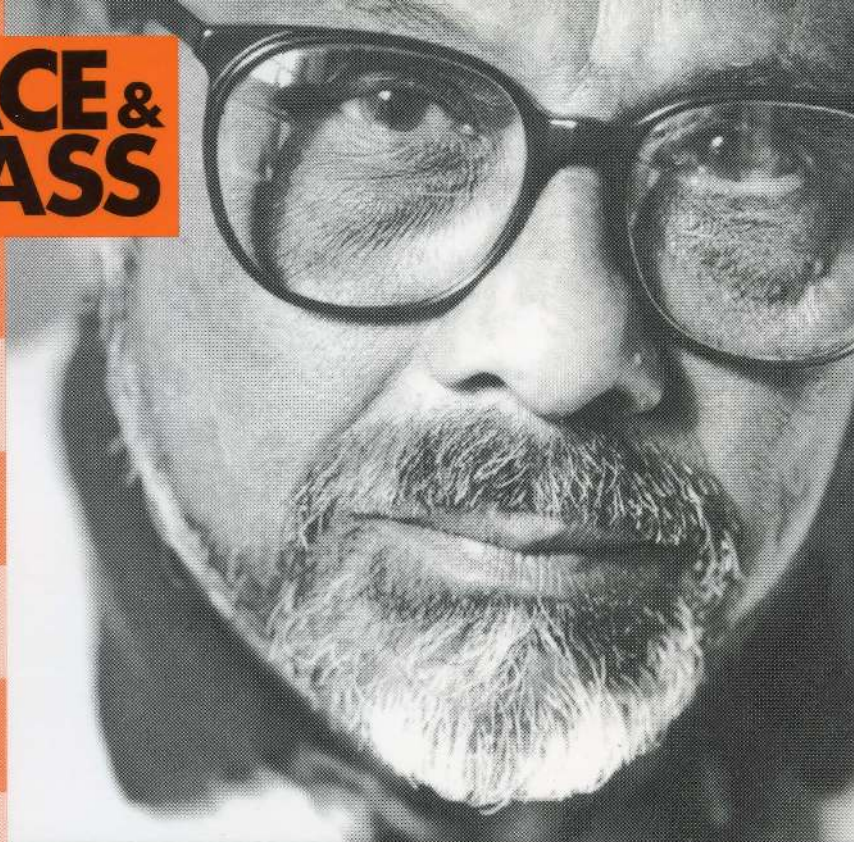


**RACE &
CLASS**



A WORLD TO WIN

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF

A SIVANANDAN

EDITED BY COLIN PRESCOD AND HAZEL WATERS

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A. SIVANANDAN**

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AND HAZEL WATERS

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Introduction

On the occasion of Sivanandan's 75th birthday, the editorial working committee of *Race & Class* has taken the opportunity to devote this issue of the journal to exploring and celebrating his unique contribution, not only to black struggle in Britain but to the anti-imperialist movement; not only to Marxist thought but to socialist practice; not only to philosophy but to literature. And to dedicate this issue as an expression of gratitude to a colleague and comrade who has helped to extend, in so many different ways, the possibilities for all of us.

Race & Class, the journal of the Institute of Race Relations, is, we believe, unique. That uniqueness derives from the principles hammered out by Sivanandan, with the support of some of the most distinguished scholar activists from the liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s – Eqbal Ahmad, Malcolm Caldwell, Basil Davidson, Chris Farley, Thomas Hodgkin, Ken Jordaan, Orlando Letelier – in the aftermath of the transformation of the Institute itself from serving the policy-makers to serving the policed. *Race* (as it then was) was seized from a dead academia and put to use; a dull, blunt instrument, it was honed, under Sivanandan's editorship, to a sharp and glittering scalpel to cut through the lies of power – in the belief that the function of knowledge is to liberate.

Race & Class sought to give primacy then, and does still today, to the analysis of their own realities by Black and Third World scholars, to challenging cultural and academic orthodoxies, to the recognition that the world to be won needs action as well as thought – to thinking, that is, in order to do.

And this is the first issue, in the 25 years of its regular publication (itself an achievement for an unfunded, unadvertised journal of the Left) that has not been scrutinised by his careful editorial eye, not been weighed by his political judgement, not been tested by his principles, principles kept ever fresh by his unprecedented ability to 'catch history on the wing'.

The wealth of articles gathered together here refracts, at one level, the multi-dimensionality of Sivanandan's achievement, the sheer breadth of his unseen, unsung influence. That influence is so powerful because it is so personal, speaks so directly to the recipient, whether the speaking is done face to face or in the pages of an article that, because it deals urgently with an issue of the now, touches immediately those caught up in its dilemmas. And, at another level, this collection testifies to the integrity and scope of his ambition – always for the poorest, the voiceless, always for a social order built on justice, on love of fellow human beings, never ever, in the slightest degree, for self.

As befits such an uncompromising integrity, there has been no public honour for Sivanandan's service to public life where it matters most – in its conception of and commitment to social justice; no roses, no myrtle. But then, publicity, notoriety is exactly what Sivanandan has never sought –

only truth, wherever, however, in whatever guise it may be found, and whatever the cost.

The cost has been great. Here is a man of such qualities and talents, creative in every sphere of life – from administration (creating the post-1972 Institute virtually from scratch) to librarianship (creating a whole philosophy of librarianship from the starting point of race) to publishing (creating this journal, IRR's sharply-focused research pamphlets, its education series) to black activism (fostering a range of black self-help movements from the Black Unity and Freedom Party onwards) to political thinking (creating an original, brilliant and committed *oeuvre* on race, imperialism, Marxism) to imaginative writing (creating an epic novel of his country, Sri Lanka) – only one of whose achievements, *When Memory Dies*, has received public recognition. Yet, in the midst of all, personal relationships have always come first, with a generosity that has been the bedrock of his life and work, helping friends, colleagues, comrades, without stint. One treasured expression of this ability to focus on the personal, without losing sight of the whole of which the personal is a part, is his mastery of – of all things – the obituary form, those jewels of sadness and celebration that mark the pages of *Race & Class*.

Much of this work, this achievement, was being built while he was also single-handedly bringing up his three children. 'Living comes before writing'.

That dictum may not be familiar – but 'thinking in order to do', 'the function of knowledge is to liberate', 'catching history on the wing', will all be recognised by readers as his phrases. And they all betray one of the most fundamental, yet little recognised, qualities of Sivanandan's work and life (the two are inextricable). He is the critic who creates, the theorist who practises, the thinker who does. And not only does the thinking inform the doing, but the doing shapes the thinking, yet never with any compromise to the truth. Academics, intellectuals, whose only responsibility is to follow where abstract thought leads, regardless of actual lives being lived in actual miseries, may theorise on what capitalism is, what imperialism is, what racism is. Sivanandan's concern is with what racism does, what imperialism does, what capitalism does. And, in analysing the doing, he also sees what is necessary for their undoing; how lives could and should be lived free of their incubus.

'What I do is me, for that I came'. Those words of Hopkins – whose poetry, like that of Eliot and Dylan Thomas, has also sunk deeply into his soul – could speak for Sivanandan. He is, to all who know him, whether personally or through his writings, the 'kingfisher' catching fire, the 'just man' justicing.

'What I do is me, for that I came'.

Hazel Waters

The theory of practice

Out of the dust of idols

As long ago as 1976, A. Sivanandan was to write, in words of extraordinary prescience:

Within ten years Britain will have solved its 'black problem' – but 'solved' in the sense of having diverted revolutionary aspiration into nationalist achievement, reduced militancy to rhetoric, put protest to profit and, above all, kept a black underclass from bringing to the struggles of the white workers political dimensions peculiar to its own historic battle against capital. All these have been achieved in some considerable measure in the past decade and a half – and the process has already thrown up the class of collaborators so essential to a solution of the next stage of the problem: the political control of a rebellious 'second generation'.¹

It is at least arguable that his classic essay, 'All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times',² is an enraged reflection, in much broader frame, upon the fulfilment of that dark prophecy which he had offered some fourteen years earlier. How much water had flowed under Westminster Bridge in the interim, and with what devastating effect, was well indicated in the fact that Stuart Hall, who had penned a brief and guarded introduction to *A Different Hunger*, would now be one of the principal contributors to, indeed, a shaper of, that special issue of *Marxism Today* (October 1988) which Sivanandan quite correctly regarded as a defining moment in the taming of the British new Left, or

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at least a substantial portion of it. Rereading that seminal essay is instructive today, almost a decade later, as what Hall and his colleagues had called 'New Times' – which was even then, as Sivanandan put it, 'Thatcherism in drag' – is now parading under the guise of New Labour, while Martin Jacques makes pathetic little attempts to distance himself from what he still so obviously desires.

I shall return to the text of that essay at some length presently. Some things need to be said straightaway, however. The sharp anger, which gives to the essay its special passion and precision, is there precisely because what was at stake was not some harmless little disagreement, of an academic nature, over this policy or that. Rather, the dispute was over the future of the British Left to the extent that the politics of that Left had very immediate repercussions for everyone who lived within the Isles, white or black, old native or new immigrant. But, then, the dispute was also over the modalities of, precisely, what Sivanandan had earlier called 'political control of a rebellious "second generation"' of black youth, even as the new racism – shifting more fully, in Sivanandan's eloquent phrase, from 'racism in the service of racism' to 'racism in the service of capital' – opened up the schools and universities for the formation of a new kind of black British meritocracy. In this context of racism's determination to create a 'class of collaborators', it mattered a very great deal what this 'second generation' of black British, entering schools and universities in the late '70s and '80s, heard from those older members of the British Left who were of Asian and Caribbean origin, and who had become in their own way illustrious and authoritative. It mattered a very great deal, in other words, what the role of the dominant black intellectuals – 'black' in the British sense of 'from the former colonies' – would be. They could try to show this youth the way back into those 'communities of resistance' that were comprised of a vast underclass living in and fighting from within the inner cities, and from which much of this 'second generation' was drawn. Alternatively, they could collaborate in a situation where the majority of this black youth was left behind to languish in those inner cities, while a meritocracy of what DuBois might have called 'the talented tenth' was led out of those communities, never to return, and, instead, to integrate itself into a new petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, self-absorbed and upwardly mobile, evading questions of class and colour in the name of an integral subjectivity, whose devotion to consumerism would now be glorified as a 'politics of pleasure'. The role of intellectuals like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha, and, more generally, of the principal figures in what was soon to be called 'postcolonial theory', came up for contentious discussion in this particular context. Hall mattered the most, in a way, thanks to his immensely authoritative presence for the British Left in general as well as an authoritative, virtually iconic status for black youth aspiring for their place in the academic sun. What he

said thus mattered, twice over. And because Sivanandan's latter essay was engaged with this whole range, it still offers – without intending to quite do so – a devastating critique of what we now know as 'post-colonial theory'. Most of the thematics of that theory, and most of what has been wrong with it, are all here.

* * *

To all that I shall return in some detail. Let me begin, though, with a different question: what was the moment of 1976, in Britain and elsewhere, when Sivanandan made his prediction? He had placed the argument within the story of the changing patterns of immigration in the post-second world war period and the impact of that immigration on the British economy, society and state policy. He divides this story essentially into three phases that can be summarised as follows.

In the phase of acute labour shortages immediately after the war, Britain was to import much labour from elsewhere in Europe as well as from the former and existing colonies. In that initial phase, levels of immigration were controlled not so much by the state, through strict categories and quotas, as by the market itself by adjusting supply to demand, in which unskilled and semi-skilled labour from the colonies ended up in the lowest paid jobs and the most decrepit housing. This labour market was fully streamlined by the end of the 1950s and the immigrant communities, burdened with economic deprivation as much as with effects of spiralling racialism, were ready to explode, as became clear in 1958. For the state, then, 'the first step was to slow down immigration, thin out the black presence, the second to manage racism'.³ In the second phase, inaugurated by the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, immigration was, in effect, restricted largely to professionals and the highly skilled: 'Over 75 per cent of the vouchers issued in the first half of 1966 alone went to such personnel.'⁴ By the end of the 1960s, thus, a two-pronged policy was in place.

On the one hand, rights were increasingly abridged for all classes of non-European immigrants, while those immigrant communities were internally much more sharply divided between a majority consigned to the lowest paid, non-growth sectors and a minority consisting of techno-managerial personnel ready to join the lower rungs of state employment and the private professions. On the other hand, there arose an elaborate state machinery 'to manage racism' by addressing, first of all, the grievances of the relatively well-to-do blacks and that, too, more in the social arena than in the economic.⁵ This 'race relations' side of the state was where the first openings were made for the black functionaries that mediated the relations between the British state and the immigrant communities. What was the consequence? Sivanandan's comment on the achievements of the Community Relations Commission, established in 1968, is eloquent:

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the Commission took up the black cause and killed it. With the help of its 'black' staff and its 'black' experts, with the help of an old colonial elite and through the creation of a new one, it financed, assisted and helped to set up black self-help groups, youth clubs, supplementary schools, cultural centres, homes and hostels. It defined and ordained black studies; it investigated black curricula; it gave a name and a habitation to black rhetoric... It has taught the white power structure to accept the blacks and it has taught the blacks to accept the white power structure... what has been achieved in half a decade is the incorporation of a whole generation of West Indian militants. The Asians had already settled into the cultural-pluralist set-up ordained for them by the state as far back as a decade ago... Only in regard to the Asian working class was there any trouble... The strategy of the state in relation to the Asians had been to turn cultural antagonism into cultural pluralism – in relation to the West Indians, to turn political antagonism into political pluralism.⁶

Sivanandan is here speaking specifically of the British experience and the shifts that occurred within that experience virtually year by year, shifts that must have remained largely imperceptible to most people at any given moment but were cumulatively so substantial that he was able to measure them in terms of a decade and even half decade. For one such as myself, more knowledgeable about the black experience in the United States than the immigrant experience in Britain, all this has nevertheless a familiar ring, and even the phrases resonate. There, too, during roughly the same years, the oppositional energies of the original Civil Rights Movement and the ghetto uprisings were eventually killed through state patronage and the money that flowed in 'with the help of its "black" staff and its "black" experts' who then put the state in a position from which 'it defined and ordained black studies; it investigated black curricula; it gave a name and a habitation to black rhetoric'. This trend had become altogether clear by 1976, when Sivanandan penned those words about Britain, and a 'habitation' was found for this rhetoric eventually not just in little neighbourhood centres or inner-city schools but in the whole system of universities, research institutes and *avant garde* journals, to the extent that now, in the late 1990s, Harvard serves as the most influential and lucrative of such habitations, as other famous universities – Columbia, Chicago, Princeton, Cornell – look at their senior, more powerful partner with envy.

In other words, the US, too, was home, during the decade of 1965-75 let us say, to that same unbridgeable social gulf between the ghettoised black militant and the middle-class white demonstrator that had prevented the coming together of the black agitations and rebellions with the predominantly white anti-war mobilisations. The two streams of '60s radicalism in the US had remained in their own time separate and

unequal and, if the extremities of black nationalist rhetoric prevented that potential consolidation from one side, the very class character and anarchistic culturalism of most of the white militancy did the job of dividing and bifurcating from the other side. The state was able, at length, to sift out the more recalcitrant elements in both camps and destroyed virtually all of them; the less recalcitrant on both sides of that militancy, black as well as white, the anti-war academic radicals as well as the beneficiaries of the black rebellions, were, however, pacified through incorporation, thus putting 'protest to profit'.

Two things happened in tandem. One was the transformation of the education system and, more broadly, the structure of training, employment and production in the ideological sphere as a whole. The more militant demands were abandoned, such as the demand for open admissions in all colleges – i.e., the demand that any youth from minority communities and low-income families who had completed high school be admitted to college and be provided the financial and educational supports to adequately equip herself for educational success and employment opportunity. As the emphasis shifted from confrontations over inner-city schools and undergraduate colleges in the state university system to more tenured positions and graduate admissions for the talented 1 per cent, the upper crust of the black intelligentsia was increasingly absorbed, with very handsome rewards, in the graduate departments of the elite universities, from where its representatives preached a US version of the postmodern 'New Times' – for example, 'the cultural politics of Difference', in Cornel West's significant phrase. The era of confrontational politics was already drawing to a close by the time of Nixon's incumbency and re-election in 1972. By the time the Carter presidency got going in 1976, the consolidation of a new type of black petty bourgeoisie meant that the politics of putting 'protest to profit' could now have full play.

For, what had also been happening was that even partial implementation of such reforms as curriculum revision and affirmative action – in education, employment, a range of business practices such as credit availability, contracts and rents – had brought an unprecedented number of black students into the educational mainstream. It had turned the study of black history, literature and culture, and generally the business of educating this enlarged black student population, into a much wider area of employment, research and publication; greatly expanded opportunities for black businesses catering to new categories of taste and demand arising out of this new social mobility for selected strata within the black population; and facilitated comparatively greater integration of black and white businesses and elites.

Meanwhile, starting especially from the '60s, there was a dramatic demographic shift as the US began importing petty-bourgeois entrepreneurs and techno-managerial strata much more from the Third

World, notably Asia and the Middle East, than from Europe. Cumulatively, then, these changes led to rapid expansion and transformation in the character of both the black and Asian bourgeois fractions in the United States. Already perceptible by the late 1970s, such shifts have by now altered the whole landscape of class relations and cultural claims. With a formidable proportion of high-flying professionals and businessmen, Indian immigrants and settlers in the United States are estimated to be, on average, the most affluent of the 'ethnic' communities there. This is fully reflected in the very formation of the postcolonial intelligentsia which is largely a US enterprise and in which intellectuals of Indian origin who are located in elite US universities have a controlling share. The African-American bourgeoisie, which used to be comprised mainly of such petty-bourgeois strata as clerks, porters, petty shopkeepers and lower-rung civil servants until after the second world war, now boasts a prosperous and relatively widespread social base in which, according to Manning Marable, 'By the mid-1990s, one in six black households earned incomes that exceeded \$50,000 annually.'⁷

Marable was to identify three specific consequences of such a radical class transformation. First, there arose, to some of the highest offices in the land, some very influential African-Americans who were nevertheless highly conservative: he cites the cases of general Colin Powell, commerce secretary Ronald Brown and Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas. Second, Marable notes the dramatic shift from popular militancy to pure electoralism; on the radical side of recent black politics, he cites the case of Jesse Jackson who preferred to disband his own very sizeable and growing 'rainbow coalition' rather than risk a break with leading lights of the Democratic Party. Third, he equally emphasises the rise of a large number of a novel kind of black neoconservative theorist and elected official on both sides of the electoral divide, among the Democrats as well as Republicans, who was very largely unresponsive to the black constituency which had put him there and responsive mostly to the right-wing white consensus which was keeping him there. For the first time in the history of US blacks, there has arisen a whole stratum of black political professionals who garner all the advantages of becoming the spokesmen of a sizeable and potentially rebellious minority without accepting any of the obligations or restrictions arising from that role, except the inverse obligation of keeping that minority disorganised and deliverable as a vote bank.

Marable is, by and large, silent on the issue of the 'Young Conservatives' among the upper crust of the black and immigrant academic intelligentsia,⁸ but that same tendency to combine great distance from the politics of the working classes with various rhetorics of radicalism, along with an easy acceptance of the market as the final arbiter of merit and the social good, which Sivanandan has noted about the dominant figures in the present generation of black academics in Britain, was equally evident

in the case of their US counterparts. I might add that if a certain number of intellectuals of Asian origin, Indian as well as Arab, have played a leading role in this campaign to 'reduce militancy to rhetoric' and thus to bridge the gap between Asian and black academic elites, some intellectuals of Caribbean origin, located primarily in Britain, have consolidated a transatlantic alliance of these rhetorics. This, too, has been, in its own way, a project to forge a novel kind of Black Atlantic.

