RACE & CLASS

RACIAL · SUICIDE

the re-licensing of racism in Australia

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Keith Buchanan
1919–1997

A whole man, a seamless man – between the feeling and the thinking and the doing fell no shadow. I did not know him, to the touch, to the sight: I had not met him. But I knew him as once a community of the Left knew each other, across worlds and across time, through speaking truth to power. Keith had homed in on *Race & Class* as he was wont to do (I was to learn later) on anything that was anti-establishment and radical and held hope for the future. And he, with Anne, encouraged us through lean times and hard, with letters of appreciation and notes of praise, to carry on doing 'relevant, accessible and usable work' – they sat on our shoulders like a conscience.

Keith was a geographer by trade, but, as he himself said in his *Map of Love*, he was 'more concerned with the contours of men's minds and with the forces that shape and warp our emotional landscape than with the configuration of the physical ...' And that search took him into the 'two great culture-worlds of Africa and East Asia' – with a sensitivity that was to capture, in print and in speech, the very inscape of the lives of their peoples and a commitment that bore witness to how their traditions had been 'transformed or ... brutally shattered' by the impact of western civilisation.

Keith taught at various times at various universities in South Africa and Nigeria and Wales and at the LSE, and ended up, in 1953, at Victoria University in New Zealand, as professor of geography – a post he held till 1975. He, and Anne, then retired to the Welsh countryside, there to continue his other work as gardener and woodworker and graphic artist. In 1986, they returned to New Zealand. Between times he travelled widely in China and South East Asia, edited the journal *Pacific Viewpoint* and wrote, among others, *The Chinese People and the Chinese Earth*, *The Geography of Empire*, *Map of Love* and *Out of Asia*.

A teacher who learned as he taught, an activist who loved as he fought, a visionary who never lost sight of the immediate, Keith Buchanan remains a signpost and exemplar to us all. Especially, in an age where the intellectuals have sold out to power or retreated into post-modernity and the politics of ineffectuality, Keith is a constant reminder of the precept that the function of knowledge is to liberate.

A. Sivanandan

RACE & CLASS

SUVENDRINI PERERA and JOSEPH PUGLIESE

'Racial suicide': the re-licensing of racism in Australia

A society has race prejudice or it has not. There are no degrees of prejudice. One cannot say that a given society is racist but that lynchings or extermination camps are not to be found there. The truth is that all that and still other things exist on the horizon.

<div align="right">Frantz Fanon[1]</div>

In the Australian general election campaign of 1996, the slogan of the Liberal-National coalition that went on to win by a record margin was 'For All of Us'. It remained for Noel Pearson, chair of the Northern Land Council, and a key member of the team that had negotiated the Native Title Settlement in 1993, to spell out the implicit message of the slogan: 'For All of Us (but not for them)'.[2]

Less than a year after the new government took office in March 1996, Pearson resigned, citing burn-out and misgivings about the government's commitment to Aboriginal concerns, particularly to land rights settlement which, in the person of the new prime minister, Pearson said, had 'fallen on a fallow heart'.[3] The National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has also lost at least one prominent member, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, who again denounced the government's lack of commitment to the goal of reconciliation with indigenous Australians and called for fellow members of the council to resign. Both the prime minister, John Howard, and the minister for Aboriginal affairs, John Herron, have attacked what they call 'the Aboriginal industry' and

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described the goal of self-determination for indigenous peoples as 'divisive'. The government has made a series of moves to restrict the autonomy of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the main representative body for indigenous peoples. ATSIC had its funding cut by $78m in the 1996 budget.

In the same budget, the national immigration intake has been cut by 11 per cent, with a 25 per cent cut to the family reunion programme. Although government ministers assiduously protest that these cuts are not racially based, the categories, family reunion and non-skilled immigration, ensure that the effects are felt disproportionately by Asian-Australians and other recent migrant groups. Social security, unemployment, sickness and youth training benefits for new migrants have been banned for two years after arrival.[4] With effect from 4 March 1997, after the Labor opposition reversed its original objections to this legislation: 'For the first time, Australia's policy is to allow a particular group of legal residents to starve or beg rather than to grant them any form of social security'.[5] Those hardest hit have been migrants who were approved prior to 4 March 1997 but were not informed of the new conditions they would have to face. Not surprisingly, the logic of a ban which refuses help to migrants at the beginning of their settlement, but offers it to them after two years, when most have become established, impacts most painfully on arrivals from South Asia and Africa who do not have the savings to survive a two-year period of unemployment. A more direct approach would be to ban Third World migrants outright, but, as Adele Horin points out, 'a blanket ban on migrants from poor countries would smack of White Australia'.[6] Instead, people are allowed to complete the application process and abandoned on arrival, perhaps in the hope that word will trickle down.

In the case of asylum-seekers and refugees in detention, it is now illegal for the Human Rights Commission to make contact with these arrivals to inform them of their rights under Australian law. A ten-year ban has been imposed on migrant doctors before they can practise as GPs in Australia. English language training for migrants has been cut, as have community language programmes in schools. Both the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and the Office of Multicultural Affairs have been defunded and thereby effectively abolished. Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, previously a cabinet portfolio, has been relegated to junior ministry status. Prominent figures, from the independent MP Pauline Hanson (to whom we will return) to Jerzy Zubrzycki (frequently touted in the media as the 'father of multiculturalism') and the academic John Hirst have advocated the 'abolition' or 'ditching' of multiculturalism.

In this climate, the prime minister has declared an end to the era of 'political correctness' and its 'pall of censorship' under Labor, rejoicing in the return to 'free speech'. In Port Lincoln, South Australia, all but

one of the city councillors resigned in protest over the comments of the mayor who, in the spirit of free speech, described children of mixed race marriages as 'mongrels'. In the subsequent election, the mayor was comfortably returned, though some of the councillors who objected to his language were voted out of office. The minister for Aboriginal affairs who, early in his term, launched at Parliament House a book defending the assimilationist policies by which Aboriginal children were taken from their families to be raised in Anglo institutions – a policy current until the early 1970s – has suggested that some children actually benefited from this practice. Concurrent with his remarks has been a national inquiry into the forced separation of Aboriginal children, set up by the previous government. Over the past year, this inquiry has provided, state by state, daily testimony to the continuing psychic, social and cultural costs for these stolen generations of indigenous Australians. For example, children taken under the policy, and their own children, have higher rates of adult and juvenile imprisonment and deaths in police custody and are over-represented in child substitute care and as wards of state.[7] In its submission, the federal government stressed the benevolent intentions of the state in adopting such policies and ruled out as too 'divisive' any question of compensation to its targets.

Jacqui Katona, project officer at the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Service, has described the era of assimilation as 'an Australian holocaust, an Australian version of ethnic cleansing ... We cannot let this chapter be closed in Australian history – it has to be dealt with and addressed'.[8] Even as Aboriginal spokespeople called for acknowledge-ment of the hidden aspects of Australian history, however, the prime minister refused to make an official apology for the genocidal policies of assimilation and attacked what he termed the 'black armband school of history'. His words were unequivocal:

> I sympathise fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told that we have a racist, bigoted past ... to tell children whose parents were no part of that maltreatment, to tell children who themselves have been no part of it, that we are all part of a, sort of, racist, bigoted history is something that Australians reject.[9]

The term 'black armband school of history' is one Howard has borrowed from the right-wing historian, Geoffrey Blainey, who, in the early 1980s, campaigned against the entry of Vietnamese migrants into Australia. Howard's own claims during this period that Vietnamese immigration threatened Australia's 'social cohesion' were responsible for his being rejected as the Liberal Party's candidate for prime minister in 1988; his bid for re-election in 1996 was accompanied by a guarded retraction and protestations that he was not anti-Asian. Recently, members of Howard's own party who worked for his re-election have

publicly called on him to disavow the racist position of Pauline Hanson, in particular her remarks about the country being 'swamped by Asians'.[10] Earlier, the prime minister had described Hanson's remarks as 'an accurate reflection of the feeling in some parts of the community'. As even Howard's own minister for immigration acknowledges, Asian-born migrants currently represent 4 per cent of the population, hardly a case of 'swamping'.

On the street, Asian-Australians and other identifiable racial/ethnic minorities have reported increasing incidents of abuse and violence. The Human Rights Commission has recorded a steep rise in complaints of racial harassment (over 30 per cent) since the election of the new government.

And our catalogue could go on ...

'Racial suicide' and the return of whiteness

The white man must learn to stop viewing history as a plot against himself.

Vine Deloria[11]

We do not pretend that our list is either a neutral or a disinterested one. At a personal level, as non-Anglo Australians, we have not been immune from the rising number of attacks on those who identifiably do not conform to the assimilationist norms – or should we say demands? – of Anglo-Australia. Professionally, as educators whose practice is centrally concerned with questions of anti-racism and decolonisation, our experiences in the classroom, as well as the constraints we face at institutional and disciplinary levels, bear out the increasing costs of carrying out such work. We do not locate ourselves, then, as non-participants in the struggle currently being played out over the meaning of terms such as 'history', 'multiculturalism', 'assimilation', 'racism', 'free speech' and, especially, 'Australian'. Rather, our essay is an attempt precisely to examine the current racialisation of the term 'Australian,' and the means by which the White Australia that is claimed to have been decisively abandoned with the Menzies era is being effectively reconstituted in the present.

In the current climate, the term 'un-Australian' has come to be used in an increasingly ethnicised and racialised manner. We are concerned here to spell out the racial parameters that are mobilised, for example, in the current use of this term by senior government members. The unstated racial qualifiers in their use of 'un-Australian' in speeches and policy documents, refer to ethnic minority cultural practices that stand in dissonance to Anglocentric norms and values. Thus, particular forms of behaviour and belief are condemned by being described as 'un-Australian', a usage that resonates with the rhetoric of 'us' and 'them'

astutely identified by Pearson in the government's election-winning slogan. As Joe Wakim, secretary of the Australian Arabic Council, has pointed out, 'The increasing use of the term "un-Australian" needs to be debated ... Victims of racism have frequently been told that they need to learn to "cop it on the chin", and that if they have no sense of humour [about racist attacks] then they are "un-Australian". This is tantamount to intimidating these people into silence.'[12]

The current re-racialisation of Australian identity targets in particular indigenous and Asian-Australians as those groups who must be re-situated, structurally, at the bottom end of the ethnic scale. That is, it targets those racialised groups least conducive, corporeally and culturally, to the process of assimilation, and therefore least likely to be re-cycled into Anglo-Australians. This re-racialisation was announced in a spectacular fashion in Pauline Hanson's victory speech, given the day after her election, where she declared that she was fighting for the 'white community, the immigrants, Italians, Greeks, whoever, it doesn't really matter – anyone apart from the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders'.[13] Hanson later went on to include Asians as the other group that would be excluded from her constituency: 'They [Asians] have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.'[14]

In our attempts to describe the popular response generated by Hanson's remarks and by the new government's policy initiatives, we found a recent essay in *Race & Class*, Bill Schwarz's 'The only white man in there', illuminating. Schwarz discusses a particular moment in England's history, the period of decolonisation, in which, increasingly, immigration from former colonies began to transfigure the imperial metropolis, even as English identity was also threatened by the pressures of Europeanisation and increasing US dominance. In this period in England, Schwarz suggests, 'whites were coming to imagine themselves as historic victims and ... commensurably blacks were believed to be acquiring a status of supremacy'.[15] Schwarz examines in detail the rhetoric of betrayal and white victimhood employed by figures such as Roy Welensky in Southern Africa and Enoch Powell in England in response to this sense of beleaguered white Englishness. Particularly useful to us is Schwarz's analysis of Powell's appeal to a white English populism, his claim to be

> speaking for an embattled, vulnerable white community on the point of ... being sold down the river by their own government ... Powell identified the usual suspects who constituted the enemy within: immigrants and students and hippies and so on ... But then ... he accused the power bloc, the politicians and civil servants ... in effect of *racial suicide* (emphasis added).

In Australia during the 1980s and 1990s, the cultural impact of the

dismantling of the British empire has been coupled with the struggle for *internal* decolonisation at a number of different levels: indigenous land rights claims have won (limited) legal and legislative recognition; many of the children of indigenous and non-English-speaking backgrounds who were targeted by the assimilationist policies of the 1950s and 1960s have testified to the failure of the project of assimilation; since the dismantling of the White Australia policy in the 1970s, visible and vocal Asian, Middle Eastern and African communities have emerged. Simultaneously, the effects of regional decolonisation have challenged the sense of assured cultural, racial, economic and military superiority that once characterised relations between Australia and neighbouring countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.

The process of decolonisation, however, could not be named as such by a Labor government that claimed to have made a seamless transition from a monocultural and imperial to a postcolonial and multicultural nation. In the absence of clear analytic models for the changes Australia was facing, the sense of whites as hapless victims was able to gain ground. We find Schwarz's notion of fear of 'racial suicide' a useful one for describing the anxieties aroused, among both 'left' and 'right' commentators, by the former Labor government's policy directions: specifically, its active pursuit of a domestic agenda of Aboriginal reconciliation, multiculturalism and republicanism and a foreign policy of Asianisation and regional solidarity. These initiatives were closely identified with the then prime minister, Paul Keating, who declared on numerous occasions that Australia must cease functioning as a 'branch office of empire'.

Although elsewhere we have argued that Keating's political rhetoric has its own racial biases and exclusions, and functions in continuity with, rather than being a radical break from, the dominant nationalist and masculinist narrative of Australian history, we do not under-estimate its disturbing effects on Anglo-Australia.[16] Labor's policy directions under Keating led to an obsessive re-examination of national identity on the part of both its supporters and opponents. Those opposed to various aspects of this platform often invoked a beleaguered Anglo-Australian figure, the true-blue Aussie battler, who had been left behind by these policies. Simultaneously, a class of elite public servants, politically correct academics and Canberra fat cats (or in the words of a National Party candidate for parliament, Bob Katter, 'femocrats, environazis and slanty-eyed ideologues') were seen as having taken charge of an increasingly isolated Labor government. During the 1996 election campaign, Keating was represented as an out-of-touch leader who had betrayed Labor's traditional constituency in his arrogant pursuit of a dangerous ideological agenda, or 'big picture'.

In comparison, the Liberal Party cast itself as moderate, pragmatic and concerned with everyday issues, while its leader rejoiced in his title

of 'honest John' and his cricket-loving image, and claimed to have a 'relaxed and comfortable' view of Australia's present and future. It did not take many weeks after the new government took office, however, for it to emerge that Howard himself possessed a 'big picture' agenda that was every bit as ideological as Keating's – one which seeks to distance itself from Asianisation and the notion of an Australian republic, and to erase from its horizon any vision of land rights, Aboriginal self-determination and multiculturalism.

The return of the 'battler'

Significantly, these three terms – land rights, Aboriginal self-determination and multiculturalism – were conspicuously absent from the bipartisan declaration on tolerance hastily passed by parliament in a panic response to the disquiet expressed by leading politicians and newspapers in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and Taiwan over the first speech of new MP Pauline Hanson. Hanson, originally a Liberal candidate in what had always been a safe Labor seat, had her endorsement withdrawn by the Liberal Party just before the 1996 general election for her racist remarks about Aboriginals. As an independent, however, she was elected with a huge majority, thus gaining ready publicity and a groundswell of popular support for her extremist views. Hanson's first parliamentary speech was a classic expression of *ressentiment* against Aboriginal and Asian Australians, and called for, amongst other things, the immediate abolition of multiculturalism, the halting of Asian migration and the reintroduction of national service. It drew no rebuke or rebuttal from the prime minister (although other members of the ruling coalition did express some disagreement) until Asian trade interests – in the form of tourism, overseas students and business investments – were seen to be at risk. At this stage, the government agreed to pass a joint declaration (originally proposed by Labor) committing both parties to non-discriminatory immigration policies and 'tolerance'.

This minimalist declaration of racial non-discrimination, although hailed by some as a victory against Hanson and her extremist supporters, underscores for us the fundamental continuities between her views and those of the ruling party. In one sense, the Hanson circus has served as a distraction from more material and lasting issues such as the policy and legislative changes itemised at the beginning of our essay, which were already constitutive features of the new government's political agenda. Howard's 'relaxed and comfortable' 'big picture', we would argue, is simultaneously underscored by a racialised anxiety. This fear has articulated itself along a number of axes, including the political and cultural. And it is a fear that draws upon one of the classic mythical figures of Anglo-Australia: the 'battler'.

The Aussie battler is a mythic figure which emerged within the context of the fervently nationalist period (1890s) that culminated in Australian Federation (1901). This figure, of the underdog who battles against all odds to survive, found its definitive, canonical form in the writings of such national and nationalist authors as Henry Lawson, Banjo Patterson and Barbara Baynton. The figure was, from the outset, exclusively white and Anglo-Celtic. It must be remarked that this racialised iconic national figure (which was reproduced in poems, novels, short stories, paintings, and advertisements) emerged simultaneously with the enshrinement of the White Australia policy, which effectively prohibited the entry of non-white peoples into the country. That racism was the constituting factor in the formation of the Australian nation is underlined by the fact that the inaugural legislation passed by the first session of parliament in 1901 was the Immigration Restriction Act, popularly known as the White Australia policy.

The poet, Henry Lawson, a canonical proponent of the battler figure and renowned for his anti-Asian xenophobia, wrote in an essay entitled 'The Chinese question', that it was 'I fear, one of the problems which we must leave to our children to solve ... For my part I think a time will come eventually when the Chinaman will have to be either killed or cured – probably the former'. [17] 'The Chinese Question' Lawson left to 'our children to solve' still generates debate in contemporary Australia, only now it has become the generic 'Asian question'.

The Aussie battler, with its racist legacy, has been reappropriated and reinvigorated by both the prime minister and Hanson. Both have indulged in a strategically political use of this figure. Whereas Howard represents himself as speaking *for* the Aussie battler, Hanson has represented herself *as* the authentic Aussie battler. What needs to be emphasised here is the fact that this figure was constitutively marked by race in the first instance, and that, in its contemporary form, it has been virulently re-racialised.

In the so-called 'race debate' which has erupted since the election of the new government and the delivery of Hanson's notorious speech in parliament, the figure of the Aussie battler has been invoked in order to articulate the myth that white, mainstream, Anglo-Australians are now to be seen as a marginalised, persecuted and silenced majority. This myth has pervaded speaking positions across the broad social spectrum of Anglo Australia. For example, Les Murray, 'Australia's unofficial poet laureate' (who is 'regarded as the quintessential Australian poet, a modern Banjo who sings to us Australian songs about our place and our time'[18]) has written about being made an 'exile' in his own country:

the country people, the rednecks, the Anglo-Celts – they have turned their backs on us ... They denigrate that majority of Australians

who are born in this country, those that have mainly British ancestry ... We Old Australians ... are now mostly caught and silenced between the indigenous and the multicultural.[19]

This view has also been echoed by selected super-assimilated non-Anglo-Australian subjects, such as the respected Australian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Helen Chung Martin, who recently claimed that as a multiculturalism maintained by 'ethnic warlords' had eroded the 'one nation' that had existed in the 1950s, Anglo-Australians had become the 'most disenfranchised' citizens of the country.[20]

In this narrative of victimhood, Australia's non-Anglo minorities and its indigenous peoples are scripted as the majority who have control of the key organs – governmental, bureaucratic, institutional and media – of power. This narrative of the majority being disenfranchised and reduced to silence is belied by the domination of those same organs of power by the very majority that scripts itself as Australia's new victimised minority.

In the domain of the arts, this narrative of Anglo-victimhood recently found its most spectacular protagonist in the Helen Darville affair, where a middle-class young woman of British ancestry assumed a fictitious Ukrainian ancestry under the name of Helen Demidenko, and proceeded to promote herself, and to collect various prizes along the way, as a second-generation migrant writer. Early in 1997, two further frauds were exposed: the Aboriginal painter, 'Eddie Barrup', was revealed to be the invention of a well-established Anglo-Australian woman artist, Elizabeth Durack, the descendant of a prominent pastoralist family; while the prize-winning Aboriginal novelist, 'Wanda Koolmatrie', was revealed to be an Anglo-Australian man, Leon Carmen, who claimed that white men had no chance of getting published in Australia. These acts of impersonation, though denounced by Aboriginal spokespeople, won a surprising degree of support from establishment figures such as university professors of English, gallery directors and leading cultural commentators. One critic explained Darville's imposture as a necessary tactic to overturn the 'handicap' of British ancestry: 'In a way this is not even her [Helen Darville's] fault but the fault of a society that constantly devalues the mainstream in favour of minorities; which says that to be the Australian-born daughter of Anglo-Saxon parents in outer suburbia, and to be educated at a private school, is to be a person who has nothing worth saying'.[21] Erased in such apologias for acts of racial and ethnic imposture are the cultural capital and the systemic privileges (economic, cultural and linguistic) which allow the Darvilles, Duracks and Carmens to have the mobility to move between identities, accumulating considerable financial gain along the way.

The act of imposture has, to a degree, become a strategic mechanism for political as well as cultural players in the context of contemporary Australia. Pauline Hanson, for example, has repeatedly assumed the public persona of the little Aussie battler – a worker in a pub, then a fish and chip shop owner in the suburbs of working-class Ipswich, caring for four children as a single mother, while qualifying for none of the 'advantages' that, she argues, are unfairly disbursed to Aboriginals and migrants. The strategic use of this public persona is immediately made apparent when juxtaposed with the fact that Hanson's assets include properties worth $300,000, while the business she owns is worth an estimated $200,000 and she also runs a cross-Arabian horse farm, which has an estimated resale value of $500,000.[22] We itemise these little-known and little-advertised statistics in order to underscore the powerful ideological effects of speaking as a representative of the Aussie battler in the public domain; the mythic figure of the battler lends millionaire Hanson a priceless credibility when she comes to speak of hardship, struggle and disadvantage.[23]

The battle of the backyard

In the contexts we have outlined, racism must be viewed as constitutive and not marginal to the construction of (a white and Anglocentric) Australian national identity. We would argue, further, that factors such as Hanson's call for compulsory military service must be seen not only as a call to mobilise against a threat from the Asian north, but also as symptomatic of a fear to protect against the Asian alien who is already within the nation's borders.

Our thesis about the collapsing of clear racialised borders between inside and outside becomes intelligible when examined within the context of various urban sites within the nation that are marked as Asian 'hot spots' of crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, violence and corruption. A visibly Asian suburb such as Cabramatta, in Sydney's outer west, for example, has already been termed (by Hanson and others) a 'suburb apart' from the body of the (white) nation; it is a suburb in which television cameras have been installed at key points in the suburb's main streets and shopping mall in order to monitor its already criminalised (mostly Asian-Australian) subjects, who are now under twenty-four-hour surveillance, and are placed under official threat of 'deportation', even if they are permanent Australian residents.

The xenophobia of the 'Asian threat' from without the nation (the Asian countries north of Australia) has been now *internalised*. White Australia is, within the operations of this racist logic, already doubly at risk. And, unlike the period when the White Australia policy was firmly in place, a period which guaranteed that the threat could only come from outside the nation, the abolition of the White Australia policy and

the consequent entry of Asian immigrants has made the existence of impregnable racialised borders less certain. As the inside/outside racialised dichotomy of the nation becomes more problematic, the anxieties over questions of race have become more hystericised.

Nowhere are such racialised anxieties and fears more graphically represented and mobilised than at the level of popular culture, through activities such as sport, gardening and television viewing, activities that are seen as constitutive of the typical – i.e., Anglo-Australian. In this sense, the realm of representation is not extraneous or incidental to the re-racialisation of Australian identity that we have identified so far at legislative and structural levels; rather, these changes are enabled by, and inextricable from, the struggle being acted out over constructions of 'the Australian'. In what follows, we examine two instances of the attempt to interpellate and mobilise Anglo-Australia, directed at the externalised and internalised anxieties about Australian identity respectively. Our first example is an episode of the television programme, *Burke's Backyard*, in which Hanson was featured as a 'celebrity gardener'. *Burke's Backyard*, a long-running series with an iconic status in Australian culture, currently has the second-highest ratings in the country. Drawing upon the Anglocentric nationalist tradition of representing the nation in terms of gum trees and barbecues, *Burke's Backyard* articulates a vision of the Anglo-Australian dream: home-ownership on a quarter-acre block, with the backyard metonymically signifying that patch of turf which is the little Aussie battler's own kingdom and domain.

Over the years, *Burke's Backyard* has produced a series of programmes on gardening by non-Anglo Australians (both at home and abroad) that make it clear exactly what cultural and racial norms the programme reproduces. The invitation to Hanson to appear as 'celebrity gardener' on *Burke's Backyard* is difficult to explain if gardening is indeed taken to be the programme's main interest, since her 'garden' turned out to consist of bare paddocks populated by a handful of livestock. The segment on Hanson makes perfect sense, however, if we understand its main function to be a cultural and political one. In his interview, Burke suggested to Hanson that the drive-way she proposed for her future garden might include 'Chinese jade, Japanese maples and black boys'. To which Hanson responded, 'I have no problem with that, as long as they all blend in'.

Any pretence of the programme being about gardening was immediately abandoned, as Burke proceeded to ask how Hanson was coping with all the attacks she had undergone. Hanson's noble reply that she was simply doing her duty was editorially underscored in a manner disturbing in its crude racialised appeal: cut to Hanson in combat gear, complete with camouflage and helmet, flanked by a quotation attributed to Winston Churchill: 'In war you are only killed

once'. This representation immediately framed Hanson as both a little Aussie battler and a soldier fighting for her country. The figure of Churchill invokes empire, arch-conservatism and the values of Menzies, while the quotation refers back to Australia's involvement in the second world war and the defence of the nation against a Japanese invasion. In the current climate, however, the Asian threat must be seen as also coming from within the nation, and the only acceptable Asian presence here is of the domesticated and fully assimilated garden-variety – Chinese jade and Japanese maples.

What also resonates in this military scenario, staged in Australia's backyard, are anxieties about land ownership in a post-Mabo state. Hanson has been vocal in asserting that this is 'her' land and that she will not budge from it – as though Aboriginals had issued orders of repossession regarding Hanson's (extensive) land holdings. The use of 'black boys' in Hanson's racially assimilated backyard invokes racialised concerns about Aboriginal claims to their own land, and the national hysteria that erupted with the passing of the Native Title legislation; the catch-cry from white Australia was that no one's backyard was safe from the grasp of demonised Aboriginal claimants.[24]

In recent months, such fears have been reignited by the Wik legal decision, a ruling that declares indigenous title not to have been *automatically* extinguished on land on which pastoral leases are held.[25] In response to this decision, which potentially affects over 40 per cent of all land in Australia, the government, under heavy pressure from the many farming and pastoralist interests in its party, is currently legislating to ensure that native title on pastoral leases be effectively extinguished. The racialisation of the opposition to the Wik decision is demonstrated most clearly in a series of prime-time commercials sponsored by the National Farmers Federation (NFF), depicting a white and a black boy engaged in an increasingly violent tussle over a black-and-white version of the 1970s children's game, Twister.

