Filipino workers in the West, PETA’s repertory arm, the Peta Kalinangan Ensemble, embarked on an eight-month tour

taking them to cities across Europe, Canada and the USA. In their role as ambassadors of goodwill for the Filipino people, through their skilled, fast-moving and highly entertaining performance, they projected and contextualised the past twenty years of Philippines history. As the tour has progressed, the drama – which takes as its starting-point the Filipino myth of the creation – has incorporated and responded to current political developments within the Philippines.

Race & Class interviewed Alan Glinoga, a writer in PETA and a member of the Peta Kalinangan ensemble, when the ensemble visited London earlier this year, at the outset of their tour.

Race & Class: We want to start by asking you how and why your group was formed and how it sees its role.

Alan Glinoga: We were established as the Philippines Educational Theatre Association almost twenty years ago – that was in 1967. And of course, since we have been in existence for nineteen, twenty years or so, we have developed through the years. To some extent we have helped to shape the reality of the Philippines, the reality of what has happened in the Philippines. But primarily PETA is a cultural organisation dedicated to its vision – the creation of a national culture in the Philippines.

R & C: But US cultural imperialism is very strong in the Philippines, isn't it?

AG: Yes. The necessity for organising PETA in the first place was because of our history. We have been under three colonial powers – we were under Spain for more than 300 years, under the United States for fifty years, under the Japanese for five years and then again under the Americans. One result of that cultural imperialism has been what we call the culture of silence. In the Philippines people were made to believe that they cannot do anything, create anything, decide anything. So, part of our work was to break that silence.

I think to a certain extent we have been successful – not only PETA but other organisations, people's organisations. Take, for example, our ideas of aesthetics. As a result of colonial culture, we held that white is beautiful. So, if everybody believes that white is beautiful, then what develops – as it did in the Philippines – is a sort of national inferiority complex. If you cannot believe in yourself, you don't have national self-esteem, you are not capable of doing anything. Slowly we had to introduce the idea that it is not only white that is beautiful, brown is also beautiful, black is also beautiful. To be cast in a play you had to be white or of fair complexion, you had to be pretty or beautiful according to the American standard. So, the mere fact that we were casting ordinary people with ordinary faces in itself gave the people an assurance that they too were beautiful. It's as basic as that.

R & C: How do you draw ordinary people into your work?

AG: In the beginning, of course, we had to 'strategise'. When we first organised (five years before martial law was declared in 1972) theatre and the arts in general were largely confined to the schools. What prevailed in mainstream theatre, in cinema, and television, were European and American plays, movies and tele-plays. What we did with our first repertory plays – which consisted of about eight or ten plays altogether and of which three or four were adaptations, some in the English original and some in translation – was to invite popular personalities, movie and tv performers, to appear in our shows. In that way we started establishing a name for ourselves. And then, by slowly introducing the vernacular and Filipino original plays during that time, we built in the first five years a reputation for our Filipino plays. By 1970 all our plays were in the vernacular and we had begun to perform original Filipino plays. Side by side with that, what was as important as the performances that we were giving, was the organising and education work carried on outside our regular productions. So what we were doing, and are still, is to organise teams of artists and trainers, who we field in the communities, organising them into community theatre groups.

We want a theatre that is not only a theatre for the people, but a theatre by and owned by the people. Our long term strategy as far as our work is concerned is to transfer, or develop among the people, the artistic means – the tools of production – so that they themselves create their own culture. In the long term we want to negate our role as a special group of people.

R & C: Did you come up against a lot of resistance from the authorities when you started out?

AG: Definitely. For example, when martial law was declared the first casualty was our television programme on which we stopped production. Although there was nothing laid down in black and white on censorship, the unwritten rule was 'produce at your own risk'. And at that time, of course, we did not have much financial support; our publicity was suppressed in the newspapers so we had to develop our audience on our own. In 1983 our office was burnt down, just to get rid of our documents and everything, so we had to start again. But we are, I should say, relatively lucky compared to other groups, because at least we had built our reputation by then so that the authorities could not just suppress us entirely. And then, of course, they did not really know the implications of what we were doing. I should say they underestimated us. In fact, the most creative years of PETA have been when repression was greatest. People often ask us, 'well, how can you create if you are constantly under pressure, under threat?', but our experience showed that you can be very creative in a very difficult situation.

R & C: You mentioned that there were other groups who fared worse than PETA under Marcos. What sort of things were happening?

AG: Some were arrested and killed. Only a short while ago I was investigating the exact circumstances about a theatre director in the south who was gunned down – he was a very close friend of ours.

I'll give you a very particular example. Two years ago I was assigned as PETA coordinator to the south, in Mindanao. I directed one community play about torture; what happens in a 'safe house', in military safe houses. It was about a disappeared person. In our play one community youth leader – he was about 21 years old – who was leader of community drama there played the role of a prisoner kidnapped by the military, detained in a safe house and tortured. During the rehearsals we discussed how he should react, what happens in a safe house, how should he psychologically and physically prepare for that. The play was shown in the community and it was well appreciated. One week later he was actually arrested and actually tortured. The same torture he underwent in the play, he underwent in reality. Anyway, eventually he was released and the first person he saw was me. And he addressed me, 'Thank you very much,' he said, 'salaam, thank you for casting me in the play.' I said, 'Why?' 'Because the play prepared me for the actual torture.'

The sad part was that he was later gunned down by the military and dragged off to a safe house again. After he had been missing for about four or five weeks we found him floating in the river – dead.

R & C: How do you develop your material? Do you develop it with the community, with local people?

AG: It depends. I should probably describe the creative process. It's a kind of dynamic tension, or balance – balancing the mandate of the times, or the situation, with your creative impulse, and that's very difficult. Basically we do two kinds of play. The first is the one we really prepare and perform for a season. We do extensive research and then either we commission one writer or we assign a group of writers – the usual kind of thing when you prepare a well-made thing. The other kind of play we do is if something happens – for example, somebody died the other day, so we had to improvise around that theme. Everybody participates in a collective process wherein somebody just plays the role of a facilitator and comes up with something. Our output – our creative output – is actually just a product of our overall formation, or training of our artists. Our training is to do research, living in a community, go to the provinces, work there; that is all part of how we get our materials.

R & C: Can you tell us anything about your relationships with the political groups, with the liberation movement?

AG: In the Philippines there are two kinds of politics. There is the partisan kind of politics – electoral politics – and the other is the grassroots politics. We say that we are not a political party in the sense that we don't ally ourselves with any political party or groups. We are open about our stand that we are aligned with the grassroots political movement. How is that alignment expressed? We see ourselves as a service organisation. We are not the cultural arm of any particular group but serve other groups independently. For example, in the trade union movement we help them evolve their kind of cultural programme for the workers. We relate with the peasant organisations to come up with a cultural programme for the peasants, for the fishermen, the students and so forth. In the youth movement we have our own alliances like the League of Filipino Students. We encourage and help them to build their own cultural groups. And, in the same manner that we help them, these organisations also help us, so every now and again we call consultations or conferences with them, we all meet so that they see that what we are doing really serves the people.

One indicator of that is that you will notice that in factories where the labour unions are very strong, the cultural groups are strong. And where the cultural movement is strong, the labour groups are strong. We help them not only, for example, in performing for public demonstrations, or in training them to do agitation or propaganda plays, but more than that – we have helped evolve a kind of educational process where they actually learn trade unionism. We adapt and use drama processes so that, instead of the usual seminars or lectures, they do role playing, they do visual arts, they do music, to learn the dynamics of trade unionism. Or even in their actual work and struggles, for example when they have pickets, they learn how to do creative picketing. It can be very demoralising if you have been picketing, striking for one year, two years, so we do something creative just to help them maintain their morale. Some nights we perform in public squares, at rallies and public demonstrations.

Have you heard of the *welgang bayan*, the people's strike in the Philippines, when the people paralysed the cities totally? One of the first strikes was in Mindanao, in the south. It was a group of cultural workers who facilitated the strike. You know how they did that? The night before the strike was going to be held, the farmers came from the villages and stayed, about two or three thousand of them, in the gymnasium of a Catholic school. There we divided them into three groups – 800 over here, another 800 there, another 800 here. The first group had a workshop on the visual arts (mural making), the second one a workshop on music, the third on role-playing.