* * *

These dramatic shifts have not been restricted to either the academic field or the Anglo-Saxon world. The reversal of trends that Sivanandan noted in 1976 in the politics of immigrant communities was part of a much wider and deeper reversal, and the academic fraction has been astonishingly docile in following trends that were set elsewhere, all claims of intellectual independence notwithstanding. New Times, for example, proved to be a mere caesura – something of a connecting link in the campaign of legitimation – between Thatcherism and 'New Labour'. I have analysed elsewhere, in very great detail, that reversal in the fortunes of the revolutionary and anti-imperialist forces around the world.⁹ Suffice it to say here that, as we look back on post-war history, the mid-1970s now appear to be the years when imperialism regained the decisive initiative after having been on the defensive for roughly a quarter of a century. It was perhaps the majesty and heroism of the Vietnamese revolution that made it difficult for us at that time to assess the magnitude of the shift in the global balance of forces. With the benefit of hindsight, though, one can now see that the defeat in Chile was perhaps the more substantial sign of the times.

Now, when the memory of those revolutionary years has begun to recede, it has become much more fashionable, even on the Left, to credit the financial and technological superiority of imperialist capital – the Right would call it civilisational superiority – as the real cause of those defeats. There is no gainsaying the fact that, throughout this period, imperialism has had immensely greater productive resources at its disposal than its adversaries could even dream of having, and that its ability to sustain a fully fledged technological revolution, not only during the long wave of prosperity during 1945-70 but also during the period of relative stagnation thereafter, attests to that material superiority. The reversal was, in any case, far more comprehensive and of a qualitatively different kind, in which the political played at least as substantial a role as the economic, and what happened in the domain of cultural theory was structurally connected with that whole complexity. How, then, did the world, not just Britain or the United States, look in 1976? Let me summarise.

There was, first, the erosion of the post-revolutionary regimes – in three quite distinct ways. Within the Soviet Union, the number of people

with more than a secondary education rose from twelve million in 1960 to forty million in 1985; standards of comfort and consumption rose dramatically during the Khrushchev era and then slowly but steadily under Brezhnev as well. However, the refusal of the regime to create a democratic polity in keeping with these rising educational standards and cultural aspirations meant a quantum increase in levels of mass disaffection, while the political decision violently to suppress the movements for socialist democracy in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and elsewhere meant a loss of popular faith in the ability of these regimes to reform themselves. This was the internal dynamic which, combined with unremitting imperialist pressure from the outside and the domestic Soviet failure to make a full transition from extensive to intensive industrialisation, meant that there was no longer much popular consent to accept standards of living that were demonstrably lower than in the advanced capitalist countries. That much had happened by 1976. When the Soviet regime did respond, in the shape of the Gorbachev reforms, initially presented as the second coming of Bukharin and Khrushchev and the Prague Spring, the reforms were belated, confused, incompetent, *ad hoc* and directionless. It was not at all clear whether the new regime aimed to create a reformed and more democratic socialism, as was claimed, or we were witnessing the rise of a new bourgeoisie, in the exact sense of the term, from among the state bureaucrats and their shady cohorts (in the already extensive black market, for example), as in fact happened. By 1988, when New Times were announced, the decomposition of the Soviet Union both as territorial state and as social system was fairly far advanced. It was a good time in Britain to break with the 'Stalinists' and start bridging the gap between Thatcherism and the Labour Party.

In a second set of post-revolutionary societies – the small countries where great revolutions had taken place, from Cuba to Vietnam to Mozambique – the sheer scale of imperialist aggression, military as well as economic, invasion as well as internal subversion, meant that any material foundations upon which something resembling a socialist society could be built were systematically destroyed. In China, meanwhile, the post-Maoist regime was already in power and was to launch, by 1978, full-scale 'reforms' to restore and vastly expand the capitalist system. It was only in the wake of this particular outcome of the political struggle inside China that the new technologies and financial resources of the imperialist system became so attractive to a Chinese ruling class which increasingly looked like a new, vastly more powerful Guomindang. No wonder that postmodernism has now become quite the rage among the university elite there, far beyond Hong Kong and quite aside from Taiwan, even as the new capitalist 'reforms' have already generated a 'floating population' of 80 million (expected to soon reach 200 million) who were, until recently, peasants and workers but

are now a massive reserve army of the unemployed which is making possible the super-exploitation of the employed working class. If the theoretical prestige of Althusserianism in corners of western Europe had been connected with the passing prestige of the Chinese cultural revolution in the '60s and '70s, the sharp decline of it a decade or so later was equally closely connected with the passing of modish Maoism in Paris and the elimination of the Gang of Four within China itself. Time had come for a new concoction of liberalism, pragmatism and post-modernism.

Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, what I have called 'the nationalism of the national bourgeoisie' was already exhausted and/or defeated by the mid-1970s. The murder of Lumumba in the Congo, the *coups* against Nkrumah in Ghana and against Soekarno in Indonesia, the rise of Sadat and *Infitah* ('Open Door') in Egypt, the descent of the Algerian FLN into corrupt and authoritarian developmentalism, the Declaration of Emergency in India – these were among the key episodes in the defeat and disorganisation of radical nationalism in Asia and Africa between the early years of post-war decolonisation and the mid-1970s. The more reactionary nationalisms that had been kept at bay in most instances but now began to replace those radical and usually secular nationalisms were, more often than not, based on the savage identities of race and religion, e.g., Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism in Sri Lanka, Hindu majoritarianism in India, the proto-fascist Islamisms of Afghanistan, Iran, Algeria, Sudan and elsewhere. It is difficult to recall now that Iraq and Sudan had mass communist parties during the 1950s, or that in 1948 the British Foreign Office was receiving secret diplomatic mail from its functionaries stationed in Tehran, saying that Tudeh need make no revolution because it was poised to take power constitutionally. The 'postcolonial theory' that arose on the ruins of that world, merely as an adjunct of Parisian high fashion, offers no account of that whole complex history of struggles and defeats in the very postcolonial period of which it claims to be the theory. Indeed, it methodically suppresses memories of that kind and dismisses them as myths of progress, rationalist nostalgia, etc. The requisite adjustments were made nonetheless: from Third Worldist nationalism to postmodernist rejection of all nationalism, *tout court*; from secular nationalism to celebrations of Khomeinism to a liberal suspicion of all 'isms'; from anti-imperialism to a play of Differences, and so on.

The theory itself arose, in any case, not within the imperialised world but in the imperial centres – not in the former colonies but in the colonising ones – among intellectuals of Third World origin whose entire experience and world view were framed by these epochal shifts, including class shifts within the immigrant communities, as they were experienced and understood within those centres. This issue will come up later. Let me return, though, to the equally important matter of the

shifts that were occurring within these centres. In addition to the tendencies already discussed with reference to Britain and the United States, we should also note some other shifts of great importance.

* * *

There was, first, the termination of revolutionary hopes. The Portuguese revolution was perhaps the last event in the history of capitalist Europe which still held out the promise of revolutionary transformation within a colonising country, and the defeat of that revolution meant that revolutionary hopes were terminated in the region as a whole. Second, the collapse of the Common Programme in France and the later defeat of the PCI in the 1976 elections then signalled a definitive defeat of Eurocommunism as well, in which some of those who later drafted the New Times manifesto had invested great hopes. Third, there was an equally great crisis of social democracy itself; Mitterrand, who had so cynically used the Common Programme for his own purposes and in whom so many of the former rebels of Paris had invested equally strong hopes, was to emerge as Reagan's closest ally in Europe, alongside Margaret Thatcher. The twin crises of Eurocommunism and of western European social democracy were perhaps best symbolised in the fact that the Italian socialists, to whom Berlinguer had offered his 'historic compromise', were to come to power under Craxi, who surely matched, often exceeded, the corruptions of the Christian Democrats. Fourth, the labour movement as such faced a series of defeats throughout Europe, symbolised most graphically in the defeat of the miners' strike in Britain.

Finally, there were the multiple and even contradictory consequences of the onset, from the early 1970s, of relative stagnation throughout the advanced capitalist world. The offensives of capital against labour in the core countries became far more brutal than had been the case during the preceding decades, as the employment expectations, wage rates and social expenditures that had been associated with the welfare state came under fierce attack. As declining levels of industrial accumulation were compensated for by radical redistribution of income from the poor to the rich, even Keynesianism was no more. The demise of Eurocommunism and the disarray in social democratic ranks surely paved the way for the success of those Thatcherite-Reaganite offensives but, at a deeper structural level, the full-scale retreat of the two principal tendencies in the western European labour movement was itself a consequence of the end of social democratic illusions; Eurocommunism and the 'historic compromise' it offered had actually been a latter-day Keynesianism.

Under the pressure of this brutal capitalist offensive, fissures between the different layers of the working people and the immigrant communities widened, with their own novel effects on the radicalism of the intelligentsia, so that radicalism came to be identified almost exclusively

with rhetoric, in the classical sense of the art of persuasion; lectures in the classroom and books issued from university presses came to replace the political pamphlet and the kind of political activity of which the pamphlet had sought to be an adjunct. Perhaps for the first time since the advent of working-class politics, a whole intellectual fraction arose which made for itself the largest radical, even revolutionary, claims but which had no affiliation, past or present, with political parties, trade unions, mass strikes, working-class neighbourhoods, or insurgent struggles of the poor outside the academic arena. In a parallel move, most of the humanist intellectuals who had been previously associated with what Sivanandan has called 'communities of resistance' left the risky arena of confrontational politics and retired to academic enclaves to expound on theories of hegemony, etc. Culturalism, and the inflation of the cultural sphere as the primary arena of struggle, was the direct product of this curious mixture of retirement and employment.

This, too, was structurally related to the kind of divisions capital itself had introduced within college and university systems. Faced with long term stagnation, capital could no longer adequately finance the whole range of higher education needs as it had promised during the decades of prosperity. The same stagnation required, however, that capital continue with the technological renovation of its own means of production and communication, which, nevertheless, could not be financed without withdrawing resources from the humanities and social sciences and concentrating them on science and technology. This, in turn, required the reorganisation of the impoverished sectors as such, both to contain protest and to sustain the requisite level of instruction and reproduction. So, the field of higher education in the humanities and social sciences was drastically revamped. As conditions of work deteriorated for the majority of the personnel employed in these areas, there also arose an elite at the apex of this personnel whose rewards were greater than anything the humanist intelligentsia had ever known. While unemployment among fresh Ph.Ds expanded to unprecedented proportions and class sizes increased constantly for the less famous, even as promotions became more difficult for them, fellowships, lecture fees and other perks soared for the very narrow stratum at the top. The acquiescence of the majority was thus gained cheaply: the famous were given inordinate powers to determine who would or would not get the jobs, the promotions, the lecture fees, the opportunities to publish in periodicals and publishing projects supervised by the famous, while those opportunities, in turn, determined the opportunity for jobs and promotions and lecture fees for the lower strata within higher education. Conformity and herd-like clubbiness were the systemic expressions of a much deeper fear of being left behind, even as this new conformism's own claims of political radicalism kept getting taller. Within this academic atmosphere, then, it was only among those who

did not command such powers and did not pursue such an exaggerated sense of being special that any meaningful and enduring relation with actual communities of resistance could be found.

The larger shifts in the world, of course, affected everyone, but the restructuring of humanistic disciplines in the university that I have summarised above was much more possible and visible in the United States where the phenomenon of the radical academic superstar was born, thanks to the sheer size of the money. And this kind of superstar was much more remote from the world of the working class there, since the US had neither a social democratic party like the British Labour Party nor a welfare state in the European sense. Ever since McCarthyism destroyed the old Left, and the political movements of the 1960s were partly crushed and partly co-opted, academic radicalism usually had a much more individualistic and clubby character there even than in Britain. And the case of *Marxism Today* was special even inside Britain. Born of a break within British communism, it was still on its way to *discovering* the virtues of individualism and consumerism, even as it thought of itself as an intervention in mass politics. It was thus very much a hybrid, transitional phenomenon. Hence the peculiarity that the New Times ideology that Sivanandan analysed in 1990 with such superb effect was, in one substantial sense, a specifically British phenomenon and yet, at its ideological core, it contained much that was to become integral to postcolonial theory as it stabilised itself on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, Stuart Hall himself was to keep shifting until he emerged, late in his career, a self-professed 'postcolonial'.

* * *

What was the nature of Sivanandan's criticism and argument? First, he accurately pinpointed that which was specifically British about it. 'In France and Italy', he said, 'the Eurocommunists were parties in their own electoral right, but in Britain *Marxism Today*, having broken with the "Stalinists", had no comparable base.' In essence, then, the New Times prognosis was an attempt by a narrow but influential group to serve as something of a think-tank and help modernise the Labour Party – in the image of Thatcherism itself, as it turned out. In a classic formulation, Sivanandan was able to get to the heart of the matter in a way that would apply to much more than the immediate object of his criticism. 'New Times', he said, 'was born in the throes of political pragmatism under the sign of cultural theory bereft of economic reasoning.'¹⁰

Part of the pragmatism was that an ideology born out of a whole series of defeats that the working classes and revolutionary movements had faced, nationally and globally, refused to see itself as such and presented itself, instead, as a politics of pure pleasure, a happy awakening from the false consciousness of Old Times. Its 'economic reasoning'

was based largely on the buzz words of a new kind of technological determinism (post-Fordism, flexible production, information technology, globalisation, decline of the nation state, decline of classes, rise of consumerism and life-style, and the rest); determinism in the specific sense that everything that happens in society and politics seems here to be determined by certain technological changes in certain branches of industry in certain regions of the world. And, since specific technological changes were the point of origin, this 'reasoning' could preoccupy itself with explaining the 'conjuncture' produced by flexible production, etc., dispensing with any need to give a historical account of the class struggles, revolutionary movements, imperialist wars and counter-offensives, grounds won and lost, over a whole century around the globe, which had been central in producing this 'conjuncture', flexible production notwithstanding.¹¹

The working classes as key agents of historical change were dissolved twice over. It is not that they had been defeated through unremitting warfare spanning the whole century and the entire globe; the case was made out that they had been calmly dispersed by 'flexible decentralized production', class belonging giving way happily to life-style consumption. But then, as Sivanandan was to point out, this 'economic' explanation appeared alongside another quite different account without being organically connected with it, in which semiotics seemed to be the science of choice and which served to shift 'the language of politics more over to the cultural side', so that the search for 'meaning', rather than the desire for liberation from infinite toil and exploitation, was said to be at the heart of working-class consciousness, for the simple reason that the 'symbolic' rather than the 'real' was the very stuff of consciousness – *all* consciousness, consciousness of *everything*. If the 'economic' could be traced to technological change rather than to the struggle of classes, the culturalist side of the argument referred itself to a very special kind of revolutionary history: 'the cultural revolutions of the '60s, 1968 itself' and the 'theoretical revolutions of the '60s and '70s – semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism'.¹²

Why had the two explanations, the 'economic' and the social-cultural, remained parallel without any causal connection? The point that Sivanandan emphasised most was that Stuart Hall was so wary of 'economic determinism' that he was unwilling to draw the really radical conclusions that flowed logically from his own economic argument, namely that (a) the shift to the 'social-cultural' had itself been determined by the changes in the 'economic' and (b) that 'the terrain of battle' had moved 'from the economic to the political, from the base to the superstructure', thanks precisely to the specificities of 'post-Fordist' technologies and processes of production. The point is well taken, but I would probably want to disagree with a part of it. Sivanandan shares, in my view, far too much of Hall's 'economic' explanation, while dis-

agreeing with him very fundamentally on some other counts: (1) Hall's refusal to draw conclusions for his 'social-cultural' argument from his own 'economic' one; (2) Hall's endorsement of what would become the stock themes of post-Marxism and his absurd celebrations of shopping, consumerism, etc.; (3) the extremity and even elitism of Hall's politics of the semiotic and the symbolic; (4) Hall's prescription, in effect, that Labour could recover lost ground only by taking all the steps of Thatcherism and more; and, finally, in consequence of the whole structure of this argument, (5) the disappearance from it of that one-third of Britain – the immigrant, the poorest of the poor whites – who should have been, as Sivanandan points out, 'socialism's first constituency'.

Much of this criticism of Hall is wholly impeccable and I shall return to those points presently. But two disagreements with Sivanandan I should also register, precisely at the point where he seems largely to agree with Hall. The more substantive has to do with the 'economic' itself. The methodological flaw seems to be that there is, on the one hand, an attempt to offer an account of the present 'conjuncture' in the history of capitalism as such – an account which can now only be a global account and must therefore base itself on the structures of very uneven development on the global scale, in which the story of 'flexible production' in some areas can only be told in conjunction with the inflexibility of all the rest. And there is, on the other hand, without any proper transition from one level of analysis to another, an immediate preoccupation with British politics in the moment of Thatcherism. At the global level of this analysis, the news of 'the emancipation of Capital from Labour' is, in my view, greatly exaggerated. Let me put it this way: India is not pre-capitalist but capitalist; most of the labour processes here are not post-Fordist but pre-Fordist; most of the profits here are made not through the deployment of dead labour but through super-exploitation of the living.¹³ As for the British end of things, the analysis is more plausible but the political conclusions that are drawn do not follow immediately, because the analysis occludes that very large part of the story which is itself neither techno-economic nor merely British. I will again put it telegraphically: the coming of the welfare state across western Europe – classical social democracy, reformed capitalism – had a lot to do with the palpable threat of working-class revolutions in the very centres of European capital; at a later stage, capital's offensives for the liquidation or at least contraction of that type of state and civil society in that same region had just as much to do with the termination of that threat. Technological change facilitates, but it does not determine. The economic is surely the base, but the actual balance of force among contending classes and class forces, in any given 'conjuncture', is determined not merely by the economic but politically and historically.

Which brings me to my second point about Sivanandan's objection to Hall's argument, i.e., his view that Hall's 'economic' argument ('Brill-

iant, clear, to the point, exhaustive', Sivanandan calls it, without irony I think) could have yielded very radical conclusions and much more substantive premises for his own social-cultural analysis but that he does not draw those conclusions because he is too wary of 'economic determinism'. Now, that fear of 'determinism' may well be why Hall did not attempt to establish a causal relation between his 'economic' argument and the 'social-cultural' one. My own sense is that the exercise would have proved futile in any case. What Hall was refusing in that argument was not 'economic determinism' even in the last instance, going farther than Althusser, but any primacy of the 'real' itself, somewhat in the wake of Baudrillard's 'hyper-real', etc. He could not possibly refer to real majorities, contemptuously, as 'so-called real majorities', nor speak so comfortably of 'symbolic majorities' as being primary for electoral processes, if he did not so radically question the primacy of the 'real'. The fundamental preoccupation here is not with the political economy of flexible production but with mediatic fabrication of the Society of the Spectacle. So radical a primacy of the semiotic can simply not be derived from an 'economic' explanation in any recognisable sense of that term. And that 'one-third' of British society which Sivanandan identified as the 'first constituency of socialism' tended to get very much out of focus because the focus here was more on the symbolic aura of things than on the real relations among persons.

The two strands of Hall's argument remained causally and structurally separate because they belonged to two irreconcilable strands in Hall's own intellectual frame. One of these strands belonged more to his own past as an activist within the 'immigrant' communities, a Marxist very much like Eric Hobsbawm, a cultural materialist in the mould of Raymond Williams – a past that, much to his credit, he has not been willing entirely to forego, as so many of his colleagues have. But, then, there was this later strand, derived from 'the theoretical revolutions of the '60s and '70s – semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism', which made it difficult to make the journey back to that one-third of Britain which should have been socialism's 'first constituency'. Much of Hall's later work is shaped by this unresolved tension.