The commercial, filmed in black and white, evokes the period prior to the introduction of colour TV in Australia, reducing its participants to the binary simplifications of black and white and subliminally calling up viewers' nostalgia for a period before Aboriginal land rights and immigration challenged the certainties of white Australia – a time when the outcome of any round of territorial grabbing was comfortably predetermined. As a spokesperson for the Indigenous Working Group on Native Title, Peter Yu, has remarked, by representing the negotiations as, literally, a black and white struggle with a winner-take-all outcome, the commercial reveals an understanding of land ownership rooted in the premises of colonisation. As Yu points out, the NFF's campaign aims to erase Aboriginal people from the landscape of contemporary Australia:

The campaign plays on sentimental myths which have nothing to do with the contemporary reality of the cattle industry. They are myths of an Australian national identity that relies on white men and their cattle and horses, the droughts, the hardships and the taming of the landscape (and any Aboriginal people who live within) by brave and strong pioneers. It's a national identity that pretends that local Aboriginal people are long gone, losers in the survival of the fittest.[26]

Instead of acknowledging that contemporary rural Australia is inescapably a place where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians must – and do – co-exist, the commercial suggests that Aboriginal peoples can be either vanquished or dispossessed, once and for all, of their land rights. Yu's strategy is to counter these representations from the heyday of colonisation with different narratives of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations: he chooses to highlight the new forms of identity and resistance that have emerged as a response to colonisation and assimilation, responses that include working with and through non-Aboriginals.

Yu's essay, published in the only national newspaper, *The Australian*, suggests the importance that questions of representation and of dominant and resisting identities possess in current political debates. As a comment on racial and ethnic identity in multicultural Australia, the NFF's commercial suggests the ongoing dominance of colonial images and narratives, not only about the nature of the land and its ownership, but also about the nature of Australian identity.

Advance Australia backwards

I don't expect white people to feel guilt, but I do expect them to feel.
Archie Roach, discussing the impact of assimilation
on indigenous Australians[27]

If Hanson has strategically positioned herself as speaking as a little Aussie battler, the prime minister has assumed the role of speaking for the battler. On the occasion of the 1996 Menzies Lecture, in his so-called 'Battlers speech', Howard vowed that his government's priority was for 'the battlers and families struggling hard to get ahead'.[28] Here, Howard explicitly aligns himself with the former Liberal prime minister, Robert Menzies, whom he praises for 'building a broadly-based constituency'. This broadly-based constituency is seen as founded upon the 'concerns and aspirations of the Australian mainstream, rather than the narrower agendas of elites and special interests'.[29]

What is being performed in this speech is a rhetorical turning back of the clock to the 1950s. This rhetorical turning back finds its brutally literal equivalent in the catalogue of cut-backs with which we opened

this essay. We need hardly remark that the image of the Australian mainstream here is, once again, fully racialised. Howard's chilling affirmation of the Menzies era needs, however, to be discussed in detail. The Menzies era is precisely the period when the policies of monoculturalism were being implemented with a vengeance in Australia. The most destructive of these policies was that of assimilation. Assimilation, which demanded the systematic shedding and erasure of any cultural or linguistic differences which did not mesh with Anglo-Australia, was a doctrine which impacted at virtually every level of public and private life of indigenous and ethnic minority peoples. Its most devastating impact was felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The policy of assimilation saw indigenous languages outlawed, cultural practices and rituals banned, tribal and customary law annulled, the enforced displacement of people from their birth-lands and consequent enclosure within arbitrarily located missions and, most devastating of all, the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their parents.

For people of non-English-speaking background (NESB), the doctrine of assimilation demanded that they divest themselves of any cultural and linguistic practices which were seen as unacceptable to the model of a monocultural, Anglocentric Australia. Assimilation translated, in practice, once again to forms of violence against ethnic minorities both at the systemic level of the state, whose institutions and services were designed solely for the benefit of its English-speaking subjects, and at the level of daily life, where NESB subjects were discriminated against and often publicly upbraided or assaulted for speaking a language other than English in public – or, indeed, simply for their embodied, corporeal differences from the Anglocentric norm. At the level of the psyche, assimilationist ideologies served to mould and sometimes to deform the aspirations, values and desires of generations of NESB children who passed through the school system in Australia in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

The invocation and celebration of the Menzies era, then, resonates with the wish to return to the time when indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities knew their minoritised places in the Anglo-Australian mainstream scheme of things. That this vision of the past still constitutively structures the government's vision of the future is made graphically evident in the recent disclosure of a letter (dated May 1991) by the prime minister, expressing his opposition to that very policy, multiculturalism, which instigated, to some degree, an overturning of assimilation: 'My own view on this issue,' he writes, 'is that Australia made an error in abandoning its former policy of encouraging assimilation and integration in favour of multiculturalism.'[30]

Racism, resistance and the rhetoric of tolerance

I believe that Australia is a tolerant nation.
John Howard[31]

Tolerance is a more refined form of condemnation.
Pier Paolo Pasolini[32]

The disturbing return to the Menzies era that is systematically (i.e., structurally and not merely rhetorically) being enacted by the current government needs also, however, to be placed in the context of a series of contestations that complicate the ringing endorsement that both Howard and Hanson have received. If there has been a significant shift towards the re-licensing of racism in Australia, there have also emerged many voices ready to contest this racism. Often the most eloquent repudiations of racism have come from people concerned about the effects of racism in the context of their everyday lives: young salespersons, factory workers, teachers, bus drivers and so on.[33] At the same time, alliances of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have mobilised strongly against some of the government's proposals, such as its Wik legislation; groups like Asian-Australians Against Further Intimidation have been formed, and begun to exercise a strong and creative sense of political agency.

We remain somewhat wary, however, of celebratory announcements by people committed to anti-racism, who naively declare that the 'race debate' was precisely what was needed in order to re-establish a network of solidarity. What is disturbing about these positions is that, even as an invaluable sense of social bonding and solidarity in opposition to the likes of Hanson is mobilised, they effectively lose sight of the structural (i.e., policy, legislative and legal) changes that have occurred and continue to occur, while the public is riveted to the spectacle of the 'race debate'. To a great degree, Hanson has been an invaluable publicity prop for the government. Her infinite capacity to generate controversial news copy has worked as an effective smoke-screen which has placed the brutal process of dismantling the social-welfare net and related equity programmes out of the line of public sight. There has been much public discussion about racism specifically targeted for foreign consumption – about how the 'race debate' is tarnishing Australia's image overseas, how it might impact negatively on trade, tourism and the intake of foreign fee-paying students – but little about the actual policy changes that impact on Australia's indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Placed in this context, self-congratulatory celebrations of 'solidarity' have a hollow ring.

We are also concerned by the rhetoric of tolerance that has characterised so much of the 'race debate'. Already encoded in the call for tolerance is a position of power which *patronises* the minoritised

subject deemed worthy of tolerance; such declarations of tolerance barely mask the often violent, unequal relations of power that masquerade under the code of the 'civil'. To talk of tolerance is already to assume a position of dominance where one can choose to extend an always circumscribed and delimited amount of having to-put-up-with the different, the foreign, or the alien. It is in this light that we read recent calls to 'allow the term "multicultural Australia" gradually to be replaced by a "tolerant Australia"' as driven by a desire to abolish the equity programmes that only came into being because of the policy of multiculturalism.[34] We emphasise that the civil protocols of tolerance need to be underpinned, in the first instance, both by laws guaranteeing non-discriminatory rights and by those very equity programmes now being systematically dismantled by the incumbent Liberal government.

Postscript, June 1997

Unwelcome confirmation of our concerns about the dismantling of rights has just been provided by an Amnesty International (AI) communiqué condemning the introduction of draft legislation preventing Australians from challenging violations, in their own country, of human rights treaties ratified by Australia. According to AI, 'this is the latest in a series of steps by the Australian government which effectively undermine their commitment to human rights'.[35]

In the budget of March 1997, Abstudy, the government programme designed to provide access to higher education for indigenous students in remote communities, sustained a massive cut of $25m over three years, with a prospect of further cuts. Funding for on-the-job training for Aboriginal Australians has been slashed by 8 million.

In the same budget the annual migrant intake has been cut by 6,000, totalling a 20 per cent cut to migration over 1996 and 1997. Most severely affected are categories such as family reunion, especially the sponsorship of aged parents. The official rationale for this cut was declared to be 'because of high levels of unemployment', even though the immigration minister announced only a few weeks ago that migration does not cause unemployment. In fact, all available research shows that migration either does not affect, or fractionally improves, employment levels. However, the prime minister says he has never believed these facts.

Funding for the Human Rights Commission, which produced the official report into the stolen generations of indigenous children, is to be cut by 40 per cent over the next two years.

Not unreasonably, Hanson has interpreted these recent moves relating to the elimination of equity-based programmes, the halting of Asian migration and withdrawal from UN obligations, as the government's adoption of her *platform*, even as it seeks, spasmodically, to

distance itself from some of her *rhetoric*. A few months ago, the prime minister finally stated that some of Hanson's ideas were 'wrong', though with the proviso that her supporters could not be called racists, and that he 'understood' their concerns. In 1997, Hanson launched her new party, One Nation, which has received (apparently unsolicited) endorsements from the National Front in Britain and the Ku Klux Klan and Lyndon La Rouche in the United States.

Les Murray, the chosen bard of Anglo-Australian *ressentiment*, received Britain's prestigious T.S. Eliot prize for his 1996 book, *Subhuman Red Neck Poems*.

Notes

1   Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York, Grove Press, 1988), p. 41.
2   The 1992 High Court decision popularly known as the Mabo judgment recognised for the first time the existence of indigenous land title prior to white invasion in 1788, and in certain cases held that title not to have been automatically invalidated by the principle of *terra nullius*. (*Terra nullius*, literally 'No one's land', was the convenient fiction by which British justice sought to erase the presence of its original inhabitants from the country, thus enabling colonists to seize land freely.)
    The Mabo decision prompted lengthy negotiations in parliament throughout 1993 to enact legislation recognising native land title in certain (very rigidly defined) circumstances. Pearson was widely regarded as one of the chief spokespeople for the Aboriginal negotiators advising the then prime minister. Since the change of government, the Native Title Settlement has been subject to a series of challenges.
3   Quoted in Jodie Brough, 'Mabo champion bows out with one final barb', *Sydney Morning Herald* (27 June 1996), p. 3.
4   The government has also attempted to impose a two-year ban on the following for new migrants: the carer's pension, widows' allowance, disability wage supplement, mature-age allowance, special benefits, partners' allowance, maternity allowance, seniors' health cards and family payments. These bans are currently being opposed in the upper house by opposition parties, but the government has announced its intention to resubmit the bill and, if it is rejected again, has threatened to use it as the occasion for a double dissolution of parliament. Although this opens the chilling prospect of a general election fought on the issue of migrant benefits, it is one that the government has obviously not hesitated to contemplate. See Karen Middleton, 'Migrant welfare clamp blocked', *The Age* (27 November 1996), p. 2.
5   Toni Buti (ed.), *After the Removal* (Perth, Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, 1996), p. 23.
6   Quoted in Lisa Mclean, 'Forced removal of children "an Australian holocaust"', *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 February 1996), p. 4.
7   Ben Mitchell, 'Howard faces new rebuke on race debate', *The Age* (12 December 1996), p. A5.
8   For example, the Liberal member of the NSW upper house, Helen Sham-Ho, who had earlier raised money for Howard's 1996 election campaign, called for the prime minister openly to criticise Hanson in an interview on the Radio National progamme, 'PM', on 28 November 1996.
9   Quoted in David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London, Verso, 1991), p. 93.
10 Joe Wakim, 'Time for a lead on cultural diversity', letter to the editor, *The Age* (9 October 1996).
11 Quoted in David Leser, 'Pauline Hanson's bitter harvest', *Good Weekend* (30

November 1996), p. 25.

12 James Woodford, 'MP debuts with attack on Asians', *Sydney Morning Herald* (11 September 1996), p. 3.

13 Bill Schwarz, '"The only white man in there": the re-racialisation of England, 1956–1968', *Race & Class* (Vol. 38, no. 1, 1996), p. 73.

14 See, for example, Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, 'The limits of multicultural representation' in *Communal/Plural* (No. 4, 1994), pp. 91–113.

15 Henry Lawson, *Stories, poems, sketches and autobiography*, edited by Brian Kiernan (St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1991), p. 82.

16 Angela Bennie, 'Poetry's redneck rebel', *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 September 1994), p. 9A.

17 Quoted in ibid.

18 Helen Chung Martin, 'Globalising Australia' Conference, La Trobe University (20 June 1997).

19 Natalie Jane Prior, 'The Demidenko Diary', *The Age* (6 January 1996), Section E, p. 1.

20 Greg Roberts, 'The hidden Hanson', *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 November 1996), p. 41.

21 The success of this ploy is revealed by the strong public support that Hanson has achieved. According to a November 1996 poll, the majority of the Australian public has, firstly, indirectly endorsed Hanson's agenda by fully supporting the prime minister's refusal to condemn her racism. (The government's vote stands at 48 per cent, while the opposition, nationally identified as pro-multiculturalism, has scored its lowest post-war rating, 34 per cent, five points below the vote recorded in the March 1996 elections.) Secondly, those polled have directly endorsed Hanson's call for the reduction of Asian migrants (53 per cent agree, 36 per cent disagree); for a short-term freeze on immigration (62 per cent agree, 36 per cent disgree); that the federal government treats Aborigines over-generously (55 per cent agree, 34 per cent disagree); that there should be compulsory twelve-month national service for 8-year-olds (48 per cent agree, 47 per cent disagree). See Michael Millet, 'PM refuses to change approach on Hanson', *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 November 1996), p. 2, and Michael Millet, 'Hanson agenda splits the nation', *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 November 1996), p. 1.

22 In fact, under the Native Title Act, Aboriginals cannot claim privately-owned land (the mythical backyard), as freehold title remains inalienable; claims can only be lodged for government-held land, and only if uninterrupted occupation can be proven. (This clause ensured the elimination of indigenous claimants who had been forcefully removed from their land during the regime of assimilation and of all urban Aboriginals who no longer occupied traditional lands.)

23 Pastoral leases, a uniquely Australian institution, refer to the granting of leases to coloniser-farmers for grazing sheep and cattle from 1848 onwards. Earl Grey, Britain's secretary of state for the colonies and member of the reform-minded Exeter Hall group, directed that, although farmers were to be allowed access to the land for grazing and limited cultivation, 'these leases are not intended to deprive the natives of their former right to hunt over these districts or to wander over them in search of subsistence in the manner to which they have been accustomed' (quoted in *The Frontier*, Dir. Bruce Belsham, episode 2, ABC TV, March 1997). In effect, this ruling did not prevent a number of farmers from treating the leasehold as private property and exterminating their indigenous inhabitants, or, at best, commandeering them as free labour.

24 Peter Yu, 'Co-existence a reality', *The Australian* (1 April 1997), p. 15.

25 Quoted in Martin Flanagan, 'Sharing history in a wide brown land', *The Age* (5 November 1996).

26 Quoted in Michael Millet, '"Battlers" rally to Libs, says PM', *Sydney Morning Herald* (19 November 1996), p. 3.

29 Quoted in ibid.

30 Quoted in Michael Millet, 'Letter comes back to haunt Howard,' *Sydney Morning Herald* (23 November 1996), p. 2.
31 Quoted in Nicki Savva, 'PM lashes out at his Asian critics', *The Age* (30 October 1996), p. A2.
32 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Gennariello', in *Lutheran Letters*, trans. Stuart Hood (Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1983), pp. 21–22.
33 See, for example, Dai Le, 'Migrants face new fear', *Sydney Morning Herald* (11 November 1996), p. 15; Geoffrey Cousins, 'Today's pride and prejudice', address given to the AM Club (21 November 1996); and Jennie Eldershaw (radio presenter), 'The Race Debate', Triple JJJ ABC radio (1 November 1996).
34 John Hirst, 'Unity in a tolerant diversity', *The Australian* (18 October 1996), p. 15.
35 AI Index ASA 12/06/97.
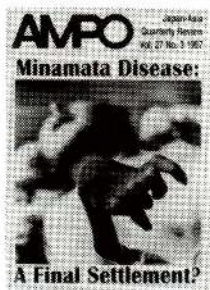
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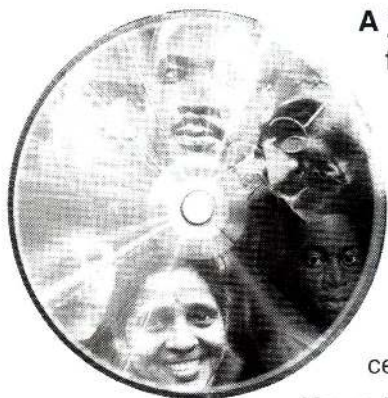
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CHRISTOPHER I. CLEMENT

Returning Aristide: the contradictions of US foreign policy in Haiti

Very little has been written in the social sciences about the US-assisted return of the popularly elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Haiti in 1994. It is no secret that the US State Department, the Agency for International Development (AID) and several local elites favoured his rival candidate, Marc Bazin, during the election. All three made their disappointment clear after Aristide was elected and openly worked with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to destabilise the new government by empowering opposition groups and encouraging the continuation of Haitian military terror. Given these circumstances, how then can one explain the US/OAS embargo immediately following Aristide's overthrow and, even more importantly, what could have possibly led groups once hostile to Aristide to favour his return just three years later?

The mainstream news media have suggested that this shift was due to either changes in the presidency, a new pro-democratic foreign policy agenda, or the Haitian refugee crisis. The first explanation holds that the Bush administration hastily favoured Aristide's removal to protect threatened US interests in Haiti, but the Clinton administration sought negotiations and compromise to resolve instability on the island. Recent US support for elections throughout the western hemisphere has also led some to believe that promoting democracy is now an essential part of US foreign policy making. In this context, Aristide's return is seen as part of a democratisation effort in Haiti, sponsored and supported by the US. The last perspective, the refugee crisis, is the

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most well-known. The claim is that the refugee crisis caused by instability in Haiti influenced the US government to return Aristide to power.

Those relying on these explanations would look at ideological conflicts and varying national security concerns among foreign policy makers to explain this shift. Such approaches overlook or understress the role Haitian elites played in the overthrow and restoration. As events unfolded in Haiti after Duvalier's departure, the US became increasingly involved in Haiti's internal affairs. But the stimulus for such action originated in Haiti, not in the US foreign policy and national security apparatus.

Haitian society is a constellation of class forces in which the interests of the dominant classes prevail in both state and society. On the one hand, the Haitian state preserves these class relations through its monopoly on the means of coercion. This function of the state is congruent with the US concern for domestic stability in Haiti and national security at home. On the other hand, the Haitian state serves as a conduit for business transactions between Haitian elites, foreign investors and international development agencies. In this context, the US was able to accomplish economic objectives in Haiti with the assistance of key figures in the Haitian state. As Haitian society went through its most important transformation since independence, it became increasingly difficult for the US to view the two primary features of the Haitian state in terms of a singular foreign policy.

The Duvalier years – prelude to uprising

The circumstances concerning Aristide's removal and return can be traced back to the early 1980s when, during the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier, international agencies evaluated the growth of Haiti and worked towards a new development strategy. US businesses operating overseas and multinational corporations were instrumental in developing a US foreign policy to advance what has been described as a 'neoliberal agenda'. This agenda, endorsed by the IMF and World Bank, speculated that development in Haiti was dependent on deregulating the Haitian economy by loosening state controls, divesting the state from the economy and breaking monopolies, opening Haiti's markets to more foreign goods and promoting the growth of agribusiness and assembly factories for exportation. The emphasis on assembly and agribusiness exports resulted from what AID called Haiti's comparative advantage in the world market. The country's low-cost labour force was favourable for promoting cost-saving, maximum-profit yielding export industry. Haiti's potential for diverse agriculture and its close proximity to the US were also viewed as an advantage for agribusiness.[1]

International agencies realised that the new emphasis on export-led development would require massive restructuring of Haitian society. In particular, the agribusiness export strategy would require large tracts of land for mass production. Hence, AID speculated that the concentration of land would result in landlessness among peasants and a decline in the standards of living in the rural area.[2] The assumption was that these peasants could migrate to the urban areas and re-enter the workforce as assembly factory workers.[3]

International agencies were continually frustrated by the corruption and misuse of funds provided by international lending institutions. By late 1981, the IMF expressed concern that funding was not going to projects placing emphasis on agribusiness and assembly factory exports and AID openly scolded the government for lack of accountability. Furthermore, the tensions fostered by the export-led development strategy resonated throughout Haitian society. Among Haitian elites, two factions were emerging which Ronald Cox has called the 'modernisers' and the 'traditionalists'.[4] The modernisers tended to favour the recommendations of the international agencies and were committed to opening competition in Haiti. This breaking of monopolies and price-setting directly affected those elites with ties to Haiti's agricultural market, especially coffee growers who, through monopolies, had become wealthy from coffee exportation. The US viewed the modernisers as the engine of development.[5] Traditionalists 'include coffee exporters and speculators who constitute a rural rentier class dependent on monopoly privileges extended by the Haitian state'.[6]

Both groups worked within the Duvalierist state to accomplish contending goals. The Haitian state supported traditionalists by working with them to maintain monopolies while, at the same time, courting US investors and the Haitian modernisers by channelling funds into light industry. Traditionalists had long-standing connections with the state to prevent competition in the agricultural market.[7] Moreover, the state-owned industries such as *Ciment d'Haiti* and *Minoterie d'Haiti*, which produced cement and flour respectively, maintained high prices, thus reassuring traditionalists that the government was committed to monopolies and price-fixing.[8] Yet the modernisers were not completely excluded from the state. First, the modernisers relied upon the military and the *tontons macoute*[9] to keep assembly labour subordinate and check peasant uprisings.[10] Second, modernisers operated through state channels to maintain favourable terms with the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. The constant corruption within the Duvalier administration, however, frustrated modernisers and, ultimately, they began pressing for reforms.

The adverse effects of structural adjustment and the intra-class quarrelling within the Haitian state wreaked further havoc on the

impoverished country. The sluggish growth of the assembly-export sector could not accommodate the mass migration from rural to urban areas, thereby resulting in high unemployment and poverty. Even the workers employed in the assembly factories were far from well off. At a minimum wage of three Haitian dollars (US$1.11) a day, assembly workers could barely afford, or not afford at all, to eat, live in adequate shelter or even travel to work.[11]

Popular unrest, combined with vocal opposition against Duvalier by the pro-democratic bourgeoisie within the modernisers' camp, opened a genuine political space in Haiti. The crisis in Haiti, however, did not necessarily result in automatic uprisings. Haitians, desperate to flee political instability and economic strife, were taking more and more dangerous voyages across the sea in search of a better life; the US was, of course, the most favoured destination. By 1986, popular uprisings in Haiti and the refugee crisis could not be ignored by either the Duvalier regime or the US.

Duvalier had alienated his best foreign ally, the one most capable of backing him against uprisings. Four days before Duvalier departed Haiti, the US announced it would reduce a $56 million dollar aid package for Haiti by $7 million dollars.[12] Duvalier's departure on 7 February was a victory for many forces; indeed, as Marx V. Aristide and Laurie Richardson pointed out, the collective celebration following Duvalier's departure reflected a broad tactical unity against the regime.[13] However, neither the US nor the two factions of Haitian elites were prepared for the massive popular rebellion and uprising following Duvalier's departure. Events would not happen as the US, the international agencies and Haitian elites had planned.

The landslide begins

Throughout the early 1980s, the US was reassured by the international agencies that Haiti's population was passive and the investment climate relatively stable. Thus, relations between Washington and Port-au-Prince were generally cordial. Duvalier's departure made many in Washington pay attention to events in Haiti. Restoring a stable invest-ment climate by resolving the roots of the refugee crisis and controlling the opening of political space was the most important task for the US. The US State Department began working directly with international agencies and Haitian elites to accomplish these objectives.

Consequently, American foreign policy's support for elections resulted from the US's failure to control the Haitian military's rampage and neutralise popular forces. Ironically, the failure to control the military rampage stemmed from the US's reliance upon the military for accomplishing security objectives. At the same time, the US pursued economic objectives with modernisers whose economic interests

conflicted with key military figures. US attempts to place modernisers in crucial areas of the state apparatus were at the expense of security objectives. Relying on the military for security objectives meant compromising economic objectives and forcing more Haitians to leave the island.

The National Governing Council (CNG), a six-member junta headed by general Henri Namphy, was appointed by Duvalier before leaving the island. Amid celebration in the streets of Haiti, the CNG attempted to uphold the status quo by preserving the corrupt Haitian state. The CNG and the *tontons macoute* enforced a reign of terror by attacking grassroots organisations and individuals with such viciousness that many noted that the repression had got worse since Duvalier left.[14] Those who had worked so hard to remove Duvalier from power now faced what was called 'Duvalierism without Duvalier'.

The US's hope was that if aid flowed to the CNG under the stipulation that it curtail human rights abuses and follow through on elections scheduled for 29 November 1987, then the US would have the leverage it needed to control events in Haiti.[15] The strategy aimed to undermine the possibility of popular uprising by backing the CNG, and then to limit the CNG's brutality by threatening to withdraw aid if elections were not held. The CNG reciprocated by accepting $384,000-worth of riot equipment and opening the economy to international competition. The perception of the CNG was that the riot equipment signalled US concern for stability in Haiti and that the US viewed the CNG as the institution for maintaining order. The CNG also reassured the US by appointing the former World Bank official, Leslie Delatour, as finance minister and ending some of the monopolistic and protectionist trends characteristic of the Duvalier regime.[16]

The CNG further legitimised itself and appealed its case to the US by arguing that popular forces in Haiti were a threat to stability. After the CNG assumed power, the Haitian masses fought back against Duvalierism by forging a movement called *dechoukaj* – the uprooting. *Dechoukaj* was portrayed to the US by the CNG as an unruly movement of angry, hungry mobs out for blind vengeance. But what most convinced the US about the danger of *dechoukaj* was the growing hostility towards the US presence in Haiti and the physical force which ordinary Haitians were using to fight back against the military and the *macoutes*. The steady flow of terrified, disillusioned or weary Haitian refugees into the US further complicated matters. Resolving the crisis in Haiti was becoming a problem at home and abroad for the US.

The donation of riot equipment, the early flow of foreign aid to the CNG and the continual dialogue between the CNG and the US fostered distrust of the US among the Haitian masses. Those in *dechoukaj* considered the relationship between the US and the CNG as part of what they called an American plan to steal all means of

advancement from the lowest ranks of Haitian society. As Father Jean
Bertrand Aristide, then a priest serving the Salesian order at St John
Bosco church, told Amy Wilentz:

> Of course, the US has its own agenda here. That's natural. If you are
> a rich man, and you have money to spend, you like to make
> investments. Then, once you've made the investment, well, you want
> to make sure the operation works the way you envisioned it. You
> want to make sure it gives you the best rate of return: stability and
> profit, in the case of the US in Haiti. I understand the reality of the
> geographical situation and the geopolitical situation, but I cannot
> accept that Haiti should be whatever the United States wants it to
> be. And it won't be, I can assure you of that.[17]

Father Aristide's ability to articulate the anger and perseverance of the
Haitian people made him one of the most popular figures in Haiti.