In the mural workshop a small chap gave them brushes paints and everything to write on, and the farmers painted their situation and what they wanted to happen with the strike. Through the murals we could

visualise what they wanted to happen. In the music workshop we taught them how to make songs and write lyrics. They wrote the theme song for the strike and they sang it during the marches. And in the other workshop – it was a role-playing workshop – we used this exercise, which we call ‘the four marching soldiers’. I don’t know whether you’ve done that. Six or twenty people played the role of soldiers whose objective was to crush the people’s strike. The objective of the other side was to prevent the soldiers from crushing the strike. If the tactics were wrong, then anyone could correct them and they could think up another strategy or tactic to stop the police. In the process they were able to come up with some guidelines for how to respond to the police and military the following day. So, instead of just some political organisers giving them guidelines – ‘this is what is going to happen tomorrow, this is the possible scenario; if the police come you do this and that’ – the people really defined their own strategy.

This is drama – not drama as a substitute for revolution, but drama as a rehearsal for revolution.

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SOUTH AFRICA IN STRUGGLE

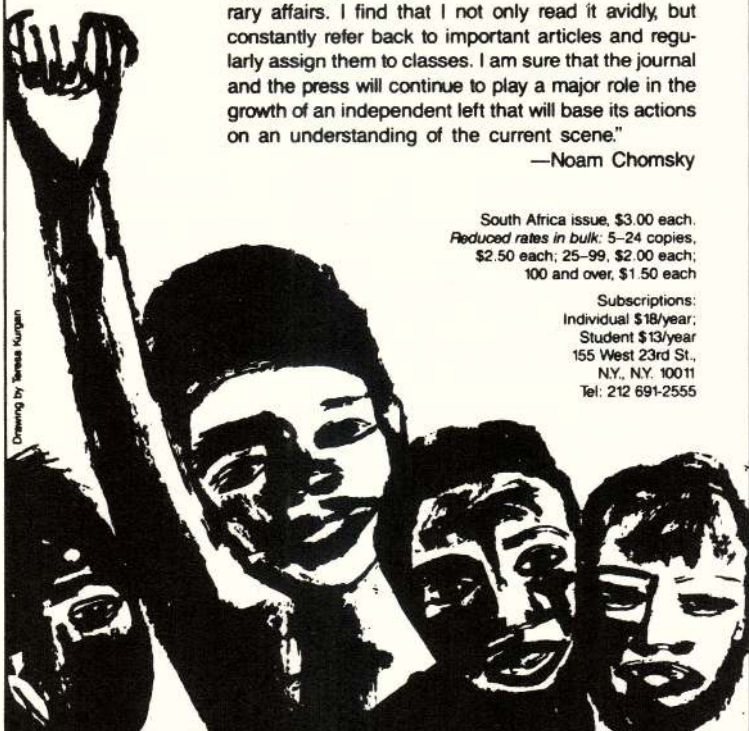
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Drawing by Teresa Kurgan

MONTHLY REVIEW

an independent socialist magazine

Book reviews

Robert Leeson – socialist storyteller*

Robert Leeson is probably the most widely read socialist novelist writing in Britain today – and yet it is quite likely that few readers of this journal will be familiar with his work. Why is this? The answer is simple: Leeson writes fiction for children and young people. Over the past fifteen or so years, he has produced over twenty novels that provide radical perspectives on issues of race, class and gender, and have at the same time proven immensely popular. He has also made a number of critical interventions in the field, most notably his useful popular history of children's literature, *Reading and Righting*.

Probably the most popular of his books are the four volumes he contributed to the 'Grange Hill' series: *Grange Hill Rules OK*, *Grange Hill Goes Wild*, *Grange Hill for Sale* and *Grange Hill Home and Away*. Although closely based on the popular children's television series, Leeson nevertheless manages to give his contributions to the accompanying novel cycle a sense of class identity that the others lack. In these, as in all his books, Leeson does not make dogmatic political statements that lecture the reader, but instead makes his point by putting working-

*Of the books under discussion here, *Reading and Righting*; the 'Grange Hill' series; *Forty Days of Tucker J.*; the 'Genie' books; *It's My Life*; the historical series; *Time Rope*, *Three Against the World* and *The Metro Gangs Attack* are all published by Collins (London). *United We Stand* was published by Adams and Dart (London); *Strike and Travelling Brothers* by Allen and Unwin (London), and *At War With Tomorrow* by Longmans (Harlow). (Longmans also publishes the hardback and schools edition of the *Time Rope* books).

class kids, black and white, at the centre of the narrative. Working-class kids are shown as interesting and attractive characters, as having dignity, pride and emotions, as active agents in the plot, rather than as the criminal or comic figures of much of traditional children's literature.

Leeson introduces us to the inimitable Tucker and his pals, Benny and Alan, and to their various enemies, in particular, Michael Doyle, son of a local businessman, who is also chairman of the school governors, and Eddie Carver, Booga Benson and the rest. Tucker, who is continually in trouble at school, nevertheless plays a big part – first, in saving the school's reputation from Doyle's scheming, and then, in saving the school itself from Carver's more incendiary intentions.

In *Grange Hill for Sale*, the school is to be closed down and the students organise to prevent it. The book has an excellent portrayal of a local journalist pretending to be friendly and sympathetic to their cause, but really intent on using any information he can get to rubbish the school. This is an education in itself. Alongside the campaign to save the school, Leeson confronts the problem of racism. Hanging around outside the school are Eddie Carver and his gang of racist thugs. They bully the black kids and in one incident beat up a black girl, Precious, when she is out training at night. Carver is not content to see the school close, he plans to burn it down. He is foiled in the nick of time by Tucker and friends.

The last of Leeson's 'Grange Hill' books, *Grange Hill Home and Away*, introduces the archetypal school bully, Gripper Stebson, an embryonic Nazi who insists on all his gang carrying swastika identification. When the teachers take industrial action, Gripper tries to organise a student demonstration against them, while another student, Zammo, organises a demonstration in their support. Defeated, Gripper joins the school trip to Austria, hoping to meet some old time Nazis who will help him in his efforts to dominate his somewhat demoralised gang. He finds himself seriously out of his depth and is scared out of his wits by his experience with the real thing. His final downfall is contrived by Zammo, who fatally punctures the bully's reputation by flying his trousers from the hostel's flagpole.

The whole 'Grange Hill' project, both the television series and the novels, can be seen as a long overdue 'democratisation' of that staple of children's literature, the school story. To Leeson belongs the distinction of giving it a social content as well, of making students like Tucker and Benny not just students at comprehensive school, but also members of a social class existing outside the school. By taking on the issues of racism and fascism, at a time when both the National Front and the British Movement were directing considerable energy into recruiting school kids, Leeson played his part in helping to stem what seemed for a while their inexorable advance.

The 'Grange Hill' books were followed by an account of Tucker's experiences after leaving school, *Forty Days of Tucker J.* The book is witty, angry, full of life and sometimes moving as Tucker undertakes to survive as one of the unemployed. He helps hand out 'Right to Work' leaflets, actually gets a job 'shovelling shit', is hassled by the police, has a row at the Social Security when Trisha Bates has her money stopped, and narrowly escapes when Booga Benson and his pals catch him painting out their racist graffiti. It is a great pity but with this book Leeson's involvement with Tucker's exploits seem to have finally come to an end.

While the 'Grange Hill' books were inevitably limited by the fact that they were novelisations of a television series, Leeson has also produced two classic stories of home and school that show his abilities as a writer at their best. *The Third Class Genie* and its sequel, *Genie on the Loose*, are marvellous stories of what happens when a working-class boy, Alec Bowden, finds a genie trapped in an empty but sealed beer can. Like much of the best fantasy writing, the fantasy element serves to illuminate the real world. Unfortunately for Alec, Abu Salem is only a third-class genie and his only really successful wishes involve the provision of a variety of exotic take-aways. His other wishes go disastrously wrong with often hilarious but nevertheless pointed results. When he orders the genie to write his school project on the Crusades, he finds himself in trouble because he upsets the history teacher's prejudices by handing in a Saracen account of their resistance against the cruelties of the Crusader aggressors!