That I would have some reservation about Sivanandan's assessment of the role of the 'economic' in that particular argument is a minor matter. And rehashing that earlier argument over Thatcherism and Labour's transformation would now be of largely archival interest, even though Sivanandan had wonderfully trenchant things to say about it, and even though today's New Labour has a curious kinship with yesterday's New Times. What is of great, continuing significance about that argument is that it focuses our attention so vividly on the fact that cultural theory as it came to be refitted with 'the theoretical revolutions of the '60s and '70s – semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism' has served, in the hands even of some of the best of its practitioners, to press

the political agenda of the academic Left in the direction of political pragmatism and, eventually, towards the neoliberal Right as it gets reborn in the shape of Blair's New Labour in Britain and the Clintonite Democrats in the US. In the British context, and in the hands of the more forthright authors like Hall, the connection has been clearer, at least in the past, because there was still the intention to intervene in the conduct of actual politics, and one could not simply mystify one's positions if one was also trying to speak programmatically. In other contexts and in other hands, where even that sense of responsibility is lacking (and it is lacking, in most cases, owing to the lack of any programmatical political involvement), that same connection has been more mystified. It is very hard to see, in either case, what there is in the post-Marxist, postmodernist, postcolonialist theories – in postism generally – that could be systematically distinguished from very ordinary and very familiar kinds of liberalism and pragmatism, all the radicalism of the rhetoric notwithstanding.

In this larger context, then, what was distinctive about Sivanandan's argument was that it addressed a large number of issues that were by no means restricted to Hall or even *Marxism Today* but are still with us, so that we shall do well to listen to those words yet again.¹⁴ On the broader issue of what have come to be known as the 'new social movements', for example, Sivanandan's summary position, with its delicate balance of involved solidarity and critical interrogation, continues to have the same relevance that it did about a decade ago:

What is so profoundly socialist about these new social forces is that they raise issues about the quality of life (human worth, dignity, genuine equality, the enlargement of the self) by virtue of their experiences as women, blacks, gays, etc, which the working-class movement has not just lost sight of but turned its face against. But if these issues are fought in terms of the specific, particular oppressions of women *qua* women, blacks *qua* blacks and so on, without being opened out to and informed by other oppressions, they lose their claim to that universality which was their particular contribution to socialism in the first place. And they, further, fall into the error of a new sectarianism... which pulls rank, this time, on the basis not of belief but of suffering. (32)... It is not enough to ask what it is that the new social forces bring to the socialist movement without also asking what it is within these movements that could be corrupting of socialism. (34)

It is not clear how each social force, constituted by a specific form of oppression or social ill (the gay movement, the environmentalists), is to be 'opened out' to other such forces (transitory, issue-by-issue, day-by-day coalitions? some more durable form of collectivity?), but what is remarkable is this conception of the struggle for socialism as a broad church (a 'universality') in which there are no privileged sufferers or

natural leaders, and in which every struggle over the quality of life objectively contributes to the struggle for socialism, even though many of the actual participants in those struggles may not consciously think so. The democratisation of the culture of resistance that this vision associates with the plurality of transforming agents can be fruitfully contrasted with the argument of the New Timers that widening networks of consumption, life-style choices and shopping signify the deeply democratising spirit of popular culture and of capitalism itself. This issue of consumption reconceived as liberation comes up a bit later in Sivanandan's own argument:

'have we become so bewitched', asks Stuart Hall, 'by who, in the short run, reaps the profits from these transactions and missed the deep democratisation of culture which is also a part of their hidden agenda? Can a socialism of the twenty-first century revive, or even survive, which is wholly cut off from the landscapes of popular pleasures?' (36-7)

And Sivanandan retorts:

Should we become so bewitched by 'the deep democratisation of culture' that we miss out on those who reap the profits from 'these transactions'? How do you gauge democratisation – by its spread or the spread of effective choice – and how deep is it that it deprives a third of the population of such choice?... In an age of 'designer capitalism', as Robin Murray terms it, who 'shapes' our lifestyles? Who still sells us the ideas that sell us the things that we buy? Who lays out for us 'the landscapes of popular pleasures'? (37)

One would have thought that it was the gratification gained through consumption that could be associated with the immediate moment and therefore the 'short run', whereas 'profits' were intrinsically a part of the more enduring structures of the expanded reproduction of capital itself. And it is hard to see how 'deep democratisation' is actually part of the 'agenda', 'hidden' or not, of the profiteers, as Hall claims. He reverses the real logic of the short and the long run and credits the profiteers with a nobler 'agenda' – which can only mean 'conscious pursuit' – than could plausibly be the case. Nor is it clear what 'democratisation' in Hall's view actually means. Ordinarily, 'democratisation' would be associated with equality, but not only is one-third of the population simply barred from effective demand in the market-regulated consumption within Britain itself, as Sivanandan points out, but access to consumption is hierarchically structured for all the rest as well. Some get Cadillacs, others make do with shampoos and ice creams. Marx once said that the formal equality of individuals in liberal doctrine reflects the fact that the exchange of commodities in the market is organised in a language of equivalence. It is probably this kind of 'equivalence' that Hall here mistakes for 'deep

democratisation'. In all these emphases, and in assigning such higher ends to these 'transactions' in the market, Hall merely repeats one of the stock ideological claims of capitalist liberalism: that the market itself is the real agent and guarantor of 'deep democratisation'.

Marx had once thought that no 'landscape of popular pleasures' could actually be organised in any authentic sense until labouring humanity, the popular masses, regained control over the means and processes of production, whereas those who were alienated in the very process of their productive activity would, for the most part, enjoy even their leisure in ways that were deeply alienating. Now it transpires that lack of control over one's own labour, including the products of that labour, can be overcome through 'product choice' for the purpose of consumption; the era of class struggle is said to be over, since the individual is now free to choose from a variety of goods and services. And so we return to the 'individual', the abstract universal of all liberal thought, as the supreme good and as the primary locus of all pleasure, all resistance, all freedom. From here, then, there is a very short step to the ideology of 'the personal is political'.

Sivanandan's treatment of this theme is subtle and complex, so I will not try to summarise it. Two emphases can be recalled, however. One is that, as he put it, 'By personalising power, the "personal is the political" personalises the enemy.' (37) Taken to its logical consequence, this personalising of the enemy leads to a condition of permanent civil war in which every individual is pitted against a series of shifting individuals, along lines of colour, gender, sexual preference, in an infinite number of personalised antagonisms, so that the structural basis of oppressions disappears from sight and the building of solidarities across these lines of personal antagonisms becomes impossible. By the same token, moreover, liberation, too, becomes personalised and voluntaristic. Since it captures a particular moment in black politics so very vividly, and because it nevertheless makes a much larger, much more fundamental statement, the following needs to be recalled in full:

The 'personal is political' has also had the effect of shifting the gravitational pull of black struggle from the community to the individual at a time when black was already breaking up into ethnics. It gave the individual an out not to take part in issues that affected the community: immigration raids, deportations, deaths in custody, racial violence (38)... There was now another venue for politics: oneself... If, in addition, you 'came out' black, by wearing dreadlocks say, then you could be making several statements... Equally, you could make a statement, by just being ethnic, against Englishness, for instance; by being gay, against heterosexism; by being a woman, against male domination... the individuals who could leave the black community to its problems and mind their own were those who were not directly

affected by them: the emerging black middle class of functionaries and intellectuals... The flight of the intellectual, however, is not confined to the black community – that is a particular type of flight: new, raw, immediately noticeable (39)... It is part of a larger, smoother, more sophisticated flight of Left intellectuals from class – a flight that was already intimated in the philosophical excursions of theoretical Marxism and the politics of Eurocommunism but found objective justification in ‘post-Fordism’. (40)

This is an extraordinary passage. It condenses several overlapping moments in the evolution of what eventually came to be called ‘identity politics’. The moment of the multiplication of identities, in two quite different ways: the same individual could be black against white, woman against man, lesbian against ordained heterosexuality, even African against Arab, and so on; and multiplication also in the sense that every kind of oppression produced its own unique kind of sufferer, and the sufferer was fundamentally accountable only to those who shared in that identity; each identity produced, in other words, its own kind of free masonry. And the moment of fracture: the fracture of a black identity into numerous ethnic identities: it was no longer sufficient that you were collectively designated ‘black’ in a society permeated with white racism, nor that you were all immigrants from the various colonies of the same colonising power; what mattered most now was that the Grenadian was not a Sri Lankan, a Sri Lankan not an Indian, an Indian not a ‘Paki’, a Gujarati not a Kashmiri and so on; all the units falling out of this fracture were then locked with each other in a deadly embrace of either pure competition or, at best, collaborative competition. The moment of a malleable subjectivity, in which one’s politics was related fundamentally not to collectives and solidarities but to one’s own interiority which was then free to express itself in public in terms of one’s own choosing: dashiki, jeans, dreadlocks, business suits, shaved head; all the stigmata of dress codes to make oneself believe that the self was free because it could be remade, over and over again, in a spectacular politics of appearances. Finally, the moment of double-faced narcissism: one picked up a collective identity from a shopping list of identities, white, black, gay, woman, what have you; but the life-style version of the ‘personal is political’ meant that the main business of even this shared identity was not that of mutual responsibility but of self-fashioning; you needed a socially recognisable identity so that you could be self-identical in your own unique way, and being gay, for instance, was fundamentally a *self-expression*.

But then, towards the end of the passage, there are three other emphases. One is that this kind of flight from collectivity into self-fashioning was a privilege of a very special kind, available only to the emerging middle-class black functionaries and intellectuals; this empha-

sis actually takes us back to the essay of 1976 with which I began this piece and which was focused on the black experience in Britain. Here, in this riposte to *New Times*, the issues are wider. So, a distinction is immediately made: the black intellectual is not the only one given to such flights but is only more noticeable because, as a black person making this decision in the midst of a white society, the decision produces a different kind of raw pain, visibility and solitude. In the larger scheme of things, this is part of 'a larger...flight...of Left intellectuals from class' that remains, in the case of white intellectuals, 'smoother' because it is performed with the confidence that one is in one's own inherited world and merely shifting from one location to another, as one might change one's postal address. If Eurocommunism had paved the way for a 'historic compromise' between historically antithetical positions, the ideology of 'flexible production' was now to facilitate flexible and shifting political locations for individuals whose identities, too, had become fluid. That is so because: 'From then saying "farewell to the working class" to electing themselves the new agents of change in *New Times* was but a short and logical step.' (40) That final step has been crucial, not just in the personal biographies of the *New Times* ideologues but in the making of a collective narcissism of the academic Left much more generally, on both sides of the Atlantic. If the working classes and communities had only been left behind but left in their own way intact, the intellectual could always be asked, wherever he/she landed after the 'flight', just what his/her relationship now was with that which was left behind but which was still very much there. In order to pre-empt even the possibility of such interrogation, it was necessary to invent a whole sophisticated theory of the *disappearance* of classes and communities as stable, identifiable, unmelting entities; the flight of the intellectual could make him or her free only if the world itself was now represented as pure flux. As it turned out, that 'farewell to the working class' was not a leave-taking on the eve of one's own departure but something of a funeral oration after which the ancestor could be buried so that one was then free to become the head of household.

Out of such jubilant orations was postcolonial theory at length born. Little did Sivanandan know in 1990 how quickly, in the hands of an immigrant elite, *New Times* would become simply Postcolonial and declare itself a timeless Sublime.

References

The title is taken from a passage of Jacques Roumain that Sivanandan quotes at the end of his essay, 'The liberation of the black intellectual', in *A Different Hunger: writings on black resistance* (London, Pluto Press, 1982), p. 97.

- 1 'Race, class and the state: the black experience in Britain', in *Race & Class* (Vol. XVII, no. 4, 1976), reprinted in *A Different Hunger*. Quoted from the latter, p. 101.

- 2 *Race & Class*, (Vol. 31, no. 3, 1990), reprinted in A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: writings on black struggles for socialism* (London, Verso, 1990).
- 3 *A Different Hunger*, op.cit., p. 105.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- 5 Sivanandan cites a telling statistic. 'In the year April 1969 to March 1970, for instance, the highest percentage of success recorded related to discrimination in clubs: 50 per cent, the lowest to dismissals in employment: 4 per cent.' *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp.120-1
- 7 Manning Marable, 'Rethinking black liberation: towards a new protest paradigm', *Race & Class* (Vol. 38, no. 4, 1997).
- 8 Jurgen Habermas makes a useful distinction between 'the Young Conservatives' and 'neoconservatives'. In the latter category, he includes those former liberals in the US, such as Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer and Seymour Martin Lipsit, who turned to the Right in the moment of the crisis of US liberalism ensuing from the Vietnam war and the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s. See 'Neoconservative cultural criticism in the United States and Germany', in his *The New Conservatism: cultural criticism and the historian's debate* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1992). The more polemical and combative term 'Young Conservatives' he uses for the leading members of the philosophical and cultural *avant garde* – e.g., Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard – that rose to pre-eminence in Paris in the wake of May 1968. One could make a similar distinction between the 'neoconservative' functionaries of the political machine that Marable discusses, and the academic 'Young Conservatives' (by now not so young either), such as Kwame Appiah, Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates Jr, who rose to dominance in black academic life in the US after the earlier rebellions had been defeated.
- 9 Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: classes, nations, literatures* (London, Verso, 1992). See, in particular, the introduction, as well as chapters 2 and 8.
- 10 *Communities of Resistance*, op.cit., p. 23.
- 11 As the postist positions, of which the New Times ideology was one, came to dominate Anglo-American academe, the very idea of history as an intelligible sequence of events over time came under great hermeneutic suspicion, and 'conjecture' was all that could be reliably addressed – leading to its own kinds of political pragmatism.
- 12 The ideological universe of Hall's formulations here is so doggedly European that the text does not indicate, one way or the other, whether the Chinese cultural revolution was any part of these 'cultural revolutions of the '60s'.
- 13 A somewhat similar point could be made about China as well, where: 'The share of labour intensive manufactures in total exports rose from 36% in 1975 to 74% in 1990... Between 1985 and 1993 employment in textiles increased by 20%, in clothing and fibre products by 43%, in plastic products by 51%.' (United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report*, New York, 1996. Quoted in David Harvey, 'The geography of the manifesto', in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, eds., *Socialist Register 1998*, Suffolk, Merlin Press.) That this intensified exploitation of labour, so reminiscent of what Marx once called 'primary accumulation', should coincide perfectly with the coming of the counter-revolutionary regime in China is far from coincidental. Dead labour is simply in no position to displace the primacy of living labour – not at any rate in countries like India and China which together account for roughly half of humanity. There are many such countries in the world, only smaller by comparison. Sivanandan does make the general point that 'flexible production' in the advanced capitalist countries presumes the super-exploitation of the Third World but does not, in my view, draw the requisite conclusion for his own 'emancipation of Capital from Labour' for what he identifies as a whole new stage of capitalism as such.
- 14 All the following quotations are from 'All that melts into air', op.cit. Page numbers are embedded in the text.



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TIMOTHY BRENNAN

Poetry and polemic

When I was in graduate school at Columbia University, *Race & Class* was banished to the basement library of the School of International and Public Affairs – a tall, forbidding high-rise on the wrong side of Amsterdam Avenue. Stockpiled under the fluorescent lights of the ill-used periodicals room in a part of the university reserved for future diplomats and foreign agents, the journal could only come off to a New York graduate student as a curio from an unknown London, warehoused for the benefit of some future dissertation on failed utopia. This physical location (one might call it a kind of exile) had the effect of keeping the journal for the only students who knew how to use it; the poets and the socialists who (like me) would slip over to enemy territory from time to time to find a reprieve from the suffocating efflatus of Lionel Trilling and ‘high’ literary learning.

This is a paradox, I think. Anyone who knows *Race & Class*’s editor, A. Sivanandan, knows that he cannot write an essay without quoting T. S. Eliot at least once. One could see right away that ‘Siva’ spoke the language of literary learning – not an aestheticised learning, but nevertheless majestic, even spiritual. I survived graduate school in part by reading *Race & Class* and by sharing its anger. Not that it was literary criticism, of course. The articles were not about Shelley. They were Shelley – the rebel poet of English tongue and street-corner broadside, equator of beauty and revolution.

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There is a lot to be written, it seems to me, about rhetoric and politics, especially the rhetoric of iconoclasm. In that mode, the rhetor is less an orator or stylist than a public litigant (wasn't it Shelley who once called Roman law 'poetry'?). Sivanandan was a poet even before he became a published novelist – and he was, in that sense, like his contemporary E. P. Thompson, whose fights with the British cultural conservatives and francophilic theorists were laced with Blake, Hopkins, and Auden, living the sort of literature that makes writing move. In a much more direct, less scholarly, way Siva always kept the same company as Thompson, and wrote with the same *modus operandi*.

To bring up rhetoric in this way, though, is to make one wonder if a case cannot be made for a classicism that has an affinity to radicalism itself. The 'forever' quality of classicism's simplicity (usually thought to be, for that reason, conservative because changeless) is perhaps more closely related to honest speech. This is an old, one might say, 'classical' problem that can be raised here again in the embattled world of class and race in Anglo-American current affairs – the realm of everyday politics, police bulletins and the broadsides of the *Daily Express*. Siva's is a speech that doesn't clear its throat or cover its face with its hands, and in that way it meets the enemy on its own turf. Its virtue, among other things, is that it does not let burghers and philistines have the only unguarded, populist say, but gives the Left its chance to speak without dallying or evasive gymnastics. But to say this is to bring up another problem related to that of *Race & Class*'s literary audience and (seemingly) unliterary profile. For, the poetry of polemic is not exactly poetry; and the bid to be a poet by writing a work of fiction (as Sivanandan now has) means entering a rhetorical world where polemic cannot be.

Is the political poetry of exposure found in *A Different Hunger* or in 'Imperialism in the silicon age' impossible when imperialism's prosecutor becomes an author of literature? This must be more than an idiosyncratic question for one who escaped graduate school by reading *Race & Class* in a basement library. It is a question about the limits of literature itself, although now reversed: not literature endangered by politics but a danger to politics. Siva's essays have given us what most literary criticism does not – the language of clear air, the speaking with pointed fingers and folded arms, without recourse to passive voice or third person. Without a hint of backing off from his commitments, Siva set out to write a novel because of the poetry within him, and because of the opportunity it gave him to have his say on the Sri Lanka of his childhood rather than the black or working-class Britain of his adopted stay. Youth, first impressions or, more simply, the past all seemed to dictate the mode of fiction. But although no less elegant as prose, *When Memory Dies* – as a novel – carries within it a necessity of form, and it is a necessity that essays do not suffer. The organic closure of fiction militates against the enlightening negativity of the essay-form: negativity

as critique, opposition, accusation, fact. There cannot be in fiction defiance without arrogance. As Ezra Pound put it, the most beautiful is the most clear (or something to that effect). But novels invite uncertainty and unverifiability. They virtually demand ambiguity.

Years later, now out of graduate school, I met Siva in the offices of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in London while writing an anthology on the black communities of Britain. We spent hours jabbing at a crippled, self-defeating, cultural leftism then fashionable in the United States and Britain – the argument that would later find a place in his essay 'All that melts into air is solid', an essay I greatly admired and quoted from often, although it said nothing I had not felt deeply for more than a decade before its composition. His assault on the turn of Stuart Hall in the 'New Times' controversy was exactly that of my own critical take on Hall in an essay I had written in 1989 as a result of my London research: 'Black theorists and left antagonists'. But although my critique was my own, and similar to his, I did not have Siva's words. It is difficult to be plain. Directness is terrifying because one lives in fear that the simply dull or uninformed is often mistaken for the bravely plain, just as (in turn) the plain is often slandered for being dull. Throughout the 1980s and '90s, *Race & Class* took the risk of slander for the purpose of speaking not so much to 'ordinary' people (its politics remain extraordinary and minoritarian) but to people who might become extraordinary without being privileged specialists.

These are problems of accessibility; they intertwine with the rhetoric of poetry and polemic; they lie at the heart of Sivanandan's and, by extension, *Race & Class*'s achievement. Their successes, as I will try to explain below, are shadowed (on the one hand) by the vexations of cultural 'theory' and (on the other) by what I would call the dilemma of the small. The one has to do with the paradox of carving out a clarity by force of a certain willed ignorance, apportioning precious time, choosing sides and accepting that one cannot be everything for everybody. The other has to do with the Institute of Race Relations as an outpost of honesty set up (not altogether consciously) to keep ideas alive precisely because it is, in important ways, 'untimely' and isolated.