By late 1989, attempts at using foreign aid as leverage to temper
CNG repression and check popular uprising had backfired. Instead of
limiting the repression of the CNG, foreign aid gave those in power the
confidence they needed to continue the violence. Furthermore,
Delatour's efforts to open the Haitian economy and promote export-
led development were, on the one hand, hindered by traditionalists with
conflicting interests and, on the other, by unrest in the form of strikes
and work stoppages.[18] Outright support for the CNG was no longer an
option for the US and the suspension of foreign aid, prompted by
CNG-sponsored disruption of elections scheduled in November 1987,
continued even after Namphy was replaced by General Prosper Avril,
another traditionalist. An electoral strategy emerged as the best option.

While supporting the CNG, the US also worked to strengthen the
position of modernisers in the Haitian state. The State Department
worked through the NED and AID to empower this group and make
them more influential in Haitian politics. The NED was instrumental in
funding Marc Bazin, the State Department's preferred candidate, in the
December 1990 elections. Moreover, the NED and AID funded what
was ostensibly a human rights organisation, the Haitian Center for the
Defense of Rights and Freedom (CHADEL), and a union called the
Workers' Federation Union (FOS) to undermine authentic popular
organisations.[19]

Inside the US, those supporting the modernisers pointed them out as
a force for change. In a memo from congressman Walter Fauntroy to
president Bush, several elite families, engaged in agricultural and other
market monopolies, were 'identified as major players blocking change
in Haiti'.[20] Several 'courageous members of the private sector who have
stood up for democracy and free markets' were also identified. Among
them was Andre Apaid. Apaid was appointed by the AID to head
Prominex, an organisation established 'to recruit assembly contracts

and attract overseas investors'.[21] Apaid would later back the coup to overthrow Aristide, and, at a conference in Miami after Aristide's departure, he threatened to strangle Aristide if he returned to Haiti.[22]

The aim of the electoral strategy was to secure the position of the modernisers in the Haitian state through elections. The November 1987 election was intended to do just that, but the plan backfired when the Haitian military, ironically made confident by foreign aid, interfered. Another chance finally arrived when elections were once again scheduled for 16 December 1990. The US expected Bazin to win the election; then, Aristide entered the race for presidency just days before the elections and completely altered the course the US wanted to follow.

Aristide's victory – democracy under siege

From the start, the US, the international agencies and the Haitian elites, both modernisers and traditionalists, were hostile to Aristide's presidency. There was concern among them that Aristide's intended social reform measures would inhibit the international agencies' development strategy and also challenge the existing social order in Haiti. If Aristide proceeded, both economic and security objectives would be endangered. The difference, however, is that those who had previously quarrelled about economic and security matters were now united against a force which was perceived to threaten all of them. Sectoral and ideological differences between modernisers and traditionalists and tensions between the two objectives were set aside in order to confront Aristide and the popular forces.

AID's opposition to the new government resulted from Aristide's plan to raise the minimum wage and his support for labour militancy. After the election, AID formed a team of US and Haitian business groups to assess prospects for the continuation of the export-led development strategy. Barely a month after Aristide was inaugurated, AID drew up a working paper based on the conclusions of the team.

The working paper claimed that 'decisions had been made which could be highly detrimental to economic growth, for example in areas of labor and foreign exchange control'.[23] AID concluded that the support for private sector interests could be best pursued by using Prominex as an umbrella organisation for private sector interests. AID lamented in another document that the wage increase would compromise Haiti's comparative advantage and discourage foreign investors.[24] The 'Democracy enhancement' project launched by AID and NED was designed to back Aristide's opponents in the private sector and serve as what Paul Farmer called 'conservative counter-weights' to Aristide.

After Aristide was elected, the US State Department cooperated

with CHADEL in compiling a record of alleged human rights violations. Such a record was never established under Duvalier and, in fact, the State Department consistently argued that there were no human rights abuses.[25] Jean-Jacques Honorat, the head of CHADEL, personally handled the task of recording every incident between the masses and former *macoutes* and Aristide's opponents.[26] Honorat became the voice of 'human rights' in Haiti and constantly blamed Aristide whenever the people mobilised and demonstrated against former *macoutes* or attempted to pressure the Haitian senate to approve Aristide's reform bills. This so-called human rights record would later serve as tool to discredit Aristide after he was overthrown. During Aristide's governance, the US closely watched events in Haiti. From the US perspective, it certainly seemed that such things as the mass demonstration outside the Haitian senate and the use of 'necklaces' (burning tyres placed around the necks of those accused of past political crimes) were indications that Haiti was well on its way to revolution.

Both groups of Haitian elites were discomfited by the Aristide victory. Growing labour militancy directly affected modernisers engaged in the assembly sector and small-scale manufacturing for local goods, while the general climate of anti-Duvalierism threatened to uproot the social system which traditionalists reigned over. Workers' unions and peasant rights groups were in confrontation with modernisers and traditionalists respectively. Moreover, Aristide's intention of placing price controls on basic food items so the poor could afford to eat angered both agricultural monopolists and food importers.

But the agenda of the US and the Haitian elites was held in check by the immense popular support for Aristide's social reforms. The Haitian people supported his policies with vigilance. Granted, the crowds gathered outside the Haitian legislature resorted to intimidation when senators opposed to Aristide threatened to block his reforms. However, the popular use of coercion simply mirrored the violence used by Aristide's detractors who worked to destabilise a democratically elected government. Within Haiti, CHADEL and others complained to the US press about Aristide's alleged dictatorial style. Haitian elites complained that Aristide was unleashing mobs on his opponents and was responsible for the continuation of political violence. The truth is that human rights violations declined significantly under Aristide and the military, which opposed the government, was responsible for the vast majority of human rights violations which did occur.[27] Of course, these facts did not matter to the US or its operatives in Haiti; what mattered was that 'Democracy enhancement' would not be enough to stop Aristide. There was one group Aristide had yet to reckon with – the military – and, unfortunately, it was the only group physically

capable of derailing everything Aristide and the Haitian people had worked for.

The military had the most to lose by Aristide's reform measures within the government. Corruption was providing a second income throughout all ranks of the military. In rural areas, officers were often entrepreneurs owning small stores and enjoying the privilege of not paying taxes or custom charges. Moreover, high-ranking military officers doubled as section chiefs.* Section chiefs were usually engaged in peasant-landlord relationships. Peasants, other landlords, and illegal aliens from the Dominican Republic provided the equipment and materials necessary for agrarian production. Hence, section chiefs earned profits without ever having to spend any money on costs.[28] Aristide's announcement that he would end the rule of section chiefs angered many in the military. In a move to protect himself from a military backlash and to curb the power the military had over the Haitian people, he began restructuring the military. Ironically, he appointed General Raoul Cedras – who would later overthrow him – as chief of staff.

After returning from New York, where he had addressed the United Nations, Aristide was informed of rumours of an impending coup. His speech to the Haitian people upon his return was especially alarming to those who complained of his use of 'mob violence'. His reference to a 'tool' for fighting for change was perceived by his opponents as an endorsement of necklacing. On 30 September 1991, a military coup overthrew Aristide just eight months after his administration took power. The military's justification for the coup was as expected: to preserve democracy and halt the instability resulting from Aristide's alleged abuses. As Aristide himself said, 'Cedras the Just had sacrificed himself to unmask Aristide the Dictator – and to denounce the ongoing violations of the Constitution and of civil justice, and the flouting of human rights'.[29]

The struggle continues in exile

One would think that the US's swift condemnation of the coup and support for an OAS embargo meant unconditional support for Aristide. Nothing could be further from the truth. In spite of secretary of state Baker's claim that the coup government was illegitimate, the US government launched a disinformation campaign against Aristide. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations, the Congress, and several branches of the government bureaucracy were complicit in this campaign.

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* Haiti is divided into sections. Section chiefs act as local leaders for their respective section.

By all measures, the Bush administration's support for the embargo was a hoax. On 5 October 1991, the Bush administration promised it would enforce an OAS embargo designed to force Haitian elites and the military out of power. In response to mounting pressure by US businesses operating in Haiti, the Bush administration began granting special licences so that assembly plants could receive components from abroad.[30] State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said such licences would be granted only to US corporations, not to those supporting the coup. But, in fact, licences were granted to several families known to support the coup, including the Mevs. The Clinton administration did not reverse the licences and even worked with the Mevs when negotiations for Aristide's return reached a deadlock.

The US was also faced with a refugee crisis when Haitians fled the island due to escalating military-sponsored violence and the economic downturn. Bush began interdicting refugees at sea and interning them at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) screened asylum-seekers. When numbers swelled at Guantanamo Bay and concern grew that too many refugees were being granted asylum, the Bush administration then enforced a repatriation policy wherein refugees would be returned to Haiti without even the benefit of an interview. The Clinton administration did not differ from its predecessor in its treatment of Haitian refugees. During the presidential race, candidate Clinton criticised the Bush administration for its repatriation policy. However, once in office, president Clinton actually ordered a naval and coast guard blockade of Haiti to keep potential refugees from leaving the island.

Why could Clinton not reverse Bush's policy and accept Haitians into the US as political refugees? The answer rests in good part in the State Department's disinformation campaign and the less than enthusiastic support for the OAS embargo. Just days after Baker's condemnation of the coup and declaration of support for the Aristide government, the focus began to shift from support for, to criticism of, Aristide. Within the executive and in congressional circles, noisy indignation about Aristide's alleged human rights record masked the ongoing atrocities committed by the junta. The State Department's record was a primary source for gathering information against Aristide.[31]

A Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs hearing held a month after Aristide's overthrow considered whether or not the coup leaders and supporters had legitimate grievances. The conclusion was that they did have legitimate grievances, but that this did not excuse the coup. While the subcommittee did not excuse the coup, the burden of reconciliation was placed on Aristide. Assistant secretary for inter-American affairs Bernard Aronson told the subcommittee, 'They [the Haitian elites and military] are afraid of mob violence and clearly one

of the challenges is not only to return him [Aristide] physically, but to create conditions ... where order can be restored and human rights respected'.[32]

In February 1992, the INS directed senior intelligence officer Gunther Otto Wagner to Haiti to investigate reports of attacks on repatriated Haitians. Wagner's investigation was absurd. He coordinated his investigation with the very same military accused of harming repatriated Haitians. Wagner concluded that the reports were unsubstantiated and, in a follow-up report, said that 95 per cent of Haitians applying for asylum did not have credible cases. Bernard Aronson added to the charade by claiming that Haitians were preparing a mass exodus to the US. This claim was later found to be completely false but it and Wagner's reports gave impetus to Clinton's decision to order a naval blockade of the island.[33]

The anti-refugee policy and the smear campaign against Aristide were perceived by coup leaders and supporters as a lack of US commitment for Aristide's return. First, Wagner's reports assured Aristide's opponents that human rights violations were not an issue with the US. In fact, the reports actually served the unintended function of intensifying the repression and political intolerance. The burden of denying human rights violations was placed on Aristide alone. Second, the smear campaign was interpreted to mean that Aristide's return, if he were to return at all, was subject to negotiation. These perceptions had the paradoxical effect of leading Haitian elites to negotiations with the Aristide camp through the US, while making the coup government more confident that it did not need to step down and hand power back to the deposed president.

Thanks to the special licences, US corporations were still conducting business in Haiti, but the overall Haitian economy was suffering. Despite efforts to isolate Haitian elites from international trade and commerce, the OAS embargo was not working. In fact, reports were indicating that Haitian elites were profiting by price gouging goods, especially food and gasoline.[34] However, the frustration within the US stemmed not from the inability to use the embargo to pressure Haitian elites into negotiations, but from the still unperformed job of implementing the recommendations of the international agencies. One thing was certain: as long as the military remained in power, Haiti would follow the same economic patterns as under Duvalier and the CNG. The Clinton administration worked with the World Bank to develop a structural adjustment policy for the period following Aristide's return to power. The issue of controlling the opening of political space and not allowing a repeat of what had happened after Duvalier's departure was yet another problem, one which ultimately could only be handled by US military occupation.

Aristide's return – business as usual

Three years after Aristide was overthrown, his return seemed nowhere in sight. As discussed above, the US was not committed to returning Aristide to power. Coup leaders and supporters were only willing to negotiate with the US when they felt that they were in the position of bargaining for concessions from Aristide. Modernisers, in particular, had been interested in negotiations to gain more access into the Haitian state. After all, their major contention was that Aristide had shut them out of the political process when he was in power. The primary objective of US foreign policy in Haiti was the same as it was during the CNG: to place modernisers in key positions of the state apparatus without risking domestic instability. After the coup government failed to follow through on arrangements for Aristide's return as had been agreed at Governors Island in July 1993, it became clear that the Haitian military would not and could not control events if Aristide returned. US military occupation would become the only option possible to carry out the delicate agreements made at Governors Island.

The pro-democracy bourgeoisie within Aristide's *Lavalas* movement moved towards reconciliation when the disinformation campaign against Aristide began. This effectively split the pro-democracy camp into two general factions: one moving towards reconciliation and the other supporting popular struggle. Those in favour of reconciliation worked with the US and Haitian elites, pro-democratic and pro-coup, to begin negotiations. Aristide was coaxed into negotiations and convinced that this was the only way to stop the violence in Haiti; without Aristide, the popular struggle was isolated.

The agreements reached at Governors Island would return Aristide to power by 30 October 1993. General Cedras would step down, Aristide would appoint a new prime minister, and then return to Haiti. Cedras did not step down and it appeared that everything the US had worked to accomplish was in shambles. Ironically, the US provided Cedras and other coup leaders and supporters with the confidence they needed to renege on the Governors Island agreements. First, the CIA started an even more malicious disinformation campaign against Aristide which claimed he was taking anti-depressants for mental illness. The Clinton administration did nothing to disclaim the charges. Rather, the administration used the latest smear tactic to twist Aristide's arm to appoint a prime minister to its liking; the pro-democracy bourgeoisie was busy twisting the other arm. Aristide selected Robert Malval, a businessman and friend, who had, nevertheless, opposed many of Aristide's reform measures.

A report by the Puebla Institute, a moderate think-tank which purports to support Catholics in the Third World, and a statement by the US special envoy on Haiti, Lawrence Pezzullo, at a hearing before

the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs (held after the Governors Island agreements) reveal the amount of pressure placed on Aristide.[35] Pezullo spoke specifically about what steps Aristide had to take before returning to Haiti: appoint a prime minister, grant an amnesty to coup leaders, and guarantee the maintenance of peace and order. But his statement is peculiarly vague about what the coup leaders needed to do besides step down. The Puebla Institute once again revived the lies about Aristide's human rights violations to reach the conclusion that technical assistance was needed to institutionalise democratic norms. By claiming that judicial means did not exist for a fair trial, the Puebla Institute provided a convenient get-out for coup leaders not to pay for their crimes.

Pressuring Aristide had the effect of making coup leaders believe they did not need to comply with the agreements at Governors Island. First, the US acceptance of Malval as prime minister was perceived by the coup government as a sign that the US was still primarily concerned with placing modernisers into the state. Just as the CNG had done, coup leaders attempted to close the rift with the US by appointing to office some modernisers with ties to the US. The coup government first appointed Honorat as prime minister and then the US's favourite son, Marc Bazin. Second, the reviving of Aristide's alleged human rights record shifted the focus on human rights violations away from the coup government. The military and a paramilitary organisation called the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH) bolstered its terror against those who were celebrating Aristide's expected return. FRAPH would later be identified as a CIA-funded group which, ironically, was responsible for turning away the USS *Harlan County*, the US military mission sent to oversee the transition.[36] More important, however, was General Cedras's claim that the rebellion in the streets of Port-au-Prince was an ominous sign of what lay ahead if Aristide returned.[37]

As a result of FRAPH's actions and the coup government's refusal to step down, Aristide was not returned until 15 October 1994. For two years, the US tried to carry through the agreements made at Governors Island. The hardest tasks confronting the US were how to conduct the transition without causing a political and social situation similar to Duvalier's departure and implement the structural adjustment pro-gramme at the same time. These two objectives had been compromised by relying on the Haitian military for too long. At that point, it became clear to the White House that direct military intervention might be necessary. Five days before Aristide's return to Haiti, Clinton addressed the nation and, for the first time since the crisis began, started talking about human rights violations in Haiti. By 17 September 1994, an invasion seemed imminent.

Then former president Jimmy Carter stepped in to act as a liaison

between the White House and coup leaders. In a last-ditch effort to prevent an invasion, coup leaders were offered the same amnesty stipulated at Governors Island, luxurious exile in Panama, and the release of funds from their bank accounts in the US which had been frozen.[38] Clinton announced US troops would still be going to Haiti to oversee the transition; however, the job of upholding order would be deferred to certain members of the Haitian police and military. US troops were directed not to get involved in conflicts between Haitians. The *New York Times* summed up the purpose of the US troops in Haiti well, 'to permit the elected government to retake power in the next few weeks – and to do so with the full cooperation of the very forces that seized power after the September 30, 1991 coup'.[39]

Aristide's return entailed three deals: signing an IMF loan package stipulating many of the structural adjustments which international agencies had sought for so long, cooperating with the US and certain members of the Haitian military to maintain order, and granting amnesty to coup leaders. The World Bank provided a 400-page document to two of Aristide's advisers. They drafted an eight-page document which called for the abandonment of import quotas and most tariffs, divestment of state-owned enterprises and an $800 million dollar loan package for social and economic reforms. AID administrator J. Brian Atwood was so pleased with the draft that he praised Aristide for changing from someone with a 'real attitude' to a president who has grown and 'knows all the practical issues'.[40]

US troops were positioned around the perimeters of affluent neighbourhoods and businesses to prevent looting. Within the slums of Port-au-Prince, the poor were left to fend off FRAPH members by themselves. Many US soldiers watched as Haitians celebrating Aristide's return were clubbed, beaten, and shot by FRAPH members, the police and the military. Clinton then ordered US troops to intervene in cases of obvious abuse, but not to act every time the police clubbed Haitians. The order to use discretion did little to stop the attacks on Haitian civilians; US troops intervened in a few cases, but, overall, the terror continued. When angry people fought back against the intimidation and attacks, the US press portrayed the incidents as reasons for US military presence. In cases where the people fought back against their antagonisers, US troops suddenly became all too willing to intervene, even using pepper gas to repel the people from the accused. Amid the jubilation and continuing violence, US troops escorted Cedras and others to the airport where they departed for Panama.

Conclusion

Maintaining a stable climate for foreign investments and limiting the opening of political space were the two objectives which shaped US

policy towards the Duvalier regime during the early 1980s and towards the CNG in the late 1980s. Internal responses, shaped in part by economic liberalisation, further complicated matters. The US found itself in a predicament where regulating internal politics in Haiti meant risking the investment climate, but promoting the investment climate was cultivating unrest throughout all levels of Haitian society. The case of Haiti demonstrates that security and economic interests often conflict and can cause deadlock or a revision of how to implement objectives. Security and economic interests in Haiti were ultimately reconciled by the US military presence.

Elections were held on 17 December 1995, with markedly low voter participation. Aristide's successor, Rene Preval, has continued the deregulation of the Haitian economy. Recent purchases of foreign rice from Miami and plans to privatise state-owned industries indicate that the modernisers fully intend to follow through with the IMF agreements. However, strikes and mass demonstrations have been common since Aristide's return. The US military presence can only temporarily resolve the contradictions of US foreign policy. US foreign policy makers are fully aware that neither the US nor the UN can stay in Haiti forever.

Hence, millions of US dollars have been spent creating a new security apparatus in Haiti. Since Aristide's return, the US International Criminal Investigations Training and Assistance Program (ICITAP) has been training the new Haitian National Police (HNP). Candidates for the HNP are largely drawn from the old Haitian army.[41] At the same time, AID and NED provided funds to several candidates in the last elections. The main purpose of these funds was to establish electoral politics as the only acceptable political action in the country. However, with the popular movement ailing from the military's massive demobilisation effort, electoral politics has provided very little outlet for real change. This guarantees that the type of stability the US seeks will not take place. Implementing the neoliberal agenda without repression is unlikely. Yet repression can foster a climate unfavourable to neoliberalism. It appears, then, that the central contradictions of US foreign policy in Haiti persist.

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IAN BOXILL

Fiji: the limits of ethnic political mobilisation

In May 1987, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and the Fijian military over-
threw the democratically elected government of Fiji. Later that year, a
second coup was staged which sought to consolidate the power of
Rabuka. A decade after the coup and a general election which was won
by Rabuka, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future of the
country. Distrust of Indians by Fijians and Fijians by Indians[1] – the
two major ethnic groups – continues to fester. Following the coup and
the suspension of the constitution (which was replaced by a 1990
constitution that entrenches the political leadership of the country in
the hands of an indigenous Fijian elite), Fiji was expelled from the
Commonwealth, and has received much international criticism for
subverting the democratic process. Additionally, there has been the out
migration of a number of skilled Fiji Indians and Fijians from the
country and a reduction in the value of the Fijian dollar. Although
many writers have focused on the Fijian problem by looking at the
conflict between Indians and Fijians, I prefer, following a recent visit to
the country, to look at the Fijian situation from a different angle,
emphasising the intersection of culture, economics, politics and
ethnicity – rather than focusing on the ethnic issue, per se. Indeed, I
believe that the problem of the Fijian state (and perhaps of indigenous
Fijians) has less to do with an 'Indian threat' than with the limitations
of the strategy of ethnic mobilisation pursued by the incumbent
regime.[2]

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Background

Lieutenant Colonel Rabuka staged the first coup d'état of 1987 after the Fijian-dominated Alliance Party had been defeated in the country's fifth general election since independence in 1970. A coalition composed primarily of the Indian National Federation Party (NFP) and the new Labour Party won the elections. The coalition then appointed Timoci Bavadra, a Fijian, to the post of prime minister.

In the weeks following the election, racial tensions worsened in the country as the Taukei (Indigenous) movement warned Fijians about an imminent Indian take-over of the country. It pointed to the plight of other indigenous peoples in the region and suggested that Fijians should not be marginalised in their own country. Ostensibly as a result of these protests, Rabuka and the military intervened, deposing Bavadra from office. Rabuka won support from the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and, as a result of international pressure, he handed over the reigns of government to Governor General Ratu Penaia. However, as a result of negotiations between Ratu Mara and Bavadra, a second set of disturbances occurred, again led by the Taukei movement, in which many Indian-owned business were attacked and others destroyed. This action appears to have provided the rationale for a second coup in September 1987. Following this coup, Rabuka abolished the constitution and later declared Fiji a republic.[3] Ratu Penaia became president and Ratu Mara interim prime minister.

In 1990, a new constitution was promulgated which, in effect, guaranteed Fijians political control over the country. Of the seventy-seat House of Representatives, Fijians were allocated thirty-seven, Indians, twenty-seven, General Electors or Voters, five and Rotuma Islanders, one. The new Senate consisted of thirty-four seats, twenty-four of which were reserved for Fijians, nine for other races and one for Rotuma Islanders. Furthermore, the posts of prime minister, president, heads of the army and public service were basically reserved for Fijians.

Local and international criticism of the new constitution did not prevent it from being adopted by the Fijian government. It was under this new constitution that the 1992 elections were held. In 1992, Rabuka's party, the *Soqosoqo Ni Vakavulewa Ni Taukei* (SVT) or the Fijian Political Party, won thirty of the thirty-seven guaranteed Fijian seats and Rabuka became prime minister. The SVT is a party which has the backing of the Fijian traditional elite, the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs). However, because Rabuka was not guaranteed support from all of the elected members in his party, he linked forces with the Indian-dominated Fijian Labour Party (FLP), the General Voters Party, two independents and the sole Rotuma representative to form a government and ensure his position as prime

minister. In return, Rabuka promised to review land tenure and the constitution. In 1994, Rabuka was re-elected by a larger margin. On this occasion, he opted for the support of the General Voters Party instead of seeking an alliance with the Indians.

Although Rabuka's assumption of power was, in Chin's words, seemingly to 'solve the Indian problem', the issue is still as potent as ever in political circles.[4] With a devaluation of the dollar by 35 per cent since the coup, increasing external debts, accusations of corruption within the government, and Indians continuing to protest about lack of political rights, Fijian society may be characterised as being in a state of high uncertainty, or even crisis.

Ethnic analyses

A number of scholars have focused on the Fijian problem by emphasising its ethnic/racial dimensions.[5] Perhaps the leading champions of the ethnic approach are Premdas and Ravuvu who both characterise Fijian society as plural, although offering very different analyses of the situation. Premdas argues that the crisis faced by the country following the 1987 coup had been in the making for a long time, 'below the veneer of racial calm projected to the outside world, there had lurked fierce torrents of interjectional suspicion, fear and potential strife'.[6] Ravuvu, on the other hand, contends that 'Fijians had long feared that Indians would one day rule Fiji, the country of their heritage and for which their ancestors have shed their blood and sweat, and lost their lives defending it'.[7]

Now, while I do not underestimate the importance of the ethnic issue, I treat ethnicity as an intervening, rather than a causal, variable. There is nothing novel about this perspective. Plange, for example, stresses the importance of history and class formation in coming to terms with the Fijian crisis. His view seems to be that ethnicity should be located within this complex set of factors, rather than as a starting point of analysis.[8] By the same token, I contend that to understand the Fijian problem, ethnicity, in so far as it has explanatory value, should be contextualised within culture, politics, history and the process of globalisation.

Among the factors which will, in the future, hinder the Fijian ruling elite from successfully mobilising their constituency by appealing to ethnic loyalties are the following: (a) the problem of ethnicity and economics, which fundamentally disadvantages poor indigenous Fijians, as opposed to the elite (of all ethnic groups); (b) the inability of the Fijian political elite to successfully articulate their position globally; (c) the problem of identity among Fijians both within the Pacific and globally; and (d) the emphasis on traditional political institutions which harbour corruption and also clash with the

changing society increasingly characterised by a capitalist market economy and western values.