The book contains fine evocations of working-class home life and of life on a council estate. In an inspired scene, Alec tries to remedy years of council neglect by ordering the genie to transform the estate:

Alec stood in Boner's Street, holding the can. A minute passed. Then the ground began to heave like an earthquake. In front of him the railway arches began to quiver and shake, like a dream sequence on telly. One by one the arches opened, showing the blue sky beyond, and on the slopes he saw the estate and his home appear. The Tank, with its mouldering brickwork, its rusty iron, its dark shrubs and weeds, its oozy canal, had vanished like smoke in the air.

In its place was a long low hall with bright windows, a football pitch, tennis courts and archery butts. Beyond it all, a waterway gleamed in the sun and boats bobbed on the water where the crane house had been. The great plank fence had fallen away and instead there were trees and flower beds. From the corner of his eye, Alec saw Boner's Street and gasped. The tall houses were newly painted, the high stone steps shone white, the windows caught the sun. The piles of rubbish and the broken down cars had vanished. At the end of the street had appeared a clear space with swings, slides and a high commando climbing net. It was fantastic. Who would have believed Boner's Street and the Tank could look like this?

The spell fades and reality reappears. Abu's powers were not great enough to effect the transformation and it must remain a cherished dream. Moreover, the genie's exertions have left him so exhausted that he cannot dematerialise, so Alec and his pals are forced to hide him while the authorities hunt him as a suspected illegal immigrant.

The sequel has Alec trying to cope with Abu Salem's son, Abdul, against a background of racist agitation by the Barker family, newly arrived on the estate, and a terrible smell from the heavily polluted canal that is making life on the estate unbearable. In one marvellous scene, the history teacher is telling Alec's class that slavery has to be put in historical context and that slaves did not dislike slavery because they knew nothing better. This is too much for the invisible Abdul, whose booming voice interrupts the lesson: 'Father of Lies, O Infidel Pig. How can you know what it is like to be a slave.' The story ends with the racists routed and with Alec accidentally draining the canal through a culvert into the neighbouring private estate, whereupon the council begins to show a sudden interest in the smell.

The main weakness of the books in the Grange Hill series is that they tend to be dominated by the lads. Leeson makes recompense for this in a remarkable feminist novel, *It's My Life*, that has attracted surprisingly little attention. This is the story of a schoolgirl, Jan Whitfield, slowly becoming aware of the nature of a woman's role in the family and in society after her mother runs away from home. Her education in the politics of gender is summed up when she tells her Dad: 'I think I know why she walked out. The only thing that amazes me is why she waited so bloody long.' It is a grim, sombre, thoughtful tale, sometimes quite harrowing and often moving, showing a young woman's gradual realisation of the way in which 'society' expects her to sacrifice her individuality and independence in the service of men.

Leeson's most ambitious novels are his three historical novels, *Maroon Boy*, *Bess* and *The White Horse*, and the four science fiction 'Time Rope' novels. The historical novels are complex tales following the lives and times of Matthew Morten, his half-sister, Bess, and her black son, Matt, from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I to the English Revolution. All three books are fast moving adventure stories, but they also contrive to portray English society from an unusual and unconventional angle. In *Maroon Boy*, instead of a traditional tale of sailing with Hawkins and Drake in the style of G.A. Henty, we are shown a harsher view of an Elizabethan society dominated by commerce, where the poor are whipped for that crime and the heroic seadogs of legend make their fortune trading slaves. Matthew is one of the crew on a slaver, but decides to throw in his lot with the slaves. He helps them escape when they reach South America and flees with them into the jungle where they join with the Cimarron rebels fighting the Spaniards.

The sequel, *Bess*, has his half-sister refusing to conform to what is

expected of a young woman and setting out in search of adventure and her lost half-brother. She eventually finds the Cimaroons and falls in love with the chief's son, Akenoro. After many adventures they have a son. The last book, *The White Horse*, concerns her black son Matt's return to England in search of Sir Ralph Ferrers, the man who killed his father, and his involvement in the Civil War. Here Leeson provides a masterly fictional account of the radical politics of the period, with Matt serving as Cromwell's bodyguard but at the same time sympathising with his radical opponents, the Levellers and the Diggers. Disillusion with the new regime follows, and when Matt is sent to Jamaica to join the English garrison, he deserts to join the Cimaron rebels, bringing the story full circle.

In all three novels, Leeson not only provides an exciting adventure story, but also exposes to view the whole social order, so that the fictional protagonist and the reader together come to realise how the lives of ordinary people are controlled by wealth and commerce, how the rich and powerful always seem to come out on top. One last point worth considering about Leeson's historical fiction concerns not what he has written but what he hasn't. Leeson is the author of a number of works of labour history: *United We Stand*, *Strike* and *Travelling Brothers*, and yet he has so far not produced any fiction reflecting this interest. Surely there are rich opportunities for juvenile fiction concerned with Chartism, the New Unionism, the children's strikes of 1911, the General Strike and Miners' Lockout, the Great Depression and the struggle against Mosley's fascists. These books are yet to be written.

Less successful than his historical fiction is the 'Time Rope' series: *Time Rope*, *Three Against the World*, *At War with Tomorrow* and *The Metro Gangs Attack*. These are an excursion into science fiction and involve a future Britain which has divided into a poor backward North and a prosperous technologically advanced South after a bloody civil war. At a secret research institute, the Time Rope experiment is allowing a young woman, Kera, to relive the experiences of her ancestors. The experiment picks up Tod and Roller from the 1980s, where the civil war is already in the making, and the three of them relive the struggles of past generations. Tod relives the experience of leading apprentice riots in eighteenth-century London and of fighting with the International Brigades in Spain; Roller relives the experience of fighting with the Maroon rebels against the British in Jamaica; and Kera relives her love for a trade union leader in the 1840s, his death at the hands of the military and her murder of her father for ordering the shooting. The experiences they relive provide them with the means to fight the regime that controls the future: 'know who you were, understand who you are, decide what you will be.'

Unfortunately, while the historical elements of the books work quite effectively and move the story forward with considerable pace, the

future is only poorly realised and lacks conviction. Partly, the fault is political in origin: Leeson's future society seems to be a fictional realisation of the 'Beyond the Fragments'/'Forward March of Labour Halted' arguments. The opposition to the regime comes from a number of self-contained communities: Gold Town inhabited by blacks, Green Town by women, Blue Town by whites, and White Town by the 'Godlot'. There is also a small Red enclave. The trouble is that none of these communities occupies any sort of strategic position in the future society he has visualised, none of them is in a position to damage seriously, let alone topple the regime. He has created a society where, to all intents and purposes, the regime is invulnerable because the opposition is marginalised and exists on the periphery of the system. In the end, the rebel's last resort is to appeal to the prime minister's better nature! Now, of course, such a pessimistic future is a perfectly legitimate fictional stance, but it is clear that this is not what he intended. The books were obviously intended to celebrate resistance, as indeed the historical sections do, but the politics informing his future world actually serve to undermine the validity of resistance.

This brings us to what is arguably Leeson's best book to date, *Candy for King* which, despite the unfortunate title, is a superb anti-imperialist and anti-militarist satire. It concerns the exploits of Kitchener Candeford, a young man with an all too literal view of life, and his unfortunate experiences, first, in industry and then in the army in the 1950s. Brought up in the belief that his father was a hero of the Empire, killed by heathen savages while fighting for King and Country, Candy nevertheless finds himself leading a mutiny when stationed in Sharabia and organising fraternisation with the local nationalist population. Only later, when under arrest, does he learn the truth, that his father had been a deserter, living with a Sharabian woman, and that they had both been killed in the riot that had occurred when British troops had tried to arrest him. The interrogating officer who tells him that his mother was a 'wog bint' is promptly flattened, very probably for being disrespectful to women. *Candy for King* is a well-written, often extremely funny book that makes a whole number of very serious points whereby the reader shares in Candy's painful education: when his mates refuse to give evidence against him, he realises for the first time that true loyalty does not run up the chain of command in our society, but cuts across it.

Children's literature suffers from a general critical neglect in Britain today, and it is a great mistake for the Left to share in this. While Leeson is the most prominent and prolific writer of radical fiction for young people, he is certainly not alone. Other writers such as Jan Needle, James Watson and Michael de Larrabeiti, whose marvellous *Borrible* novels more than stand favourable comparison with the best of children's literature past and present, all deserve to be taken seriously by the Left and to have their work celebrated and encouraged. The only

tragedy is that there is no equivalent body of good popular radical fiction on the adult shelves in the bookshop and the library.