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Let me begin, then, with the end. The point of my opening was that Sivanandan's essays on racism, Sri Lanka, capitalist technologies and the British media, although about 'race relations' and social studies, were not for the most part read by people in those fields. His audience was made up of students of literature as well as activists who found their bearings in terms ('justice', 'truth') mostly confined to the yearnings of the imagination during the slacker era of Thatcher/Reaganism. For the sombre social sciences, the analysis of *Race & Class* was at once more naive and less 'scientific' than dignity allowed. A radicalism of belief, by

contrast, had managed to survive in literature departments both in England and the United States, as well as on the activist Left, many of whose members were hibernating in academia. Sivanandan's rhetorical presentation had created an audience by way of a classicism derived, ultimately, from the astonished and indignant humanism of nineteenth-century European radicalism. This formation had to do with a certain schooling in Sri Lanka, a certain relationship to un-benighted white colonial teachers who gave him a handle on the language of the dominant tribe, and he took this for what it was, transforming the poetry of the colonial classroom into a demand for the values it contained while facing the realities of Brixton and Tottenham, defunding, Tory rate-capping, 'sus' laws and the culturalist blathering of 'New Times'.

At least part of Siva's brilliance, I would argue, is the result of a particular collision of contradictions that have literature at their centre. Over and over again, in intervention after intervention, his focus is tirelessly on policy, pragmatics, on an end – once for all – to bullshit. One expects no novels from such a man. The unforgettable essay on 'Racism Awareness Training' (RAT), for example, is probably the most eloquent, most unflinching of all his work, attacking the confusions and fallacies of RAT's 'metaphysics' and 'potions', its tortured belief in the church manuals and education bulletins with their arguments that racism was some 'structural taint' interiorised 'within the white psyche and white behaviour', thereby giving multiculturalism a *de facto* separatist content.¹ It may be his masterpiece. I emphasise it here not because it has no rivals but because it makes us recall the workmanlike surroundings of Siva's clearest polemics – their hammered-out quality in the unscholarly environment of an old-fashioned 'cell'. One learns to appreciate the sort of tongue that in 1985 – the era of Fred Halliday's 'New Cold War', the rise of 'cultural studies' as a new discipline and the triumph of junk bond king Michael Milkin – could express the following:

There is a class war going on within Marxism as to who... are the real agents of revolutionary change: the orthodox working class, which is orthodox no more, or the 'ideological classes' who pass for the new social force or forces... The solution, for theory, pointed to a re-reading of Marx, a rehashing of Gramsci and a return to intellectual rigour accompanied by activist mortis. The working class, as a consequence, was stripped of its richest political seams – black, feminist, gay, green, etc. – and left, in the name of anti-economism, a prey to economism. Conversely, the new social forces, freed from the ballast of economic determinism (and class reductionism), have been floated as the political and ideological 'classes' of the new radicalism. But that flight from class has served only to turn ideological priorities into idealistic preoccupations, and political autonomy into personalised politics and palliatives.²

Among the interesting aspects of this passage is that it considers 'theory' untheoretical. Not only does this theory lie behind, or at least act in concert with, the apparently unrelated world of Lord Scarman's report, the Kerner Commission and so-called 'Human Awareness Training' (launched on a military base in Florida at the end of the 1960s), but it is, more importantly, *passé* ('rereading' Marx, 'rehashing' Gramsci). He rips the shibboleths of cultural Marxism from the sacred pages of postmodern novelty and instead of seeing the 'new social movements' as black, feminist, gay, or green – which were, he says, a full part of the 'old' social movements (if one bothered to read Wilhelm Reich, C.L.R. James, Alexandra Kollontai or Gramsci) – sees, rather, intellectuals acting on behalf of a class they nominally opposed, undermining activism in the name of the 'personal'.

Sivanandan is not only accurate in making these claims, and he not only made them early, but his rightness is related to being vexed by theory, and to being 'small'. If the literary academy was a place where a belief-radicalism could hibernate during the winter of Reaganism, it did not escape the inroads of another and more mainstream culture of belief. The very constituency drawn to *Race & Class* was whittled away at by a theory that rendered culture a god so that literature could be more easily dispensed with. It was as though postmodernism's 'culture' was the conflation of literature and activism, making the active longing of the one and the longed-for action of the other a topic for paralysis. What Sivanandan takes up in 'RAT and black struggle' is continued in 'All that is solid melts into air' – the essay that addresses the lamentable theorising of post-Marxism, but now in the academy rather than in the world of policy.³ The latter essay is his attempt to come to terms with the fact that the cultural Marxists dominated the field, and had won the attention of youth. A key constituency was dying. It was no longer certain that one could go on speaking without quotation marks.

Siva the novelist, still a few years off, was busy fighting for the classical word of rage in the venues of critique. This contradiction in the making grew out of a great nay-saying that was effective, but had its limitations. For Stuart Hall – the object of Siva's polemic – had certainly read Michel Foucault, Max Weber, Julia Kristeva and even Marx with an impeccable erudition and creativity, one that Siva could hardly match. Siva, by contrast, had spent his time making contacts, dealing with editorial meetings, lecturing to activists, or wielding a conjunctural pen. What he knew of Marx he knew by instinct rather than textual mastery. From a scholarly point of view, there is just no real competition between Stuart Hall and A. Sivanandan on the corpus of Gramsci, even if Hall had rendered Gramsci a corpse. The balance sheet is not as straightforward as it might seem; there are losses as well as gains.

Anyone who has spent decades reading cultural theory knows the dangers in an anti-intellectual, 'rough-and-ready' approach to knowl-

edge on behalf of activism (one thinks of Marx crashing his fist to the table in the presence of the Proudhonists with the oath that 'ignorance brings us nothing'). There is, to be sure, an overwillingness in *Race & Class* to dismiss cultural theories without fully knowing them. On the other hand, how long is life? What are the diversions? How ingenious are the ways to silence the oppressed? It was Sivanandan, not Hall or the British cultural studies speakers' circuit, who understood the emptiness of Thatcherism and prophesied the disenchantment it would bring, portraying in vivid colours the people who would pay for it with their jobs, their dignity and, at times, their lives. Sivanandan is not, exactly speaking, a scholar. So be it. But he, rather than Hall, won the key debate between them, and left a more welcome, clearer and more accurate political legacy. It would do to analyse why. It is a classical problem.

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At times one can say that it pays to be small. Or maybe that is the illusion; one remains small by remaining true. The problem with the strictures of rhetoric is that language renders most trite what is most true, and it is therefore difficult to say convincingly what needs to be said about Siva. He is willing to lose friends for the sake of ideas, because he knows they are never only ideas, but seeds of future action (one does not act on what one cannot see). But clearly the ideological cannot always be thought of in so utilitarian a way. The point of not dodging 'theory', whatever its present contagions, is to come to what one does not yet know or even conceive, and therefore need not insist on, protect or safeguard. How can knowing more do harm? How can theory's explorations into the possibility of thinking or the historical development of the structural possibilities of thought be irrelevant to struggle? I do not believe it is. Put another way, the world looks different after reading Heidegger (whom I pick because of his influence on the worst, murkiest, most infuriating positions in contemporary cultural theory: his destruction of materialism in the name of 'things'; his pessimism about knowing in the name of a shadowy 'being'; his demolition of the idea of persons as effective agents in the name of an aestheticist 'revelation' of the inanimate). The Left is stronger knowing him than not, provided it knows what to make (or remake) of him.

The holding of the line that we associate with *Race & Class*, its 'folding of the arms' in the face of theory (as I said above) is not in itself preferable. But a careful analysis of the last two decades tells us that this obstinacy was necessary. Zola famously wrote '*J'accuse*'. Sivanandan said, in effect, '*Je refuse*', and we benefited from his position. He and the IRR must always be thanked for it, because they were a meeting-place during dark times, and reminded us we were not crazy; that we, not only William Bennett, could talk of 'virtue' (although not in his Christian terms); that not only the religious right wing (or in Britain, the new

Majorite entrepreneurs) understood that politics meant control of office rather than cultural style; that not only the *Sun* or the *New York Post* knew how to talk to people without mediation. *Race & Class* gave words to our ideas and expressed our anger when theory didn't help us but only muddled us, or when we were fearful of losing props. While the identity cops were patrolling the battlements, we either could not, or would not, find the right words. It mattered having allies brash enough to accuse – those with nothing to lose in the kudos dispersement sectors of the professional managerial class.

Especially in an essay about rhetoric, it seems grotesque to speak of 'truth'. But I do not apologise. Truth is often incompatible with the rhetoric of public nicety. Any reasonable analysis of El Salvador during the US occupation, for example, or of Israel today would tell us that 'terrorism' is not merely a politics of desperation but a contributing factor to a favourable resolution of conflict. As a strategy, terrorism cannot win alone, but neither is it in all cases counter-productive, unthinkable or unjustified in principle. This is true, but one feels it must not be said. Sectarianism has similar image problems, as does the utopian diatribe, the grey discourse of official parliamentary politics, or anarchist spleen. But each has its place...and time. Even untimeliness has its time. *Race & Class* provided a bridge from the battles of the 1970s to the present, keeping alive a way of seeing and speaking for two long decades. Rather than being like the librarian whose watch has stopped, it was like the village chronicler and prophet. It said, 'This is where you will be for the "simple" reason that there is no other place to go.'

Many of Sivanandan's interventions display his awareness of, if not pride in, untimeliness. He met the charges of belatedness (which is not the same thing) above all in two major essays that, on the one hand, plunged him directly into the methodological and political quagmire of Anglo-American cultural 'theory' ('All that melts into air is solid') and, on the other, displayed the contemporaneity of the IRR's overall social theory ('New circuits of imperialism'⁴). The former essay, along with much else, showed the self-consciousness with which Siva explored many of the paradoxes I've been underlining here – his desire to face his own untimeliness and defend it strategically. He was never, in other words, a bridge between a period of former struggle and a future possibility only in some 'objective' sense, but actively and with self-awareness. The latter essay, apart from continuing his earlier observations on key technological changes affecting race and class ('Imperialism in the silicon age'), looked forward to his debates over globalisation with Ellen Meiksins Wood – an intervention that, despite its classical rhetorical posture, dealt with a topic that was not only modern but actually trendy. The point is key, it seems to me, for diverting the slander to the effect that little separates *Race & Class* from traditional cultural conservatism of the Leavis type.

His polemical essay on Hall and cultural theory is the most useful

one to examine here, since it both directly confronts the recurrent problem of knowledge vs. activism that I have been alluding to above, and because it sets up my concluding comments on the rhetorical drift from essay to novel in Sivanandan's writing – a problem of poetry and polemic or, rather, the poetry of polemic. 'All that melts into air is solid' is one of his two or three most important essays. It illustrates both the tone and theme of his exemplary style which is, among other things, funny – an important aspect of his rhetorical voice and a key weapon in his arsenal. More than the programme, it is the humour that is Marxian, depending (like Marx's own gibes) on the logic of Hegelian reversal. It serves the purpose of declaring one's lack of awe towards the enemy, one's self-confidence in the face of a numerically superior foe, since humour occurs above all to the unimpressed, whereas vituperation is an attitude of weakness.

The very title of the essay, of course, turns Marx's famous line from the *Communist Manifesto* around while expressing a surprisingly similar idea, in effect completing the *Manifesto's* argument. The metaphysical bias of capitalist mystification, Sivanandan implies, has become so depressingly complete in the 1980s that it now takes its metaphysical self to be the 'material'. One has not fled from materialism and agency but replaced them with a helpless, arrogant evanescence: everything is culture. This logic of reversal, on the other hand, does not at all end in the title, which only forecasts a barrage of belittling inversions, now ventriloquised in the voice of the culturalists themselves: 'I am, therefore I resist', 'Philosophers have interpreted the world; our task is to change the interpretation'.⁵ If not exactly a student of philosophy *per se*, Sivanandan nevertheless sums up the era, theoretically speaking, with perfect accuracy: 'a discourse on western imperialism was transmogrified into a discourse on western humanism'.⁶ The agony of the recent cultural Left cannot be put more succinctly than that.

In other words, Siva's relationship to Marx is not one of knowing a tradition but being a part of it in his time. There is an urgency in every line regarding the danger of getting analysis wrong, of the consequences of sloppiness or egotism when it comes to 'the communal lifestyle of the poor'.⁷ By contrast, for all of its intelligence, the discourse of his interlocutors (among them, Hall, Martin Jacques, Rosalind Brunt, Charlie Leadbetter) seems almost ludic, an experiment in revision. Satirical humour, in good Gramscian terms, is set against ludic irony; one kind of humour against another. Of course, Siva himself may never have these Gramscian references to hand as such; it is only that he feels what it is to be Gramsci now, a Sri Lankan, Tamil, 'common-sense-socialist' Gramsci for a new Britain that is not, for all that, 'New Times'. And, like the dignified Left of old but unlike the cultural studies circuit, there is a graciousness of tone. Given the British cultural Left's concessions to Thatcher, its rediscovery of individualism, its apotheosis of consump-

tion – given what all these positions must have meant to him – one might have expected Siva to greet his opponents with imputations of motive or descend to *ad hominem* caricatures. The rhetorical voice, by contrast, is businesslike with a preference for economy of means, for lists and facts, striving for an emotional neutrality it only occasionally betrays: ‘From saying “farewell to the working class” to electing themselves the new agents of change in New Times was but a short and logical step’.⁸

If talk of ‘apostasy’ lingers in the wings in passing accusations about culturalists ‘taking their cue from Tory successes at the polls’, the general style relies not on the barb but on patient explanation. As a materialist, he repudiates New Times, based on an analysis of labour’s structural disintegration rather than the momentous implosions of the self. While the language threatens to ironise culturalism (whose manoeuvres are referred to at one point as ‘the big waffle’), Sivanandan mainly sticks to education, regaling the culturalist dictum that ‘the personal is political’ by insisting on ‘determinacies’.⁹ The reshuffling and internal disarticulation of the working classes have, he argues, paved the way for a rudderless intelligentsia that attempts to solve the crisis by its own lights, using the suspect tools of the merely imaginary: ‘dragging Marxism with them to their own intellectual terrain, altering the battle-lines to suit their bent and equipment’.¹⁰ The frangible working class – once a kind of unity, now fissiparous – is replaced by an information class that personalises the crisis while seeking social meaning in the ‘person’. It is thus personal in two senses, seeing itself as the solution while seeing labour as a body of monadic subjectivities.

By personalising power, ‘the personal is the political’ personalises the enemy: the enemy of the black is the white as the enemy of the woman is the man. And all whites are racist like all men are sexist. Thus racism is the combination of power plus prejudice. Remove the prejudice and you remove the cutting edge of power; change the persona and you change the office... Carried to its logical conclusion, just to be black, for instance, was politics enough: because it was in one’s blackness that one was aggressed, just to be black was to make a statement against such aggression.¹¹

The *reductio ad absurdum* is in the position charged rather than the charge. For Sivanandan concedes the need to redress racial, sexual and gender discrimination as such, with attention to the particular sectoral interests of each, but at the same time stresses that culturalist solutions ‘deal not with the politics of discrimination but its arithmetic... The new social movements tend to replace one sort of sectarianism with another... when their native thrust and genius were against sectarianism and for a plurality of interests’.¹² The key theoretical point to be made here is that *Race & Class* lives up to the demands of a collectivity based on opinions and goals rather than on backgrounds and professional

associations. The journal has withstood the slacker years by way of its colloquial reiterations, in every issue, of the class in race, the uses of race to class divisions. Siva in particular has never, for example, disallowed whites from having something progressive to say about race, or of the privileged (white or black) from having something progressive to say about class. Dubbed 'sectarian' by the ameliorists of cultural Marxism, he is precisely the opposite.

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Perhaps the shift from the polemic's rigid grace to the langorous demotic of the novel – at least Siva's novel, *When Memory Dies* – comes from the necessity of memory. In its structure memory is a place, a country and an identity. The focus on policy now must take place as a domestic matter, in every sense of the term 'domestic'. The argument over outcomes can only arise within the family, so to speak, and that has its effects on the novel's political possibilities. Overwhelmed by the sound of the falling rain of the opening chapters, which are set in the villages of 1920s' Ceylon, the reader is arrested not simply by the restraint of the prose, but its anti-romanticism. This is decidedly a beauty without 'colour' – a novel of mood whose backdrop is what it is because it was. Being autobiographical, the setting cannot be re-imagined, but cannot be only affect either; it is fixed. Ideologically, the setting must be an arena for personal education as much as national decline.

And yet the paradox I have been building up to is that Sivanandan's rhetoric is driven here by the force of principle to a truth-telling that would, politically, have been better to fictionalise. To describe the collapse of contemporary Sri Lanka into a berserk communalism in the novel's third section (of the same kind but more desperate than the identity politics of 'All that is solid melts into air') is both to rob the reader of the earlier chapters' confident flow, and to convert the anger of analysis into the lament of fate. I've often wondered what the effect might have been (as in the political science fictions of Samuel Delaney, say) if the final chapters had refused to narrate the actual history of contemporary Sri Lanka with its descent into sectoralist carnage, but instead imagined the outcome he would have wanted for Sri Lanka – a socialist, or multicultural, Sri Lanka, not necessarily without conflict on the model of *Soviet Life*, but at least governmentally victorious, along the lines, say, of Cesar Vallejo's Peruvian socialist-realist novel, *El Tungsteno*. Under Siva's observant eyes, the truth of fiction is almost more than one can bear. The logic of the saga-form dictates the unsatisfying, and uncharacteristic, conclusion that our lives typically end in a tragedy that must be content with knowing tragedy's perennial nature.

And it is knowing, finally, that links the author to the polemicist on the pages of *When Memory Dies*, which cannot be set free from the

essays. For, it can be said that the novel is one long song of praise to education, to an ethos of living as learning and striving, that manages at every step to avoid (as John Berger has said of the novel) 'flip evasions, or post-modern cop-outs'. Thus Uncle Para mourns, at one point, the burning of the bazaar and the library, 'the two pillars of our life... community and scholarship, the social and the ascetic'.¹³ The wistfulness of elderly wisdom permeates a narrative that is, by nature, a familial looking-back. But this is the sort of mood we learn from at rest rather than at war. The memory of saga is a different way of making the same points as the essays, but the difference has consequences: 'no doubt my telling of it now after all these years', says the narrator, 'gives conversation a greater clarity than it perhaps showed at the time'.¹⁴ In other words, the present is, after all, open-ended; the immediacy of polemic asks that we be accounted for at future's making. A saga struggles over the record, a record filtered by feeling. It is with a strong sense, then, of the consolation of knowing that the novel urges, 'return your education to the people who gave it to you' and protests, 'We Tamils have never wanted to get rich... we wanted to have just enough to go on learning'.¹⁵

Notice the shift in tone when Sivanandan makes the same sort of point in his essay, 'Sri Lanka: a case study' (1984):

Eminent scholars who voiced their opinions of dissent in public were set upon and beaten – while piddly little sociologists who descended into the lurid investigation of sexual manners or historians who cobbled together books from other people's books or researchers in institutions that produced great tomes of meaningless abstraction which left them safe continued to make it in the upper echelons of academia. The universities themselves had ceased to be places of learning and become the seed-beds of reactionary excellence – and provided the climate for the racial violence that erupted in the Peradeniya University in May 1983.¹⁶

This specific placement of the jeremiad in real events ('Peradeniya University in May') is not what separates the essay from 'fiction'; real events can be found scattered throughout the novel as well. What is different are the frontal assaults on the professoriate and the disparaging adjectives ('piddly', 'meaningless', 'reactionary'). The purifying anger comes out like a great gasp, heightened because they are precisely personal. Sivanandan knows these people, and it has given him an insight into the breed. He does not want to hide his disgust because it is inextricable from the political reaction he is eliciting.