Ethnicity and economics

Although Fijians control more than 80 per cent of the land, along with the main political offices in the country, commerce is decidedly non-Fijian. Fiji's business class is essentially made up of expatriates from Australia, New Zealand and Asia, as well as Fiji Indians and Fiji Chinese. Even though Fijians own most of the land, much of the commercial activity associated with those lands is controlled by Fiji Indians and other non-indigenous Fijians. It is difficult to see how a regime which appeals to ethnic loyalties to achieve political control can successfully rule in the long run if members of its ethnic group do not also have effective control over trade and commerce. This is, of course, unless an alliance is struck between the business elite and the political elite. In such a case, we have, from a marxian standpoint, the classic case of capital in collusion with the political elite forming various layers of the ruling class. In such a circumstance, the issue of ethnicity becomes a smokescreen for ensuring the dominance of a ruling elite. Indeed, in interviews which I conducted with various academics and politicians, this is the view which many of them shared. As one Fijian academic argued, 'the coup was not in the interest of ordinary Fijians. This is a case where the political elite have used ethnicity to maintain their dominance over the society.'[9]

On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the Rabuka regime can survive without the input of other ethnic groups, given the fact that, in general, Fijians are much less prepared than Indians to operate within an increasingly complex global economy. As a peripheral economy, Fiji is extremely vulnerable to external global influences. People in peripheral states are especially susceptible to marginalisation or manipulation by larger dominant economies in the core, and those on the margins of the periphery will tend to be even more susceptible to the influences of the 'centre'.[10]

In Fiji it would appear that Indians, by virtue of their history, are more disposed to dealing with the world capitalist economy than Fijians. This is because many more Fijians than Indians live in isolated rural communal settings – on the periphery of the periphery. Indians were the indentured labourers introduced into Fijian society as part of a global capitalist economy dominated by Britain. Despite its semi-feudal nature, indentureship carried with it aspects of capitalism, including waged labour, rational calculation and individualism. Even though Fijians, prior to Indian indentureship, were part of this global economy, their involvement has never been as extensive as that of Indians.[11] *Although Plange acknowledges the involvement of Fijians in*

the market economy, mainly in the production of sandalwood, beche-de-mer and copra, he also points out that, under the colonial state, 'Fijian access to, and effective participation in, the newly introduced economy from structurally vantage points were discouraged'.[12]

As a result, Fijian traditional culture seems less disposed to individualism and accumulation than Indian. This difference is arguably part of the reason for the growth in capitalist enterprises among Indians, and the relative few among Fijians.

Now if, as I have intimated, an ethnic-based political regime requires economic support from its constituency to survive, it is difficult to see how this regime can last as Fijians are not in a position to provide such support (the land issue notwithstanding). On the other hand, if the regime seeks alliances with non-ethnic interests in order to survive, then, in the long run, its ethnic basis for mobilisation will disappear. In such a situation, the regime will have to reform its mobilising rhetoric, turning it away from ethnicity if it wants to remain in power.

The problem of articulation

In order for a political regime to persist in power, it must have at its disposal the means for developing and propagating its ideas. As Plato argued in his *Republic*, the creation and propagation of myths is necessary to shaping the structure of a society. The people in charge of this process, the intelligentsia, usually articulate ideas and values to ensure the survival of a particular social formation. It is the educated elite which creates and rationalises knowledge which then becomes truths for the society at large. It is this intelligentsia – the writers, painters, university lecturers, school teachers, lawyers, physicians, scientists, journalists, religious leaders – which ensures the longevity of hegemony of a ruling elite.

But is the current regime better placed than the opposition convincingly to articulate its ideas and values nationally and internationally without the use of repressive measures? In the long run, in my view, the opposition, which is predominantly, though not exclusively, Indian, is in a comparatively better position than the ruling elite, because levels of education are higher within the Fiji Indian intelligentsia than within the Fijian ruling elite and its mainly Fijian supporters.

Historically, education in Fiji has been segregated and community operated. Since the nineteenth century, religious and cultural organisations have established most of the community-based schools for both Fijians and Indians. According to Naidu, up until 1994, the government directly owned and operated only 2 per cent of primary schools and 8 per cent of secondary schools. Because government-owned schools are better funded, equipped and run, however, many of the

community-run schools are of comparatively poor standard. A second characteristic of Fijian education is that, while there are more Fijian than Indian schools (though ethnic segregation is not as widespread as in the past), there are many more Indians in post-secondary education than Fijians. Furthermore, many more Fiji Indians have post-secondary education and university diplomas than Fijians. While Fijians are qualified in a small number of areas, Indians can be found in a wide variety of fields, especially business, science and technology, journalism and education.[13] The predominance of Indians, relative to Fijians, in the top professions is not a recent development. Ali notes:

> the postwar era witnessed an expansion of Indians into new areas such as the professions: Indian lawyers , doctors, school teachers with degrees became a feature that began to be apparent in the 1950s and increased rapidly in the 1960s.[14]

Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of schooling among Fijians derives from the dispersed and rural nature of much ethnic Fijian settlement:

> the schooling of rural children generally and Ethnic Fijian children in particular is adversely affected by inadequate physical facilities, non-existent libraries and unqualified teachers.[15]

At the tertiary level, most of the leading intellectuals and university lecturers at the University of the South Pacific, the most influential tertiary institution in Fiji, are Fiji Indian. Indians are also much better represented in printed media than Fijians. So visible is the imbalance that there has been a policy of 'positive discrimination' in favour of Fijians, particularly in the public service, which is now predominantly Fijian.

That Indians have a much larger, wider and perhaps more capable educated elite to act as an opposition to the relatively small and limited Fijian intelligentsia cannot be disputed. It should also be acknowledged that there are many leading Fijian intellectuals and professionals who did not support the coup or the Taukei movement, and who now form part of the opposition to the government. Indeed, part of the reason for the international condemnation of the 1987 coups was related to the ability of journalists, intellectuals and professionals to articulate the Fijian problem in the international arena. The emigration of numerous highly skilled Indians (and some Fijians) to Australia and New Zealand resulted in a critical mass of educated Indians who could raise public awareness about what they perceived to be repression and the subversion of democracy.

Indians are better placed, in the long term, to influence international opinion on Fiji than a small ruling class which is based in Fiji, because of superior education, access to various ways of propagating their ideas

and their presence in influential countries in the region. The relatively large numbers of educated Fiji Indians and Fijians who live outside of Fiji, and who are opposed to the regime, are likely to form alliances with internal opposition elements, adding pressure to the ruling regime. Since most of the government support comes from its rural constituency it is less likely than the opposition to articulate, in a sophisticated way, a hegemonic ideology. But, it is also the case that having a sizeable Fijian educated class does not automatically guarantee support for the ruling elite, since many professional Fijians fled the country after the coup of 1987.

For all of these reasons, it difficult for the ruling regime to continue mobilising political support simply on the basis of ethnicity, without incurring the wrath of the international community, especially Australia and New Zealand – the two countries which see their role as protecting the democratic process in the region. If the regime is unable to counter opposition propaganda abroad, it may have to resort to more repressive measures. This, however, may only lead to greater isolation of the regime, reducing its viability in the long run even more.

The problem of identity

An essential aspect of any group's struggle for recognition is the creation of its group identity. Because of their immigrant status, Fiji Indians had to confront the issue of their social identity in a new land, and so dealt with it fairly effectively – but Fijians have not. The idea of political mobilisation based on ethnicity, without examining the notion of who is a Fijian, could, in the long run, lead to serious problems among the ruling regime's constituency. It would appear that indigenous Fijians – while confident about their status as indigenous peoples as opposed to settlers – have not resolved the issue among themselves and are somewhat ambivalent about where they fit in among the Polynesians and Melanesians of the region – and in the world in general.

Part of the problem may be related to the fact that the interpretation and discussion of Fijian identity has been dominated by expatriate writers and scholars of European origin. In trying to locate Fiji within the discourse on peoples and origins, Williams states:

> The native songs are silent in the matter, and no hint of a former immigration is to be heard of: the people have no intercourse with other nations, except as visited by them and the popular belief is that they never occupied any country but that which they dwell.[16]

This passage, which is often cited by researchers as an authoritative source, disconnects Fijians from the web of other major groups of people outside the Pacific. By showing that Fijians have no known

links to other peoples or places, Williams isolates them from other major centres of world civilisation. But, to further complicate matters, he goes on to show that Fiji is neither Melanesian nor Polynesian, but a hybrid. Subsequent writings on Fiji have characterised the country as a confluence of different cultures over a period of time.[17] Fijians, by virtue of their culture and phenotypes, do not comfortably fit into the Melanesian and Polynesian dichotomies created by European scholars, as other Pacific Islanders do.[18] The reality is that indigenous Fijians, at least culturally, hold many identities, even though there seems to be a dominant Melanesian one.

The idea of Fiji being a single country and people was socially constructed by European missionaries.[19] Prior to contact with Europeans, Fijians identified with their tribes or clan, rather than the nation state. The nation state pan-tribal/clan identity was therefore one of the products of European contact. Fijians of diverse backgrounds came to define themselves as Fijians in reference to the 'other' – the *vulagi* or outsiders. Now this issue, of classifying all of the indigenous people as Fijian, is not itself a problem; rather, it is the ramifications for identification of the self locally and globally.

Since the classification of Fijian is artificial, the idea of thinking of Fijian in essentialist terms runs into all sorts of difficulties. The essentialist ideas advanced by the Taukei movement, and embraced by the ruling regime, could result in a problem of identity among Fijians themselves. In searching for what is essentialist, there is a tendency to emphasise only those images (of culture and people) which are perceived to be positive. For instance, many Fijians prefer to associate or emphasise their Polynesian identity over the Melanesian one. This is understandable. Fijian society and scholars of the Pacific have been infinitely more hostile in their portrayals of Melanesian cultures than Polynesian ones. Furthermore, when Europeans reached the Pacific, they had already invented a body of literature which sought to denigrate people of dark complexion or those who remotely resembled people of the so-called negroid race. In the origins of the slave trade among Polynesian Pacific Islanders, Maude argues that, during the 1860s, slavers rationalised the enslavement of Polynesians over Melanesians by making reference to the fact that they were more civilised than Melanesians:

> there was no longer any need to engage in a long and expensive voyage to Melanesia to procure cargo of truculent savages when gentler Christianised Polynesians were available for the asking.[20]

Racialist ideas were, therefore, part and parcel of the interaction of Europeans with both Fijians and Indians. It should also be noted that Indians came to Fiji with very strong prejudices which were more critical of Melanesians than Polynesians. Ali states that when Indians

arrived in Fiji they referred to (Melanesian) Fijians as '*hoos*, a term implying savagery and lack of civilisation'.[21] Thus, we have in Fijian society the confluence of expatriate racist education, immigrant prejudice and a nebulous notion of 'Fijian', resulting in the elevation of Polynesian traits and the denigration of Melanesian ones. The result is a great deal of tension and prejudice among Fijians themselves.[22]

Some Fijians of Melanesian descent characterise Fijian identity as fundamentally Melanesian. Others, of mixed or Polynesian background, prefer a Polynesian emphasis. This, I am told, has led to differences in foreign policy emphases in the region between Rabuka, who is essentially Melanesian, and the president who is more Polynesian than Melanesian. While Rabuka has stressed the importance of linking closer to other Melanesian countries, the president has placed greater emphasis on the link with the Polynesian Pacific.[23] Where the question of Fijian identity might have wider repercussions is in Fiji's relations with the international community. It has become difficult, if not impossible, for nation states to survive without alliances. In light of this, Fiji's lack of historical and genealogical connection to larger or more powerful groups of peoples (outside the Pacific islands region) may have contributed to its relative isolation internationally after the coups of 1987 – tacit support from Tonga and a few other Asian countries notwithstanding.

So influential is the role of phenotype in the construction of racial and ethnic identity that many Fijians hold firmly to the belief that their ancestors came from Tanzania – a story apparently started by a missionary.[24] Many Melanesian Fijians reject the idea that their ancestors came from Taiwan or other parts of Asia, as some anthropologists speculate. They are more favourably disposed towards an African origin, even when they have no evidence, barring a few oral tales, to substantiate their conclusion. In an interview which I conducted with members of a rural village, part of the rationale for believing the story about the African-Fijian connection had to do with the fact that many villagers could identify with the physical similarities between Africans and Fijians. Of equal importance is the fact that identification with East Africans gave them a global identity; a connection with other people, as the Fiji Indians have with India or Fiji Europeans with Europe.

Political mobilisation along ethnic lines may become a less attractive option as differences among Fijians are brought more into the open. Fijians have yet seriously to confront ethnic differences beyond the binary oppositions of *taukei* (indigenous or owner) and *vulagi* (visitor or foreigner). Such a process could, potentially, make the Fijian electorate a much more heterogenous group and make it far more difficult to mobilise by simply stressing the *taukei* and *vulagi* concepts. Furthermore, given that Fijians are unable to identify (genealogically

and historically) with other significant (numerically and economically) peoples or nations outside the Pacific, they could easily be ostracised by the world community.

Stratification, modernisation and traditionalism

One of the main features of Fijian society is the apparent conflict between traditional communal society and the capitalist market economy. As the market encroaches into all parts of the society, Fijian traditional ways of life are surrendering to the trappings of western modernisation. Ironically, one of the main objectives of the 1987 coups and of the 1990 constitution was to make political institutions more consistent with traditional Fijian values of leadership and authority.[25] This meant greater emphasis on village life, as opposed to urbanised individualism, and the strengthening of traditional systems of authority, most notably the GCC.

Although the GCC was institutionalised during British colonialism, it has been seen by many within the Fijian elite as part of a leadership tradition. Ravuvu notes that the GCC is 'the highest forum pertaining to Fijian affairs'.[26] Historically, the GCC and the colonial government made decisions on behalf of the Fijian masses. While the franchise was granted to Indians in 1929, for many years Fijians had to rely on the GCC and the colonial government to function on their behalf. Ravuvu admits that, 'unfortunately by being too paternalistic and protective of the Fijian people, colonial officials deprived Fijians of the opportunity to develop political awareness...'.[27] Although Fijians were granted the franchise in 1962, the GCC continues to play an important decision-making role in the society. In the current constitution, the GCC is allowed to nominate twenty-four of the thirty-four persons to the Senate. Indeed, Rabuka's power base resides in the GCC which formed his SVT party to contest the 1992 and 1994 general elections. The GCC continues to exercise a great deal of authority on a number of social, political and economic issues.[28]

However, not all Fijians are satisfied with the way in which the hereditary leaders have been leading Fijians. A scandal associated with the loss of millions of dollars from the state-owned National Bank of Fiji (NBF) led critics of the regime to accuse the government of corruption.[29] It has been alleged that loans were granted to friends and relatives of bank and senior political officials, under highly questionable circumstances.[30] In interviews which I conducted with academics and a politician, it was consistently stated that the Rabuka regime has used the argument of protecting Fijian traditions in order to protect the power base of the Fijian ruling elite.[31]

Even though Fijians have a great deal of respect for their traditional leaders, it is not a foregone conclusion that this will be the basis for

continued support of the SVT. As the 1987 election demonstrated, Fijians will not necessarily support a political party or regime simply on the basis of ethnicity.[32] If the economic situation of working Fijians worsens, and complaints about corruption continue, it is quite possible that the ruling regime will find it difficult to appeal to the preservation of culture and traditions as a mobilisation strategy.

Perhaps the greatest threats to ethnic mobilisation are the capitalist market economy and modernisation process. The conflict between traditional communal existence and the encroachment of the market economy is already leading to a transformation of Fijian society. For instance, in 1956, 73 per cent of Fijians lived in rural villages, 16 per cent in rural areas outside villages, and 11 per cent in urban areas. By 1986, 46 per cent lived in villages, 21 per cent in rural non-villages and 33 per cent in urban areas.[33] While most rural Fijians live in rural villages, as Ward shows, 'the trend [is] towards residence in towns, on dispersed farms, plantations, or at places of rural wage employment such as forestry or construction camps or tourist resorts...'.[34] The demographic transformation of Fijian society is the direct consequence of the penetration of capitalism which changes the relations of production and social relations.

Ward notes further that the trend towards Fijians becoming *galala* (persons living outside of the village on a separate farm) is indicative of the changing values away from subsistence and communalism towards individualism and commercialism. This situation, he continues, will lead to the marginalisation of many Fijians from the political system which, following the constitution of 1990, is based on the traditional systems of social and economic organisation. That is to say, Fijians living outside villages or traditional settlements will not have the same degree of political representation as those who do.

On the other hand, the growth of towns and decline of villages and rural life will inevitably reduce the power of traditional leaders, and institutions such as the GCC. Furthermore, a growth in urban centres could lead to the concentration of wage labourers of different ethnic groups in similar geographical areas, as is the case with Suva. The development of a large class of wage labourers comprising both Fijians and Indians could potentially reduce the physical and social distance between the two groups. Such conditions, as seen from the 1987 elections, favour the building of alliances across ethnic boundaries. Unlike rural areas, people in urban social formations tend to be more individualistic and dependent to a much greater extent on the market for survival.

Given this emerging social and demographic matrix, it may prove difficult (though not impossible) for the current political regime to successfully mobilise under the banner of ethnicity and tradition. Only if Fijians are visibly disadvantaged economically relative to Indians in

the urban areas will there be the distinct possibility of successful mass mobilisation on the basis of ethnicity. However, as the market transforms people's values, economics will become an even greater variable in determining the political allegiance of both Fiji Indians and Fijians.

References

1 In this paper I use the terms 'Indian' or 'Fiji Indian' to refer to Fiji nationals of Indian ancestry, and 'Fjian' or 'indigenous Fijian' to refer to Fiji nationals who are *tangata whenua* or indigenous to the country.
2 This paper does not purport to be an extensive treatise on the Fijian political economy or social life. The data which I used for this paper were based on a number of interviews which I conducted with academics and politicians in Fiji, in January 1996. My perspective on the Fijian situation is strongly influenced by my 'western' education and a set of life experiences which have been affected by the dynamics of Caribbean society and its historical interaction with America and Europe.
3 For details of the coup, see, for example, *The Contemporary Pacific* (Vol. 2, no. 1, 1990); R. Premdas, 'Military intervention in Fiji: fear of ethnic domination' in *Social and Economic Studies* (Vol, 1, no. 1, 1992); and A. Ravuvu, *The facade of democracy: Fijian struggles for political control 1830-1987* (Suva, Fiji, Reader Publishing House, 1995).
4 For extensive discussions on the problem of Fiji's economic crisis and corruption in government, see James Chin, 'Fiji: a nation in waiting', *The International New Zealand Review* (November, 1995); and *Report on Consultation on Fiji's Constitution Review* (Suva, Fiji, University of the South Pacific, 1994).
5 See, for example, Jone Dakuvula, 'Chiefs and commoners: the indigenous dilemma' in D. Robie (ed.), *Tu Galala: Social Change in the Pacific* (Wellington, New Zealand, Bridget Williams Books, 1992); Ralph Premdas, 'Military intervention in Fiji: fear of ethnic domination', *Social and Economic Studies* (Vol. 41, no. 1, 1992); Rob Kay, *Fiji a Travel Survival Kit* (Hawthorn, Australia, Lonely Planet Publications, 1993); Chin, op. cit.; Ravuvu, op. cit.
6 Premdas, ibid., p. 104.
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11 Plange, op. cit.; Ravuvu, op. cit.
12 Plange, op. cit., p. 21.
13 Vijay Naidu, 'Ethnic Aspects of Education in Fiji' (Suva, Fiji, University of the South Pacific, unpublished paper, 1995).
14 Ahmed Ali, 'Indians in Fiji: an interpretation' in Subramani (ed.), *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (Queensland, Australia, Queensland University Press, 1979), p. 16.
15 Naidu, op. cit., p. 6.
16 Thomas Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians* (Suva, Fiji, Fiji Museum, [1858]1985), p. 17.
17 See, for example, Peter France, *The Charter of the Land* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969).
18 While there is also Micronesian influence in Fiji, it has not been as strong as the

Polynesian. Hence, there is a tendency for writers to argue that Fiji is predominantly Melanesian with significant Polynesian influence culturally and genealogically. See, for example, Thomas Williams, op. cit.

19 France, op. cit.; Williams, op. cit.

20 H.E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864* (Canberra, Australia, National University Press, 1981), p. 7.

21 Ali, op. cit., p. 4.

22 Based on discussions which I held with many ordinary Fijians and academics, I discovered that there were important differences in culture and world views between Polynesian and Melanesian Fijians. Also, part-European Fijians are considered to be different from other Fijians. Many part-European Fijians tended to identify as European rather than as indigenous Fijian; this changed after the coup. The social-psychological aspects of Fijian identity have not been seriously researched by academics. One reason for this may be that Fijians have only debated the question of differences in binary terms, i.e. Fijians as opposed to others.

23 This observation was made by a leading member of the opposition.

24 France, op. cit.

25 Ravuvu, op. cit., p. xi.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid, p. 46.

28 For example, in an interview with *The Review*, January 1993, on whether Sunday should be officially designated a day of worship in Fiji, Rabuka stated that such a decision was to be made by the GCC.

29 *The Review* (January 1996).

30 Chin, op. cit., p. 19.

31 The interviewees were a leading opposition politician and two Fijian social scientists who have been following the issue. See also J. Dakuvula, op. cit.

32 In 1987 when many Fijians voted against the Fijian Alliance Party, which had held power since 1970, in favour of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), they broke with a tradition of voting for the dominant ethnic Fijian party. The Alliance Party was supported by the GCC.

33 R.G. Ward, 'Fijian villages: a questionable future?' in R. Crocombe and M. Meleisea (eds), *Land Issues in the Pacific* (Christchurch, New Zealand, University of Canterbury and University of the South Pacific, 1994), p. 135.

34 Ibid.

LAURA CHRISMAN

Journeying to death: Gilroy's *Black Atlantic**

Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* has received considerable international academic acclaim. Within cultural studies, literary studies, black studies, Caribbean studies, American studies and anthropology, the book has been hailed as a major and original contribution. Gilroy takes issue with the national boundaries within which these disciplines operate, arguing that, as the book jacket tells us, 'there is a culture that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but all of these at once; a black Atlantic culture whose themes and techniques transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce something new and, until now, unremarked'. Animating Gilroy's academic challenge is a political energy. He sets out to expose the dangers as he sees it of contemporary nationalism: whether academic or popular (as in US Afrocentrism), implicit or explicit, black or white in focus, Gilroy sees it as socially and politically undesirable. Gilroy's concept of a black Atlantic is then offered as a political and cultural corrective, which argues the cross-national, cross-ethnic basis and dynamics of black diasporic identity and culture.

Gilroy's formulations mesh neatly with an Anglo-American academic climate of the 1990s, which has seen the rise in popularity of concepts of fusion, hybridity and syncretism as explanatory tools for the analysis of cultural formation. The 1990s is also a decade in which,

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broadly speaking, post-modernist intellectual concerns with language and subjectivity have infused both academia and 'new Left' politics to create a dominant paradigm of 'culturalism' for the analysis of social relations, at the risk of abandoning the tenets and resources of socio-economic analysis. Aesthetics and aestheticism can function both as explanation of and solution to social and political processes. For these reasons, Gilroy's book (the aestheticism of which will be discussed later) is a 'sign of the times'; for these reasons too, perhaps, it has become so popular.

The book must also be seen in the live context of an international intensification of diverse kinds of nationalist movements, ethnicist, secular and fundamentalist. Gilroy's characterisation of nationalism tends not to acknowledge such diversity but, rather, targets a generalised (and somewhat caricatured) ethnicist nationalism as the only kind of contemporary nationalism, one which afflicts both white and black communities in identical ways. Hence another reason for the book's (no doubt, unintended) appeal to academics: it licenses an easy armchair condemnation of black politics (and of socialism, as shall be seen); it enables academics to feel justified in not taking seriously the challenges posed by black and Third World nationalisms to established forms of knowledge and to their institutional privilege.

If contesting nationalism is one goal of this book, intervening in debates about modernity is another. Gilroy challenges (what he sees as) marxist, economic and philosophical accounts of the development of modernity as a self-contained European process, based on principles and practices of rationality, economic productivism, Enlightenment egalitarianism and wage labour. Slavery, he argues, was fundamental to modernity; racial terror lies within its heart. Gilroy's concern with the racial terror of slavery chimes with a burgeoning academic interest in the experience of Jews under Nazism ('Holocaust studies'), a connection which Gilroy makes explicit in the book.

In contrast to some trends in post-modern thought which equate the whole of the Enlightenment project with genocide, Gilroy does not reject modernity altogether but, rather, accentuates slavery as an unacknowledged part of it. This contestation of modernity's self-complacency by emphasising the inhuman violence and brutality with which modernity is entwined is to be welcomed. However, the mere juxtaposition of concepts of 'freedom' with 'coercion', 'reason' with 'terror', does not amount to a reconceptualisation or explanation of the relationship between the two spheres. They remain in frozen, almost mysterious, association. Gilroy's formulation has, arguably, inadvertently catered to a current academic predilection for paradox, for the sublime and the incomprehensible: a danger is that this licenses an essentially static academic mode, comforted rather than challenged by configurations of phenomena which 'defy' norms of explanation.

Of the many important concerns in *The Black Atlantic*, I want to focus on two here: Gilroy's conceptualisation of the relations between nationalism, socialism and black identity; the characterisation of black expressive culture in relation to slavery and political agency. I will present, as I see it, some of the problematic aspects of Gilroy's arguments. I am interested in tracing some of the implications of Gilroy's opposition to nationalism and socialism, his formulation of a black utopian aesthetic premised on a death-drive.[1]

While Gilroy's whole oeuvre is animated by a rejection of what he sees as the reductively absolutist, vanguardist, exclusivist and essentialised-purist currents of ethnic nationalism and economistic socialism, I want to suggest that the counter-model Gilroy presents, of an outer-national, hybrid blackness, itself rests on many of the same assumptions. Where Gilroy is a powerful, materialist deconstructor of the mystificatory and implicitly authoritarian agendas of other political projects and intellectuals, his own project subscribes to a decidedly mystical, idealist ideology and constructs a transcendental category of blackness, which retains the 'ethnicism' for which he castigates Afrocentric nationalism. Because his definition of this emancipatory black diasporism repudiates the potential resources of nationalism and socialism, and proceeds by way of positing absolute antinomies between these respective value systems, Gilroy's formulations become necessarily self-enclosed, hermetically sealed off, resistant to dialogism, dialectical transformation and cross-fertilisation. 'The Black Atlantic' becomes, despite its immense potential, an exclusive club liner, populated by 'mandarins' and 'masses' hand-picked by Gilroy, bound for death.[2]

There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the emergence of antinomies

Gilroy's first book, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, argues Black British expressive culture to be fundamentally anti-capitalist. This anti-capitalism, he contends, derives from a wholesale rejection of productivism. The experience of slavery, and its historical memory, has rendered black peoples, unlike white workers and socialists, resistant to the notion that productive labour and expansionism of productive capacities is the medium, or precondition, for human emancipation. Black music, argues Gilroy, is full of this romantic anti-capitalism, expressed through lyrics which criticise the alienation of the labour system and which

> celebrate non-work activity and the suspension of the time and discipline associated with wage labour ... In these cultural traditions, work is sharply counterposed not merely to leisure in general but to a glorification of autonomous desire which is

presented as inherent in sexual activity. The black body is reclaimed from the world of work and, in Marcuse's phrase, celebrated as an 'instrument of pleasure rather than labour'. (p.202)

There is much to agree with here. But what I find questionable is the equation of 'wage labour' with 'labour', so that the critique of capitalist waged work structures becomes identified with a rejection of productive labour, of self-realisation through labour. I think that Gilroy's stark polarisation of work and recreation is also questionable. A more fruitful approach to the analysis and theorisation of black anti-capitalisms, I think, might start with the premise that there is anything *but* an antinomy between work and play in this music; that (a notion of) the positive value of labour is precisely what fuels the representation of the labour-intensive process of sexual pleasure here. Gilroy even discloses such an approach but seems not to notice, when he argues that

> these tropes are supported by the multi-accentuality and polysemy of black languages. For example, in black American ghetto speech the word work can mean dancing, labour, sexual activity or any nuanced combination of all three. (p.203)

The fact that the word 'work' can denote, equally, 'labour', 'dancing' and 'sexual activity' suggests that, far from there being an antinomy between labour and recreation, there is a strong association or even identification between the activities. That such a fluid interchange-ability is possible is what needs conceptualisation, and for that a methodology needs to be developed which can allow of dialectical and dialogical relationships, rather than oppositions.