Leicester

JOHN NEWSINGER

The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict

By JAMES BELICH (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1986).
396 pp. £22.50

This is a splendid book, fascinating, provocative and superbly researched. James Belich examines the wars of 1845-72 and comes to radically different conclusions as to their outcome from that of accepted history. He demonstrates that the Maoris won the Northern War, that the Taranaki war was, effectively, a draw; and that it took 12,000 British troops to win the Waikato war and even that did not ensure lasting subjugation of the Maoris.

This is a military history but in that genre I suspect it is in a class of its own, for 'this book is not just about what happened, but about what people thought happened, and why they thought as they did'. For the British encountered an enemy whose strategic finesse and tactical sophistication successfully blocked the imperial forces time after time. The British were delayed or beaten, received high casualties, were continually outmanoeuvred, and were quite unable to accept that this had happened to them. Not at the hands of weak-minded natives! They therefore effectively rewrote history so that 'whatever their historical success, historiographically the British won the New Zealand wars hands down'. Since this view still holds over a century later, Belich is not only concerned to ascertain the truth, but to reach an understanding of why and how it was distorted.

Belich rejects the notion of a simple, primitive and unchanging Maori society, but describes one that was 'varied, complicated and robust' though with a subsistence economy and lacking metal tools. Thus, after the initial conflict with the European invaders the 'norm was peaceful, though sometimes uneasy, co-existence and trade'. For the Maoris wanted the knowledge and goods that the Europeans brought. They did not, therefore, set out to fight a war of expulsion, but sought to limit British interference in their tribal affairs, and excessive annexation of their lands. They did not foresee the scale of immigration that was to follow nor the imperial greed for power that could not permit co-existence, but demanded subjection.

The Maoris were outnumbered and, theoretically, outclassed by the professional military forces of the British Empire. 'Maori society had no professional warrior class, and it produced little in the way of an

economic surplus.' Belich describes how the Maoris evolved their fighting techniques in order to compensate for their disadvantages. One of the first tactics they had to let go was a preference for open battle. It proved untenable against the British and after the Battle of Puketutu in May 1845 it was not used again. The Maoris thereafter perfected a skill in military engineering so superb that again and again they were able to check the British, who were incapable of perceiving the brilliance of their opponents. Since the British view could not envisage parity with the Maoris, they were unable to grasp the significance of Maori field engineering. The Maori fortification - the *pa* - was re-engineered so as to be able to resist both artillery and storm troops. A double row of palisades and virtually musket-proof flax matting was surrounded by a trench complete with firing steps, and traverses to prevent enfilading fire yet encompassing a communications trench. The traditional firing platform above the stockade was abandoned, being too vulnerable to artillery fire and instead flanking angles were built onto the main perimeter. Most importantly the new *pa* also incorporated *ruas* - anti-artillery bunkers. 'These pits . . . were underground compartments roofed with beams of timber. Earth, fern . . . stones, were piled on top of the excavations to render them shell-proof. Bunkers of this type [were] possibly a world first in military engineering.'

Traditional *pa* had served to guard routes or borders, or to protect cultivations, and were easily accessible. But the modern *pa* served a different function. They were resited, remote from agriculture, difficult of access as, for example, at Ruapekapeka, where it took three weeks for the British 'to crawl over 18 miles of hill, bush, river and ravine, hauling thirty tons of artillery along with them and cutting their road as they went'. The site of the modern *pa* prevented the British surrounding it and yet always incorporated an escape route for the Maori occupants. Having only a military value, and no social or economic one, they were easily abandoned. The Maoris, therefore, invented an early trench and bunker system as a defence against high enemy firepower and massive bombardment. They moved the battleground away from vulnerable community centres to sites that it would cost the British much effort to gain and no value to win. Maori garrisons could hold the *pa* with minimum casualties, defeat storming parties, then abandon the fort when they needed to. The British, in some bewilderment, would then claim the empty *pa* as a battle won, and yet would have failed to achieve the decisive victory that the imperial power needed in order to impose subjugation.

Nevertheless, the warriors of a tribal socio-economy could not afford to engage in a full time war. They had to leave the battleground in order to plant and to harvest. The Maoris, therefore, developed a shift system so that cultivation and trade could continue, and could support both the war effort and the community. In the Taranaki war a missionary,

John Morgan, noted that the warriors would leave off fighting to reap their crops, sell the produce to the British in a neutral province, buy whatever they needed, and return to the war to relieve the earlier shift!

In the end the Maoris were beaten because they were vastly outnumbered. By 1864 the then governor, George Grey, had succeeded in obtaining 12,000 troops from the unwilling imperial government – more men ‘than were available for the defence of England at that time’. The Maoris continued to adapt and develop sophisticated earthworks – which the British continued to underestimate – and in the Waikato war extended the individual *pa* to lines of fortifications backed up by excellent guerrilla techniques. In 1868 a series of great Maori victories came close to reversing their defeat in Waikato. But in the end they were beaten.

Belich’s reassessment of the New Zealand wars is exciting. The scenario is of British troops coming up against qualitatively superior military opponents and being unable to recognise the fact because the enemy was black. Belich is not tendentious. He is a very careful historian and his judgements come over as scrupulously fair. His reassessment of each engagement is illuminated by an examination of the comments of both participants and observers, and the subsequent accounts that historians have constructed. But Belich is not content to receive the dominant view, and sifts each incident and each report until he comes at the truth. And that his account has exposed the truth seems beyond question. At Kororareka, for example, the British claimed that they were opposed by a force of between one and two thousand Maoris, and they claimed 130 Maori deaths. Belich offers evidence that the actual number of warriors was 450, and they lost thirteen dead. Again, in September 1863, the Maoris destroyed a major British supply route, in the course of one day being victorious in three engagements. But ‘history’ only records the ‘glorious’ escape of a sergeant and his men when trapped in the bush. And this pattern is repeated for each engagement that the British lost. The number of Maori victors – and their casualties – was greatly exaggerated; British failures were put down to military incompetence – either bad leadership or poor soldiering. The difficulty of the terrain and the ‘cunning bushcraft of the native’ were also common excuses. And when the military genius of the Maori fortifications was finally realised, it was ascribed to renegade European assistance!

And how did this come about? Belich is perhaps too kind to the British in his assessment of them, he does not characterise their version of history as ‘lying’ or anything so harsh as ‘racist’. But his account of ‘The Victorian interpretation of racial conflict’ is illuminating. Basically, the British expected to win because they were British and therefore superior. Sometimes, this expectation ‘proved so strong that it simply overshot the evidence – given one element of an equation, commen-

tators would deduce the second from the principle that the British always won battles against the savages’.

Where defeat was recognised, the jarring disjuncture between event and expectation created a traumatic shock, which then had to be alleviated through the development of acceptable explanations for the disaster. British stereotypes of their own and of Maori military abilities determined what was acceptable and what was not. Unacceptable implications which survived this process were subsequently played down, obscured or forgotten.

Belich does not suggest a conspiracy but an inability to question a whole world view, for ‘the European monopoly of the higher mental faculties was the inner tabernacle of Victorian racial attitudes’. It was not deemed possible that the Maori could exercise the higher mental faculties, nor manifest the higher military talents. Ipso facto, the British won the New Zealand wars. Belich proves that this was not the case and raises the exciting possibility that the ‘New Zealand effect’ could have been duplicated in other colonial wars, and that further analysis may uncover a wider imperial falsification of history. A New Zealand settler, F.E. Maning, commenting in 1846 on Britain’s claim to have won the Northern war, remarked ‘... I really begin to think that it is all a mistake about us beating the French at Waterloo. I shall always for the rest of my life be cautious about how I believe an account of a battle.’ I am now of the same opinion.

London

ANGELA SHERLOCK

Hidden struggles in rural South Africa: politics and popular movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930

By WILLIAM BEINART and COLIN BUNDY (London, James Currey, 1987) 326 pp. £25

At a time when there is already a substantial body of literature on South Africa, it is useful to question the role of the endless conferences, plays and books that are being churned out to see how they actually further our understanding of the situation in that country.

However simple the solution for Southern Africa appears – and the ultimate choices are perhaps clear cut – it is no easy matter for activists to cohere the diverse and impatient masses who everywhere erupt in unanimous and unorganised fury, and steer that energy in constructive ways. And, even when they do, however momentarily, their impact and influence are seldom chronicled and broadcast to the world outside, particularly when they refer to struggles beyond the urban ken.