But the rhetorical shifts should not be overstated either. If one systematically set the novel, point for point, against 'Sri Lanka: a case study', there would be more than a few parallels (and that essay remains in some ways the necessary primer for reading the novel). Above, Uncle

Para considered scholarship to be ‘asceticism’, an almost clerical notion that is implicit in the reined-in anger and classical parallelism of the polemical moment: ‘[Britain] divided in order to rule what it integrated in order to exploit’.¹⁷ On final analysis, the novel is filled with such moments too – moments of what might be called activist antimetabole: ‘If you can’t join them, beat them into joining you’.¹⁸ Indeed, line for line, there is little that separates the language of novel and essay provided one is looking at the right passage, as in this aside from the late chapters on sectoral fighting: ‘The ludicrous sight of Marxists persuading capitalists to part with their ill-gotten wealth has been overtaken by the more ludicrous prospect of Tamils asking the Sinhalese to part with their race-begotten power’.¹⁹

For those of us who came to know Siva in the campaigns against British imperialism and (for me at least) its American legacies, *When Memory Dies* jolted us into remembering his early formation and on-going attachments to Sri Lanka. There was, in myself at least, a sense of worry that the novelist would overcome the politician, and that the urge to write the sort of work he had so long invoked and loved would dampen the fire, and reduce it (of all things) to an image. We worried that the style of memory would only make him sentimental. In the end, the novel cast his polemical essays in a new light, reminding us of the poetry that was both in them and of them.

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- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 278.

The prose of insurgency: Sivanandan and Marxist theory

In this article I would like to reflect on the politics of Sivanandan's writing, above all in relation to Marxism. This is not quite the same as considering Sivanandan *as* a Marxist. Sivanandan's *socialist* commitments are explicit and unambiguous. 'Any liberation struggle which is not socialist in the first instance ends up in tyranny', he declares, for instance, in *Communities of Resistance*, a volume of his essays from the 1980s, significantly subtitled *writings on black struggles for socialism*.¹ But his standpoint on Marxism is more difficult to pinpoint.

On the one hand, his terminology and general mode of conceptualisation bespeak not only a familiarity with, but a deep-seated allegiance to, Marxist methods and understandings: Marxism, he tells us in a recent essay which might be said to summarise a long-held view on the subject, 'is a way of understanding, of interpreting the world, in order to change it. It is the only mode of (social) investigation in which the solution is immanent in the analysis. No other mode holds out that possibility.'² In this sense, Sivanandan continues to write as a Marxist. He is still that person who, as a university student in colonial Ceylon fifty-odd years ago, 'found' dialectical materialism and 'in it... a way of analysing my own society, a way of resolving my own social contradictions, a way of understanding how conflict itself was the motor of one's personal life as well as the combusting force of the society in which one lived'.³ He still holds today that 'in the final analysis, the Marxist method of analysis always remains.'⁴

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On the other hand, there has always been a tendency in Sivanandan's work to cast Marxism in particularistic terms as a nineteenth-century social philosophy, not only predicated on but conceptually beholden to the Eurocentric universe of industrial capitalism, and hence relatively inapplicable to the contemporary, 'globalised or 'post-industrial', world order. To some extent, what is at issue here is a critique of the parochialism and cultural arrogance of many (western) Marxists in the post-1945 era, rather than of Marx himself. Hence Sivanandan's repeated excoriations of western radicals and Marxists – from the theoreticians of the various communist parties to André Gorz and the British 'New Times' group – for their inability to think at the level of the world system. But the charge of particularism, ideological as well as historical, is also pressed, however intermittently, against Marx and Marxism as such. 'Marxism, after all, was formulated in an European context and must, on its own showing, be Eurocentric', Sivanandan writes in 'The liberation of the black intellectual', one of his signature essays, first published in 1974.⁵ And he argues consistently that the social changes that have intervened between Marx's time and our own are not only qualitative but of such epochal significance as to oblige us to disassemble Marx's concepts and theories, to test every one of them anew 'on the touchstone of [Marx's]... method', to discard those that are no longer tenable or applicable, and to work towards the construction of a new Marxism 'relevant to our times'.⁶

What emerges in these terms is not so much an ambivalence about Marxism on Sivanandan's part as a certain agnosticism concerning it. The 'moral creed' or 'secular faith' that socialism is, on his understanding, can be embraced wholesale; indeed, it ought to be, since it incorporates all of 'the great and simple things' – 'loyalty, solidarity, camaraderie, unity' – that make for a truly humane society.⁷ Marxism, however, is not a faith (still less a dogma)⁸: self-identification as a Marxist (as distinct from any other kind of socialist) would therefore seem to require more minutely focused, more narrowly analytical considerations. Sivanandan is impatient of all forms of theoreticism. He mocks the abstraction and idealism of today's Left intellectuals, suggesting that they have effectively rewritten Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach such that it now reads: 'Philosophers... have interpreted the world; our task is to change the interpretation'.⁹ Sivanandan is not interested in intervening in the debates of the contemporary academic Left. It is not necessarily that he views these debates, which pre-eminently concern the social and cultural implications of 'postmodernity', as inconsequential. Rather, he deplores the fact that the new radical theories are quite as blind to the global dimensions of capitalism as the old radical theories almost invariably were. He notes, for example, that while almost everybody on the Left today has something to say about 'globalisation' and its social implications, 'nowhere in the whole literat-

ure of the Left is there any evidence of a systematic attempt to understand, let alone combat, the havoc being wreaked on Third World countries by capital in its latest avatar'.¹⁰ There is nothing merely rhetorical about *Race & Class's* banner – a journal for black and Third World liberation – under which Sivanandan has done most of his writing. The cornerstone of his social thought has always been the systemic concept of imperialism. His politico-intellectual practice has always been anti-imperialist, and hence universalist and internationalist, in the first instance.

* * *

In thinking about the nature of Sivanandan's politics, we would do well to attend not only to what he says but also to the way he says it: to his language and style, his mode of address, the forms of his self-presentation. Consider, for example, the following four passages, arranged in chronological order of their publication. They have not been chosen at random, of course. Yet, to the degree that they are representative of Sivanandan's discourse, they could each easily have been substituted by many other formally similar passages scattered throughout his work:

How does one express the holiness of the heart's disaffection (*pace* Keats) and 'the truth of the imagination' in a language that is false to one? How does one communicate the burden of one's humanity in a language that dehumanises one in the very act of communication?¹¹

We have cultures of resistance to create, communities of resistance to build, a world to win. Now is the moment of socialism. And capital shall have no dominion.¹²

What New Times represents...is a shift in focus from economic determinism to cultural determinism, from changing the world to changing the word, from class in and for itself to the individual in and for himself or herself... A sort of bazaar socialism, bizarre socialism, a hedonist socialism: an eat, drink and be merry socialism because tomorrow we can eat drink and be merry again...a socialism for disillusioned Marxist intellectuals who had waited around too long for the revolution – a socialism that holds up everything that is ephemeral and evanescent and passing as vital and worthwhile, everything that melts into air as solid, and proclaims that every shard of the self is a social movement.¹³

Globalisation...throws up its own contradictions or, rather, it arranges old contradictions differently, and moves the site of struggle against capital from the economic to the political – from the fight against capital and, therefore, the state, to the fight against the state and, therefore, capital, or, rather, the state-in-capital. So that even the economic struggles of the working class have now to be fought on the

political terrain; the fight for the right to fight for wages antedates the fight for wages.¹⁴

The rhetorical dimension of these passages is striking: the cadence of the language; the rhythm and pacing of the syntax with its conjoined, cumulating sentences; the oratorical quality of the prose; the studied use of punning, repetition and inversion to thicken and compound meaning, to cluster it without cluttering it – these are some of the characteristic features of Sivanandan's mode of delivery. Combined with what Stuart Hall (who, as the principal theoretician of *New Times*, would himself subsequently become the butt of the devastating critique excerpted in the third of the passages above) once identified as Sivanandan's 'capacity to go directly for the seminal issue, and to give that issue an original formulation',¹⁵ these features enable us to recognise that the magic of Sivanandan's prose is essentially performative. To read him is to be made aware of oneself as a reader, that is, to be made aware that the writing represents a staging, that it is *occasional* (motivated, situated, context-dependent), that the writer – Sivanandan – is engaged. 'The means are the ends, there can be no distinction between them', he proposes in 'The heart is where the battle is'. 'There is no socialism after liberation, socialism is the process through which liberation is won.'¹⁶ In this light, his writing, with its polemical charge, its cut and thrust, its passion and intensity (anger and romanticism, sarcasm and sentiment), its liking for what Brecht called *plumpes denken* (literally, 'plump thinking', thinking in slogan form, aphoristically: 'New Times is Thatcherism in drag';¹⁷ 'The micro-processor is to the new industrial revolution what steam and electricity were to the old'¹⁸), must be thought about in terms of the production of liberation theory. In his introduction to *A Different Hunger*, Hall correctly observes that while the "'unity of theory and practice" ... [is] frequently invoked on the left' Sivanandan's writings 'represent something as closely approximating to that idea as one is likely to find anywhere in recent British writing on the themes of black struggle'.¹⁹

The register of the four passages quoted above can also be thought about in another sense, in terms of the 'traditions' within which they situate themselves, which they activate, uphold and contest, all at the same time. (Actually, one wants a better word here than traditions to describe what are in fact structured and materially inscribed modes of intellectual practice: but neither 'episteme' nor 'problematic', taken over from French (post-) structuralist theory, seem adequate; and the concept of tradition has the relative advantage, in the present context at least, that, in the form of T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the individual talent', it once received a strong, if profoundly idealist, formulation by a writer whose work has been central to Sivanandan's own thought.) In 'The heart is where the battle is', Sivanandan recalls that what 'opened [him] up' at university in Ceylon in the 1940s, what enabled him to

'formulate' his emergent political consciousness, was exposure to 'the writings of such people as Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau, Owen and Proudhon and Fourier and finally...Marx'.²⁰ Sivanandan constantly refers his readers to the work of these European political philosophers and their counterparts in creative writing (especially English). His writing is dense with allusion to the 'great tradition' of English literature: Shakespeare and Donne; the Romantic poets (Keats, Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley above all); the novelists from Austen to Joyce and Lawrence and beyond; Wilde; Eliot, Yeats and the modernist poets. The first of the passages cited above, for instance, simultaneously echoes and subverts the Keatsian idiom in its own reference to the black intellectual's need to 'express the holiness of the heart's *disaffection*'. Similarly, the third passage cleverly inverts Marx's characterisation of the world-transforming dynamism of bourgeois society – 'Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations...are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned'²¹ – to demonstrate that the postmodern 'Marxism' of New Times is itself susceptible to Marxist critique. And the second passage transforms the canonical poetic reference – 'And death shall have no dominion' – from religious into historical time – 'And capital shall have no dominion' – in order to insist on the alterability of the existing human condition.

I am indelibly reminded here of various passages in the work of C.L.R. James: as when, describing his education in colonial Trinidad, James observed that it turned him into a British intellectual before he was ten,²² but a rather unusual British intellectual, one committed at the same time to British culture and to the struggle against British imperialism. Or when he declares himself an admirer of 'the learning and the profound discoveries of Western civilisation', since it is 'by means of the work' of the contributors to this tradition that 'my eyes and ears have been opened and I can today see and hear what we were, what we are, and what we can be'.²³

My juxtaposition of Sivanandan with James is overdetermined. What the two have in common is their intellectual formation within, and against, colonial culture. Like James in Trinidad, Sivanandan speculates that he 'was formed...by...[the] move and mix of cultures fighting for an independent Ceylon'.²⁴ He adds that 'that is perhaps why I still think that culture is something dynamic, moving, forged in the crucible of struggle, and not some pre-ordained, congealed set of artefacts, folklore (which incidentally is what multiculturalism is about)'.

The two writers also share the initial experience of colonial education as deracination or alienation. James notes, thus, that his training transformed him into 'an alien in my own environment among my own

people, even my own family’;²⁵ and Sivanandan speaks of the ‘societal conflicts which are personalised for one by the nature of colonial society - by the deracination that one undergoes and then by the way one questions that deracination’.²⁶ Yet, above all, the two writers have in common the fact that their intellectual development does not freeze at the point of this unforgeable, colonially-induced alienation. Sivanandan’s key essay in this context is, as we have seen, entitled ‘The liberation of the black intellectual’. And both he and James make clear that their encounter with colonial culture neither leaves them culturally colonised nor positions them forlornly as ‘men of two worlds’, suspended ambivalently and powerlessly between ‘white’ and ‘black’ social universes. On the contrary, even as James is speaking of himself in Tunapuna as a ten-year-old British intellectual, he points out that ‘[s]omehow from around me I had selected and fastened on to the things that made a whole’.²⁷ One major burden of his argument in such essays as ‘The making of the Caribbean people’ is to insist that the philosophical category of universality finds concrete confirmation in the experience of (anti-) colonialism, since the struggle at this level requires a dialectical thinking: with the coloniser against the coloniser. Sivanandan puts it in the form of a question: ‘what is it in the black and Third World experience, in the experience of the oppressed and the exploited, that gives one the imagination to see other oppressions and the will to fight for a better society for all, a more equal, just, free society, a socialist society?’²⁸

* * *

At issue here is the distinctive politico-intellectual practice that I have sought, in my own research on colonial and postcolonial intellectualism, to consider and evaluate under the rubric of ‘hating tradition properly’.²⁹ In James and Sivanandan – but not only in them: in the work of two or possibly three entire generations of radical intellectuals from the colonial world – we encounter an extraordinary commitment to universalism, to seeing the world whole, to the construction of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr, in a discussion of Frantz Fanon, has felicitously called a ‘global counternarrative of liberation’.³⁰ This universalism (one could also call it a ‘cosmopolitanism’ of sorts, although this particular term has always been much disputed, and remains so³¹) is to be distinguished sharply from the ‘double consciousness’ theorised so memorably by W.E.B. DuBois at the turn of the twentieth century. It consists, rather, it seems to me, and remarkably, of an aspiration towards totality, the conceptualisation of the world as a single, unified system, however contradictory and non-synchronous its constituent elements and dimensions. What always strikes me as exceptional and astonishing about the intellectual work of such figures as James, Fanon, Sivanandan, Césaire, Cabral, Abdel-Malek, Nehru, Castro, Samir Amin, Ho Chi Minh, Nkrumah, Neruda and so on, is their simultaneous commitment to what Jürgen

Habermas has recently termed the 'philosophical discourse of modernity' and to its urgent critique, their extraordinary command of and respect for western (or bourgeois) tradition, cultural and civilisational, existing alongside an equally extraordinary knowledge (and critical endorsement) of other cultural works, social projects, and historical experiences, the necessary consideration of which cannot be accomplished on the provincial soil of western (or bourgeois) tradition.

It is this simultaneous commitment, I think, and what lies behind or beyond it, that has served to render Marxism an ineradicable touchstone for radical intellectuals from the 'Third World'. The point is that, through its conceptualisation of the universalising tendencies of capitalism as a mode of production, through its formalisation of these tendencies in the concept of imperialism, through its elaboration of the global social logic of combined and uneven development, Marxism, and Marxism alone, has, over the course of the past 150 years, offered a plausible account of the integration and trajectory of the modern world system, and also, of course, of what superseding this system must entail. The rallying to Marxism of Third World intellectuals active in the anti-imperialist cause is significantly a function of this theoretical achievement. Yet western-based Marxists (and their postmodernist successors today) have often demonstrated a culturally-determined blindness to this distinctive achievement of Marxism: like their liberal and conservative and non-Marxist socialist counterparts elsewhere in society, they have been disposed to take the nation (or at most the bloc or region: 'Europe'; 'the West') as the operative social unit of their analyses. The result has been a catastrophic misrecognition of the differential social aspects – the diverse forms of appearance – of capitalism world-wide, and a corresponding tendency to think of the western bourgeoisie in its relation to the western working class as paradigmatic of capitalist class relations *per se*.

* * *

Sivanandan's work demonstrates the broad allegiance to Marxist principles and premises that I have been describing as characteristic of radical intellectuals of his general cohort. The commitment to a socialist internationalism is fused with a commitment to philosophical universalism, which takes the form of a systemic materialist analysis centred on the idea of capitalism as a social order that is without precedent either with respect to its geographical extension or its intensive saturation of social relations. The discrepancy between the 'one-worldism' of his own analysis and the Eurocentrism of that of so many of his western Marxist interlocutors provokes Sivanandan to fierce critique: he makes much of André Gorz's influential little book, *Farewell to the Working Class*, for instance, whose analysis he reads as symptomatic rather than as specific to Gorz himself: 'Only the blind

chauvinism of Eurocentric Marxism which mistakes its working class for the whole working class could bid the class farewell', he argues in 'New circuits of imperialism'.³² And in 'The heart is where the battle is', he again invokes this 'chauvinism', before going on to explain how *Race & Class*'s 'line' differs from it:

Race & Class poses a counter view. It sees the relationship of racism and imperialism as a symbiotic one; the fact that black and Third World peoples are in the 'First' World is directly connected to the presence of the 'First World' in the form of multinationals, of superpower machinations in the Third World. Yet *Race & Class* never subsumes race under class. It looks at race in terms of class, while at the same time bringing to an understanding of the class struggle the racial dimension. I suppose that is what distinguishes us from other Left, Marxist or Third World journals.³³

This citation already takes us some way towards a specification of what might be claimed as the distinctive contributions of Sivanandan's work to Marxist theory. I would list three such contributions as especially significant. The first of these, to which the quotation above already gestures, concerns the general relation between race and class. The second concerns the theorisation of what I would call black metropolitan intellectualism, above all with reference to Britain. Finally, there is the analysis of globalism as 'the latest stage of imperialism'.³⁴ Let me, in drawing this review to a close, offer a brief comment on each of these contributions in turn.

* * *

With reference to the consideration of race and class and their social articulation, Sivanandan has battled continuously for years against theoretical antagonists on both sides. On the one hand, he has insisted on the irreducibility and material effectivity of race in face of those (mostly white) radicals who have urged the subsumption of race to class in the interests of proletarian solidarity. In 'The liberation of the black intellectual', for instance, he sought to counter such arguments by emphasising the existential or experiential dimension of race as a mode of social being:

what the white marxists fail to grasp is that the slave and colonial exploitation of the black peoples of the world was so total and devastating – and so systematic in its devastation – as to make mock of working-class exploitation... The cultural and psychological dimensions of black oppression are quite unparalleled... If the white workers' lot at the hands of capitalism was alienation, the blacks underwent complete deracination. And it is this factor which makes black oppression qualitatively different from the oppression of the white working class.³⁵

On the other hand, however, he has also taken issue with cultural nationalist thinkers who, seizing on such formulations as these, have argued for the separability of race and class, and the discontinuity between the struggle for socialism and the struggle against racism. What such thinkers have not been willing to take into account is what follows the passage cited above in 'The liberation of the black intellectual'. There, Sivanandan not only specifies the structural nexus that obtains between race and class in metropolitan society ('the racism inherent in white society is determined economically, but defined culturally') but goes on, further, to insist that black liberation is ultimately only conceivable on the basis of 'the participation of the masses, not just the blacks'.³⁶

One is reminded, again, of C.L.R. James, who, in a debate that has only latterly begun to receive the attention it deserves, argued against Trotsky in their meeting in Mexico in 1939 that the resolution of 'the Negro question' required the formation of an autonomous 'Negro movement'. James never doubted that the 'Negro must be won for socialism. There is no other way out for him in America or elsewhere.'³⁷ At the same time, however, he was adamant that 'he must be won on the basis of his own experience and his own activity. There is no other way for him to learn, nor for that matter, for any other group of toilers.'