If Gilroy's anti-economistic approach precludes the possibility of a dialogical relationship between blackness and labour in expressive cultures, it also here jettisons the possibility of any economic analysis of black cultures or social movements. This is, I think, regrettable, and it is also an irony, given that black music and other recreational activities like sport are exactly the media most traditionally subject to mass commodification.

I am recommending, then, that Gilroy's analysis be supplemented by an approach which holds on to the utility of economic analysis in con-ceptualising black cultural productions, one which postulates these cultures as voicing a working relationship between labour and play. I advocate, too, an expansion, not rejection, of class political conceptualisation, one which is adequate to black experience, neither invalidated by it (as Gilroy alleges) nor invalidating of it. The same expansion I would urge of the conceptualisation and analysis of nationalism and the nation-state. Gilroy, in *There Ain't No Black*, wants to locate blacks as falling historically outside the received versions of the nation-state by cultural racism and choosing to remain

outside by choice (identifying as members of diaspora and local community instead); his intolerance towards all nationalisms reaches new heights in *The Black Atlantic*, where his emphasis falls on a black trans- and anti-national identity and politics as an antidote to the pernicious exclusivisms heralded by black nationalism-as-ethnic-absolutism.

Nowhere does Gilroy reveal himself to be as First World as in this, his absolute rejection of the utility of national categories. I want to suggest that Gilroy's denunciation of a cosily racialist cultural nationalism shared by Right and Left might now be supplemented in a number of ways. His denunciation rests, I think, on a fatalism – there ain't no black in the union jack and there never can be – which, ironically, operates to leave such racially exclusive nationalism intact rather than capable of being challenged from within, the more so as he rightly sees Right and Left as united here. This fatalism, however, overlooks the historically highly contestable and contested constructions of British nationness and nationalism; in effect, Gilroy's analysis replicates the cultural determinism that he ascribes to cultural nationalists, by presupposing an unchangeable homogeneity of white British national ideology. The more challenging approach, I think, would be to work theoretically and politically to foreground the seldom acknowledged heterogeneity of Britishness through history, and one way to do this is by opening up a comparative, mutually illuminating analysis of the languages and practices of British nationalism, colonialism and imperialism. Gilroy, in focusing solely on the interaction of languages of 'race' and nation, forecloses such analyses.

If materialist and cultural history are useful for explaining and challenging certain exclusivist brands of nationalism, so too is the notion of utopia. Gilroy is indeed a big fan of utopianism, but his formulations appear to want to align utopianism solely with outer-national cultural impulses. The utopianism of black music, for him, appears to lie in its expression of a fundamentally migratory identity and an anti-capitalism which, as outlined above, he argues to be radically opposed to all aspects of the production process. Contemporary US black nationalism, in the form of Afrocentrism, is also grounded in a utopianism which takes the form of an affirmation of an idealised, pure African heritage, to which black Americans rightfully belong and through which they can transcend socio-economic disadvantage.

Gilroy's critique of this essentialising brand of nationalism is important for his disclosure of its intellectual fallacies and political shortcomings. Where his critique falls short, I think, is in not taking seriously enough the force of the utopianism that underlies Afrocentrism, the positive potentialities that such utopianism can hold and its critical as well as affirmative relationship to a white racist

hegemony. Rather than see Afrocentrism, as Gilroy does, as a reprehensibly self-inflicted false consciousness, worthy of denunciation, and strangling other possibilities for black political imagination, it might be more productive to engage with it and look at it as a symptom, rather than as a cause. My sense is that though some, perhaps, of Afrocentrism can be explained as the product of black petty-bourgeois intellectuals in pursuit of self-aggrandisement – as Gilroy has it – not all of it can be. One would never know, from Gilroy's account, that Afrocentrism has gained popularity among a wide range of black institutions and communities in the context of an ever-worsening socio-economic crisis for black Americans, in which white racial paranoias and hostilities towards black minorities seem to be intensifying. That broader context has to be considered to have some bearing on the phenomenon's popularity; an exclusively immanent critique will not go very far in hastening its demise.

In any case, as I have already suggested, I am not sure that I see the elimination of nationalist ideologies, nor the cancellation of national entities as objects of analysis, as possible or desirable. Gilroy's presumption, in his discussion of Afrocentrism as of British nationalism, is that nationalism can only be ethnically purist and exclusivist, and is incapable of pluralisation, which is questionable. To posit nationalism and outer- or trans-nationalism as mutually incompatible political goals, cultural values and analytic perspectives is, I suspect, less productive than to see them as interdependent.

First World blackness, intellectuals and Europe

Gilroy's whole conception of the Black Atlantic is motivated, in part, by his desire to rebut the fallacies of black nationalism and white English cultural theory. As he argues:

> In opposition to both of these nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective. Apart from the confrontation with English historiography and literary history this entails a challenge to the ways in which black American cultural and political histories have so far been conceived. I want to suggest that much of the precious intellectual legacy claimed by African-American intellectuals as the substance of their particularity is in fact only partly their absolute ethnic property. (p.15)

What Gilroy then advocates and initiates is a mode of conceptualisation which posits black diasporic identity to be constituted through the triangular relationship of the continents of Africa, Europe

and America. He traces the path of this transnational cultural-political formation through an exhilarating series of case studies analysing contemporary black music, the formative sojourns of prominent black intellectuals W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright in Germany and France respectively. Of Du Bois, for example, he argues:

> Du Bois's travel experiences raise in the sharpest possible form a question common to the lives of almost all these figures who begin as African-Americans or Caribbean people and are then changed into something else which evades those specific labels and with them all fixed notions of nationality and national identity. Whether their experience of exile is enforced or chosen, temporary or permanent, these intellectuals and activists, writers, speakers, poets, and artists repeatedly articulate a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even 'race' itself. Some speak ... in terms of the rebirth that Europe offered them. Whether they dissolved their African-American sensibility into an explicitly pan-Africanist discourse or political commitment, their relationship to the land of their birth and their ethnic political constituency was absolutely transformed. The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. (p.19)

Exciting though his readings of black Americans Du Bois and Wright are, and highly insightful into the role that travel and European philosophy played in shaping their personal, political and intellectual identity, as a counter to Afrocentrism they are probably limited. Only from a very specific and academic perspective could the affirmation of black debts to European philosophy be argued to be a counter-model of social emancipation. A better way to counter Afrocentric nationalism might be to emphasise black US intellectual, political and cultural cross-fertilisation with the Caribbean, Latin America, proletarian cultures (white, Hispanic, trade union), as well as Third World liberationist thought. And a way to counter the problematic racial purism of Afrocentrism might be to emphasise and explore the significance of mixed race intellectuals and cultural texts.

My other reservation about Gilroy's exclusive focus on Europe as a space of liberation for New World blacks is that it overlooks entirely the experience of Europe as historically, and structurally, oppressive for blacks from colonies – so well charted, for instance, in the Senegalese writer and film-maker Sembene Ousmane's *Black Docker*, the novel of a young Senegalese aspiring writer who comes to Marseilles, works as a docker, and entrusts his book to a white French woman writer who, having promised to help him find a publisher, steals

the book and has it published to great success under her own name. After accidentally killing the woman in anger, he experiences the humiliation of being denounced as a liar when he claims the book to be his own, and is imprisoned and sentenced to death.[3]

My reservation is less that Gilroy does not take on black colonialism in what is already a highly ambitious and broad-ranging analysis, but that the way in which he conceptualises the Black Atlantic is one which makes totalising claims for itself, so that the identity and experience of New World slave-descended black people is somehow, by default, seen to contain or represent all modern black experience. Slavery is consistently accorded a primacy which colonialism is not, be that primacy in constituting black identity and culture or in serving as a structural/ontological deconstructor of Enlightenment modernity.

Conceptualising slavery

If Gilroy's Black Atlantic is concerned with the work of 'high' intellectual black writers, it is also concerned with the mass phenomenon of slavery and its impact on black vernacular culture and sensibility. It is this aspect that I want to focus on here, in some detail, since it is from Gilroy's conceptualisation of slavery that his most controversial, most powerful and also most problematic contributions derive. Gilroy's characterisations of slavery serve two distinct, if overlapping, aims: the first is to situate slavery and its legacy as constituting in black people a distinct 'counterculture of modernity'; the second is to argue slavery as a condition which forces a reconceptualisation of Enlightenment modernity, even as it calls the project into question. I find it fascinating that Gilroy seems split between two very different, and possibly conflicting, representations of slavery's counterculture. The first is essentially holistic, in which slave subjects form a condition which refuses modernity's categorical separation of the spheres of aesthetics, ethics, politics and epistemology. As Gilroy suggests:

> Their progress from the status of slaves to the status of citizens led them to enquire into what the best possible forms of social and political existence might be. The memory of slavery, actively preserved as a living intellectual resource in their expressive political culture, helped them to generate a new set of answers to this enquiry. They had to fight – often through their spirituality – to hold on to the unity of ethics and politics sundered from each other by modernity's insistence that the true, the good, and the beautiful had distinct origins and belong to different domains of knowledge. First slavery itself and then their memory of it induced many of them to query the foundational moves of modern philosophy and social thought, whether they came from the natural rights theorists ... the

idealists who wanted to emancipate politics from morals so that it could become a sphere of strategic action, or the political economists of the bourgeoisie who first formulated the separation of economic activity from both ethics and politics. The brutal excesses of the slave plantation supplied a set of moral and political responses to each of these attempts. (p.39)

That slaves and their descendants are thus set up to occupy the place of humanity's emancipatory subjects is explicitly argued by Gilroy in an unabashedly utopian formulation:

This [slave] subculture often appears to be the intuitive expression of some racial essence but is in fact an elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an alternative body of cultural and political expression that considers the world critically from the point of view of its emancipatory transformation. In the future, it will become a place which is capable of satisfying the (redefined) needs of human beings that will emerge once the violence – epistemic and concrete – of racial typology is at an end. Reason is thus reunited with the happiness and freedom of individuals and the reign of justice within the collectivity. (p.39)

Now, there is much here that I find suggestive, notwithstanding the fact that Gilroy seems at once to assert that slaves' holistic subjectivity is both something that they had to struggle to hold on to against the pressure of modernity's compartmentalising imperatives *and* that this holism is something bequeathed to them by the very experience of modernity itself. What I find troubling is the next step of his argument, which repeats the polarisation of labour and liberation, labour and art, found in *There Ain't No Black*, and already briefly discussed here. Gilroy argues thus:

I have already implied that there is a degree of convergence here with other projects towards a critical theory of society, particularly Marxism. However, where lived crisis and systemic crisis come together, Marxism allocates priority to the latter while the memory of slavery insists on the priority of the former. Their convergence is also undercut by the simple fact that in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination. Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, there becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation. (pp.39–40)

I find this problematic for a number of reasons, not least being Gilroy's

assumption that he can have access to the historical psyche of slave descendants and pronounce so authoritatively on the meaning that labour has for these people, a meaning that admits of no positivity whatsoever. I will return to the exclusively negative characterisation of labour shortly, when I discuss Gilroy's revision of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. But here I want to focus on the description of the aesthetic activity for slaves, which is argued to function as their vehicle for individual and collective liberation. For workers, Gilroy implies, labour serves this liberatory function; for slaves, however, it is artistic expression alone which fulfils such a transfigurative role.

I wonder about this aestheticism. Whereas in *There Ain't No Black* Gilroy did go to some lengths to argue black expressive culture to be part of a broader black emancipatory, transfigurative social movement, and devoted a chapter respectively to the analysis of black music and black social movements as witnessed in the 1980s black British 'riots', by the time he writes the *Black Atlantic* he has, it seems, reached the conclusion that black art *is* black social movement, not one component but its totality.[4] He does not altogether outlaw directly political activity by blacks, but accords it no transfigurative potential, labelling it instead as expressive exclusively of a politics of bourgeois civic 'fulfilment'. Artistic activity, in contrast, performs what Gilroy terms a 'politics of transfiguration'.[5]

Now what has happened to Gilroy's contention that slave counter-culture is distinguishable precisely for its refusal to segregate politics, aesthetics, ethics, and knowledge as human categories and operations? From the challenge posed by this holistic formulation he moves swiftly, and, I think, regrettably, to the less challenging refuge of a traditional aestheticism, in which, it seems, black art is the only authentic repository of this holism, the only category which can contain and articulate black countercultural ethics, politics and knowledge.

Gilroy's refusal to cede political and labouring activity any social transformative capacity is embodied in his account of the master-slave relationship as represented in Frederick Douglass's autobiography. Douglass, a leading nineteenth-century black liberatory activist and thinker, was himself a slave, and wrote several versions of his autobiography. His first and most famous narrative contains a detailed account of the turning point in his life, when he fights his slave master in a protracted physical struggle. The struggle engenders Douglass's self-respect, masculinity and the respect of his master, who cannot defeat him. Douglass concludes that

> I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached a point at which I was not afraid to die. (p.63)

Gilroy argues this account to present a radical alternative to Hegel's version of the master-slave dialectic, contending that

> Douglass's tale can be used to reveal a great deal about the difference between the male slave's and the master's views of modern civilisation. In Hegel's allegory, which correctly places slavery at the natal core of modern sociality, we see that one solipsistic combatant in the elemental struggle prefers his conqueror's version of reality to death and submits. He becomes the slave while the other achieves mastery. Douglass's version is quite different. For him, the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of inhumanity on which plantation slavery depends ... This [is a] turn towards death as a release from terror and bondage and a chance to find substantive freedom ... Douglass's preference for death fits readily with archival material on the practice of slave suicide and needs also to be seen alongside other representations of death as agency that can be found in early African-American fiction. (p.63)

Now, there is a lot to unravel here. I am not concerned right now with the accuracy or not of Gilroy's take on Hegel, but rather with the way he manipulates Douglass's testimony to pursue his central argument of the death-drive fundamental to slave culture, a drive maintained in what Gilroy argues to be the nihilistic orientation of contemporary black cultures. I want to remark on two things here, before going on to consider the political and intellectual consequences of such a theorisation for the mapping of contemporary black counterculture. The first is that Gilroy seems over quick to convert a willingness to risk death into a positive orientation, a desire for, death. The second is that, even were one to grant the persistence of a death-drive in contemporary and historical black culture, such a desire is articulated, as in the Douglass narrative, within the matrix of a spiritual redemptionism. Douglass throughout his narrative stations himself as a form of Christ, for whom, one supposes, death is not quite the finite condition it is for mortals.[6] Gilroy is so determined to identify death-drive as expressive of a radical nihilism – he bizarrely links Douglass's position to Nietzsche's in its alleged godlessness – that he underestimates, I think, the significance of redemptionism as a condition of the 'inclination towards death'. For Gilroy, I think, it matters little whether the death-drive is conditioned by 'apocalyptic or redemptive' sensibilities, as both are the same in their consequences for modernity's rationality, as he argues:

> The discourse of black spirituality which legitimises these moments of violence possesses a utopian truth content that projects beyond the limits of the present. The repeated choice of death rather than

bondage articulates a principle of negativity that is opposed to the
formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern
western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave's preference for
bondage rather than death. (p.68)

I think, however, that it is extremely important to differentiate between
the meanings of a positive and a negative utopianism in black cultures.
By the time Gilroy reaches his final chapter, it is clear that his
preference is for the negative, drawn from his version of Adornian
thought and fused, in my view awkwardly, with a Benjaminian
conception of modernity as ontological rupture. In this brand of
utopianism, only the principle and representation of negativity
(associated with a finality of death, absolute termination) and the
rejection of any achievable and positive representations of a possible
'afterlife' or future earthly life – only negativity can indicate, gesture
towards, an 'authentic' emancipatory future condition of being.

The emphasis, that is, falls on nihilism instead of optimism; a
nihilism through which its opposite can emerge. To give positive
expression to, and literally represent, the forms an emancipated life
might take (in heaven or on earth) is to capitulate to the existing forces
of actual domination which exercise control (among other things) over
the notion of 'representation' itself. This I find both problematic and
inaccurate, in the case of slave cultures, in which the immense explicit
emphasis given to positive utopian notions of spiritual redemption,
solace and the imaginings of actual future social transformation is
overlooked and undermined by Gilroy's exclusive valorisation of the
negative and non-representable.

This emphasis on moribundity as the fundamental, and inescapable,
consequence of slavery, tied in with the refusal to grant legitimacy to
modern rationality, is at once politically challenging and disturbing.
For all his discussion of modernity and rationality, it's never quite clear
to me whether Gilroy is arguing the institution of slavery to be a form
of racial terror which is obscene because it *is* rational, systematic, or
whether, in contrast, he is arguing for slavery's basis in *irrationality*: the
relationship and his argument are mystified and obfuscatory, and all
that is clear to me is Gilroy's desire to invite scepticism towards
rationality's emancipatory qualities. His own systematic isolation of
slavery from any economic context adds to this ambiguity, and his
argument at the end of *The Black Atlantic* for the linkage of Jewish
Holocaust thinkers (including the Frankfurt School) and their
experience with black diasporan experience does nothing in itself to
elucidate his position further.

Since a concept of dialectics is, for him, clearly refuted by his
allegorisation of Hegel's allegory, the Frankfurt School's historical-
dialectical analysis of the relationship between reason and unreason,

and its dialectical linkage of rationality with political economy, is obviously not what Gilroy has in mind when he argues for elective affinities between black and Jewish analysis. Such a dialectical approach, based upon a structural concern with the dynamic, mutually transformative processes of political domination and intellectual production, might be a more productive basis for analysing the connections of slavery, reason and terror than the static, ontological and mystical approach taken by Gilroy.

It's the partiality of Gilroy's death-drive, however, as an account of slavery's counterculture, that I want to consider here. Discussing contemporary black culture as derived from the primal moment of slavery (there are all sorts of issues one can take with this supposition, but that is another matter), Gilroy argues:

> The turn towards death also points to the ways in which black cultural forms have hosted and even cultivated a dynamic rapport with the presence of death and suffering ... It is integral, for example, to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which ... serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory ... this music and its broken rhythm of life are important ... The love stories they enclose are a place in which the black vernacular has been able to preserve and cultivate both the distinctive rapport with the presence of death which derives from slavery and in a related ontological state that I want to call the condition of being in pain. (p.203)

Blues, blues and more blues, seems to be the conclusion. Powerful though this is and, I find, a convincing gloss on one component of black vernacular culture, I think it overlooks – actually, precludes – theorisation of other impulses in contemporary black cultures, which arguably derive from more positive, resistant elements in black political history. So intent is Gilroy on emphasising slave suicide and fatalism that he neglects other forms of violent and non-violent resistance practised by slaves, such as the regular sabotaging of plantation machinery and the practice of abortion. Both of these practices are themselves complex examples of the performance of a scientific rationality, which is presumably the reason for Gilroy's disinclination to consider them. As technological and calculated practices they do not bear out his contention of black subjectivity's scepticism towards rationality. In deploying knowledge of, and making use of, scientific reasoning, they refute his contention that slave identity is 'opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking' (p.68).

I would, however, be interested to consider the legacy of industrial sabotage as a component in the black political cultures of graffiti, and

more generally to pronounce the iconoclastic, ironic, and scatological aesthetics alongside those expressive of pain and death. And, given that Gilroy emphasises black convergences with Jewish history and experience, how about looking at the parallelisms of Jewish *humour* as a response to racial terror, a survival resource and a means of resistance? There is plenty of black saturnalian, ludic and trickster culture, but perhaps, as I suggest above, Gilroy's reason for eschewing these as significant or primary cultural modalities is that they are rooted in a form of intensified – and often lateral – reasoning. His interest is in arguing scepticism towards rationality as foundational to black culture.

As a means of conceptualising New World black cultures, Gilroy's model is richly suggestive but, at the same time, limited by his determination to present antinomies – between socialist and black value systems, between nationalist and internationalist impulses – where, I would argue, it is more profitable to look at these not as antinomies but as mutually enabling. The most serious question, perhaps, to be posed of Gilroy concerns his argument for the death-drive in black cultures.

References

1 Gilroy's formulation of a 'turn towards death' within black subjectivity – discussed later in this article – is more ontological than psychoanalytical. He argues it to have its origins in the historically specific, social experience of slavery. For a more psychoanalytic postulation and explanation of a 'death-drive', see Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.
2 For an important critique of *The Black Atlantic* see Neil Lazarus's 'Is a Counterculture of Modernity a Theory of Modernity?', *Diaspora* (Vol. 4, no. 3, 1995), pp.323-340.
3 Many other literary examples can be given here. Two fictional accounts of black Caribbean emigrant experience in Britain are Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging*. Ama Ata Aidoo's novel *Our Sister Killjoy* charts the experience of a young Ghanaian woman sojourning in Germany. For historical and sociological discussions see, for example, Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: the history of black people in Britain*; Winston James and Clive Harris (eds), *Inside Babylon: the Caribbean diaspora in Britain*.
4 For an analysis of these 'riots', see chapter six of *There Ain't No Black*, 'Conclusion: urban social movements, "race" and community', reprinted in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a reader*. See also A. Sivanandan's *A Different Hunger: writings on black resistance* and *Communities of Resistance: writings on black struggles for socialism*.
5 See, for example, p.37 of *The Black Atlantic*, for Gilroy's distinction between what he calls a 'politics of fulfilment' – 'the notion that a future society will be able to realise the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished' – and his notion of a 'politics of transfiguration', taken from Seyla Benhabib, which 'exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung'. While the 'politics of fulfilment' are, he argues, 'immanent within modernity', the 'politics of transfiguration' 'partially transcend modernity, constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come'.
6 I am grateful to Robert Chrisman whose insight this is.

Commentary

Mexico

Indigenous uprisings: never more a Mexico without us!

The Mexican essayist and poet, Octavio Paz, has described Latin America as 'the suburbs of the West'. In those suburbs/states where large indigenous populations live, the notion of 'Amer-indian' has not taken on. In Mexican political discourse, the word 'Indian' does not necessarily imply prejudice and it is into that particular labyrinth that this article leads.[1]

'Mexico is a *mestizo* country' you will be told over and over again by persons you would swear are Indians. The concept of *mestizo* in Mexico is very broad. The North American (Anglo-saxon?) notion that ancestry and descent are the key indicators of racial identity is not entirely the case in Mexico and other Latin American states composed of large indigenous populations. In these countries, historically dominated by Spanish descended elites, the descent principle was overturned in the independence struggles of the nineteenth century as the new *mestizo* (mixed race) bourgeoisies came to power, promoting the particular nationalism of the state in question – Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, *et al.*[2]

In *mestizo*-America, appearance and behaviour became the key indicators of identity; descent remained important but became – officially – mutable. Identity is self-perception and, in the rush towards 'modernity', the Mexican bourgeoisie and its state have elevated the racial homogenisation principle of *mestizo* identity to a state ideology that forms part of Mexican nationalism, '*mestizaje*'. By adopting 'modern' behaviours, clothing and manners, an indigenous person may transcend her or his indigenous identity and adopt the *mestizo* reality of modern Mexico. In this way, Mexican nationalism has historically adopted a racist attitude towards Indian peoples in Mexico, where

unofficially the more a person approximates the ideal racial type of the European colonial conquerors, the more chance that person has in Mexican society.[3]

Mestizaje is the idea that *mestizo* Mexico is a post-colonial, mixed race population – the modern Mexican is formed and informed by this cosmology. Those citizens are neither European nor Indian, they are Mexican. This post-colonial national personality is, in theory, non-racial, but racism continues and Indian identity is stigmatised as a result. Mexican nationalism has historically posed Mexican as a *mestizo* identity, adversarial to the identity 'Indian'.

The outcome of *mestizaje* is that the majority of the Mexican population, though partially or wholly of Indian descent, do not identify as 'indigenous'. 'Mexican' is the state ideology and it is the mass consciousness. In its specific national forms, this is a hegemonic concept in much of Latin America. Mexican indigenous activists see the capture of that mass consciousness as a tantalising prospect, though they know it is unlikely. They might influence some people, perhaps enough to move forward some basic constitutional changes, but the self-perception of most *mestizo* Mexicans has internalised the undesirability of the identity 'Indian'. In 1990, the Mexican national census recorded only 7.9 per cent of the population as Indian people.[4]

This national stigmatisation of Indian identity means that the indigenous population in Mexico has remained 'invisible' in Mexican political discourse for many years. This situation began to change as the planning for festivities surrounding the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas got underway. A continental polemic arose among Indian peoples – more than 40 million of whom live in the Americas today – questioning the character of these celebrations by governments which continued to promote colonialist policies, 'maintaining the structures and mechanisms of subordination expressed in the practice of racism, discrimination, exploitation, ethnocide, segregation and extermination of Indian peoples'.[5]

The next milestone on the road to recognition was the 1987 adjustment of the Nicaraguan constitution that established an autonomous zone in the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, where a number of Indian nations and Nicaragua's blacks reside. This constitutional change in a sister republic in the region, albeit in the time of the Sandinistas, drew regional attention to the question of constitutional recognition of Indian peoples.

In 1992, the Mexican constitution was amended and Article 4 for the first time recognised indigenous people as part of the nation. It was a limited first step, a cultural recognition; it did not recognise the economic or social rights that people are discussing in Mexico today. This amendment established that Mexico was a *pluricultural* country. (Ecuador has taken the next step and declared itself *plurinational* in

recognition of the Indian nations there.) The special characteristics of the Indian people were recognised as part of the national agenda. Language, traditions, particular social organisations were specifically recognised.

The earlier Mexican constitutions of 1824, 1877 and 1917 had never got around to mentioning that there were Indian peoples in the country. There were just citizens. The ideology of *mestizaje* has dominated the Mexican political arena, and continues to be a powerful mechanism in the continuing conquest of the indigenous population.

Zapatismo

The 'recognition' in 1992 was fine, but, by 1994, the IMF and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had pushed through an amendment to section 27 of the Mexican constitution which removed the inalienability of Indian lands, previously laid down. This was seen as a condition of the NAFTA which came into effect in January 1994. The *Ejercito* (army) *Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) moved on that day in Chiapas, a southern state of Mexico, opening a popular front against the Mexican government.