What Beinart and Bundy record in their book are precisely those

hidden rural struggles which took place in the Transkei and Eastern Cape between 1890 and 1930. The alliances thrown up in the course of these (eight different) struggles were, for the most part, derived from a short-lived, ad hoc unity between peasants and small sections of mission educated 'progressives', as they called themselves. What they fought was the erosion of the traditional authority of the chieftainships, the introduction of government-controlled *Bungas* (rural councils) and the imposition of various taxes and levies. They fought, too, against the appalling conditions of migrant workers in then German South West Africa. These alliances (though not always with the acquiescence of the 'progressives') also campaigned with a women's movement against taxation and beer-brewing restrictions. Trade union organisation also had its roots here; its strength lay in the fact that, through their previous struggles, its members had past experience of organised resistance.

Then, as now, the more responsive an organisation to the needs and feelings of the people, the better able it was to achieve lasting gains, in terms, for example, of thwarting the administrative councils and rendering government legislation and taxation unworkable. And the more responsive the organisation, the more its leaders remained accountable to the people and true to their cause. Then, as now, there was little systematic work done by national organisations to politicise and organise people in rural areas around issues that concerned *them*. Some groundwork was done by the PAC in later years. The ANC of the time tended to be largely constituted (in the Transkei) of 'progressive' types, who, while not advocating a radical 'Africanist' perspective were unable to take up the main concerns about land ownership (something that became crucial at the time of the 1913 Land Act), cattle dipping levies, beer brewing licences, the working conditions of migrants and the encroachments of the *Bungas*.

Those who led the resistance were those on the ground who could articulate and shape these issues. And that resistance ranged from the sporadic and ethnically divided struggles in Griqualand over land holdings, to the more organised and sustained resistance in German South West Africa among the migrant workers and the women's movement and the independent Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, which even recognised the fact that a fight for African self-government should also include the possibility of alliances, at least, with Indian and Coloured communities.

One of the strengths of the book lies in the way it demonstrates the interrelationship between the 'leaders' - like Adam Kok, Le Fleur, Enoch Mamba, Clements Kadalie, Wellington Buthelezi, Annie Sidiyiyo - and the people they worked with and served. In doing so, it shows how localised peasant demands at times developed into overtly political concerns, relevant region- or country-wide.

Today, in the now famous township of Soweto and the Bantustan of

Kwandebele, state and council incursion is still resisted through rent and bus strikes, store boycotts, or the refusal to register, dip or cull livestock examples that are significant because they have a long history as tactics for survival. And, what is interesting today, as formerly, is the state's response; the buying up of 'difficult' chiefs and community leaders, the extensive use of ordinary people as police and spies (ironically, it is the very records they made that provided much of the raw material for this book), and the often vicious treatment of those whose 'disloyalty' to the state went too far.

What the book shows above all is that rural and peasant struggles are if anything harder, the contradictions clearer, the price of success higher, the cost of failure more lasting, than in the more volatile conurbations. But the rural areas are the site on which many fundamental battles have been fought, and which still now remain to be re-won.

Institute of Race Relations

BUSI CHAANE

Kimathi's letters: a profile of patriotic courage

Edited by MAINA WA KINYATTI (London and Nairobi, Zed and Heinemann, 1986). 138 pp. £6.95

'Let us offer our own lives for the freedom of our people. If we sacrifice our lives for our country, our people will never forget us. They will immortalize our names.'

Dedan Kimathi

The publication of *Kimathi's letters: a profile of patriotic courage* could hardly be more timely. The book, which brings to life a history of resistance which the government has long attempted to suppress, appears at a time when Kenyans are enduring mass arrests, the systematic use of torture and other forms of intimidation unparalleled in the country since the colonial period. Over the past year, several hundred people, including students, journalists, churchmen, civil servants, teachers and peasants have been arrested and charged with belonging to a 'subversive' organisation called Mwakenya, whose alleged existence is being used to justify a dramatic curtailment of legal rights, and a brutal extension of repression (now documented in the 1987 Amnesty report on Kenya).

Coincidentally, the book was published during the week in which its author, historian Maina wa Kinyatti, was denied the remission to which he was legally entitled on a six-year sentence that had been imposed on him in 1982 for 'possession of a seditious document'. He is being kept in Kamiti prison despite the urgent requests by Amnesty International and other human rights agencies that he be released in order to seek the medical treatment needed to save his deteriorating eyesight.

Somewhere in the same prison are the bones of Field Marshall Dedan

Kimathi, leader of the Kenyan Land Freedom Army, who was secretly executed by the British and buried in Kamiti thirty years ago. Six years later, when Kenya became independent under the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, the first guerrilla war for liberation in Africa was already more of an embarrassment to ruling circles than a cause for national pride and celebration.

Kenyatta, though designated leader of 'Mau Mau' by the settlers and a colonial court, was in fact never trusted by the forest fighters, and had never been involved in their armed struggle. At independence the Kenyans who were best placed to taste the 'fruits of uhuru' were not Dedan Kimathi's guerrillas, many of whom still languished in detention camps. The fighters and their families had already economically lost out in the land consolidation programme undertaken by the colonial administration to pacify the 'reserves' and reward the 'loyalists'. The loyalists-turned-patriots, rapidly entrenching themselves in the administrative and political machinery of the newly independent country, had much to lose from a critical examination of recent history. It was not, then, just the settlers who were grateful to Kenyatta for his injunction: 'forgive and forget'.

Under both Kenyatta and his successor Daniel arap Moi the official version of the past is that 'we all fought for independence'. Officially, Kimathi is little more than the name of a Nairobi street. At the universities lecturers have furthered their careers by embracing quasi-colonial interpretations of 'Mau Mau', seeing it as a primitive revolt carried out by 'illiterate young men who did not know what they were fighting for', in the words of one professor.

Maina wa Kinyatti and a number of other teachers – all either now in prison or in exile – were prepared neither to forget the past nor to distort it. Maina spent several years interviewing men and women who had fought in the forests and seeking out documents relating to the Kenya Land Freedom Army – quantities of which had been captured when government forces raided Dedan Kimathi's camp in 1955. Most of them were either destroyed soon after independence or placed in archives in Britain and Kenya, with the proviso that they be kept from the public until the year 2013.

Kimathi's letters, while not an exhaustive record of the liberation struggle, does more than merely defy the 'forgetters'. Maina managed to unearth and photostat a considerable number of documents held by individuals and libraries around the world, and these significantly advance our understanding of the nature of the Kenya Land Freedom Army, its strategies and goals, and the tensions within it. The volume contains letters which Kimathi wrote to other guerrilla leaders, to colonial authorities, to chiefs and contacts in other countries as well as letters he received, passages from his diary and records of the 'Kenya Parliament', the supreme organ of the armed struggle which established an

underground archives in the forest in 1953. The concluding section of interviews with former guerrillas and loyalists demonstrates just how relevant the old fight for land and freedom remains in Kenya today.

One of Maina's stated concerns in bringing together the documents in this volume was 'to undermine the anti-Mau Mau arguments that are being propounded by a handful of pro-imperialist Kenyan intellectuals'. Certainly lecturers and politicians will have a tough time maintaining that 'Mau Mau' was an example of an atavistic Kikuyu tribalism in face of the evidence presented here. Listen to how Kimathi described the goals of the movement in a letter of May 1954 to a Tanganyikan whom he hoped would support the cause:

What is being referred to as Mau Mau is a genuine struggle of the African people against British slavery ... It is not true that we are against civilization, that our aims are to take our people back to ancient times. Our fighting is for the return of our stolen land and freedom. On my part, I consider myself a great African patriot fighting, not for the liberation of Kenya alone, but for East Africa and the rest of the continent.

And it was not just Kimathi who denounced regional chauvinism, parochialism and disunity within the guerrilla forces. Commander Ndiritu Thuita, for instance, told the 'Kenya Parliament' in the forest that all its members should understand 'that we are fighting for national liberation, for the total liberation of Kenya, and not for one nationality or region'. Certain former leaders were castigated for seeking 'the freedom of their region, not the total liberation of Kenya and Africa. They do not know where Mombasa or Rudolf is, nor do they know the way from the Cape to Cairo.