The gesture here to other 'group[s] of toilers' is particularly interesting. For James, no representative social claim ought to be subsumed by another in the struggle for freedom. And this, too, resonates with Sivanandan, who often argues in similar vein, not only with respect to race but, on one occasion at least (his 1973 'The colony of the colonised: notes on race, class and sex') with respect to the women's movement. Here he notes that while it may be that 'in the final analysis the only way to expect change in society is through class struggle', 'the woman must come to...[this truth] herself, relate it to the specific experience of her own specific oppression and exploitation – travel from the particular experience to the general, from caste to class, and in the process bring to the class struggle itself some of the perspectives and directions and leadership which...it so sorely requires.'³⁸

The second arena in which Sivanandan's work might be said to have been decisive concerns his theorisation of black metropolitan intellectualism. 'The liberation of the black intellectual' can readily be set alongside Fanon's 'The fact of blackness' (from *Black Skin, White Masks*), which, in a strict sense, it complements. Both Fanon and Sivanandan draw centrally on Sartre in order to work through the limitations of the abstraction that derives from the French philosopher's failure to recognise the social functioning of racial difference. Sivanandan focuses on Sartre's 'Black Orpheus' and 'A plea for intellectuals'. In both of these essays, Sartre defines the intellectual in terms of a structuring contradiction between his class position and the social aspiration bequeathed to him by his practice as an intellectual. Like 'The fact of

blackness', 'The liberation of the black intellectual' is conceived as a fraught and dangerous voyage of discovery, from deracination and co-optation towards self-definition in terms of blackness. What renders the journey particularly perilous is that:

the only tools of intellection available to [the black intellectual]... are white tools – white language, white education, white systems of thought – the very things that alienate him from himself. Whatever tools are native to him lie beyond his consciousness somewhere, condemned to disuse and decay by white centuries. But to use white tools to uncover the white man so that he (the black) may at last find definition requires that the tools themselves are altered in their use. In the process, the whole of white civilisation comes into question, black culture is re-assessed, and the very fabric of bourgeois society threatened.³⁹

As in Fanon, so, too, in Sivanandan, the resolution of the problems of black intellectualism is accorded an epistemo-political privilege. 'The human condition, plans for mankind, and collaboration between men in those tasks which increase the sum total of humanity are new problems, which demand true inventions', Fanon writes in the famous conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*. 'Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.'⁴⁰

What Sivanandan might then be said legitimately to bring to this discussion is a consideration of the problematics of black intellectualism, not in the space of the colony, but in the metropolitan heartland. His work stands in this respect as a bridge of sorts between the literature of decolonisation and the vast American literature of anti-racism and civil rights struggle. Sivanandan is deeply marked by his exposure to the American writers and activists – from Malcolm X to King and Cleaver and the Black Panther Party, from Ellison to Wright to Baldwin. His pre-eminent concern, however, is with Britain and, although he draws on the American discussion, he is careful to eschew its nation-centrism in favour, characteristically, of a reading predicated on imperialism. His analysis in 'Race, class and the state: the black experience in Britain' begins with colonialism: 'colonialism perverts the economy of the colonies to its own ends, drains their wealth into the coffers of the metropolitan country and leaves them at independence with a large labour force and no capital with which to make that labour force productive'.⁴¹ It then goes on to demonstrate that it is only when the phenomenon of racism in post-war Britain is returned to the economic crisis engendered by decolonisation that it can be properly understood. In much of his writing of the 1970s and 1980s, Sivanandan is concerned to develop a sociological narrative of the unfolding of racist ideology in

Britain. His argument, briefly, is that 'the economic profit from immigration [in the post-war period] had gone to capital, the social cost had gone to labour, but the resulting conflict between the two had been mediated by a common 'ideology' of racism'.⁴² Nobody writing before Sivanandan makes this general argument more elegantly and succinctly than he does. Indeed, very few writing since have been able to match the explanatory cogency of his schema.

The commentary on globalisation arises as Sivanandan attempts to project his sociological narrative forward, into the 1970s and beyond. In a series of important and controversial articles – 'Imperialism and disorganic development in the silicon age' (1979), 'New circuits of imperialism' (1989) and 'Globalism and the Left' (1998) chief among them – he has argued for a particular version of the 'strong' thesis on globalisation. The changes in capitalist class relations brought about by 'the technological revolution' of the last three decades, he has written – 'the qualitative leap in the productive forces to the point where capital is no longer dependent on labour in the same way as before, to the same extent as before, in the same quantities as before and in the same place as before'⁴³ – are both quantitatively and qualitatively momentous enough to require us to theorise them as corresponding to a new epoch within capitalist history.

The debate over globalisation has been fierce (witness Sivanandan's recent exchange with Ellen Meiksins Wood of *Monthly Review*) and it is still ongoing. I do not plan to discuss the precise terms of Sivanandan's analysis here. Rather, I would like to close by drawing attention to certain ancillary features of this analysis. First, it is worth emphasising that while for Sivanandan 'globalism' represents an epochal moment in capitalist development, it does not rupture the unfolding trajectory of capitalism. The critique of 'globalism' is still very much a critique of imperialism:

A global culture...to go with a global economy...a global assembly line run by global corporations that move from one pool of labour to another, discarding them when done – high technology in the centre, low technology in the peripheries – and a polarisation of the workforce within the centre (as between the highly skilled and unskilled or deskilled) and as between the centre and the peripheries, with qualitatively different rates of exploitation that allow the one to feed off the other – a corporate state maintained by surveillance for the developed countries, authoritarian regimes and gun law for the developing. That is the size of the new world order.⁴⁴

Related to this, second, is the fact that, for Sivanandan, 'globalism', the 'revolution in the productive forces', has altered not only the balance of power between capital and labour, but the very terrain of class struggle itself. The forms of political struggle associated with industrial capitalism have been rendered relatively inefficacious today, when the working

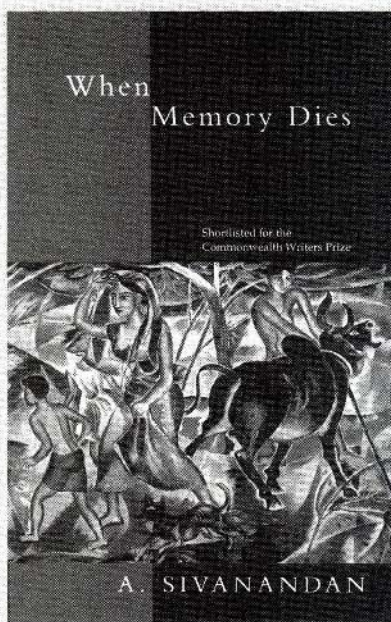
class 'has lost its economic clout and, with it, whatever political clout it had, whatever determinacy it could exercise in the political realm.'⁴⁵ Hence, for Sivanandan, the need to focus on new and emergent 'communities of resistance', new forms of struggle centred not so much in the economic as in the political arena. The terrain of class struggle has moved from base to superstructure, although what is at issue in such struggle is not 'politics' or 'culture', 'but – still... the ownership and control of the means of production and the exploitation of workers. Only now, the centre of gravity of that exploitation has shifted from the centre to the periphery, and, within the centre, to peripheral workers, home workers, *ad hoc* workers, casual, temporary, part-time workers – all the bits and pieces of the working class that the new productive forces have dispersed and dissipated of their strength.'⁴⁶

Theoretically, it is clear from the above that Sivanandan's reading of globalism derives from his conception of the *priority of productive forces* in the constitution of modes of production. For him, the forces of production are primary; they determine the relations of production. It is this conception that leads Sivanandan to emphasise, over and over again, that the contemporary developments which he believes to be world-transforming derive from 'the revolution in the productive forces'. But then it is also this conception, arguably, that leads some of Sivanandan's Marxist critics to charge him with 'technological determinism'. For it is possible to read Marx's writings as ambivalent on the primacy of the productive forces: in some passages, he appears to privilege social relations of production as determining developments in these forces. Sivanandan's position on this debate positions him alongside such contemporary Marxists as G.A. Cohen and Etienne Balibar and against such others as Ellen Meiksins Wood and Erik Olin Wright. It is not possible here to attempt to mediate this debate: suffice it to point out that Sivanandan's contemporary writings on globalism are consequential not only with respect to the subject of imperialism, but also with respect to Marxist theory in the formal, more properly philosophical, sense.

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"The extraordinary poetic tact of this book makes it unforgettable."

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JERRY HARRIS

Sivanandan and the technological revolution

A. Sivanandan was among the first political writers to understand the historic technological changes occurring with the advent of micro-electronics and their effects on the relations of production. Although others had also begun to articulate the deep-going changes, Sivanandan brought forward an analysis based in dialectical materialism and Marxist terminology. He situated his observations within the framework of revolutionary theory and practice, rather than the restricted walls of postmodern academic investigation or the triumphant pronouncements of establishment intellectuals. From his early work in 1979, Sivanandan connected the technological revolution in production to the changing nature of international capital, or what is now termed globalisation. For Sivanandan, the shift from industrial to information capitalism was of an epochal nature – a conclusion now hotly debated within the Left, even though it took another decade before most Marxists began seriously to examine this transformation.

* * *

Sivanandan has been mainly concerned with four areas of fundamental change: 1) the nature of the technological transformation and how it affects the process of production; 2) the 'hierarchies of production', or the division of labour between nations, particularly the West and the Third World; 3) how globalisation and technology have impacted on the relations of production and the position of labour; 4) how these pro-

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cesses have affected the state and politics. Unlike most Euro/American writers, whose main concerns are with how globalisation affects the West, he has paid particular attention to the Third World, immigrants and the most exploited communities within the developed world.

Sivanandan's understanding of the revolutionary changes in the process of production leads directly to his argument that there has been an epochal shift. He begins where Marx did, with an analysis of the forces of production. Let me quote at some length:

The significance of the new technologies... firstly and fundamentally, is in the qualitative change they have brought about in the productive forces, which in turn has predicated a mode of production based on information, data, gathered from dead and living labor... Changes in the mode of production change social relations. If 'the handmill gives you a society with the feudal lord and the steam-mill gives you society with the industrial capitalist', the microchip gives you society with the global capitalist, the universal capitalist, and the universal factory.¹

Here, in precise formulation, Sivanandan applies a classic Marxist analysis to the new revolution of information technology. A revolution that frees capital from labour by replacing the worker with micro-processor run machines, and frees capital to pursue cheap labour worldwide, unfixed to any one place. Sivanandan describes the changing process of production in a manner that reflects my own past experience as a machinist at US Steel: 'The skills have been taken into the machines, leaving it to the highly skilled to programme them and the unskilled to operate them.'²

This is the exact process of transformation that occurred as numerical controlled (NC) machines were brought into the machine shop where I worked. A machinist's is a highly skilled job. It takes five years of work and study to become a journeyman. There are half a dozen different machines to learn how to operate. We studied three dimensional blueprint reading, metallurgy and trigonometry at the mill school. Different metals are cut at different speeds for different jobs and held to tolerances of .003. All in all, it was an interesting job which demanded a broad range of skills and knowledge.

But NC technology took all the knowledge we held in our minds, and all the skills we held in our hands, and encoded them on a chip. It put the chip into the machine and gave us a computer board. In the morning, the foreman would give us a code of letters and numbers which took a few minutes to punch into the board and, for the rest of the day, the machine would run itself. A highly-skilled programmer turned highly-skilled factory workers into unskilled labour. Of course, the mill no longer needed fifty lathe machinists standing around watching their machines work. So lay-offs began. First, all the apprentices were let go.

This included almost all the women, Blacks and Latinos who had only gotten into the machine shop a few years before under affirmative action. The process of change continued as new technology made mini mills more profitable and our large integrated mill was shut down. US Steel became USX and diversified its operations to oil, real estate and shopping malls, while its hundred-year relationship to steelworkers in south Chicago came to an end. Changes in the mode of production had changed social relations.

Having concluded that the process of production had undergone a fundamental change, Sivanandan turned his attention to the world division of labour and the beginnings of globalisation. As he wrote: 'Changes in the productive process have freed industrial capital... from spatial strictures, given it mobility of plant and flexibility of production' to build a global assembly line.³ This established a set of 'hierarchies of production', where developed countries maintained a hold on high technology; newly industrialising countries became sites for industrial production, and the underdeveloped countries were relegated to light industry and unskilled, back-end assembly work.

The auto industry is one of the best examples of this new division of global labour. Few commodities are so closely associated with national identity. The aristocratic Rolls Royce of Britain, the brash Cadillac from America, the engineering genius of BMW in Germany, or those wonderful advertisements for the French Citroën by the artist Moebius. Yet today autos are a global product, from their first step in design to their last step in assembly. Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, India, China, Vietnam, Brazil and Argentina all have joint ventures with major corporations from the US, Japan and Europe. General Motors is the biggest employer in Mexico. In fact, getting a piece of the auto industry is a hallmark step for newly industrialising nations. The textile industry plays the same role for underdeveloped countries, where semi-skilled jobs are centred in the free enterprise zones of Haiti, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

This new international division of labour resulted in a qualitative shift in the contradiction between capital and labour. As Sivanandan notes: 'The technological revolution has allowed capital to shift the burden of extracting surplus value from the workers at the centre to the workers at the (outer) periphery', therefore 'the brunt of that exploitation has shifted to the underdeveloped countries of the Third World'.⁴

In 1979, as Sivanandan first traced this new map of exploitation, the future pattern of the 1998 Asian market crash became evident. 'Initially the industry went to Mexico, but Asia was soon considered the cheaper... from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore in the 1960s, to Malaysia in 1972, Thailand in 1973, and Philippines and Indonesia in 1974.'⁵ Looking back, we can see how Sivanandan's analysis began to locate the developing crisis of globalisation. It is exactly Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines that were the

epicentre of the implosion in 1998. As the West shifted production to the Third World, these countries underwent rapid growth and industrialisation. Speculative money pushed a boom in exports that eventually flooded the market. As the economy stagnated, international speculators pulled out their money, creating the financial crisis which impoverished millions. Unlike the depression in the 1930s that developed in the heart of the western industrialised world, the burden of crisis had shifted to Asia. The trends that Sivanandan pointed to in 1979 have become more pronounced, entrenched and explosive. Time has lent strength to the argument, not weakened it.

* * *

Along with investigating the new patterns in the international division of labour, Sivanandan began to analyse the new division of labour between workers. Key to the changing labour model is the fact that 'Capital is no longer restricted by time or place or labor... It can, instead, take up its plant and walk to any part of the world where labor is cheap and captive, and plentiful. Such emancipation of Capital from Labor alters the whole fabric of industrial society, desegregates and recomposes the working class into highly-skilled "core" workers at one end and unskilled or semi-skilled "peripheral" workers at the other'.⁶ And this division is not only between centre nations and the Third World, but creates a 'polarisation of the work-force within the centre itself'.⁷

This brings Sivanandan to his concerns over the nature of the state, politics and minority communities. As he observes, 'the political clout that the working class had under industrial capitalism came from its economic clout'.⁸ But oppositional movements are no longer centred in the economic demands of labour. The mass concentrations of workers which produced a collective solidarity have disappeared with changes in the economic base. The decline of manufacturing and the development of more flexible and decentralised forms of production produced a fragmentation of the working class. Therefore, the rise of information capitalism and the demise of industrial society has diminished the political power of western labour.

The strategy of the western Left was born in the old industrial era. The task was to 'make every factory a fortress' where the army of the proletariat under the general command of a revolutionary party would strike at the heart of capital. Yet factory after factory has been shut down, with their armies dispersed into unemployment or new jobs. It's hard to seize the fort from inside when the fort no longer exists. The Chicago steel mill where I laboured alongside 7,000 other workers is, today, a vast empty space, without a single building left standing on its polluted ground. If the working class is to organise a battle against capital, it will have to do so with a new strategy and a firm understanding of the current relations of production. The struggle of the industrial work-

ing class is not dead, but neither does it occupy centre stage in a privileged singular position.

Sivanandan points out that qualitative changes in the process of production 'enable Capital not only to do away with mass production lines and the mass employment of workers on the same factory floor but to move the workplace itself around, from one cheap labour pool to another, as required by profit and the market.'⁹ This is the process which fragmented and decentralised working-class communities in the American industrial heartland.

The south Chicago community in which I lived and worked underwent this very transformation. Steel production dominated the thirty-mile arc from Gary, Indiana, to south Chicago for a hundred years. In my neighbourhood, young men graduated from high school to go to work in the mills and retire forty years later into the same community they grew up in. The union hall was a place for Christmas parties, weddings, dances, the retiree gatherings, city ward politics and hotly contested union elections. We had steelworker baseball teams in the parks, and streets were filled with the same people you worked with. There was a collective identity and solidarity, and a base for mass political movements. Here, workers were killed in the 1930s while organising the Congress of Industrial Organization, their pictures still hanging on the lobby walls of the union in 1980. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe built their churches and fought for a better life. And here, too, Blacks and Latinos raised their families and battled corporate racism for affirmative action access to skilled jobs. Even in the last days of the mills, several hundred communists of different trends still organised in pursuit of a mass, radical, working-class movement. Little of this exists today.

Two of the three large integrated mills in south Chicago are levelled, and the third is a shadow of its former self. The union halls are shut or no longer serve as a centre of community activity. Young men in high school go into gangs, not the mills. The women board the train to work in financial and maintenance service jobs downtown. And the men do whatever they can to help the family get by. Some still work in steel fabrication, some fix cars in their backyards, others remain unemployed. The class is fragmented and decentralised. The economic base which gave this community its life and identity has changed. Steel is now made in mini mills using more efficient computer controlled technologies. The relationship which existed between capital and labour which produced a dense mass and common community of steelworkers has changed, and so has the politics and culture.

Sivanandan argues that this fragmentation has shifted the core contradiction to the bottom stratum of the western working class. This one-third of society is a replica of the Third World within the First. 'It is they who perform the arduous, unskilled, dirty jobs in the ever-

expanding service sector, who constitute the casual, ad hoc, temporary workers in computerised manufacture, who provide agribusiness with manual farm labour... They are, in a word, the cheap and captive labour force – rightless, rootless, peripatetic and temporary, illegal even – without which post-industrial society cannot run.¹⁰ These workers who toil in poverty are most often people of colour and so create a ‘symbiosis between racism and poverty’. This dual oppression is the basis for new communities of resistance, creating the most consistent and explosive opposition to capital.

Certainly, the Black freedom movements in the 1960s and ’70s were pointing in this direction. Even today, as the American labour movement shows signs of life, leading the way are minorities and women working as janitors, farmworkers, service workers and temps. The largest US labour victory in fifty years recently occurred with the unionisation of 75,000 homecare workers in Los Angeles, a work-force made up overwhelmingly of minority women and immigrants. Whether protesting police brutality, fighting for community control, or to extend immigrants’ rights, ‘these are collectivities, movements that issue from the grass-roots...of economic, social and political life, from the bare bone of existence, from people who have nothing to lose but their chains, nothing to choose but survival, and are therefore dynamic, open, organic.’¹¹

Youth from this social class face particularly hard times, with long periods of ongoing unemployment. De-schooled and never-employed, they become categorised as a surplus population and are criminalised by the state and media. The post-high school industrial jobs that were available for their parents have disappeared, turning today’s urban youth into slave labour in America’s prison industrial complex. The 350,000 jobs that fled Los Angeles in the 1980s are close to the numbers now working in California jails in the 1990s.

For workers in the Third World, two-thirds of society remains poor and semi-skilled. But it is among this giant mass of exploited people where the ‘contradictions are sharpest’ and where the ‘centre of gravity of exploitation has moved’.¹² Globalisation does not bring the end of the working class, only its Eurocentric version, since the ‘working class of post-industrial capitalism is...scattered all over the non-industrialized world.’¹³ Yet in this post-industrial world, Sivanandan contends, ‘there is no working-class army to take on the system, only a host of battalions.’¹⁴ These battalions are the new ‘communities of resistance’ that we see in the Zapatistas, among the Ogoni people of Nigeria in their struggle with Shell Oil, or the Karnataka Farmers’ Union as they battle biopiracy in India.