The uprising in large part raises objections to what Mexicans call neo-liberalism and the process of globalisation, which is reducing Mexico to the status of regional proletariat within the Free Trade Pact. It is leaving its people immiserated amid a jumble of new US products, some of them manufactured in Mexico itself – where few environmental restrictions are enforced against industrialists and wage levels are attractive. The EZLN points out that neo-liberalism, the Latin American version of supply side economics, is merely a ruling class strategy and by no means a necessary future.

The Zapatistas are leading a revolution that calls for democratisation of the Mexican political system and, within that democratisation, a re-definition of Mexican identity that respects the indigenous reality of much of Mexico – an end to the stigmatisation of Indian identity. They are not *indigenistas*, in that they are not simply calling for indigenous rights but are very specifically calling a national agenda and seeking to establish a democratic regime at a national level in Mexico – something that has not previously been realised. They seek to develop concepts of regional autonomy and national representation for Indian peoples within a new national context. In this sense, it cannot be said that the EZLN is an indigenous movement, though it operates in a number of Mayan languages as well as Spanish and is principally made up of Indian peoples in Chiapas. Simultaneously, part of the political struggle of the Zapatistas is the need to counter the ideology of *mestizaje*.

There have been two major military offensives, in 1994 and 1995, and, since early 1996, the Mexican government has been in serious

negotiations, even while it continues its low intensity war in Chiapas. The heat is on down there in Chiapas, with the Mexican army and allied paramilitary terror groups (the white hand) involved in occupying villages, 'disappearing' Zapatista supporters and terrorising the population.

Since the Zapatista uprising, Mexico's Indian peoples have become bolder. There are serious indigenous struggles under way in a number of states, by various indigenous groups. The southern crescent of states in Mexico contains, from Oaxaca south, 78 per cent of Mexico's indigenous peoples. The Zapatistas helped found the Congreso Naciónal Indigena (CNI) which has become the main voice of the enlivened indigenous movement in Mexico, representing over thirty indigenous peoples. But the strategy of the CNI and the EZLN is to tie the indigenous movement to other progressive and popular movements in Mexico and to keep the question of Indian peoples and democracy linked, so as not to lose the initiative and become isolated. The EZLN/CNI have attempted to overturn permanently in the Mexican mind the idealised notion that the Indian peoples' world is somehow harmonious and uncontaminated, in opposition to the 'western' world as the font of all things bad.

The importance of the agenda for a new political pact in Mexico cannot be underestimated; the uprising inspired and led by the Zapatistas is a movement for democracy, not just indigenous rights. *Sub-comandante* Marcos (the *mestizo* reclaiming his indigenous identity among the indigenous *comandantes*!) has become the 'armed democrat' in Mexico, and the EZLN has fired up the Frente Zapatista (FZLN) as the national civil arm of the insurgency. The FZLN works with the CNI and a network of left and centre activists and intellectuals throughout Mexico. A new discourse has emerged and a new political vision that have spotlighted the 'criminal' nature of the national politic of stock exchanges and economic studies. A number of FZLN militants are also members in good standing of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) in Mexico and have won office in the National Congress and the Senate in the July congressional elections. This has put the EZLN/FZLN agenda and the democratisation process firmly in the National Congress and in the Congress of the Federal District. The struggle is now entrenched in the politics of the national capital Mexico-DF and is no longer isolated in far away Chiapas. In the Federal District (the capital), the PRD won twenty-nine of the thirty seats in the District's Chamber of Deputies and thirty-eight of the forty seats which the Federal District elects to the National Congress. The party leader, Cuahtemoc Cardenas, is now mayor of Mexico City and tipped to be the next president of the republic.

The indigenous agenda of the CNI and the Zapatistas is broad. It involves the removal of party politics and the governing (since 1924)

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) politicians and appointed political bosses (*caciques*, hence *caciquismo*) from the 'indigenous communities' across the country. These communities constitute municipal governments across Mexico, making up the third tier of Mexican government after the federal and state levels. As well, there is a call for reform of the 'agrarian communities' and *ejidos* which are special indigenous forms of agrarian tenancies established in the times of the Mexican revolution in the 1920s. These no longer serve their original purposes, given the enormous developments in the capitalist economy in Mexico since the revolution. The agrarian communities and *ejidos* are collective forms of land holdings, but have no independent political or juridical bases like the indigenous communities. An *ejido* or agrarian community may exist within an indigenous community or municipality.

The indigenous communities are ostensibly run by popular assemblies which can instruct the municipal authorities, though these have been disempowered by municipal office bearers in many places (this is bossism – *caciquismo*). By rights, the municipal authorities have to accept the decisions of the assemblies, but this is observed in the breach. The assemblies are not formalised and they allocate jobs to people in the community. These assemblies change annually and they address issues like defence of lands held and recovery of lands lost, as well as land conservation needs. The CNI and EZLN want the municipalities, villages really, to remain outside the clutches of the political parties, and this battle goes on. The political parties, especially PRI, control most indigenous communities.

The municipalities are very poor, and receive minimal state support. Mexico's entire federal system has been described as institutionalised patronage, and the municipalities are the big losers in the division of the spoils. Funding for the municipalities and control of local resources, or royalty arrangements, are large parts of the Zapatista/CNI agenda.

Autonomia!

The indigenous cry is for regional autonomy. This means a new level of government within the Mexican Federation that would ideally involve regional representation of inter-community relations. The CNI/FZLN activists claim that automobility has been the heaviest blow against pre-colonial regional integration and that the road system this century has resulted in the break up of many formerly integrated regional economies. Part of the CNI struggle is to recover this inheritance and re-establish regional indigenous economic networks. The Mexican state opposes such a move totally. The argument against is that a kind of apartheid would result if the system were abused, but this does not hold

water, given that the EZLN and CNI are also talking about representation of *mestizo* interests in the regionally autonomous bodies. Autonomy is the guarantee of diversity at many levels.

Autonomy also means judicial pluralism – always a hard item to sell in a society where everyone must be treated on an equal basis. In the balance, equally may not be fairly. This is a call for recognition of customary law in Mexico, in the criminal and civil spheres as well as land tenure and inheritance, where it is already recognised. As in many countries where a post-colonial *mestizo* elite or other conquering group reigns, it is hard for the Mexican Federal Republic to stomach this one.

Before Mexico could be admitted to NAFTA, president Salinas de Gortari, now in exile in Ireland to escape prosecution on charges of corruption and murder, passed a number of constitutional changes. One of these ended the inalienability of Indian lands in Mexico, formerly guaranteed by the constitution, albeit ignored. This was an unequal requirement of Mexico's entry into the NAFTA, that all lands be saleable. The question of not being able to trade the earth is a high priority to the indigenous peoples of Mexico and has prompted the demand for a reform of section 27 of the constitution – a demand that is vehemently opposed by the state, as is the call for the return of unallocated state lands that were taken from indigenous peoples. Of course, the question of natural resources, underlying the question of land ownership, is also a big issue that the EZLN and the Mexican state disagree on.

Autonomy is the cry in Mexico, meaning a process of redistribution of power. Local autonomy is about the effective capacity of local collectives to orient, regulate and administer themselves. Local autonomous communities would be a level of state administration. The proposition of autonomy incorporates a concept of the inter-relationship of these local communities and the other levels of the government and the state. They would be strengthened to function specifically to serve local interests and systems of concurrence and coordination articulated in the national project. This has raised the debate over the type of nation Mexicans want in the twenty-first century.

San Andres accords

Between January and March 1996, the EZLN and the federal government signed a series of 'accords' in San Andres. These accords were a political document which the Mexican government was forced, by armed struggle, into negotiating. They were supposed to result in constitutional reforms. The accords of San Andres are an astounding document and contribute mightily to the world debate on indigenous rights. The definition of 'indigenous peoples' in the accords is at odds

with the *mestizaje* ideology of the Mexican state. Indigenous peoples are:

> descended from populations that were living in the country in the epoch of conquest and colonisation and at the time of the establishment of the State's frontiers, and that, whatever may have been their legal situation, conserve their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or parts thereof. The consciousness of their indigenous identity must be considered as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which these dispositions will be applied as indigenous peoples.

The Mexican state was able to rely upon the strength of its hegemonic ideology of *mestizaje* in signing such an accord. It is an indication of the strength of the Mexican state and of mass consciousness in Mexico, for the Mexican state can rely on the rejection of indigenous identity by the vast majority in favour of 'Mexican' identity. *Mestizaje* is the ideology that sets the two as adversarial.

The San Andres accords talked of the new type of legal framework that would be established resulting in a new federalism in Mexico and a new relation between the state and indigenous peoples. A new social pact was envisioned:

> A pact able to eradicate the everyday forms and that public life which creates and reproduces subordination, inequality, and discrimination, and is able to make effective the rights and guarantees to which these correspond: the right to their different culture, the right to their habitat: use and benefits of territory in conformity with article 13.2 of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organisation, the right to their self-governing political communities, the right to develop their culture, the right to their traditional systems of production, the right to manage and operate their own development projects.

The San Andres accords are a very radical document, certainly in the forefront of indigenous struggle. The acceptance of legal pluralism in the San Andres accords and the proposition that such recognition be enshrined in the constitution is something that might well be considered in other places and situations.

Mexican standoff

The Mexican Senate formed an all-party Commission of Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) in 1995 to consider the San Andres accords and the demands of the EZLN and urge the Mexican executive in the right direction. The Mexican executive is all powerful, the Senate is relatively powerless, but prestigious. By November 1996, the COCOPA had

proposed a series of constitutional changes in line with the San Andres accords. The executive, of course, disposes – and dispose they have.

As of January 1997, the Mexican government has offered the follow-ing recognition of local judicial pluralism as an aspect of autonomy, but the Zapatistas insist it is a rejection of the San Andres accords and utterly inadequate:

> To apply their norms, practices and customs in the regulation and resolution of internal conflicts between members of the community, respecting the guarantees established under this constitution and human rights, as well as the dignity and integrity of women. The local laws will anticipate recognition of those instances and procedures utilised for this and will establish the norms such that their judgements and resolutions will be homologated by the State's legal authorities.

To homologate is to apply a legal fiction that a defective deed or act is binding (it is recognised in Scottish law). The Zapatistas say that this constitutional reform will ensure that customary law will only be ratified in such fashion as to ensure that it corresponds to the existing fixed *mestizo* state norms. The Zapatista demand is for ratification by the state of indigenous norms, not homologation. That is to say, where there is a discrepancy between customary indigenous law and existing Mexican law, the Mexican law will automatically apply and the customary law will be homologated; in effect, rectified. It is precisely such rectification that is opposed; the EZLN proposal is that Mexican law give way to customary law, not the reverse.

In retrospect, *sub-comandante* Marcos has declared the signing ceremony of the San Andres accords to have been the government's signature as spectacle – photo opportunity – and not as commitment. Time is on whose side? The Mexican state has the biggest army in Latin America, outside Brazil. The Zapatistas have sparked the imagination of the world and pricked the conscience of Mexico, but can they win a Mexican standoff? That is the question confronting *sub-comandante* Marcos and the indigenous *comandantes* in Chiapas. The state's offers may be a big improvement on the current situation in Mexico but, as they don't go quite far enough, one must ask, will they be implemented? The executive's response to COCOPA's proposed constitutional reforms is a big retreat from the San Andres accords. The executive is, without question, rejecting what it had committed itself to in February 1996 but, given the history of Mexico, that is not surprising, though it is disappointing.

As of March 1997, COCOPA has recognised that the Mexican executive will not accept the proposals of the Senate Committee and that it has effectively reneged on the San Andres accords. It was, indeed, surprising for COCOPA effectively to announce the end of its

attempts to mediate and the withdrawal of its constitutional reform proposals from legislative consideration. Soon after this public humiliation of COCOPA, *sub-comandante* Marcos issued one of his now famous letters, pointing out that COCOPA's inability to mediate was further indicative of the failure of democracy in Mexico:

> Point number 6 of your letter is worrisome, precisely because the Federal Legislative Branch is to be renewed: 'The COCOPA considers that the unilateral remittance of the original proposal as an initiative for the Congress of the Federation, is an option without viability for legislative approval.' Chilling. Here the COCOPA acknowledges that the Legislative Branch has no independence from the Executive. If you acknowledge this lack of viability, what arguments will your political parties use in the electoral campaign which ends on July 6, 1997? Why participate in elections to Congress if initiatives which are not exclusively Executive ones have no possibility of passage?

The Zapatista struggle in Mexico and its world liaison network in the struggle against neo-liberalism and globalisation (it is all over the Internet) is the bright new face of the Left in the post-Berlin Wall era. Politically, the Zapatistas propose a fascinating project, where the democratic struggle and political redefinition (at least in Mexico) come about through indigenous peoples. In Mexico, the nexus between indigenous people and the working class lies in the impoverishment and exclusion of the working class and the Indian peoples from the fruits of the Mexican political system. The FZLN will have a far more sympathetic hearing now that its militants are entrenched in Congress and it is expected that the PRD will reach agreement on a joint declaration with the Zapatistas in the next twelve months.

Cairns
August 1997

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US

The death of nature in the splendour of spring in Virginia

Time for the beavers of Alexandria's Holmes Run Creek is probably expiring, but not because the beavers cut down a few young trees in the adjacent park.

The trouble at Holmes Run Creek in Alexandria, Virginia, is entirely man-made, created by the zealous city bureaucrats who practically every year contract out the clear cutting of the Holmes Run Creek, thus starving the beavers and devastating all wildlife habitat in an already degraded and polluted urban ecosystem.

The ecologically-illiterate 'transportation and environment' bureaucrats say they need to 'manage' the creek so that they protect Alexandria from the 100-year flood, a superstition, a technical abstraction supported by no credible scientific data or the natural history of the region.

The unspoken agenda of these 'managers' is to make Holmes Run Creek a deep ditch to receive the waters of Lake Barcroft, should that engineered construction collapse from human error as it did in 1972. But even in that flood there was little, if any, damage to homes in the neighbourhood of Holmes Run Creek. Finally, the clear cutters argue they are meeting the 'requirements' of FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) for creek management. That way, the city becomes eligible for the national flood insurance programme. Yet the Emergency Agency is giving credits to cities for maintaining their channels and drainage system 'clear of debris', not for clear cutting and ecological destruction.

Unfortunately for the residents of Alexandria, and for the neighbours of Holmes Run Creek in particular, their city government is indifferent to the destruction of the Holmes Run Creek, the almost certain death of the beavers, and the impoverishment of nature in general. In fact, the city government has been using the West End of Alexandria, with its high-rises and Holmes Run Creek, as a dumping ground for hazardous projects like the toxic garbage incinerator, only two miles from my home, and the Winkler corporation's condominium 'development', a massive collection of luxury apartments raised on the ground that, until very recently, was a 'botanic preserve' and a 100-acre forest. You pass by the edge of the destroyed forest, now overwhelmed with fast-moving cars, and you can almost feel the death of nature. No

longer the sweet music of birds, the exquisite beauty of wild flowers. And, above all, the quiet green majesty of the trees is gone forever.

This is bad social policy with ecocidal consequences under any circumstances. The tragedy, however, is that five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Earth Summit, and the creation in the United States by president Clinton of the President's Council on Sustainable Development, nothing about sustainable development has percolated down to our local politicians, their corporate funders and some of our citizens, who act as if they can go on vandalising nature for ever.

One of those citizens said, in a public meeting about Holmes Run Creek, that he wanted to 'eat' the beavers. And, to my angry denunciation of such a cannibalistic attitude, he explained he drew his inspiration from the Bible where the Judaeo-Christian god is supposed to direct men to bring nature under their control.

Changing such obsolete, nay dangerous, ideas and policies is going to be very difficult – perhaps impossible without a fundamental social and political transformation that gives nature equal rights to those enjoyed by people. Democracy and ecological consciousness, without which no sustainable development is possible, have a long way to go in my home town of twenty-two years, Alexandria, Virginia.

The only saving grace in this brutal affair is that nearly all of my immediate neighbours – about 150 people – signed a petition to our apathetic politicians to start a dialogue with us on the slim prospect of saving the endangered beavers and our beloved creek with its beautiful trees. We said to the politicians to hold on to a clear cutting moratorium for at least sixty days, so that we could have a public hearing to listen to what ecologists have to say about the values of our creek as a riparian area, a thin strip of moving water and green land in an otherwise synthetic urban environment, and to listen to those of us living next to the creek explaining our affection for the serenity and beauty of the place.

The mayor of Alexandria, who is also a banker, put our moratorium request to a vote after the city council heaped honours on the very man who wanted to 'eat' the beavers of Holmes Run Creek. The mayor also asked the city's transportation director to brief the city council on why it was necessary to cut the trees of the creek. The transportation man spent half an hour explaining the impending flood insurance disasters, should the city deviate this time from the friendly advice of the FEMA bureaucrat who, speaking more out of ignorance and well exceeding his authority, said all the trees in the creek had to go. FEMA, of course, is the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The 100-year flood was a certainty, it was said. The Holmes Run Creek had to be made into a ditch waiting for that flood.

I protested this misinformation and the mayor allowed me two

minutes to speak. I pointed out that the storming rivers of the midwest were far away from Alexandria, Virginia. I cited a couple of government documents showing the ecological significance of riparian streams like our creek. One of those documents, a summary of a November 1996 meeting of the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council – uniting the states of Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New York for the environmental protection of the sensitive and badly damaged Chesapeake Bay ecosystem – was urging Virginia to conserve existing riparian streams. 'Trees and grasses in riparian areas', said the other document of the US Department of Agriculture, 'stabilise stream banks and reduce floodwater velocity, resulting in reduced downstream flood peaks.' But, above all, I urged the mayor and the six members of the city council to give us time for a public hearing – not much to ask, I convinced myself.

I also said to the city council that a woman forester from the forestry department of Virginia, who had visited the Holmes Run Creek, Barbara White, had pleaded for an opportunity to testify on behalf of the ecological significance of our creek. Barbara White also gave me names of other government experts who would be willing to defend the integrity of the Holmes Run Creek.

Yet nothing I said made a difference to the mayor of Alexandria who voted with three of the six members of the city council to destroy the trees of our neighbourhood creek. If anything, he was visibly angry that citizens bothered him and the city clear cutting crew with questions about trees, beavers, hearings, riparian areas, ecology. The next day – 8 April 1997 – after this depressing encounter with our undemocratic city government, death filled the silence of the natural splendour of Holmes Run Creek.

April is the azalea season in Alexandria, the red and white and purple rhododendron bushes adding aesthetic pleasure in front of our modest homes, reminding us that spring is the season of resurrection of nature, of human hope. Yet, on that spring day, the ugly sound and teeth of mechanical saws killed beautiful maples, pines, oaks, eucalyptuses, mimosas, sycamores, river birches, cypress, redbuds – trees ranging from two to forty years old.

A neighbour of mine, living across the creek since 1972, wondered whether those in favour of destroying our little piece of nature included investors and developers, who now had a ready-made ditch for the massive runoff from the condominiums and a premium flood insurance benefit for those living in the floodplain of the Potomac River shoreline facing the 'old town' of Alexandria – without doubt the tourist, boutique and museum part of the city, the nerve centre of the business and development establishment.

Then, when on 9 April in the evening I walked some of the length of the familiar path following the contours of the creek, and saw the trees

piled neatly on the ground, something left me for good. Anger filled my shaken soul with bitterness. I remembered Plato saying wildlife was the soul of the world, *anima mundi*. And I remembered also the Greek gods – the gods of my ancestors and my gods – that made nature sacred: goddess Artemis with her sacred groves, goddess Demeter representing the earth and agriculture, and her daughter, Persephone, bringing spring and the resurrection of nature faithfully every year to people who worshipped her and nature with religious celebrations and mysteries. The father of the gods, Zeus, chose the eagle to be his messenger.

And yet, in my own American neighbourhood, aeons removed from my own culture, soulless humans, who profess to be Christians in religion, made certain that no wildlife would survive.

I asked myself, what is it that makes people barbarians – smashing things, raping nature, the mechanical manner they use to poison their land in order to 'produce' food, spray toxins on their lawns, thinking not at all about the consequences of their actions? I also thought about the telephone conversations I had had with the staff of congressman Jim Moran, who represents Alexandria in Congress, his brother, Brian Moran, who represents Alexandria in the Virginia legislature and is a resident in the neighbourhood of Holmes Run Creek. I also talked to several experts at several government agencies – including FEMA – about our threatened strip of land, trees, wildlife and running water. Most of these people said they sympathised with our cause to protect the creek, but they, as a matter of policy, would not interfere. After all, destroying a creek was a local issue!

I felt sick to my stomach. All the specialised discourse about shallow, deep, social and political ecology, the emerging vocabulary of sustainable development and civil society (transparency of policies, social and gender equity, ecological integrity, capacity building, indigenous wisdom, biological diversity, agroecology, organic farming, community supported agriculture, sustainable agriculture, Agenda 21 or the sustainable development agenda of the United Nations for the twenty-first century) and the rest of the language of empowerment of the United Nations Development Programme, flashed through my mind, as if to revenge my years of theoretical abstraction on the dying nature of Holmes Run Creek.

I was a lonely man, even a strange person, to have pleaded for the life of sycamores and redbuds. I should have known the barbarians among the politicians would understand nothing of my polite request. Powerlessness and its consuming sickness were at work. Nature, democracy, the need for civility, ecological knowledge and wisdom, had been replaced by real, if invisible, violence. An engineered concept, the 100-year flood, had the respectability and abstraction of science. The more difficult the pernicious doctrine, the better to hide wicked schemes.

The politicians of Alexandria had the guns of the police to impose their destructive decision. How did this violent policy – taken in ignorance and on the spur of the moment – differ from the Crusades or colonialism? Four out of seven 'elected' politicians ignored the feelings of several hundred citizens whose only weapons were verbal admonitions to leave the trees alone for moral, ecological, and aesthetic reasons. In the same contemptuous manner, the Christian western European crusaders – who thought their god should be the only god in the known world – launched wars of hatred against the Muslim infidels (as well as other Christians), thus seeding Europe for slavery and colonialism.

The beavers and wildlife of Holmes Run Creek are not Europe or America. They were and, to some degree, continue to be a fragment of nature which, however, illustrates, to a frightening extent, the political fate of nature in America. Even in this little natural corridor in the West End of Alexandria, Virginia, the endangered beavers and wildlife have always been essential and symbolic. The city's crusade against them demonstrates the mindless, violent, factory culture of this country, the United States, and the rest of the self-baptised 'developed' world of Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Instead of welcoming the challenge of leaving a liveable world for our and their children, the ruling elites – under the propaganda cover of a variety of 'development' schemes they expropriate from the ecology movement – pursue quite ruthlessly their ecocidal and corrupt policies of 'business-as-usual'.

On Earth Day 1997 (22 April), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – representing the civil society – gathered in New York from all over the world, denounced the world's governments for failing to carry out Agenda 21, the promises they made about sustainable development at the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil. The anger of the civil society is legitimate and real. Business-as-usual is putting the earth at risk. When fragments of nature (like the Holmes Run Creek) go, when entire ecosystems are threatened, as in fact they are by industrial forestry and factory agriculture, and when the planet itself is warming up from the engines of industrialism, the ecocidal writing on the wall against such culture is beginning to cover the entire landscape.

However, we dare not drop out of fighting the battle of our lives. Sustainable development, however legitimate and inspiring an idea and a policy it is for the civil society and the grassroots environmental movement, is no more than a slogan for the world's clear cutters. It's the fog that the sophisticated rich and powerful are using to soften up the resistance of the growing global environmental and civil society movements. And, while the colonising rhetoric, fake democracy, the endless and exhausting policy-making process and the foundation money of the corporate plutocracy have drained much of the original

ecological zeal of the large environmental groups, those tools of subversion have had no deleterious effects on the rapidly emerging civil society and the grassroots and indigenous political movements.

The shock of losing our trees in the Holmes Run Creek was so great and telling that it politicised the entire community, thus giving birth to another member of the NGO community and civil society determined to resist any further colonising impulses of the corporate state.

Terri Swearingen, a nurse and housewife from East Liverpool, Ohio, honoured by the Goldman Environmental Prize, 14 April 1997, for her struggles against a hazardous waste incinerator in her neighbourhood, said that grassroots activists like herself become experts from defending their lives. The incinerator in Terri Swearingen's backyard was funded by Swiss and American corporations which saw nothing wrong in setting their massive, toxic, garbage-burning factory right in the flood plain of the Ohio River, across from a 400-pupil elementary school and in the middle of a Third World, Appalachian community. Swearingen, of course, found all these arrangements as offensive as we, in the Holmes Run Creek, and other activists in countless towns, villages all over the world, find offensive and dangerous conventional development projects. Swearingen was right to attack the 'corporate value system' and 'rapacious corporate interests' threatening human health and the planet. Her reflections on accepting the Goldman Environmental Prize speak to the acute crisis of conventional development and to the challenge of survival – at the Holmes Run Creek, Alexandria, Virginia, Easter Liverpool, Ohio, and all over the world. She said:

> We have to live on this planet, assuming that we do not have another one to go to! We must get to the front end of problems so that we avoid the mistakes of the past ... We actually represent progress – not technological progress, but social progress ... We have been threatened and we have a different way of seeing the world. We know what is at stake. We have been forced to educate ourselves, and the final exam represents our children's future ... We don't buy into the notion that all it takes is better regulations and standards, better air pollution control devices and more bells and whistles ... You cannot patch up an injustice – an unjust situation – with technology.

<div style="text-align:right">E.G. VALLIANATOS</div>

E.G. Vallianatos, author of two books on sustainable development, *Fear in the Countryside* and *Harvest of Devastation*, lives near Holmes Run Creek, Alexandria, Virginia.

Book reviews

Black Movements in America

By CEDRIC J. ROBINSON (New York and London, Routledge, 1997). 179pp. £13.99.

The focus of this exploration of the history of 400 years of African-American social movements is the way in which they negotiated the tension between the Jeffersonian promise of freedom and the reality of unfreedom. From its inception, American political culture contained within itself ideas of freedom and injustice. Freedom was always heavily qualified and restricted to the privileged sections of society. At times, freedom was associated with the right to own slaves, at others, with the freedom to exclude Black people from having access to social, political and economic rights. Although institutionalisation of differential treatment has taken a variety of forms, the durability of such arrangements represents a fundamental theme in American history. And the defence of the institutions of exclusion has always been intertwined with the politics of racism. American history can be read as an interaction between the defence of institutions of discrimination and the assertion of the humanity of those excluded. A series of innovative responses from the excluded provides the centrepoint to institutionalisation of differential treatment.