The picture of the Kenya Land Freedom Army which emerges from these pages is a heroic one, the record of a 'journey to freedom' which is 'full of sacrifices: tears, hunger, clothes full of lice, blood and death'. It is difficult to read this book without feeling inspired by what was undertaken in the name of freedom, and bitter at the way the journey was interrupted.

Boston

NANCY MURRAY

Long gone: the Mecklenburg Six and the theme of escape in black folklore

By DARYL CUMBER DANCE (Tennessee, University of Tennessee Press, 1987) 179 pp. \$18.95

'Escape,' Professor Dance submits, 'has been the major theme in the Black American's folklore ... from its beginnings'. As one of this

country's most accomplished collectors of Afro-American and Afro West-Indian folklore, Dance was already familiar with the theme of escape when she became a witness to the inspiration and generation of a modern 'toast' ('a long, rhyming, narrative poem, frequently treating the exploits of Baad Niggers'). Her telling of the tale forms the heart of her study, *Long Gone*, a book which converges the arts of folklore with the techniques and interests of journalism, social history, and social criticism.

On 31 May 1984, six young men awaiting execution (for what Dance describes as 'some of the most heinous crimes committed in Virginia over the preceding five years, including twenty murders and four rapes') escaped from Mecklenburg, a new maximum security prison which was then the pride of the Virginia state corrections system. Dressed as guards, the six had driven away in a prison van, and then dispersed to meet their various destinies as fugitives. Though their flight had been accomplished with a minimum of violence, all six were condemned murderers. The news of their escape precipitated mass hysteria in several states and eventually involved the mobilisation of federal and Canadian law enforcement agencies, as well as those of several states and local authorities. Politically, the magnitude of the event virtually brought the state government of Virginia to a stand-still, subverting the presidential ambitions of the then governor, Charles Robb, and critically wounding the administration of the prison system.

In the prisons of Virginia, the airwaves and newspapers of the region, and even (as Professor Dance was to discover) the informal cultures of enforcement agencies themselves, the manhunt had a quite different result. A folklore spontaneously arose in songs, poems, rap tales, jokes and sketches, transforming the audaciousness of the six convicts into mythic proportions. By the time the last of them was captured, nineteen days later, they had been joined to the traditions of the 'archetypical runner' and the 'baad nigger'. Even Lem Tuggle, the one white among the fugitives, was granted honorary Blackness and seemed himself caught up in the spirit of the tradition (an FBI informant confided to Dance that Tuggle had bragged: 'I'm the only white man ever to escape from Mecklenburg').

The central characters of the germinating tale of the Mecklenburg Six, however, were the Briley brothers, Linwood and James. Between them, the Briley brothers had been implicated in (if not convicted of) thirteen murders, and by general reputation cut from the cloth of the baad nigger: 'Probably the most attractive feature of this character', Dance writes, 'is precisely his rejection of the authority, laws, and values of a system that does not value Blacks and his assertion of his own power and authority'. In prison, the Brileys commanded respect from inmates and officials; beyond prison, even while they were on Death Row, Dance found the mention of the Brileys inspired terror. There was,

too, the mannered authority of the brothers. In her interview with James, Dance encountered a man who was 'pleasant, confident, intelligent, eloquent, friendly, soft-spoken, but powerful and fully in control'. Others who knew them seriously questioned whether they could be guilty of the crimes with which they were charged. At this juncture, the conventional narrative of chase-runner proves inadequate.

It is precisely here that *Long Gone* begins its ascent from folklore and journalism to critical social history. In her final chapters, Professor Dance transports her study of folklore into one of a culture of resistance rooted in the historical context of the law of slavery and its descendants (slave Virginia, Dance recalls, punished *free* Blacks for being found without their free papers, carrying weapons, being vagrants, piloting a boat, preaching, holding meetings, seeking an education, writing or circulating a book, and owning dogs). Her subject is now the nature and dynamics of an oral tradition nurtured by a construction of justice whose rules and procedures have been scarred by racial oppression. She posits the possibility that the Brileys were not merely beyond the dominant 'authority, laws and values' but were true rebels: 'outlaws' whose bloodlines must be traced to the fugitive slave.

In *Long Gone*, Daryl Dance has synthesised Black folklore with its imperatives: resistance and rebellion. As such, she has attempted to use the conscience of Black folklore to deepen our comprehension of contemporary America. This is a remarkable task made even more extraordinary by the degree to which she has succeeded.

Center for Black Studies
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CEDRIC J. ROBINSON

Black American Politics: from the Washington marches to Jesse Jackson

By MANNING MARABLE (London, Verso, 1986). 366 pp.
£6.95/\$8.95

Almost a quarter of a century has passed since the Civil Rights Movement achieved its greatest judicial and legislative gains. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr has joined George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in having a public holiday declared in his memory. A black middle class has developed, less numerous and secure than propagandists for the status quo would have us believe, and a number of reactionary black intellectuals have emerged supporting and legitimating the New Right attacks on the remnants of the New Deal and the Great Society. A black mayor, Wilson Goode of Philadelphia, ordered the aerial bombing of a house occupied by black men, women and children and succeeded in destroying an area of black housing - and this outrage was *not*

followed by rioting. Black unemployment and poverty continue and the percentage of black high school graduates going on to higher education has fallen from 35 per cent in 1976 to 27 per cent in 1986. Grossly disproportionate imprisonment and executions continue to be a feature of life in black America.

What has been the response of black America to this betrayal? What role is being played by black political leadership? How do we account for the failure of what has been called the 'Second Reconstruction' and where do we go from here? In this, the first of a projected two-volume study, Manning Marable addresses these questions and attempts to provide a theoretical and historical framework to answer them and to point the way forward.

Marable sees racism as a central characteristic of a society based on the principles of 'capitalistic liberty' or 'free competition'. And institutional racism is a response to the contradictions inherent in such a system and, in black sociologist Charles Johnson's words, 'a commitment to exclude the Negro from power in order to protect the limited expansion of equal rights to others'. Marable's analysis of the First Reconstruction documents the consequences of the logic of capitalist political economy and the commitment of black petty bourgeois leaders to that system, resulting in the absence of a political leadership that effectively articulated the social class interests of the black majority. 'The great failure of the first Black political elite', says Marable, 'was its unwillingness, or inability, to demand land and material compensation for the ex-slaves'.

The consequences for the black majority of this failure were catastrophic and continue to the present. Their super-exploitation as share-croppers and debt peons in the South, their exclusion from the western frontier and homesteading, and their exclusion – until the two world wars – from the development of the industrial proletariat all shaped their current position in the reserve labour army and in the segmented labour market. The central theme, for Marable, of the black political culture from 1865 to 1985 is that

only a small segment of the Afro-American social fraction, the petty bourgeoisie, has dominated the electoral machinery and patronage positions that regulate Black life and perpetuate the exploitation of Black labour. This buffer stratum has historically focused its energies on non-economic issues, such as the abolition of legal segregation; and when it has developed explicitly economic agendas, more frequently than not it presumes the hegemony of capital over labour.

Marable's fundamental point is that the black elite's commitment to the bourgeois democratic state has led them to believe that it is the role of 'leaders' not that of the masses that is most important: all that is

required to produce equality is the inclusion of the 'leaders' in the normal 'decision-making process'. He sees this belief system and their related failure to see the link between capitalism and racism as negating and diverting mass demands for fundamental changes into system-maintaining compromises which support the status quo.

In analysing the struggle for Black Power in Chicago, around the election of Washington as that city's first black mayor in 1983, and what he calls the 'Rainbow Rebellion' Jesse Jackson's 1984 Presidential Campaign Marable argues, 'what liberal Black petty-bourgeois elites had failed to achieve in six decades, the Black working class and the poor accomplished in six months'.

Jackson's social views, Marable contends, grew during the campaign because of pressures from below. He sees the future of the Rainbow Coalition as lying not in the hands of Jackson and other leaders but in those of ordinary black people. It is they who will transform it no other vehicle currently exists capable of expressing their interests, or which can be developed to do so. But what form the grassroots struggles will take that are to achieve this, he does not appear to consider. Instead he sums it up thus:

The next stage in the struggle to uproot racism, gender oppression, and social class inequality, requires that Afro-Americans and other oppressed sectors begin to think of politics in a new way, and perceive that the power to transform capitalist society is already in their hands.