The struggle today is more political and less economic. As Sivanandan argues: ‘We have got to go straight for [capital’s] political jugular – move the struggle from the economic to the political terrain, the terrain of government power, state power, conglomerate power, with

culture, a culture of resistance, as the combusting force of that struggle. Industrial capitalism controlled the economy, information capitalism controls the polity.¹⁵

As the new capitalist mode of production spread throughout the Third World, its structure was unaccompanied by western political democracy. This was a disorganic development, with exploitation in its crudest, most naked forms. The national bourgeoisies put their countries at the service of transnational capital, their own privileged position resting on the brutal exploitation of labour without the right to organise and defend itself. Therefore, oppositional mass movements have, as their common denominator, the struggle against political oppression. Revolutions do not necessarily have class or socialist politics, but national, revolutionary and democratic components. When we survey the revolutions which overthrew the Shah, Marcos, Duvalier, Mobutu or Suharto, it is precisely their mass democratic character that stands out. For Sivanandan, the focus of struggle continues to be the mass democratic movements of the Third World and the disenfranchised minorities of the developed nations.

* * *

Recently, the debate over globalisation has been receiving a lot of attention. One of the best and most consistent critics has been Ellen Meiksins Wood of *Monthly Review*. Wood argues that globalisation is a political project of the bourgeois state in the ongoing historic process of capitalist universalisation. She criticises the view which accepts globalisation as an irreversible force, propelled by the technological revolution, because it disarms the working class and creates a defeatist mentality. As she argues: 'The globalization-as-epochal-shift model tends to see nothing but capitalist triumph.'¹⁶

Capitalism's expansionary drive is neither the product of some inevitable natural law, nor a recent technological innovation of the 'information age'. It is a historically specific characteristic of capitalism, which has been part of the system since its beginning... flexibility... competitiveness... neo-liberal attacks on social provision... are not the automatic result of some inevitable process, as so many conceptions of 'globalization' seem to suggest. They are the product of deliberate policy choices in the interests of capital.¹⁷

Part of Wood's hostility towards globalisation theory comes from her view that it is an extension of postmodernist and Left academic trends from the 1960s, trends which *Monthly Review* has battled for years. Wood even argues that the concept of an epochal shift is the creation of 'people who grew up politically and intellectually in the '50s and '60s... in the "golden age of capitalism"¹⁸ and now, 'it is almost as if some people have discovered capitalism itself for the first time. What they are

calling a new epoch may be just the basic logic of capitalism asserting itself again.¹⁹

Certainly, Sivanandan and other Marxists share some terminology with the postmodernists, such as ‘fragmentation and information capitalism’, and, yes, many of us grew up in the 1950s and ‘60s. But we’re not historically ignorant, and Sivanandan has sharply debated with postmodernism in England. It’s time Wood began to deal more seriously with an economic and political analysis that starts from a concrete investigation of the economic base and changes in the process of production. The ‘historically specific characteristic of capitalism’ is the current technological revolution which has produced information capitalism, not just elements which have been ‘part of the system since the beginning’. After all, what do we mean by ‘historically specific’, if not the present manifestation of contradictions? Wood’s linear analysis of unchanging processes fails to understand dialectical and historic breaks. This leads to her reduction of epochal shifts to ‘policy choices’, and a view which underestimates and undervalues the task before us.

Although Wood criticises the epochal theory as surrendering to some ‘inevitable natural law’ of technological determinism, her own argument of the universalisation of capitalism relies on the inevitable process and internal logic of capitalist expansion. Are the two positions so far apart? Wood seems to think so, as she states: ‘The point is that we have to understand the process of change. Sometimes the concept of “epochal shifts” is a way of avoiding the issues, as we leap from one “epoch” to another while losing sight of historical process.’²⁰

But what Wood has lost sight of is how history is transformed. The point is that capitalist expansion seizes upon qualitative technological changes to make epochal leaps. The competitive pressure to accumulate and expand are always present, but only the revolution in the forces of production makes globalisation possible. Historical processes occur through ruptures and leaps, not simply through pre-ordained internal logic. It is exactly the epochal shift that makes the logic unfold. In fact, without the new stage of information capitalism, the industrial capitalist crisis that *Monthly Review* has been predicting for forty years would have already occurred.

Dialectical materialism teaches us to investigate what is new and revolutionary; not only to see where history has been, but the possibilities of its direction. Understanding the epochal nature of globalisation helps us to see vast technological, financial, political and cultural changes as an integrated system of change. In turn, this opens up new avenues of insight and analysis, as well as emancipating our thinking to understand options not previously present in the industrial age. Wood is right in that we should not lose sight of fundamentals, but traditionalists’ views can also bind you to stagnated modes of thought.

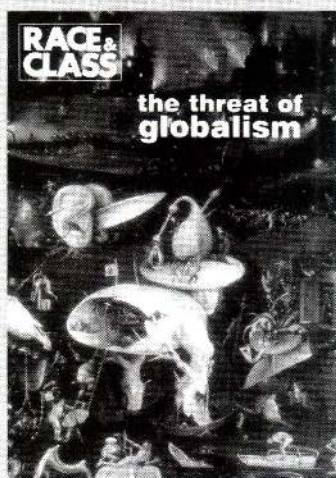
When Marx made his analysis of capitalism, it was a new system, not

even fully established beyond limited areas of Europe and America. But he was able to see its future trajectory as a world system, and lay the foundation for modern political practice. Sivanandan has helped us to see the direction of development in today's world. He has used Marx in the best possible way, not as dogma but as a guide to understanding what is new and ascending on the current stage of global contradictions. Sivanandan himself says it best:

Marx himself would require us to re-examine [theories and concepts] in the light of the massive changes that have taken place at the level of the productive forces since his time, and throw away what is not applicable – creating in the process a Marxism relevant to our times. In the final analysis, the Marxist method of analysis always remains.²¹

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"Globalism is the latest stage of imperialism – and, yet, nowhere in the whole literature of the Left is there any evidence of a systematic attempt to understand, let alone combat, the havoc being wreaked on Third World countries."

A. Sivanandan

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PAUL GORDON

Soul writing: the existential/personal vein in Sivanandan's work

*My mouth will be the mouth of those griefs which have no mouth, my voice, the freedom of those that collapse in the dungeon of despair.*¹

Let me start with an apparent paradox. Sivanandan has never had much time for psychological accounts of racism or attempts to understand racism from a psychological standpoint. His writing over the past three decades can be seen as an insistence that, whatever else it might be, whatever else it might involve, racism is always, in the first and final analysis, a system of exploitation and oppression, inextricably linked to the capitalist mode of production. And yet, there is throughout his work an equally consistent awareness that racism is not just something that finds expression materially, but something that is deeply injurious psychologically, to the psyches of individual men and women, to their souls. This injury, moreover, is experienced not only by those who suffer the impact of racism, but by those who perpetrate it or allow it to be perpetrated. (This experience, of course, is completely different according to which category someone belongs – there is no false equivalence between the racist and the man or woman at the receiving end of racism.) This personal or existential strain or vein in Sivanandan's work, his concern with the soul of man and woman, is, I believe, an important part of what makes him a unique writer in this field, and it is this that I want to consider in this essay.

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The meaning of racism

For Sivanandan, racism is not just a form of economic or even physical violence against black people. It is not just the depredations forced on Third World countries, the sex trade including child prostitution, the ruination brought about by tourism which turns Third World countries into playgrounds for affluent westerners, or the physically dangerous nature of the labour imposed on the workers of Third World countries. Nor is it the myriad forms of discrimination, from police harassment to job discrimination to the social pathology of the illnesses, including mental illnesses, in which black people are caught. All of these he has documented. Indeed, in thirty years of writing and speaking and agitating, he has articulated the parameters of contemporary racism in a way unequalled by anyone else. But racism is also and at the same time, he has said, a denial of man's and woman's 'need to be complemented', to be made whole by the other – whether this be the sexual other or the cultural or racial other. White racism is, ultimately, a denial of dignity to those who are not white.²

For the black person, colour is a whole way of life or non-life – in a piece written over thirty years ago, he put it thus: 'To say that he [the black man] is colour conscious is to imply that he has been allowed the possibility of another consciousness. In fact, it would be truer to say that his colour is the one thing he does not wish to be conscious of – for it is his mark of oppression.'³ The black is, in effect, trapped within the castle of his skin.

The liberation of the black soul

Or rather, he would be so trapped if he allowed himself to be. For the black psyche is not just deformed or threatened with deformation under racism. To accept that would be to take a completely undynamic view of personal identity, one that is contrary to Sivanandan's whole way of thinking. Just as capitalism contains within it the seeds of its own overturning, whether these are realised or not, so racism gives rise to anti-racism, to black struggle, to the quest for liberation, and it is in this struggle that a new identity can come into being. That this was at the heart of the political project of Black Power, he saw straightaway. Black Power, wrote Sivanandan in 1971, was concerned precisely with 'the politics of existence'. Such a politics was concerned, rightly, with how the black person would achieve political power. But it was also, inevitably, an existential position. It was, by necessity, concerned with a new identity for the black person and it was in the course of the civil rights struggles which gave rise to Black Power, the freedom rides, the sit-ins, the sit-downs and voter registration campaigns that 'the black man came to a consciousness of himself as he never had before'. No

longer would he accept white society's image of him as the quintessence of evil. Drawing on Fanon, Siva wrote that, for a while at least, the black had believed in the white world's 'narcissistic dialogue' of eternal values and had accepted that he was the negation of such values, 'the corrosive element disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality'.⁴ He saw that white values were meaningless and white promises ineffectual. Indeed, it was clear that the white man did not really believe in them himself. The only way open to the black was to wrest his freedom from the white by force. 'Violence... is not a matter of choice but a symptom of the fact that, for the black man, there is no choice.'⁵

To claim, as many did, including many white liberals, that Black Power was itself racist was to ignore the fact that the Black Power movement sought not to oppress white people, but to achieve the humanity of blacks:

What keeps him from this achievement is white oppression. The need to oppress, the primitive notion of racial superiority, is the white man's burden. It is he who must choose to lose it. The black man, again, has no choice... white racism incurs... the denial of human dignity; black 'racism' envisages the negation of that denial.⁶

But it was not just in the writings and programmes of Black Power intellectuals and activists that a new identity in the making was to be discerned. It was there, Siva was basically saying, in so many aspects of black culture and the life and work of black people, there, if one just looked. It was there in the wondrous voice and song of Paul Robeson, whom he first heard as a child, in a village bakery in northern Ceylon when he should have been at school: 'A man was singing what sounded like a song of his people that sounded so much like their own – and he sang as though the heart of the radio itself would break.'⁷ Long before black was officially beautiful, Robeson was celebrating 'the pride of his race and the cultures of his peoples', his song connecting him to his own origins and the struggles of the ordinary peoples of the world.⁸ It was there, too, in the figure of Muhammad Ali, who subverted the brute force of heavyweight boxing, bringing an artistry 'unsurpassed by Pavlova', epitomising in sport the promise of freedom that was black power:

Out of the very blackness, which white society decrees as evil, he squeezes out an image of himself and of his people which is both peerless and profound. Out of the very handicaps inherent in the medium he works in, he reconstructs a style which is also the life style of his people. His people dance, he dances. His people sing, he sings – in verse. His people stand with wearied heads, he brings them erect again... Out of an elegy he makes a hymn.⁹

This existential component – a concern with the content of life, the meaning of existence – is something to be found not only in the era of

Black Power. It was there, as Sivanandan saw in the early 1970s, in the struggles of women against male domination, against patriarchy. Caught up in a world that men had made, woman had to construct and reconstruct her own reality, 'in herself and in her struggle, subjectively and objectively', in a daily act of renewal:

It is a sort of permanent revolution in which merely to hold on to the reality which the woman finds for herself constitutes a revolutionary act – if only because that really is a refusal to accept the world as defined for her, a refusal to accept the status quo.¹⁰

And, of course, it is there in black struggles to the present day. It is there in the struggles that black people have waged and continue to wage – 'as a class and as a people' – at work, in the community, wherever they are. Thus, when the cities and towns of Britain exploded in the summer of 1981, Sivanandan saw not mindless riot or mere criminality, as the media and politicians claimed. He located the events in their context, a history of the struggles of black people (Asian and Afro-Caribbean) from the earliest days of post-war black settlement, a history which moved 'from resistance to rebellion'. The black youth who took to the streets in 1981, he argued, differed from their parents in not being disciplined into a culture and routine that preserved the status quo. Theirs was a 'different hunger'. But it was, nevertheless, still a hunger whose concern was life itself – 'a hunger to retain the freedom, the life-style, the dignity which they have carved out from the stone of their lives.'¹¹ The promise of black struggle remains, in essence, the promise of Black Power:

[N]ew testaments are being written, values being hewn out anew, a new man is being born. From the arid wastes of our prisons and our ghettos come the smell of man creating himself – out of the rubble of our civilisation, out of the wilderness of unlove.¹²

The deformation of the white psyche

Siva has never specifically addressed the matter of the racist white psyche. Why should he? And yet, time and time again, he addresses white people, appeals to our better selves. 'Listen, white man,' he wrote in early 1981 in an unpublished polemic, 'for it is of your destruction, and ours, that I speak.' The cities and towns of Britain were yet to burn with anger but, at the year's turning, thirteen young blacks lost their lives in the New Cross fire, a fire which the various authorities refused even to consider might have been racist. And when 10,000 people marched in protest through Fleet Street, the response of the press was even more racist vitriol. It was utterly characteristic of Siva that he should choose this moment to address the white population, this

moment to call upon whites to wake up, to open our eyes, to see what was going on around us, in our name, and to change things if only in the interest of self-preservation. 'The regeneration of the Negro,' he had written fourteen years previously, 'was also the regeneration of the white man.'¹³

I say utterly characteristic, for just as Sivanandan has always seen in racism the murder of the black soul, so he has always seen its corollary, the deformation of the white psyche. The 'theology of racial superiority', he was writing in 1971, gave the white man 'a fictitious stature based on the belief of the Black man's worthlessness' and allowed him to invest the black man 'with every psychological inadequacy in his own make-up'. But Siva did not stop there, at accusation, but went on to show that this, whatever material advantage it brought, was an obstruction in the white's development, preventing him from 'acknowledging himself and achieving the humanism he so blatantly vaunted'.¹⁴

So, too, he wanted to save the white man from himself, from his own estrangement from himself, an estrangement that allowed him to 'lay claim to the human condition and deny it at the same time'. He quoted Sartre: 'Our victims know us by their scars and by their chains and it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable. It is enough that they show us what we have made of them for us to realise what we have made of ourselves.'¹⁵

The psychologisation of racism

Racism, Sivanandan has always acknowledged, has psychological effects; it impacts upon the human soul, as it does on the body. But this does not mean that racism is a matter of psychology. It cannot be reduced to psychology, however sophisticated, nor even be explained by it; it cannot be detached from its material base, as it were. Yet this is precisely what many of those within the field of 'race relations' have tried again and again to do and, at three key points in the 1980s and 1990s, Sivanandan confronted such attempts, challenging those who would have regarded themselves as also being against racism.

The first of these moves to psychologise racism came in the early 1980s when, reeling from the urban uprisings in 1981, the British government looked to its liberal conscience in the form of Lord Scarman and turned increasingly to ethnic policies as a means of heading off black demands for social justice. Scarman's report was widely acclaimed by the Left and liberal-left establishment and by much of the 'race relations industry' but, in his analysis, Sivanandan showed that underneath Scarman's acknowledgement of widespread racial discrimination, something quite insidious was going on. For what Scarman was also saying was that racism was not a reality of black life. There was, at worst, discrimination and prejudice. Racism was reduced

to a matter of subjective feelings, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. Ethnic minorities, Scarman averred, had a 'sense' of 'concealed discrimination', while young blacks had a 'sense of rejection' and 'a sense of insecurity'. They do not 'feel' secure socially, economically or politically. They 'see' the police as pursuing and harassing them on the streets. That the police were racist was just an idea, 'popular attitudes and beliefs' which derived their strength from the 'limbo of the half-remembered and the half-imagined'.

And being a liberal, Scarman was even-handed. Racism, in the sense, of course, of something in the mind, was to be found on both sides of the racial divide, black and white. 'Institutional racism was a matter of black perception, white racism was a matter of prejudice.'¹⁶ In a sleight of hand, Scarman had, Siva commented, shifted the object of anti-racist struggle from changing society to changing the individual.

Scarman's redefinition of 'the problem', and the alacrity with which his 'analysis' was seized upon by the white establishment at central and local level, set the scene, provided the context for what was to be perhaps the most significant attempt to psychologise race relations or even racism. Racism awareness training which sought to 'sensitise' whites to 'their' racism, saw its moment and sought to seize it.

'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', first published in 1985, was a truly characteristic intervention. While a great many people involved in anti-racist activities at the time were concerned about racism awareness training and had their misgivings and doubts, Siva gave articulation to those questions. More than that, he located RAT – mischievously, but to serious purpose, he insisted on using the acronym – in its context of the decline of black political struggle, the emergence and fostering of a black middle and professional class, and the increasing abandonment by sections of the political Left of a concern with material conditions and social class for a preoccupation with ideologies.

For RAT, racism was an essence in the white psyche; it was something that whites suffered from, like an illness. In a definition that was to become part of common sense in certain circles, racism became, as if in a mantra, 'a white problem', defined as 'prejudice + power'. (But, asked Siva, if racism really was a white problem, why didn't the black people so involved in RAT and its various offshoots not just leave it to white people to get on with it?) The essential problem with RAT, he argued, was that racism was not a white problem but 'a problem of a white power structure'; power was not something that white people were born into but something they derived from their positions in a complex matrix of sex, race and class; oppression did not equal exploitation; ideas did not equal ideology; the personal was not the political, but the political was personal; and personal liberation was not political liberation.¹⁷ For RAT, however, one simply had to make the individual aware of her or his prejudice and racism would disappear.

It is perhaps difficult, nearly fifteen years later, to appreciate just how powerful RAT and its various offshoots had become – and how pernicious and oppressive they could be. It was the ‘thing’ to which so many people (local government departments, welfare bodies, voluntary organisations) looked as an answer to their need to ‘do something’ (and to be seen to be doing something) about racism. Siva’s intervention was eagerly awaited by many of us at the time. I remember the feeling of excitement as I sat down at the start of a long train journey and took out of my bag a photocopy of the final draft of the piece. Siva not only provided the most cogent analysis of RAT – immediate but considered, angry but witty, intellectually sound but written with a clear aim in mind but, at a stroke, or so it seemed, he cut the ground from under it. RAT never seemed to recover. It was, as I have said, an utterly characteristic intervention

RAT (and its variants), whether deliberately or not, sought to make whites feel guilty, about racism and their greater or lesser collusion with it. Sivanandan, it should be emphasised, has never wanted this. What white people should feel if they have any decency is, on the contrary, shame – and, having been shamed, they should then act. The difference is not one of minor semantics but one with real consequences:

Guilt, as Helen Merrell Lynd has pointed out, closes one down on oneself, internalises one’s inadequacies, breeds a sense of helplessness. Above all, it tries to live up to the standards set out by others for one. Shame, on the other hand, sets one’s own standards for oneself, opens one out to one’s own possibilities and those of others. To be guilty of racism is to have transgressed someone else’s standards, to be ashamed of it is to fail one’s own.¹⁸

As for apparently more sophisticated attempts to engage with the question of racism from a psychoanalytic perspective, again Sivanandan’s has been a sceptical voice. In an early review of *White Racism: a psychohistory* by the psychoanalyst and Marxist Joel Kovel, Siva could accept much of Kovel’s analysis – psycho-analysis, that is, and his attempt to link the world of the psyche with the historical and material world. But he parted company with Kovel over the latter’s ‘unilinear interpretation of history’ and the pessimism to which his adherence to psychoanalytic ideas led him, in particular his inability to see progress through conflict and what Siva called the ‘en-humanising’ revolution of blacks then in progress.¹⁹ It is not, in other words, that psychoanalysis is necessarily wrong, but that it is limited in its application.