Robinson's contribution provides a powerful reconstruction of the history of Black movements in the United States. It is a well constructed statement that pulls together a variety of historical experiences into a story that is at once compelling and clear. But the text is more than just a history of Black social movements in the United States. It avoids the pitfalls of many narratives that flatter the subject through arguing that 'Black people have always struggled'. This is not just a

story of the 'more of the same' variety. The author has sought to explain and differentiate the different forms of Black responses to a system where the promise of justice coexisted with the manifest reality of oppression.

The principal argument of this text is that the interaction between the experience of oppression and the Black response to it led to the development of two alternative Black cultures. Robinson argues that, during the second half of the nineteenth century, communities of free Blacks 'gravitated toward the privileged political and social identities jealously generally reserved for non-Blacks'. This assimilationist culture sought to appropriate the values of the dominant American creed. Alongside this response, there developed an alternative Black political culture which emerged from the brutal regimes of slavery and later of peonage. This culture expressed itself as separatist, assuming 'forms already familiar: marronage, emigration, migration, domestic or external colonisation'.

In a short review, it is difficult to do justice to the complexities of Robinson's argument. But he clearly sees the culture of Black resistance as the more creative of the two. This was a culture in which Black women played a pioneering role and in which the authentic assertion of Black self-determination was most clearly to crystallise. Robinson contends that this pointed to a future that was inventive and communitarian, rather than individualistic: that it was this tradition that nourished Black resistance against the different manifestations of racial oppression.

Robinson believes that, in recent decades, the divergence between the culture of accommodation and of resistance has intensified. In one sense, Black political culture has become more divided between the conservative accommodations of resistance/reaction and the more communitarian strands. One important outcome of these divisions has been the growing isolation of the Black urban poor. For Robinson, the future of Black America depends on the strengthening of what he calls militant communitarianism. He points to the important role of Black churches in providing contemporary Black resistance with vision and meaning. They provide a framework of solidarity for what would otherwise be atomised and meaningless responses.

At a time of heightened individuation leading to outbursts of destructive gang activity, the concept of solidarity acquires greater significance. *Black Movements in America* is a powerful work of synthesis that combines vigorous academic research with an important statement about the direction of Black America. History has often been used to evade the issue. Here, history is mobilised to clarify contemporary issues that can only be fully grasped with the resource of past tradition.

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Inventing the American Primitive: politics, gender and the representation of Native American literary traditions, 1789–1936

By HELEN CARR (Cork, Cork University Press, 1996). 286pp. £27.95

For once, that overworked term 'representation' is justified, since Carr's study covers precisely that – the ways in which what was not suppressed, destroyed or eradicated of the myriad Native American cultures once present in North America was taken up, reworked or reinterpreted to serve the new nation being so bloodily carved out. The story Carr tells starts when the newly constituted US was genuinely post-colonial, escaping from English domination and, in the desire to distance itself from an outmoded Europe, seeking to emphasise its areas of difference and proclaim its righteousness. But, in justifying its new existence on Enlightenment grounds of the natural and inalienable rights of man, it also bound itself into an insoluble paradox. For, in this context, the natural rights of man (the rights of the settlers to determine their own future) depended on the extirpation of those very communities of Native Americans that thinkers like Locke and Rousseau had cited as 'natural man', par excellence, living in the free and equal state that was the right of all.

It is fascinating to trace, through Carr's careful analysis, how this ambivalence and contradiction works itself out in the statements and decisions on Indian affairs of Henry Knox, first Secretary of War in the new United States: 'The Indians being the prior occupants, possess the right of soil. It cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by right of conquest in case of a just war...' They could, perhaps, be bought out, but not for too much:

> As the settlements of the white shall approach near to the Indian boundaries established by treaties, the game will be diminished, and the lands being valuable to the Indians only as hunting grounds, they will be willing to sell further tracts for small considerations ... it is most probable that the Indians will, by the invariable operation of the causes which have hitherto existed in their intercourse with the whites, be reduced to a very small number.

Of course, what transpired was a continued and bloody assault on the very existence of Native American communities – so the settlers reached for Christian Providence to justify themselves. As farmers, they would be the ones to make the land fruitful in accordance with God's wishes – the Indians were only hunters. (God's elect were apparently oblivious to the extensive and productive Indian agriculture that covered huge areas of territory, but then this was carried on by women.)

But the Native American presence was, as well as being inimical to the colonising enterprise, also what strongly differentiated the 'New World' from old, corrupt Europe. And, in a hangover from those

enlightenment ideas of the natural freedom of man, expressed in the person of the noble savage, the native Indian surfaced, from time to time, as the symbol of the new nation. Here begin the attempts, self-serving, yet fascinating in their tenuous connection with another reality, to record Indian myths, songs, poetry and cultural traditions. Carr's analysis is subtle and careful, always linking the specific texts under discussion with both the material imperatives of the new nation, and its constant assaults west and south, and the larger climate of ideas – the notions of manifest destiny, the inevitability of progress, the development of scientific racism – within which this literary cum ethnographic activity took place.

Even that eighteenth century awareness, uneasy and ineffective as it was, that the indigenes had some rights that could not be wholly overlooked, was more liberal than what was to come after. For, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it was held that Native American peoples were, by law of nature, doomed to extinction. It is an idea that is refracted at the literary level in one of the most popularly successful poems ever – Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, with its sing-song rhythms and strange sounding names. No connection was made between this self-evidently natural process and the actual wholesale slaughter and destruction carried on of communities, agricultural and hunting grounds. Nor was there any awareness of the irony involved in salvaging, for white posterity, the remnants of 'savage' cultures. Much of this early recording was carried on by women – less directly connected, perhaps, to the man's world of practical enterprise, exploitation and dispossession and themselves deemed lower down the evolutionary scale than white males. It was they who both paved the way for, and carried forward, the later, more systematic documenting work of the Bureau of American Ethnology, as well as of its most famous opponent, Franz Boas.

No doubt costs would have precluded it, but it would have been helpful, given the unfamiliarity of the texts Carr discusses, to have some extracts reproduced in an appendix. Especially as, in her introduction, she describes the impact of her own chance discovery of the writings recorded by the later Bureau of American Ethnology:

> What I found astounded me by its richness, its complexity, its depth, its beauty ... but from the beginning I could not but be aware of the problems of interpreting these once oral texts, now transcribed, translated, recontextualised, edited, used as evidence for particular anthropological theories and for western ends.

I do, however, have one cavil with Carr's book. When she writes so sensitively of her subject, interweaving literary analysis with material and cultural history so that each reflects on the other, why is it necessary to begin by citing the godfathers of literary and cultural

theory? To pass through the ritual of Lacan, Jameson, Baudrillard, Lévi-Strauss, Said, et al? Why embark on a truncated discussion of post-coloniality vis-à-vis the US in which she rightly concludes that it is 'a historical stage not a virtue', but takes issue with those who regard it as an inappropriate designation for the US which surely, in a broad context, it is? The body of her work is a much more careful and subtle rendering of her thesis which is not served by the apparent adoption of an *a priori* model.

But maybe this is the way to justify, for an academic audience, the seriousness and importance of literary analysis. It seems necessary (so sensitive is commentary in a world where words are all) even to apologise for examining such a subject at all. Carr pleads in mitigation her family 'affinity with the colonised (Scottish) and postcolonial (Irish)'. Sheer enthusiasm, passion for a literature, has to be kept under wraps. And perhaps this is the trade-off for our present day awareness of just how value-laden our language, our terminology is, how deeply dyed in a past imperial, present day racist, culture. Excitement may be lost in careful articulation. It is to Carr's credit that, when she is discussing the writings themselves and their transmission through a foreign language to a foreign culture, that excitement still breaks out.

Institute of Race Relations   HAZEL WATERS

Small Hours of the Night: selected poems of Roque Dalton

(Willimantic, Curbstone Press, 1997). 205pp. $14.95.

I first met the poetry of Roque Dalton of El Salvador during the late 1970s, at the height of the national liberation struggle of that tiny nation's people. I remember, in particular, the poem that imagined communism as an aspirin as big as the sun. A stunning image, I thought, recalling Donne's compasses and Marvell's chariot – is this an authentic Latin American metaphysical poet?

He is, but as the collection of his poems, *Small Hours of the Night*, shows us, he is much more too. Revolutionary, lyrical love poet, patriot, humorist – and, as he called himself,

a hack
in the smallest Communist Party in the world.

He came from dramatic family circumstances. His father was one of the members of the infamous 'Dalton Gang' of bank-robbers who, pursued from Kansas, settled in El Salvador and invested his loot in coffee plantations, thus buying himself into the nation's small but dominant rural elite. So, when Roque wrote of having a certain 'way of being a communist', which was, to say the least, from an unstereotypical

background and one which defied laws, norms and orthodoxies, he wrote as a Latin American revolutionary with a unique proximity to the eagle of the north, as well as one who had writhed to unleash himself from the mindsets of a Jesuit education. From there, he spent a year in the more liberal surroundings of the University of Santiago in Chile, returning to El Salvador to continue his law studies at the University of San Salvador in 1956. In 1958, he joined the Communist Party and was arrested by the military regime in 1959 and again in 1960 – when he was sentenced to death by firing squad. The day before his sentence was to be carried out, a coup d'état saved his life. That was his *first legendary escape. The second* happened in 1965 when, after a fertile period of writing and organising in Cuba, he returned to El Salvador, attempted clandestine activity, was found, captured and tortured, and only saw freedom again when an earthquake demolished the walls of his prison cell.

The stuff of poetic myth indeed, yet Roque's poetry was also a cry of insistence that its words and experience were as ordinary as those of the very next person:

> I came just as I am
> with hands that can bleed,
> with fear
> with love
> with four Mondays to each month.

His utterance, he claimed, was to reveal his country's agony in the soul of its people, and be a spark to charge transformation and betterment. In his prose poems he wrote that 'from the Spanish conquest on, my country has been laughing like an idiot through a gaping wound. It's always night-time here and that's why you can't see it bleed ... what I expect to go on being until I die is a revolutionary poet truly conscious of the problems of his time.'

Yet, from this so-called laughing country, he was, as Ernesto Cardenal calls him in his short introductory memoir, 'a laughing revolutionary'. His is the laughter of children, a boyishness that plays at the heart of his words – a frustrated child's game that is as serious as his life. For, while he adopts a persona of 'a poor kid who never carved his name upon a tree' and sees his own political and poetic soul as that of a 'sad little boy's who would still like to play', he looks towards the lives of the struggling Salvadoran people that must be 'full of daybreaks still to come', and that day

> when the world
> has lived enough to be young,
> we'll be able to spend our time caring
> for our children.

This laughter – often ironic as well as joyous and visionary – stutters too inside 'the darling sons of mildew, bad smells and rats', inside the prisons and hidden places of the struggle. It gives sound to the poetic voice – the 'bell of the five senses' – and emerges in the message of many a 'crazy soul' of the people, the prophetic thirst and commission to 'retrieve the wine of words we own as children'. It also resonates within the passion of love – social love and one, too, which is interpersonal and erotic. For the country too, emphatically, as if the nation is a family, a recalcitrant parent:

> I've had enough of you, my sleeping beauty
> mother stinking up the night with your jails.

But also for a lover, overwhelming and yearning, this time making an aspirin of tenderness:

> Without your hands my heart
> is the enemy in my chest.

Dalton's poetics ask the question nakedly in his poem, 'The art of poetry', 'who should the poet's voice be for?' His answer is to tell his own aesthetic impulse that 'you're not made of words alone', but actions, and the urge to transform and revolutionise life itself. The imagination has solid roots in the real earth of struggling women and men, in the lives of 'the farmers with callused hands and tunics smelly with sweat' – its 'proprietor' grows to have a 'clear conception of creative freedom and of his or her responsibilities regarding beauty'.

With such urgings of the imagination and the human spirit, Dalton launched himself into the revolutionary movement. Like another luminous soul of the region, Maurice Bishop, he was killed by militarists on his own side, who accused him of seeking to divide the struggle. With a historic irony that he would have appreciated, his open line of forging close links with the mass popular organisations was the position later embraced by El Salvador's revolutionary movement. *Small Hours of the Night* is a pathfinding anthology which expresses and honours an enigmatic poetic genius.

Goldsmith's College, London   CHRIS SEARLE

The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish international radicalism 1707–1995 – a biographical study

By JAMES D. YOUNG (Glasgow, Clydeside Press, 1996). 338pp. £9.95.

In the introduction to his unsurpassed *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson explained that the 'English' of his title was not the usual chauvinism, in which the Scottish (or Welsh)

experience is subsumed by the English, but a mark of respect for national differences. Class, Thompson wrote, was a cultural as much as an economic formation. This is something that the Scottish historian, James D. Young, who has done as much as anyone to tell the true history of the Scottish working classes, seems to grasp instinctively.

The men that Young writes about – there are no women here, although Young has written elsewhere about Scottish working-class women – are exemplars of this tradition, from the Jacobin James Thomson Callender through political activists Keir Hardie and John Maclean, to the writers Lewis Grassic Gibbon and James Barke, to the educationalists A.S. Neill and R.F. (Bob) Mackenzie. All represent a free-thinking radical tradition in Scottish political life, all were exemplars of those 'very bastards of creation' that the English radical, John Wilkes, dismissed as being incapable of true radicalism because they were 'foreigners and Jacobites'. As with all the best biographical history, this is a work of remembering and reinstatement of those who might otherwise be ignored. As for those who are better known, Young brings to bear his own political analysis and sense of historical placing.

To borrow a Scots word that Young himself uses in the introduction, Young is a carnaptious historian and writer, that is, a quarrelsome man. This makes for a lively, never dry, presentation of his material, for, in relating a history, he is also concerned with challenging other historical accounts, those he feels have ignored or played down the radical and nationalist element. At times, this gets the better of him. I don't think it is helpful or instructive, for instance, when discussing the work of Tom Nairn, surely one of the most important postwar political writers on Scotland, to put quotation marks around the epithet marxist. But at least Young makes it clear where, as they say, he is coming from. He is a Scot and a socialist internationalist, and his book and his analysis and argument are there to be argued with in their turn.

This is polemical, partial and committed history and Young's general sweep is sometimes better than his detail. In no sense, I think, can the writer and thinker, Walter Benjamin, really be described as an anarchist and, while one might have wished that R.D. Laing was anticapitalist, there is little evidence to support this, at least with any consistency.

In his last chapter, 'The new world order and the experience of defeat: a born again radicalism', Young tries to connect his historical account to the present. One has to praise the undertaking, and no one can but be impressed by the general story, whether of the remarkable 1970s magazine, *Scottish International*, or the work of more recent writers and painters. But, in the end, one is left with something of an inventory of Scottish radical cultural politics in the past twenty years or so. There is nothing wrong with that, but it isn't the same as analysis,

and one longs for a tougher, more rigorous examination of continuities and discontinuities.

So, too, ultimately, one longs for a more hard-headed assessment of political successes and failures. It is one of Young's strengths as a historian to insist on the integration of the cultural and the political but, in this last chapter, political action, whatever forms it takes, is all but absent. This primacy of the cultural over the political, I suspect, may be more a reflection of the Scottish reality than Young might want to admit. The question remains: why, if radical culture is so strong, has political change in Scotland been so elusive?

London   PAUL GORDON

Our Bones are Scattered: the Cawnpore Massacres and the Indian Mutiny of 1857

By ANDREW WARD (London, John Murray, 1996). 736pp. £25.

It has often been argued by the early post-independence generation that the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was the precursor of the nationalist movement, though many western historians have regarded it as scattered revolts by peasant landowners with no sense of solidarity against a common enemy. On the other hand, the marxist historian sees it as a class war against the landlords and the colonial state. Whatever the school of thought may be, the Indian Rebellion was certainly, in the words of C.A. Bayly, professor of naval and imperial history at Cambridge, 'the First War of Independence that some scholars of the 1950s incautiously proclaimed'. He went on to write: 'The mental distance between the rebels of 1857 and the nationalists of the twentieth century was not perhaps as great as we once thought. The crowds who gathered in 1947 at the gates of the Lucknow Residency and the Bibighar at Cawnpore may have had a more profound sense of history than the professional historians and politicians.'

It is difficult to come to grips with the peaceful exit of the British when one considers the horror, the fanaticism, the rage that is so visible in the bloodiest drama of colonial history – the siege and massacre of the European garrison stationed at Kanpur during the great rebellion of 1857. This resulted in a heartless massacre of thousands of Indians who were either hanged or tied to guns and blown to smithereens. Andrew Ward has given a brilliant account of this historic event in his book, *Our Bones are Scattered*. His novel about Kanpur, *The Blood Seed*, written in 1985 and followed by this fascinating study, shows his sustained interest in the 1857 insurrection of the Bengal army.

This cycle of massacre and retribution is integral to the imperial strategy of advancing the empire and silencing the critics. Similar to

Custer's debacle at Little Bighorn that presaged the slaughter at Wounded Knee, or the Zulus' triumph at Isandhlwana that led to the gruesome massacre at Ulundi, or the plundering of Khartoum which brought in its wake the carnage at Omdurman, the Indian uprising in Kanpur provoked a similar reaction from the colonisers who justified their action by showing to their sceptical countrymen the moral depravity of natives who were capable of raping and killing their 'benefactors'. Such skirmishes legitimised colonial foreign acquisitions, as, back in England, a lobby continuously held colonisation to be immoral but, when rebellions occurred and English men, women and children were killed, the cause of the invader was upheld and any harsh steps taken to punish the natives applauded and approved. Within imperial discourse, enslavement, expropriation and extermination had to be justified in a series of rhetorical formulations that depended on categories trumpeted as fundamental and universal.

The nineteenth century is full of such examples which demonstrate that European political thinkers and strategists consciously evoked a Hegelian philosophy which bestowed the right to complete human history on European nations. In the name of progress and modernisation, all types of slaughter, treachery, plunder, destruction and invasion into unknown cultures were justified with the argument that the empire, in the words of Seamus Deane, 'was performing its world-historical obligation to its destiny'.

At the outset, Ward shows his disapproval of British nationalist historians who tactfully deceived the English public into believing that the atrocities carried out by the natives were far more bloody than their punishment. The carefully managed control of public opinion at such times, and the express manipulation of the sentiments and morale of troops, are fairly widespread practices. Can we really say what happened in the past? What are historical facts and what is bias? These are questions concerning the nature of historiography, but about this book it could be said, in the author's own words, that though it is 'the fullest account yet written of the *Cawnpore* tragedy', of the people who lived here and died, it is still not definitive, as it is another reformulation 'of the sparse documentary evidence that survived the looting and razing of the station'. Ward is not guilty of conceptual over-determination and imaginative excess, but he is interested in the historical method that consists of little more than the injunction 'to get the story straight'. The postmodern approaches of theorists like Richard Rorty and Hayden White would not give much credence to such histories within the more contentious, polemical and difficult debates which are currently in circulation, and which determine how the discourse of history is constituted and considered.

Ward knowingly spells Kanpur as *Cawnpore* since the town was definitely a British invention. Kanpur was a small village, a mere stop-

over between Bethur and Jajmau, but the British confidently spelt it as *Cawnpore* and pronounced it as *Cawnpawh*, as they did with many more cities in their Indian empire. *Cawnpore* is the spelling inscribed on the local contemporary memorials to the events of 1857 and even in first-hand accounts of the uprising. And so the author retains this spelling in the book. The British established '*Cawnpore* as a staging area for their remote campaigns and a watch-tower to awe down the royal Lucknowite'. Gradually the cantonment grew, more and more company soldiers began to camp there and officer bungalows sprouted 'with their roofs of pyramidal thatch along the buffs overlooking the river'. Eventually, it would stretch seven miles along the Ganges.

Major General Sir Hugh Massy Wheeler had taken the command of the Cawnpore Division only six months before the uprising. Ward retells the story of his command and how, after a siege of the camp, Nana Sahib, the Mahratta leader, tricked the English soldiers into surrender on the promise of safe conduct and then massacred them. And, when the British reinforcements defeated Nana Sahib and surrounded the town, he had 200 British women and children captives put to death. The repercussion was the butchery of Indians, as a form of revenge and a lesson to the Indian rebels.

Ward's book has been well researched in county record officers and the archives of private historians like Zoe Yalland (to whom the book is dedicated), as well as in the National Archives of India. It is a sober account of the uprising – not as sensational as it could have been, considering the bloodlust that characterised the uprising and the depiction of all the hideous accounts of agonising death that took place in Kanpur. Writing a history set in as complex a period as that of the Company's India and composed of many dozens of characters is a difficult task; yet the story of perverted cruelty that it tells has the narrative skill to amaze even a modern reader calloused by the barbarities of the present century.

Villages were set on fire, Mahrattas smeared with blood and hanged, Brahmins forced to taste the blood of the untouchables and then executed by them. And, when the Indian peasants ran out of the flames that engulfed their village, the English soldiers shot them; bearded Highlanders pushed beef down Hindu throats. These practices deal very specially with the political humiliation and dehumanisation of the Indians, the purposeful removal of their last shreds of dignity before murdering them. 'Retribution is going on in a very fearful way,' a civilian wrote from Allahabad. 'Fourteen men were hung [*sic*] here yesterday and fourteen the day before, and houses are burnt down at once.' The fortunate ones died instantly from gunfire and the less fortunate, owing to inadequate ropes or wrongly tied nooses, lingered in agony. British officers like Renaud plundered and slaughtered as they marched their columns, 'tranquillising the country by the very

simple expedient of burning all the villages in the line of march and hanging everybody with a black face falling in their way'.

The savagery of these atrocities was compounded by the Victorian cult of the purity of English womanhood. No women were, in fact, raped by the sepoys (indeed, such bodily contact would have contravened all the tenets of caste). But such fantasies were integral to the English culture of repressed sexuality – rape of their women was worse than their death – and fuelled a powerful desire for revenge of the harshest kind.

Ward has given a blow by blow account of the twenty-one-day siege of Kanpur and its aftermath. Though his is a plausible narrative, it lacks definitive analyses of the failure of the rebellion. This was no concerted uprising; instead, garrisons mutinied at different times, some not until the revolt had almost been crushed. Trouble never spread beyond the Bengal army. The Bombay and Madras armies stayed substantially loyal and so did the forces that had recently been recruited in the Punjab.

Had India united, and the Muslims collaborated with the Hindus, the British would have soon seen the demise of their dreams. The uprising was limited to the area of Oudh and never caught the imagination of the people nationwide. Sikhs sided with the British and indicated in their deeds an antipathy towards the Mahrattas. Undoubtedly, Ward is more obsessed with one stage of the action, that of *Cawnpore*; he is not on very firm ground when he takes up other locales of action such as Lucknow or Allahabad. With his depth of research, he could have written a definitive history of the uprising, but, sadly, his canvas is limited. However, provocative and well argued as it is, *Our Bones are Scattered* should enable students of Indian colonial history to gain insights into and understanding of an event that is crucial to the question of India's struggle for freedom. The book is an eye-opening account of grotesque public executions which brought more shame than honour on the battlefield. It was 'total war' without the vestige of equal rights which one side was supposed to show to its antagonist. But, in the name of a 'civilising mission', imperial wars were waged outside the sphere of equals, against groups not recognised as human beings and, thus, deprived of human rights.

Punjab University   SHELLEY WALIA

Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain

By H.L. MALCHOW (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996). 335pp. £35.

The literary gothic provides a rich source of imagery and archetypes around which anxieties can coalesce, where the unfamiliar and threatening can be abjected as 'unnatural', 'monstrous' or 'impure'. Indeed, the continuing popularity of the gothic among writers as disparate as Stephen King and Angela Carter, or film directors ranging from David Cronenberg to Francis Ford Coppola, underscores both the flexibility of the imagery and its continuing ability to capture the uncanny. Moreover, as Professor Malchow explores in relation to nineteenth-century Britain, the deployment of gothicised imagery is by no means limited to the literary sphere, but ranges across the day-to-day administrative affairs of imperial bureaucrats and soldiers, London newspapers reporting upon the condition of the capital's poor, society gossip about the New Woman, and scientific discourse as diverse as surgery, evolutionary theory, anthropology and psychology.

In fact, the focus on 'race' in the title of the book does disservice to the range of material explored by Malchow. An important strength of his study is an exploration of the nexus of 'race', sexuality and class to be found in nineteenth-century gothic imagery. This forms the structuring principle of the work by a presentation of perhaps the two most enduring nineteenth-century gothic literary archetypes: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

The former is read against the background of the Abolition movement, Caribbean plantation slavery and the Haitian revolution which provides a suggestive web of interconnections. Should former plantation slaves be educated, will they become some uncontrollable monster, perverted from nature? Or would such education pervert by its contradictions and lead to the explosive, violent resentment that is the fate of Frankenstein's monster? Such a reading brings a persuasive coherence to a number of recent interpretations of Mary Shelley's gothic terror, wherein the monster has been variously read as: the terror of the French revolutionary mob; an expression of Caribbean racism that insisted that African slaves were mere 'beasts of burden', too crude in their tastes to rank alongside their European masters; a newly discernible industrial proletariat; or the type of racial paranoia over being 'outbred' by the freed slaves, exemplified by Carlyle's contemporary essay on the 'Nigger question'.

Similarly, Malchow's reading of *Dracula* focuses on the sexual connotations embodied in this archetype: the homoerotic predatory male taking the blood of men and women alike, with the implication of syphilitic infection and racial degeneration coupled with anxieties over male homosocial bonding, significantly over the animated corpses of

women. Again, Malchow successfully gives the novel a convincing racial context by drawing upon the long history of European anti-Semitism. The smell that follows Dracula recalls the medieval tradition of the 'Jewish odour' (the *foetor judaicus*). Equally, the mouldering piles of gold coins in Dracula's lair suggest the uncleanness of usury, but also the 'deathly, sickly odour' draws us into the register of masturbatory anxieties and homophobia. In a broader racial context, Malchow traces the mass immigration of Ashkenazi Jews fleeing the pogroms in Russia and the resulting xenophobia following their appearance in London slums and sweatshops.

It hardly needs emphasising that, within European xenophobia, Jews have been a persistent symbol of racial impurity and taint that resurfaces in fears of colonial miscegenation or 'reverse colonisation'. Yet there are also overtones of cannibalism and the charnel house of Victorian medical anatomy that ties the vampire archetype closely together with Frankenstein's monster. These themes have an immediate resonance within a colonial context which Malchow traces in two brilliant essays that intersperse the two literary readings. This is the core and major achievement of the book.

The first essay examines the question of cannibalism, both as gothic imagery and its inscription as a condition of the colonial 'contact zone'. This has a history that can be traced back at least as far as Marco Polo to categorise a racial Other in terms of utmost depravity. The need to stamp out such practices – whether real or imaginary – legitimises the colonial mission while obscuring the real exploitation. As Malchow notes, this pattern has a remarkable consistency from the earliest discoveries of Columbus in the Caribbean, its classic literary encoding in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, to British colonial warfare with the New Zealand Maori during the 1880s. This pattern also reflects class anxieties whereby the threat to property ownership posed by the French revolutionary mob was depicted as cannibalistic excess. Later in the nineteenth century, the image resurfaces in response to mass unemployment, poverty and poor sanitary conditions as the Victorian middle classes racialised the urban slum dwellers. Consistent also is the misogynistic image of the mother who consumes her own child, an image that seems to move easily between a colonial setting and the imperial metropole itself. Parallel to this tradition, and perhaps indicative of an uneasy displacement, are the many real stories of the sailors' and explorers' 'last resort' in the face of starvation. A macabre feature of these true stories of European cannibalism is that it is often non-European servants or crew members who answer to the first repast.