University of Manchester

LOUIS KUSHNICK

Race, Class and Politics: essays on American colonial and revolutionary society

By GARY B. NASH (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986).
370 pp. £33.75

Gary Nash is one of the few radical historians to have emerged from the United States who backs up his ideas with intensive scholarly research. In over half a dozen impressive books, Nash has reinterpreted the past by recovering the history of black and Indian people, women and the working class from its dismissal or inadequate treatment by 'ethnocentric, male-orientated and elitist' historians. This excellent book of essays further advances the cause.

The first essay on 'The social development of colonial America' introduces the dense complexity of Indian societies and the strong impulse for cultural survival among Africans torn from their homelands and cast into slavery in America. It stresses the need for further studies of race and gender, class and regional differences, if this formative

period is ever to be genuinely understood.

In another superbly written essay Nash berates historians for virtually ignoring the role played by blacks and Indians in the Revolutionary War. He is convinced that a man such as Thomas Peters has not found his way into textbooks only 'because the keepers of the past are drawn from the racially dominant group in American society'. This slave, who was wrenched from Nigeria to toil in Louisiana, escaped and fought for the British army. After three decades struggling for basic human rights he died in Sierra Leone, the leader of an unofficial opposition to the white government in the British colony.

When examining the growth of class divisions in colonial America, Nash makes intelligent use of statistics. He is convinced that data on wealth distribution, poor relief and tax 'forgiveness' leads ineluctably to the conclusion that there was a chronic growth in poverty after 1740. This was severe enough to affect a fifth of all families by the Revolution and demonstrated a weakening in the economic leverage of artisans. It could also have aided, considers Nash, the creation and reception of revolutionary sentiment.

Nash points out that slave holding among Quakers was far more common than has previously been assumed. By 1750 many of those in Philadelphia had overcome their scruples and owned as many slaves as other people. The fact that they were to denounce slavery more quickly than others in the wake of the Revolution has previously clouded perceptions about their ability to come to terms with, and use, this institution for a considerable number of decades.

Nash is meticulous and follows through with precision the differences in cultural patterns between those black Americans in Northern cities whose experience of slavery was relatively brief as opposed to those whose lives were affected by the reprehensible institution for a far longer period of time. In Philadelphia, where slavery had ended by 1790, there were far more black schools and churches by 1815 than in New York where the onset of freedom was slow and partial. Yet Nash is well aware that the Quaker humanitarianism that prevailed in Philadelphia was riddled with condescension. The reality was that the most humanitarian Northerners were often as racist as slaveholding Southerners.

This is a book full of detailed research and fresh analytic insights. It offers new perspectives on a period and problems badly in need of a more realistic focus. It has insights that are illuminating and can only lead to more accurate historical investigations in the future.

University of Keele

MARY ELLISON

They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadorean women in struggle for national liberation

By CLARIBEL ALEGRIA (translated by Amanda Hopkinson)
(London, The Women's Press, 1987). 145 pp. £3.95

This short memoir belongs to the characteristically Latin American genre known as 'testimony'. It is a composite portrait of, and memorial to, Ana Maria Castillo Rivas, a guerrilla commander who went under the name 'Eugenia' and who was killed in the so-called 'final offensive' of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in January 1981, at the age of thirty-one. Claribel Alegria, Nicaraguan by birth, but Salvadorean by up-bringing, and a distinguished writer on her adopted country's history, has brought together the reminiscences of Eugenia's sisters, her friends from school and university, her husband, Javier, and comrades from her political and military work, to show the development in revolutionary consciousness and practice of a daughter of the Salvadorean bourgeoisie.

Alegria supplies the political and historical background of this life, and includes recollections by women less closely involved with Eugenia whose stories give substance and dimension to the subtitle. For example, Tulita, wife of Salvador Cayetano Carpio (known in the movement as Commander Marcial) recalls their work together in the trade union movement brought to an end in a wave of repression in 1952. Other women commanders recall the murder of a primary school teacher, and discuss the role of women and the question of gender equality in the politico-military struggle. Eugenia's sister Marta recounts her nightmarish experience of being seized by the National Guard and beaten when about to give birth. Admitted to hospital under a false name, she had to engineer both her own and her baby's safety and enlist the help of hospital staff to save those who had been abducted with her. The matter-of-fact way in which all this is related underlines both the ordinariness of the 'extreme situation' in El Salvador, and the heroism with which it is confronted.

Alegria's narrative begins with a fictional account of Eugenia's death, and ends with reports and letters which fill in such details as are known about its circumstances; interest oscillates throughout between the public chronicle of the larger struggle and its moulding of the individual life, and one wonders whether there is really enough material to make the latter a satisfactory focus, and to avoid repetition. One problem is that, apart from her letters to her husband, which are often mawkish and of limited interest, everything we read about Eugenia is mediated through other speakers, whose memories often coincide and overlap. (A chapter on the life of Marina Gonzalez, garment worker, petty trader, and political activist, is, by contrast, vivid and immediate because it uses her own words.)

Indeed, the real difficulty with this book is that it is a work of piety. Written at the request of Eugenia's husband, it tends to present her as though she is a candidate for revolutionary beatification, and there are several points of correspondence between the practices of her Catholic schooldays, when she was drawn into social mission, and the disciplines of the revolutionary organisation which claimed her mature allegiance. The reader, too, is invited to approach the core of the book almost as if it were a shrine, by way of a lengthy (and informative) historical introduction, a preface, a glossary, and a final 'note'.

The fact that Eugenia's career was, in a sense, completed by her death gives a somewhat over-resolved quality to many of the comments on her personality and achievements. Remarks like 'Eugenia was always characterised by her self-discipline and commitment to the people' or 'perhaps what was most outstanding in her was her synthesis as a revolutionary, mother, comrade and wife' threaten to obscure the complex and difficult processes to be gone through in the extraordinary conditions of guerrilla warfare. Some of the most interesting material deals with questions of sex-roles and motherhood, and could have value for feminists wrestling with the dilemmas of child-care and political activism, but here too, Javier's statement (on the birth of their child) that 'she returned to her revolutionary tasks in under a week and resumed normal life in all other respects' conceals as much as it tells.

I would not wish, however, to suggest that we are being offered a leftists' plaster saint; the book fits usefully between the analysis of Marilyn Thomson's *Women of El Salvador* and the documentary fiction of Manlio Argueta's *One Day of Life and Cuscatlán*. Amanda Hopkinson's introduction is lively and wide-ranging; she might though have noted that Commanders Marcial and Ana Maria (Nélida Anaya Montes) are not, as the text may seem to suggest, still alive, but died in 1983, the year of the book's publication in Spanish. Among the statistical information she gives there are, too, errors in respect of the infant mortality rate and US military aid – which suggests a cautionary approach to some of the data. And a map would have been useful. Nonetheless the book is, despite its limitations, a worthwhile addition to our understanding of the struggle in El Salvador.

London

IMOGEN FORSTER

Is the future female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism

By LYNNE SEGAL (London, Virago, 1987). 272 pp. £4.95

Don't be misled by the title; it is tongue-in-cheek. The book is an attack on the new-fangled, all too popular 'cultural feminism' which asserts that a special, superior, moral and spiritual essence belongs to all

women and it is they who shall inherit the earth. As a critique of the key current assumptions within Western feminism which dominate debates on violence, sexuality, motherhood and peace it is one of the most sensible and exciting books to appear in a long time.

Segal explains that feminism has turned around 'from an initial denial of fundamental difference between men and women in the early seventies to a celebration of difference by the close of that decade'. In the works of 'cultural feminists' such as Robin Morgan, Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin and Dale Spender one reads of a 'separate and special knowledge, emotion, sexuality, thought and morality of women, indeed of a type of separate "female world", which exists in fundamental opposition ... to the world of men'. The writing of these authors is based on a return to the emphasis on natural and psychological gender differences. The dangers of such essentialist thinking, comments Segal, have grown stronger within feminism as the movement has grown organisationally weaker and its perspectives more fragmented. The problem with such feminism which 'sees women as essentially virtuous and men as essentially vicious is that it serves the forces of reaction as surely as it serves the forces of progress'.

The Dalys and Spenders of feminism promote, as the solution to male domination, 'an individual and psychic voyage, on which only women may embark, out of the "cockocratic sadostate"'. Women must travel to their own country by 'recycling male language and culture'. The way to end male domination is not by objectively changing women's lives but by creating women's power through language 'the need to recognise and value women's distinct ideas and experience, suppressed or ignored by the dominance of men's ideas and experience'. Segal shows how material circumstances, in this view, are irrelevant to women's subordination. Writers such as Marilyn French, for example, explicitly reject the belief that the conditions of our lives determine consciousness. In their world, explains Lynne Segal, 'there is no reality outside language and ideology'.

What is intriguing about this brand of radical feminism which is here systematically analysed and destroyed, is the way it parallels so closely developments in the anti-racism/ethnicity field. For here too, as this journal has frequently demonstrated, one can trace a return to biological or essentialist definitions and non-materialist explanations. All whites, by virtue of their skin colour are born racist, just as all men are born violent by 'virtue' of the phallus. And cultural nationalism, pan-Afrikanism and ethnic exclusivism along with an obsession over representation and consciousness are beginning to replace and/or lose sight of the larger struggle against racism and imperialism.

Unfortunately, this otherwise excellent book lacks an analysis which takes us closer to understanding why such ideas have taken root *now*. What is it about both movements and about the whole of the Left that

has allowed 'culturalism' to thrive at the expense of real creative struggles which will change objective conditions for the majority of the oppressed and exploited? And how can we, as socialist feminists (or black socialists) return the perspectives that those movements started out of, or carve out new and more appropriate ones? And all that, whilst the New Right gains more and more power in the state, the media, the education and the social and welfare systems.

The author's concluding vision for a socialist feminism that will be forged by 'building the links between our lives in the workplace and our lives in the home and the community' and ushering in 'a genuine participatory democracy' appears, in the light of her devastating critique, somewhat romantic and certainly unrealistic. The end of the book reads like the reluctant post-script of someone who felt she *had* to posit an alternative. But it is in fact from the first seventy pages, in which the opposition is so clearly delineated, dissected (and, at least in the realm of ideas) overthrown, that the book draws its power and becomes an important tool in the struggle to reclaim a degraded feminism.

Institute of Race Relations

JENNY BOURNE

Churches in Struggle: liberation theologies and social change in North America

Edited by WILLIAM K. TABB (New York, Monthly Review press, 1986) 331 pp. \$11.00

With the aim of healing the rift between the secular and religious left in the United States, William Tabb has compiled a collection of essays that explores the relationship between theologies of liberation and progressive social change. *Churches in Struggle* is an attempt to establish a dialogue between Christians and marxists based on their shared concern for liberation.

The first section, 'Theologies of liberation', outlines the development of self-conscious partisan theologies primarily in terms of their break with the concerns and methods of the theological establishment. The contributors show how different political struggles produced their own characteristic redefinition of Christianity as Christian people involved in these movements sought to ground their hopes for social change in the deeper foundations of religious hope. In turn, these grassroot theologies of liberation encouraged academic theologians to formulate intellectual challenges to the monopoly of the white male professional to define the Christian project for the whole of humanity.

Some of the implications of liberation theology are examined in 'Reclaiming the Christian message for the North American churches'. The writers celebrate the freedom and relevance that the break with

traditional concerns offers the captive white church of North America. Unfortunately, the discussion is somewhat limited in scope, concentrating as it does on the implications of the Latin American experience, without any substantial reclamation or affirmation of similar protest and resistance movements generated by the poor and the oppressed within the United States itself.

It could be argued that the secular counterpart to this is the failure, by and large, of marxism to take on the culture of the oppressed. Cornel West, in 'Religion and the Left', shows how western marxists have largely ignored this, and in doing so, have failed to account for the place of religious belief in the lives of the world's powerless. What he identifies as the captivity of North Atlantic marxism to an essentially bourgeois treatment of religion also cuts it off from a source of inspiration and vision. 'To take seriously the culture of the oppressed is not to privilege religion', states West, 'but to enhance and enrich the faltering and neglected utopian dimension of left theory and praxis. It is to believe not simply in the potential of oppressed people, but to believe also that oppressed people have already expressed some of this potential in their actual products, their actual practices.'

The section that illustrates 'Theology rooted in the community' underlines West's analysis, and is characterised by Norman Fong's statement that talk of radical social change can only be meaningful if it is grounded in the 'story' of a community's struggle for justice. Unless that talk affirms what a community is already doing to free itself, as it concretely experiences the contradictions of American society, it denies the right of the oppressed to think and act for themselves and, therefore, their humanity.

The final section explores ways in which a practical concern for the poor and oppressed has led elements of the North American church to question government policy and practice. Citing such diverse examples as the Catholic Bishops' comments on the economy, the Sanctuary movement and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, the writers suggest that a new American Dream and identity is being generated by progressive Christian-based movements and churches, as they identify themselves with the victims of American society.

Churches in Struggle is a good introduction to the issues and debates that have both separated and joined Christians and marxists in North America. The clearest lesson that emerges from it, however, is the need for the left, not to talk to itself, so much as to submerge itself in the culture of the oppressed and therein be 'converted' by the people whom it wishes to serve.

Birmingham

PAUL GRANT

Shattering illusions: West Indians in British politics

By TREVOR CARTER (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1986).
158 pp. £3.95

This book traces the political, economic and social events which shattered the illusions of those who came to Britain from the West Indies in the 1950s and 1960s. The people who came did so in the expectation – or so they thought – of an opportunity to live and participate with dignity in this society. The author himself arrived in this country in 1954. While working in various unskilled jobs, he undertook part-time study and went on to train as a teacher, becoming an educationalist and serving on the Rampton Committee on the education of West Indian children.

Although the book is semi-biographical, Trevor Carter writes with modesty of his own role in black people's struggles during the past thirty years. His experience is deeply rooted in the labour movement and he has been consistently involved with the Communist Party of Great Britain since he arrived. He draws, in the book, on his personal experiences and those of his contemporaries. Most of the events narrated are set in London: nevertheless, what he has to say will be recognised by black people throughout the country.

The book has both historical and contemporary import: it is critical of white racism but optimistic that the ultimate solution lies in the hands of the working class as a whole. Carter reminds us that the Britain to which West Indians came in the 1950s and 1960s was one which rejected, insulted, devalued and discriminated against them. They encountered humiliation and had to learn to survive within a system of economic, political and cultural subordination. He recounts the days when black people could either find nowhere to live or alternatively had to face 'black tax', rent inflated to four times the going rate.

While most of the people arriving found work, this was invariably unskilled manual work, pay was low and hours were long. Both in the workplace and in society generally, the West Indians were made unwelcome. Carter recalls the strains of social life in London in those days and also the alternatives created in response to those strains. 'The survival kit of black people', he was once told, 'is that we are experts on alternatives. It is an unconscious lesson of colonialism to find alternative ways of existing in a hostile environment, whether you're talking about food, school, culture or church.' The church, indeed, was as racist as the other institutions in society. The West Indians expected, here at least, to be welcomed and treated equally as the children of God. As with the left and the labour movement, they were bitterly disappointed. It was this disappointment among other things which gave birth to the pentecostal churches. As one of Carter's contemporaries stated

It was traumatic. We couldn't understand why we were received so coldly. We thought we were coming to brethren who cared. After a time, we withdrew and started to meet in our homes instead. Most of the Pentecostal churches have grown out of the network of house meetings.

Carter discusses too the role of the trade unions and the white left in combating racism. Although the West Indians saw the trade unions and the white left as their natural allies, in practice this belief was misplaced. The trade unions refused to align with black people in their struggles against racial oppression. In some cases they actively collaborated with the racists. It is this historical experience of disappointment with the trade unions which, he feels, probably accounts for black people's under-involvement in those organisations.

Carter supports the black sections in the Labour Party, while stressing the value of building alliances within the labour movement in the fight against racism. On the one hand, he is deeply aware – from the American experience – that unless black people are on their guard they may be absorbed into the system and lose their roots. On the other, he believes passionately that as black people are part of the working class, their struggles necessarily overlap and are therefore interdependent. As he puts it, 'a clearer vision of our common good, which must be socialism, would help us to rescue black people from the margins of political activity by redefining the mainstream'. This is a worthy course as Carter's career bears testimony.

Manchester Polytechnic

PAUL OKOJIE

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