Malchow is equally thorough with his second essay which concentrates on the figure of the 'half-breed' as gothic unnatural, again successfully bringing together questions of 'race', sexuality and class. It

is refreshing to read a book that recognises the congruence of these issues. Indeed, Malchow's approach opens up so many interrelated questions that it is impossible to do justice to the breadth and depth of his material and scholarship in a brief review. If there is one overall criticism that can be levelled at the book, it rests in the unease of some of his literary interpretations. This is particularly evident in his reading of *Frankenstein* where, rather than leaving the material itself to carry the argument, he undercuts himself by occasionally emphasising that his evidence is 'indirect, circumstantial, and speculative', or by insisting that he presents 'at least as reasonable a reading' as others. Fortunately, this does not remain a feature of the book. One further irritation is one that Malchow shares with many others, when he continually refers to the 1857 conflict in India as the 'Mutiny' rather than a war of independence.

It lastly remains to consider the question of audience. The scholarship here is impressive, yet is unencumbered by any overt theoretical agonising, leaving an exceptionally readable study. A fine example of a book that is a valuable resource for the student, while warranting the attention of anyone with an interest in race, sexuality and class as it relates to cultural production.

University of Sussex   LAWRENCE PHILLIPS

Every Secret Thing: my family, my country

By GILLIAN SLOVO (London, Little, Brown and Co., 1997). 282pp. £16.99

Kate Baeier, the protagonist of Gillian Slovo's detective fiction, is both a journalist and a detective. Like Kate, Slovo herself combines investigation and reporting, but with the added imperatives of narrative, of telling the story. The murders Kate Baeier solves are committed within a critical context of issues of social justice: race riots in Brixton and the hunger strike in the North of Ireland (*Death by Analysis*, 1986), affirmative action employment (*Death Comes Staccato*, 1987), pension funds and the elderly (*Catnap*, 1994) and police corruption and domestic violence (*Close Call*, 1995). The murder in *Every Secret Thing* is that of the author's mother, Ruth First, assassinated in August 1982 in Mozambique by a parcel bomb sent from South Africa, and the investigator, this time, is Gillian Slovo herself. Issues of social justice are no less paramount in this crime and its resolution, for Ruth First, like her husband, Joe Slovo, was throughout her life intimately and actively involved in the long struggle against the system of South African apartheid.

Who killed Ruth First? And why? And what does it mean to ask

such questions, then or now? The interrogatory underwrites *Every Secret Thing*. 'They targeted her because of who she was ... It was the work she was doing ... It was dangerous to them,' Slovo tells his daughter at the time of Ruth's funeral. 'All this was true,' Gillian writes later, 'And yet ... was it enough for them to kill her?' Ruth First, a journalist, historian and critic, had written articles exposing abuses of farm labour in the 1950s, supporting bus boycotts and opposing apartheid; she had authored a study of military coups in Africa and co-authored another on international investment in South Africa; and she had written as well a prison memoir of her own. When she was killed, First was a researcher at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo. But, as Gillian Slovo recalls of her subsequent discussions with her father in the intervening decade and a half since her mother's death, 'The one subject we never broached was the identity of her killer.' Joe Slovo, then general director of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and head of Umkhonto we Sizwe, had by that time, following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the unbanning of such organisations as the ANC and the SACP, returned to South Africa as a member of the ANC's negotiating team. Following the historic elections of 1994, he was appointed minister of housing in the new South African government. Only weeks before his death from cancer in January 1995, he had been presented by Mandela with the ANC's highest award, the *Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe*. The appointment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to investigate the history of abuses and atrocities against South Africans, meanwhile, had been a crucial part of the negotiations, but it would not begin its official inquiries until late in 1995, the year that had begun with Joe Slovo's passing. Who was to be held responsible for the killing of all the people who had died in the struggle against apartheid?

Every Secret Thing commits its own probing search for truth, a challenge to the strategies and stratagems of secrecy that had distinguished the family's life together and apart. 'Is this', Gillian Slovo writes, 'what happens, I thought then, that the webs of secrecy enmesh all of life, shrouding not only the details of the military operations that my father had organised, but also the way we feel towards each other? I never found a way of asking her [Ruth].' She goes on, 'But of course we [Gillian and her sisters, Shawn and Robyn] knew so little. We'd been brought up to tune out whispered conversations.' Truth commissions are, arguably, one of the decisive venues – and avenues – of historical research, political activism and literary narrative at the end of the twentieth century. From Latin America to Eastern Europe, and in South Africa, the question is whether there can be found truth – and/or justice – in the telling. Referring specifically to the South African TRC and the war crimes tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, Juan Méndez, executive director of the Inter-American Institute on Human

Rights, maintains, in a 1997 article in *Human Rights Quarterly* ('Accountability for past abuses') that 'Two or three years from now, analysts will have to reexamine everything said about truth and justice in light of what these experiments produce'. *Every Secret Thing* is an essay in precisely such accountability, for what happens when 'every secret thing' is made available to the public?

Every Secret Thing opens with the death of Ruth and her family's reunion on the occasion of the funeral: the closed coffin, the official ceremonies, the friends and the colleagues, the rehearsals of the past, and uncertainties about the future. And always the questions: Who? Why? Part two tells the story of Ruth First and Joe Slovo: their marriage; the exuberant days of resistance in the 1950s from the Congress of Democrats to the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter, and their famous parties; intensified repression and the decisive recourse to anti-apartheid violence; Joe's exile; Ruth's imprisonment, followed by her own departure with her daughters for London; the anti-apartheid movement in England, and, finally, relocation – or return – to southern Africa in Mozambique. 'She was a difficult act to follow, was Ruth,' writes Gillian Slovo. The third part is Joe's story: his emigrant past, his role in the armed struggle, his championing of negotiations, his ministerial work – and his admonitions to his daughter: 'I'm not going to tell you anything', he told her when she visited him in South Africa, and persisted, 'What gives you the right?' But the research continued: 'My father had tried to stop me delving in the past and I defied him.' Part four of *Every Secret Thing* recounts that defiance and the revelations it brought: the writer's meeting with her new-found half-brother Michael; research in the newspaper rooms of libraries and at the National Intelligence Service in the attempt to 'wrest [her] parents' files from police archives'; her visit with former security officer Craig Williamson who admits his role in the death of her mother, and, finally, the story of her grandmother Tilly's affair with a communist back in the 1930s.

When to talk, when not to talk. A central moment in Ruth First's prison memoir, *117 Days* (1965), was her near fatal decision that she could perhaps talk to her interrogators – without telling them anything. 'I intended', she had said at first, 'to permit no one the illusion that I accepted my imprisonment with resignation. I was in a state of buoyant aggression, disarmed of weapons except for the last, my tongue.' But she also memorised proverbs from the Bible that was her only permitted reading: 'A fool's mouth is his destruction / And from his lips are the snare of his soul', and 'Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble / Is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint'. Until finally, 'It was madness for me to think I could protect myself in a session like this, in any session with them. I had no idea what they knew, what contradictory information they had wrenched from someone else. They

were giving nothing away; they had already become too experienced for
that.' It had been a mistake, one that Ruth First accounted for her in
her prison memoir. When to talk, when not to talk. It is a mistake that
is recounted, too, in *Every Secret Thing*:

> But I know that she was right and it was I who'd got it wrong. She
> thought her friends would judge her, and she was right, some of
> them did. Those were macho times: those who talked at all were
> ostracised. If Ruth had not written her book, no one would ever
> have known that she had said anything, however trivial. Yet, once
> the book was published, instead of applauding her courage, some of
> her closest comrades judged her for her weakness. She must have
> known, before the book came out, that this was bound to happen
> and yet she let it ride. She was always a brave woman, my mother.

Macho times... And in the time of Truth Commissions? States too –
like readers and writers – have their own obligations. These responsi-
bilities, though, are to their victims, to their citizens, and even to the
international community, and include, as Méndez argues: 1) a right of
the victim to see justice done; 2) a right to know the truth; 3) an
entitlement to compensation and also to non-monetary forms of
restitution; and 4) a right to new, reorganised and accountable institu-
tions. History, research, reporting, investigation, story-telling: Gillian
Slovo's *Every Secret Thing* stands as an important contribution to a
new literature written in the time of truth commissions.

University of Texas at Austin   BARBARA HARLOW

Race, Poverty and American Cities

Edited by **JOHN CHARLES BOLGER** and **JUDITH WELCH
WEGNER** (Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina
Press, 1996). 602pp. $59.95.

Race, Poverty and American Cities, a collection of seventeen articles,
emerged out of the concern of its editors to respond to the 1992 Los
Angeles uprising and to 'the growing division between rich and poor,
whites and "minorities", urban and suburban populations, "haves"
and "have-nots"'. Its starting point is the Kerner Commission report
which began with a memorable warning:

> Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white –
> separate and unequal ... Reaction to last summer's disorders has
> quickened the movement and deepened the division. Discrimination
> and segregation have long permeated much of American life, they
> now threaten the future of every American.

The authors document the continuing reality of these two societies and the refusal of successive administrations to take the warning seriously in terms of instituting fundamental changes to reverse the division. Indeed, according to Peter Dreier,

> No other major industrial nation has allowed its cities to face the type of fiscal and social troubles – such as the concentration of poverty – confronting America's cities. Other nations do not permit the level of sheer destitution and decay found in America's cities. We see the consequences of inattention every day: growing poverty, homelessness, violent crime, and infant mortality; widening racial and economic segregation; crumbling infrastructure; and deepening fiscal traumas.

The need to understand the links between economic and social policy, at both the urban and the national levels, is seen as central by most of the contributors. Yet, the failure to make these connections dates back to the Kerner Commission itself, as Susan Fainstein and Ann Markusen demonstrate, and fundamentally limited its relevance to dealing with the situation it described. Fainstein and Markusen address the key factors determining the economic position of African Americans and provide a powerful critique of the economic strategies of local governments which have been directed at property-led economic development, based on downtown office buildings, which have exacerbated the deteriorating position of inner-city African Americans. Johnson and Farrell go on from there to analyse 'The fire this time: the genesis of the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992' and identify the consequences of government policies which have facilitated changes in the business climate to the detriment of working-class communities, particularly African American and Latino communities. They document the disinvestment by city government and local institutions, and the impact of conservative policy-making by the Reagan/Bush administrations which massively cut funding for cities, for programmes benefiting the working poor and those on income transfer programmes and which significantly increased income and wealth inequality.

Other authors address the nature of housing discrimination, government strategies and the debates over place- or race-specific programmes; the implications of racism for health care, education and social welfare, and the nature and role of the media. The need to develop new strategies to challenge housing discrimination; to create outreach programmes providing access to middle-class neighbourhoods – with their better financed schools and services – to inner-city residents; to restructure health care and educational provision to meet the needs of inner-city residents are discussed. John Charles Bolger proposes a National Fair Shares Act to create market incentives to support integrative housing choices, and market disincentives to

discourage segregative choices. John O. Colmore raises the issue of 'spatial equality' and argues that it 'compensates for past discrimination by legitimately combining the most effective features of affirmative action with expanded housing opportunity and choice ... The expansion of increased housing opportunity in other neighborhoods cannot diminish the prior commitment to neighborhood revitalization.'

These proposals – and others by Chester Hartman for a National Housing Goal and by other authors for programmes to improve education and health for inner-city poor people, particularly the African American and Latino poor – come up against the politics of the post-liberal consensus described by Kofi Hadjor in a recent issue of *Race & Class* (April–June 1997). For both political parties have engaged in playing the race card and appealing to the fears and prejudices of white suburban America. President Clinton's successful campaigns in 1992 and 1996 were based upon his creation of a New Democratic Party – appealing to the white voters who hitherto viewed the Democrats as the party of 'special interests', of the blacks and feminists. Hence the promises to cut big government and to end welfare as we know it, targeting single black mothers in particular.

While many of the proposals in *Race, Poverty and American Cities* are constructive, detailed and thorough, in the present climate, where funding is being directed towards measures of repression and containment, it is highly doubtful that they will achieve any impact. Yet the path of prison building and punitive strategies against the poor cannot be pursued indefinitely. Hence, the continuing need for analyses such as these.

Race, Poverty and American Cities also raises many questions relevant to a British readership – for the issues tackled are clearly analogous to those facing British society. The cuts in central government funding to inner cities during the Thatcher/Major years; the increasing levels of un- and under-employment; the racialised nature of those levels; the shift in investment to greenfield sites; the increasing income and wealth inequalities; the widening of educational and health inequalities; the racialised criminal justice system and massively differential levels of imprisonment, and the impact of globalisation – all pose challenges to the political system to reverse the development of separate and unequal societies. The successful electoral strategy of appealing to (white) Middle England, however, may reinforce the pressures to ignore these fundamental problems in favour of social authoritarianism and a refusal to develop and fight for policies which are based on the need to overturn institutional racism and to confront the forces of globalisation.

University of Manchester   LOUIS KUSHNICK

The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and visual representation

Edited by ALAN READ (London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, and Seattle, Bay Press, 1996). 211pp. $18.95.

Frantz Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925, studied psychiatry in France and went to Algeria to head a hospital at Blida, where he joined the struggle for Algerian liberation. He wrote about colonialism and the struggle against it from a point of view that tried to understand violence and its role in decolonisation. Fanon died in 1961 at the age of 36. Many Third World political and intellectual leaders have studied *The Wretched of the Earth*, which has been translated into many languages, including Urdu (now a native language of England), and into Farsi, by Dr Ali Shari'ati, a major influence on the Iranian revolution of 1979.

> To wreck the colonial world is henceforth a mental picture of action which is very clear, very easy to understand and which may be assumed by each one of the individuals which constitute the colonized people.

And again,

> colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.

(The Wretched of the Earth)

Algeria's resistance to external and internal imperialism persists decade after decade. When did it all start? Did it start with the surrender of Abd-el-Kadar in 1847? Or with the French orchestrated massacre at Setif in 1945, when, according to president Bourguiba of Tunisia, upwards of 45,000 people were killed? Or does it start with the war of liberation itself (1954–62), in which one million Algerians were killed and an additional 3,000 political related deaths ensued in metropolitan France?

Fanon's acts are inseparable from the Algerian war against the French. So, does a possible '90s interpretation of Fanon's thinking start with Alan Read's book? No. Why? Because most of its contributors put profound emphasis on dull '80s-style sexual politics, seen through Fanon's thrilling and naive *Black Skin White Masks* (1952).

The professors and artists in this book are benightedly disconnected from the many guerrilla movements transpiring throughout the world. Read's contributors do not discuss the tactical violence that the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) offered French civility. Alan Read keeps the issue of armed struggle out of a study of Fanon. It is impossible to discuss Fanon without discussing the many violence-

laden Algerias today, and to read Fanon in terms of the mere sexual-political trend is futile.

The Facts of Blackness records a dialogue that took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, via an exhibition, 'Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire', preceded by a conference: 'Working with Fanon: contemporary politics and cultural reflection' (1995). The conference was sponsored by Toshiba.

Read's effort consists of the work of university professors, some visual artists and film-makers who have made career improvements by injecting their work with the glorious auras of political activism via a 're-thinking' of the earlier Fanon. When reading the book, I wonder whether these anti-colonialists are doing anything but maintaining the status quo. Do they offer anything on the many imperialist machines ravaging the Third World? No. Do they show any interest in front-line struggles within the West or, for example, in Latin America? No, not at all. Instead, they just offer uglily written cultural 'theory'.

A short note on the current state of cultural studies is appropriate. The emptying of the activist politics from Fanon's work means, of course, that there will be plenty of 'committed' yet sloppy thinking. Much of cultural studies is complacent and careless these days. Read's work reminds me of the recent Sokal affair. A physics professor at NYU submitted a bogus, cultural-studies-style essay to *Social Text*, a leading journal in that field. Sokal was trying to prove that cultural studies professors haven't any rigour. Andrew Ross and the editors of the journal rushed to publish the essay: they were now going to have a physicist 'doing' cultural studies in their pages. This would make them look cutting-edge. As soon as his paper was published, professor Sokal publicly exposed the whole set-up. (For an exhilarating discussion of the inherent and utter falsity of cultural studies/postmodernists, please see Paul Boghossian's comment in the 13 December 1996 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*.)

Read's collection is a clear example of hazy and complacent 'theory' that so resembles the Sokal set-up. Stuart Hall, the king of cultural studies in the United Kingdom, writes so 'theoretically' that the word incomprehension does not describe the experience of 'reading' him. With clockwork regularity, he gives nods of approval to the beacons of Euro-civility: Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Foucault and the requisite others are noted and foot-noted incessantly. I presume he thinks that these European intellectuals are crucial to political action. Hall's introductory essay gives the impression of someone who is willing to use philosophical references to impress the naive. Action is what counts. Otherwise, why study Fanon? Why not just study Baudrillard and fall fast asleep? With unbridled erudition, Hall informs us:

Let us put it simplistically [sic] ... For, if this text is 'where Lacan

makes his interruption into colonial discourse theory', as Gates asserts, it is also where Fanon 'reads' Lacan in the light of his own preoccupations. In the long footnote on the 'mirror phase', it is Fanon's *appropriation* of Lacan which strikes us most vividly. First, the 'Other' in this transaction is *raced* ('...the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely'). It is difficult not to agree that he writes here as if 'the real Other' is indeed 'a fixed phenomenological point'.

Fortunately for Hall, this swishy stylistic complexity is far outdone by Homi Bhabha, who sometimes does do good work, I think. However, in Read's book, Bhabha constructs sentences that are so magnificent that one has to appreciate them as ink marks on the page, as a kind of finger painting in minutiae. Listen to this unadulterated Gayatri-Chakravorty-Spivakese:

> Fanonian 'continuance' is the temporality of the practice of action: its performativity or agency is constituted by its emphasis on the singularity of the 'local': an iterative structuring of the historical event and political pedagogy and an ethical sense constructed from truths that are partial, limited, unstable. Fanon's dialectic of the everyday is, most significantly, the emergency of a new historical and theoretical temporality generated by the process of revolutionary transience and transformation.

Bhabha implies that complex-sounding prose is needed to interpret and understand Fanon. Clarity, brevity and historical analysis are not needed.

This book is born of a massive pre-Oedipal-post-Foucauldian-pre-Hegelian-Electra-inferiority-complex in the contributors' attempts to outdo the colonial masters at the game of words, and not at the game of gaining political ground. Western 'radicals', argues Michael Neumann in *What's Left: radical politics and the radical psyche* (1988), are addicted to 'theory' and not to political success. To actually engage in projects that make political gains is a fate worse than death.

Read's contributors offer attacks on Fanon's correctable homophobia, misogyny and sexism. Moreover, these charges are made without fair reference to historical context, and are amplified to drown out Fanon's understanding of violence. Violence is the only thing the masters listen to. Nothing else. But political violence may not be a good companion to cultural and sexual politics; indeed, it may be bad to support it when trying to become a tenured high priest of cultural studies.

Listen to this delirious passage from the American, bell hooks:

> In love. I was thinking a lot about the place of empathy in any kind of ethic of care and the notion that part of how one embraces that

larger you – that you that Fanon uses – is through the capacity to embrace the other in some way. What does it mean if Fanon is unable to embrace the black female – what part of himself remains unembraced? How does the possibility of love or an ethic of care chart the path to this humanism that he poses as redemptive?

Are these consequential and serious psychological insights? Is there anything at all to be gained from 'thinking' about bell hooks' words? No. (This passage reminds me of the smell of an epoch when people used to smear on patchouli oil.) Need one really embrace questions of academic freedom of speech and tenure? These passages offer sufficient proof that activists who have anything contestatory to say are not permitted anywhere near the university or art institutions. Tenure protects complacent luminaries.

Read's book is a quintessential dead end. There is no human liberation here. It begins where Fanon began, not where Fanon left off. It is boring to see sloppy professors and artists toying with Fanon's bones in the old-fashioned world of sexual politics, and in the wordy flatulence of 'theory' devoted to more 'theory' and to more 'theory'.

Toronto   JULIAN SAMUEL

British Immigration Policy Since 1939: the making of multi-racial Britain

By IAN R.G. SPENCER (London, Routledge, 1997). 207pp. £14.99.

This book represents a strong current trend in historical research. Using only government sources, Ian Spencer argues that British immigration policy has been consistent in its determination to prevent the settlement of 'Asian and Black' people in Britain. In the century before the 1962 Immigration Act, this was achieved through administrative measures, but the failure of this administrative obstruction to prevent such immigration after 1945 led, after a decade of discussion and consideration, to the passing of the 1962 Act. Thus, Ian Spencer asks, not why did a 'laissez faire' policy change in 1962 but, rather, why was legislation not passed earlier? The research is based on close reading of government documents which demonstrates that legislation was raised and discussed in Cabinet throughout the 1950s. He claims that it was largely the economic and political links with the colonies and Commonwealth countries that prevented the government from acting sooner. 'Coloured' people living in Britain were closely monitored through the period by the use of surveys carried out by key officials. Evidence was sought for the assumption that they were a potential problem with respect to employment, housing and crime, and

the lack of evidence to support these assumptions failed to dent government determination to 'keep them out'.

The argument itself is not new. But this is the most thoroughly researched statement of it to date. The major problem with the work is that Ian Spencer extends the thesis far beyond the limits of his sources. He suggests that his work provides a challenge to the 'reserve army' thesis in that the government was consistent in its efforts to prevent the development of 'multi-racial' Britain, despite the post-war labour shortage. In fact, his evidence provides only a minor modification of the reserve army idea. It is clear that employers did welcome Asian and black workers, and international comparison shows that all industrialised countries have imported workers from former colonies or poorer economies, whether constructed as guest workers or citizens: labour needs would have, in the end, produced a multi-racial Britain.

The limitations and shortcomings of Spencer's argument arise from that powerful tradition in historical research which privileges official sources above all and to the exclusion of others. Ian Spencer consults no other sources; even newspapers referenced have been accessed through government documents. As a result, what we have here is, too often, no more than a descent into an academic account of the government view. The book is informed by a perspective which sees government as acting on and outside society, rather than being an integral part of it.

One other point. In his preface, Spencer declares that he has avoided using the term and the words 'race' and 'racially', as races don't exist. But, of course, he does use the concept of 'race'. Indeed, it appears in the title of the book. He is more concerned to make snipes at anti-racists and, in his refusal to name racism, he ends up leaving substantial aspects of government policy unchallenged. His thesis is theoretically impoverished and consequently he has misunderstood the significance of his own contribution.

Leicester   LORNA CHESSUM

The French Melting Pot: immigration, citizenship, and national identity

By GERARD NOIRIEL (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996). 326pp. £16.95.

Recent years have seen a rise in far-Right, anti-immigrant sentiment in France, both at the level of state policy and at a more popular level. This is reflected in electoral success for the Front National – a party which effectively fights on no issues apart from immigration. In fact, the electoral successes of the far Right go beyond anything that the extreme Right in Britain could hope for. While it is partially true that

economic crises lead to unemployment and social dislocation, which lead to racism, such a simplified economic analysis of the recent rise in racism and xenophobia in France is insufficient.

Noiriel argues that the category of 'foreigner' can only come to exist once a state has developed sufficiently to be able to define and 'track' its own citizens. In France's case, institutional xenophobia developed alongside a strong bureaucratic state apparatus which kept records on its citizens and was thus able to distinguish foreigners from French people. So, in Noiriel's view, the very difference between citizen and foreigner is, in fact, a fairly recent historical construct. This point strikes at the heart of far-Right populism which relies on its audience 'instinctively' understanding the difference between French citizen and foreigner.

Noiriel then goes on to show that large-scale immigration into France is not a new phenomenon; that community after community has come in to fill a space in the labour market, been welcomed in times of prosperity, suffered attack the moment it comes into competition with the local population and gradually undergone stabilisation and settlement in France. He emphasises the notion of continuity in this aspect of French history, demonstrating how the discourses used to attack 'foreigners' in the crisis periods of the 1880s and 1930s were very similar to those used against current migrants today.

There is, however, a danger with too much emphasis on continuity. This is that earlier xenophobia (e.g., towards Italian immigrants at the turn of the century) is entirely equated with modern racism. Any possible effects that the impact of colonialism, in particular, might have had on French consciousness go virtually ignored and, hence, any particularities of the African/North African/Indochinese experience in France today go largely unexplored. It is important not to deny that earlier waves of (European) migrants experienced stigmatisation and violence. However, French responses to, say, southern European economic migrants today could not possibly be comparable to reactions to African migrants. Today, racism and xenophobia have acquired distinct meanings and an elucidation of past xenophobia is insufficient to explain contemporary racism. Even if North African youth in France this century are fulfilling a similar economic role to that of young Belgian men in the nineteenth century, political and social structures and human psychology are not entirely economically determined and have changed since.

Then there is the question of 'assimilation' (which, given the particularities of French colonialism, is more important in France than in the UK). And here, Noiriel argues that what is crucial is the question of generations: that the processes taking place today are similar to those that took place with first-, second- and third-generation immigrants from Europe in the past. Each generation 'integrates'

further, while retaining some of the specificities of its parental culture. Levels of integration are evidenced by such criteria as the proportion of mixed marriages.

But to devote so much attention to the attempt to prove that present-day immigrants 'assimilate' no less than those of the past reinforces the notion that this is, of itself, important. It is necessary, though, to realise that the elevation of assimilation as an issue has basically been a project of the anti-immigrant Right and has served little purpose except as a tool to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria. By concentrating on how, when and why different communities have become assimilated into France, the book runs the risk of implying that the degree of assimilation of a community is the measure of its right to exist. More useful would have been an examination and analysis of how and why 'assimilation' has become such a big issue in France, particularly for the Right.

At a stylistic level, the book seems to be aimed at academics – the style is heavy and sometimes overly self-conscious. A lot of space is spent on rather abstract historiography – for example, on documenting how immigration has been largely ignored by French historians. At the level of content, it is clear that it is intended for readers who hold at least some of the beliefs of the far Right, as each chapter seems designed to confront a 'myth'. There is a rather patronising, anecdotal section documenting the contributions of well-known figures with immigrant backgrounds to French cultural, sporting and political life – one of the oldest and probably least effective ways of combating racism being to assume that it is a result of ignorance about the achievements of immigrants.

Nonetheless, flawed as it is, *The French Melting Pot* does at least reflect a shift towards questioning the bases and concept of a French 'national identity' – an assumption that has pervaded even liberal French thought and underlies some particularly French forms of racism.

London   MURAD BANAJI

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