(It’s worth noting here that, in his short piece on Muhammad Ali, Siva saw the important psychological meaning that boxing had for its white spectators. It was not just a blood sport from which ‘the white man would gather profit and pleasure at no great cost to himself’. It satisfied a need for projection and catharsis. In boxing, the white spec-

tator gathered 'myriad frustrations that in his daily life he visited on niggers in general and embod[ied] them in a single super-nigger. Two super-niggers would be doubly cathartic – and the more explosive they were, the more orgasmic his release.'²⁰)

More recently, when psychoanalysis has been taken up as a 'theoretical tool' by many academics and intellectuals writing about 'race', Sivanandan has detected, once again, the political collapsed into the personal, racism reduced to psychology. The so-called 'theoretical practitioners' have retreated from the real world of racism – including the real world of violent racism on their doorstep, in the very geographical areas where they carry out their work – into the world of ideas, of 'discourse and deconstruction and representation'. It is as though, he has said, they believe that to interpret the world is more important than to change it, 'as though changing the interpretation is all we could do in a changing world.'²¹ Those who deride what they call 'economic determinism' are those whose lives are not economically determined and who create a whole new obscurantist and obfuscating language which allows them to appropriate struggle without engaging in it and further their own interests while appearing to be radical.²²

Sivanandan is excoriating in his critique of such attempts to personalise and psychologise racism, whatever pseudo-radical garb they might appear in, and yet it is striking how, again and again, he calls upon white people to join in the fight against racism. Never has he taken the path of black exclusionism, although he understands what makes others take this path – how could he not? – and defends it against facile and insulting charges of 'reverse racism'. And this attitude has always been there in his practical work in the Institute of Race Relations which has always held out welcome, political and personal, for those whites with the sensibility and the imagination to identify with the condition of black people. This appeal to white people and to white society has nothing to do with political tactics or strategy, a recognition that, in Britain at least, blacks are but a small minority of the population and require allies. It is, rather, something that comes directly from his conviction that black and white share in a common humanity, their futures inextricably linked one with the other. His position might be summed up by the words of Camus which he quoted to end his early piece, 'A farewell to liberalism': 'We want to destroy you in your power without mutilating you in your soul.'²³

False shadows, false light: the dilemmas of the black intellectual

That many of those he takes issue with or attacks are themselves black is, to Siva, a matter of little consequence. More than twenty-five years ago, he poetically analysed the dilemmas of the black man who sought acceptance from the dominant society through his intellectual abilities.

The 'coloured' intellectual, he wrote in the early 1970s, is the 'marginal man par excellence... a creature of two worlds, and of none... what he comes into is not so much a twilight world, as a world of false shadows and false light'. Such a one seeks privilege at the court of the colonial ruler but, sooner or later, enters into 'another world where his colour, and not his intellect or his status, begins to define his life'. Virtually everyone he comes into contact with, unless they happen to be black, leaves him in no doubt that he is not welcome here. He is forced to enter 'into another relationship with himself', increasingly caught in the contradictions of his position. As a result of his colour, he is outside white society; as a result of his intellectual status, he is outside black. This contradiction is perceived 'not just intellectually or abstractly, but in his very existence. It is... a living, palpating reality, demanding resolution'.²⁴ It is only through resolving his contradiction as an intellectual that he resolves his existential contradiction. By virtue of his colour and through the instinct of his oppression, he can come to a consciousness of the oppressed and thus take 'conscience of himself' (Sartre); in taking conscience of himself, he comes to consciousness of the oppressed.

An example of the black intellectual or writer caught in this contradiction was James Baldwin. He too, wrote Sivanandan, took conscience of himself in his history and, for some of the time at least, sought to change it. Baldwin's problem, his tragic flaw, as Siva saw it, was that he viewed himself as a writer first and a black American after. His best writing arose from 'the vortex of racial struggle' in which he was caught up. But when Baldwin abandoned the struggle, it became clear that his obsession was really with himself and with America and race only when that country's history was being acted out in him. Sivanandan had no problem recognising Baldwin's considerable gifts as a writer – he was a 'consummate craftsman' – but, in the end, he was a writer 'who happens to be black', not 'a black who happens to be a writer... the one is a mercenary on hire to his people, the other is a soldier in the people's army'.²⁵

A more recent example is that of V.S. Naipaul. Siva is clear: 'I never liked Naipaul', he commences his essay. 'I could never read him without a sense of self-betrayal'.²⁶ This fellow-colonial, wrote Siva, knew his condition better than he himself did, described it with a fine and acute understanding, but 'then delivered me up to my subjugation in the pursuit of his own deliverance'. Naipaul warned Siva against himself, against betraying and being betrayed, 'around which the whole colonised psyche seems to revolve'.

It is not that Naipaul has forgotten or ignores his history and frame of reference – slavery, colonialism, plantation society – but that he 'internalises the slave condition, individualises it, and so anaesthetises it of all social consideration'. In pursuit of his own peace of mind, his own security, his own uprootedness, he abandons his history without appear-

ing to, betrays it without seeming to betray. 'Through that magic alchemy of the writer's craft, he transmutes a system into an attribute and passes off one for the other as though doing service to both.'²⁷ Naipaul exemplifies the colonised psyche which seeks 'to find its resolution, its reconciliation to itself, through embracing colonialism again, this time of its own volition, in full knowledge of what it is doing and, having failed to become whole in itself, become whole in the other'.²⁸

Sivanandan's assessment of Naipaul recalls the earlier one of Baldwin. In failing to come to terms with the historical experience of racism, 'he is diminished as a man' and because he is diminished as a man, he is diminished as a writer. As with Baldwin, there remains only the craft. But with Naipaul, Siva goes further; the man is subsumed under the writer and his thought becomes less profound and less truthful – even though the writing may get finer.

The political and the personal

On many occasions, Sivanandan has taken issue with the idea that the personal is the political, a notion that has bedevilled, diverted and weakened so many political movements. When politics has all too often become reduced to the personal, to a matter of how one lives one's life, the food one eats, the clothes one wears, the words one speaks, rather than a practice that, yes, embraces all this, but connects it to the wider world, Siva's is a voice insisting rather that it is the political that is personal. He embodies the highly complex connection between the political and the personal, and he does so in a way that makes him, I believe, unique among political writers/activists, at least in the English-speaking world. To paraphrase a line of Eliot, which he himself is fond of quoting, 'he had the experience but did not miss the meaning'. All colonised peoples, he has said, have 'all the time a subliminal sense of politics, a sense of power or rather of powerlessness'²⁹ and his own experience of achieving a certain professional status in his native Ceylon (as it then was) and the privileges that this would confer on him, made him ashamed in the face of the poverty of his family and village. And, in 1958, he experienced what he called a 'double baptism of fire', caught up in the Sinhala-Tamil conflicts and fleeing to Britain, only to find himself in the middle of the anti-black riots of London's Notting Hill.³⁰

If black is to mean anything, he has said, it has to be a generalising of experience, an opening to the experience of others, not a privileging of one oppression over others. It must mean kinship, community and solidarity:

What is the point of all the injustices we have suffered under one form of racism or another if we cannot open out to the oppressions of others? What is the point of experience if we do not understand its

meaning And what's the point of knowing its meaning if we do not change the experience? The aim of the individual, Fanon, that great avatar of blackness, once said, is to take on the universality inherent in the human condition.³¹

Above all, perhaps, Siva is a deeply moral thinker and, striking in this era of moral relativism and even ethical abdication or suspicion of so-called 'grand narratives', not afraid to say so, to be so. He himself has deplored the 'moral vacuum on the left and the moralistic fundamentalisms on the right'.³² But his morality is not centred upon the individual, but derives from the collective which gives birth to, sustains, and gives meaning to that individual. It is not that there is no place for the individual or the individual aspiration, but that the individual aspiration has also to be the collective aspiration. If it is not, there cannot be justice: 'There is nothing wrong with ambition and aspiration so long as you take the rest of the family with you.'³³

The so-called politics of identity is, for Sivanandan, an example, ultimately, of the pursuit of individualism; nothing to do with the challenging of political, including economic, power. Its notion of identity is in any case, wrong-headed, for identity is never something fixed. Rather, it is dynamic, always in-formation, being formed through self-activity and self-reflectiveness. And the postmodern notion that we are all somehow fragmented selves is, when it is not the real tragedy of the truly schizoid, a conceit of western intellectuals. I recall Siva telling a conference some years ago, looking back at the black struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, that a member of the Indian Workers' Association could be marching with the Black People's Alliance against Enoch Powell on a Sunday, leafleting the Asian community against Indira Gandhi's 'Emergency' on Monday and on Tuesday negotiating over trade union membership. 'We were Indian, black and working class in different contexts at different times and sometimes all at once. It caused us no identity crisis: we knew who we were and what we were doing – and in the doing we became who we were.'³⁴

What we must hold on to, he has argued, are not the old methods of organisation or the old modes of thought, but the values and traditions that were 'hammered out on the smithy' of the old battles: 'loyalty, solidarity, camaraderie, unity, all the great and simple things that make us human'.³⁵ His concept of community has nothing to do with the enforced values of 'communitarianism'. Nor has it anything to do with the much-vaunted 'community' of the internet and cyberspace.

[T]he new technology has made fantasy fact. You can now live in that fantasy world, because it is a world that you create in the home, alone. And, therefore, in a world of loneliness, you are never alone. In a world of poverty, you are never poor. In a world of class conflict, you are classless.³⁶

The 'community' of the internet is a fantasy community, a world of 'disembodied emotions' in a real world where feelings can be dealt with only by being disembodied, a world of 'neighbourliness without neighbourhood.'³⁷

No one, it should be said, needs to tell Sivanandan about the benefits to be gained from the communications revolution, the new industrial revolution. He was writing about the possibilities of the microprocessor revolution long before most of us had computers, let alone access to the internet. But he has always insisted on speaking a truth about this revolution – that it depends for its manufacture on the super-exploitation of Third World people, usually women, redundant by their mid-twenties because of the physical effects of their work, who are needed to make the processors that allow us to speak to each other across cyberspace.

The real benefits of the technological revolution he sees are those that would liberate us from needless and unpleasant work for a world of active and creative leisure, the creation of and participation in culture. Like community, this is a word that is difficult to use, given its devaluation. But culture is not something to be more or less passively consumed, but a process, living and dynamic, in which everyone might find an opportunity for expression to the range of their possibilities, where what is best in men and women might find articulation.

Over three decades of writing and activism, Siva has maintained that difficult and problematic, yet unavoidable, tension between the material and the individual, never taking refuge, as so many have done, in one or the other. Truly dialectical, he refuses to be in one place only. This is why it is impossible to read him, to open virtually any page of anything he has written, or to hear him speak and not be immediately aware that he is speaking not just about systems of exploitation and oppression – capitalism and racism – but about the lived lives of men and women who are exploited and oppressed and who struggle against their condition.

No race holds a monopoly of beauty, intelligence, of strength,
and there is room for all at the rendez-vous of victory...³⁸

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Reference to Sivanandan's two collections of essays and articles is made as follows, *Communities of Resistance: writings on black struggles for socialism* (London, Verso, 1990) is abbreviated to CR and *A Different Hunger: writings on black resistance* (London, Pluto Press, 1982) to DH. All references are to his works unless otherwise indicated.

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- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 18 'Left, right and Burnage', CR, p. 150. It is significant that psychoanalysis, in Britain at least, has had remarkably little to say about shame compared, for example, to guilt, which is such a cornerstone of classical and Kleinian theories. It is, as the eminent psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft said, the 'Cinderella of the unpleasant emotions', having received far less attention than others. *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London, 1968), p. 152.
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Understanding imperialism

NANCY MURRAY

Apprehending reality: *Race & Class* as an anti- imperialist journal

'The function of knowledge ... is to liberate – to apprehend reality in order to change it.' A. Sivanandan, editorial, *Race* April 1974

In response to the keyword 'Imperialism', an America Online search engine produced this list of sites early in 1999: at the top, 'food and imperialism', with sub-heads 'continental breakfast' and 'the Great British breakfast'; next, a college course outline on the rise of US imperialism in Latin America in the late nineteenth century; followed by an invitation to 'Join the ICQ revolution' by becoming part of a list 'designed to help imperialism players find each other on line', and then an entry for Star Wars ('Imperialism unbound'). Way down the list was 'Imperialism 101', a section from Michael Parenti's book *Against Empire*. Clicking onto it produced the following departure from virtual reality:

Imperialism has been the most powerful force in world history over the last four or five centuries, carving up whole continents while oppressing indigenous peoples and obliterating entire civilizations. Yet, empire as it exists today is seldom accorded any serious attention by our academics, media commentators, and political leaders... of the various notions about imperialism circulating today in the United States, the dominant one is that it no longer exists. Imperialism is not recognized as a legitimate concept, certainly not in regard to the United States.¹

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Race & Class, 41, 1/2 (1999)

It is twenty-five years since A. Sivanandan's April 1974 editorial in *Race* invited 'the emerging race of insurgent academics everywhere' to document imperialism and the struggles against it for the journal that was about to be renamed *Race & Class*. It was a time of revolutionary ferment, when American expatriates throughout the Third World were closely scrutinised for CIA ties. Anti-imperialist struggles may have been 'systematically ignored by the western media',² but, thanks to Cold War rivalry and international solidarity, they were far from invisible. Then, in the 1980s, imperialism's 'anti-communist' offensive used invasion, low-intensity warfare, economic destabilisation, terror and genocide to reverse the gains of the previous decades. And now the depredations of the 'new uncontested American imperialism'³ of the 1990s are all but invisible in the West – not just to the epoch's purveyors of 'information that never becomes knowledge',⁴ but also to a Left which had turned its back on the Third World precisely when Third World peoples were being exploited as never before. Today, Yasser Arafat welcomes the CIA to midwife an apartheid arrangement which will give Palestinians less-than-bantustans: a measure of the sea-change that has taken place since *Race & Class* was 'brech-birthered from *Race*' in that newly liberated zone, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).⁵

The Institute has always been singularly well-equipped to apprehend reality in a far-sighted and comprehensive fashion, and to weave practice and theory together in a manner which never loses sight of the audience it wants to reach. What Sivanandan wrote in memory of his friend N. Sanmugathan is equally true of himself: 'Shan had a brilliant dialectical mind that grasped a situation before anyone else had seen it.'⁶ And his words about the late Malcolm Caldwell – whom he described as a 'soldier in the people's army'⁷ – apply to each member of the IRR community. Staff and friends, who are themselves fully involved through their grassroots activity in turning knowledge into action, would feed the collective creative process set in motion by Siva, with his uncanny ability to decipher the shape of things to come. Schedules and deadlines would bend before the glimmer of an idea, or the beginnings of a theory, around which discussion would swirl until a panoramic picture would finally emerge, like a photographic image coming into focus in a developing tray. Anyone who has experienced the 'culture' of the Institute will know why, even as progressive forces everywhere have lost direction, its journal has been able to go from strength to strength, culminating in its penetrating special issue, 'The threat of globalism' (October 1998–March 1999). What still fuels its sense of mission, and burns more brightly as postmodern cynicism and indifference take over the centre stage, is the visceral hatred of injustice which has found a home at the journal for twenty-five years.

An overview of *Race & Class* as an anti-imperialist journal requires that we examine, in turn: 1) its documentation of struggles against

imperialism; 2) its analysis of the forces that have undermined those struggles; 3) its provision of tools to further those struggles; and 4) the signposts it has erected to help us find our way in a world dominated by the 'new imperium' which itself maintains (in Michael Parenti's words) that imperialism 'no longer exists'. What contribution has the journal and its editor made to 'the unending struggle to become more profoundly human'⁸ – and what role awaits it in the twenty-first century?

Making connections

*'Wherever imperialism sets foot, there is devastation, immiseration, deracination – and revolt.'*⁹

In the mid-1970s, revolt still held the promise of liberation as oppressed and exploited Third World peoples sought to break free from colonialism, where it still lingered, and from a deepening neocolonialism practically everywhere else. Their efforts to wrest back control of their own resources and the wealth they produced, and to rise above the degraded status to which racism had consigned them, became the substance of *Race & Class*. Relating the black experience in Britain to Third World struggles, making liberation movements visible, reclaiming people's history, tracing the shifting symbiotic relationship between racism and capitalism, assessing the strengths and vulnerabilities of imperialism: these were the tasks carried out by the new journal's insurgent scholar-activists in the 1970s – among them Basil Davidson, Ken Jordaan, Thomas Hodgkin, Malcolm Caldwell and Chris Searle.

As much as it owed to its editorial working committee and editorial staff, from the beginning the journal was distinguished by Sivanandan's feel for imperialism not as an abstraction, but as a 'lived experience',¹⁰ by his dialectical analysis of the connections between histories and struggles, and by his unwavering commitment to socialism not as an ideology, but as 'the process through which liberation is won'.¹¹ The act of collective resistance liberates colonised peoples to discover the power lying dormant within them, a power that can liberate territory and liberate minds to discover new ways of living and producing for the common good.

There was nothing dogmatic about the journal's approach to the anti-imperialist movements which were under way in the 1970s, and little trace of the preoccupation with ideology which (along with racism) prevented much of the Left from grasping what imperialism meant on the ground. *Race & Class* took the ground as its starting point: how is imperialism actually experienced? How is the devastation, the immiseration, the deracination being resisted? How, and how successfully, is that resistance being countered? What lessons can be drawn from that

resistance, to be fashioned into a theory that can become a weapon in struggle?

In its early years, *Race & Class* put a spotlight on the widening 'arc of revolutions'¹² in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central and Latin America, and rapidly became a hub for contributors who were either involved in the movements they were writing about, or were in solidarity with them. By the time the journal was five years old, three *Race & Class* writers and mentors – Orlando Letelier, Malcolm Caldwell and Walter Rodney – had been killed in the front line of struggle.

Side by side with articles about the revolutionary momentum in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Grenada, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Iran, Afghanistan and the former Portuguese colonies of Africa, were pieces taking the measure of the resistance in El Salvador, Namibia, Malawi, Sudan, the Philippines and East Timor and analysing the capacity of imperialism to renew itself and repress anew – in Chile, El Salvador, South Africa (where Siva's 'Open letter to No Sizwe'¹³ influenced the thinking of AZAPO on race, class and caste) and in the Middle East.

In 1976, *Race & Class* brought out its first special issue, focusing on the region it saw as the 'testing ground of imperial design' in the post-Vietnam war era.¹⁴ Over the next two decades, the journal went on to publish more than thirty articles about Israel/Palestine and US imperialism in the Middle East by contributors such as Eqbal Ahmad, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Israel Shahak. Palestinians writing from the heart of the *intifada* and, later, by Palestinians, Israelis and others analysing the post-Gulf war 'diplomacies of defeat'. As a liberation organisation, the PLO, at one time backed by more countries than recognised the State of Israel, was unique in both the extent of its international support and in the power of its adversaries: a US/Israel partnership bent on dominating the region and undermining liberation movements everywhere. Sivanandan's editorial in the 1976 special issue described why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was so significant:

Unlike the Jewish and Black diasporas before it, the Palestinian diaspora – by the very nature of its history, locale and time – carries with it the contagion of revolution. In the Arab countries into which it has dispersed, the Palestinian resistance has become the spearhead of revolutionary Arab nationalism, portending socialist change. Its very existence is a constant threat to the ruling elites of the region who, once the dust of battle has settled and dignity regained, find a more natural identity of interests with their Israeli counterparts than with their own revolutionary rabble. All the urging they need is imperialism's whisper: we are all capitalists under the skin.¹⁵

In this paragraph we see assembled the elements that gave *Race & Class* its exceptional ability 'to catch history on the wing':¹⁶ its concern

with actual situations (history, locale and time) that undergird revolutionary movements is combined with an awareness of the way economic determinants enable imperialism to mutate into new forms, win new allies, and change the terrain of conflict. Everything was in motion, which made the outcome potentially hopeful but uncertain. But just as the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 and ZANLA's victory in Zimbabwe in 1980 made it seem that the 'contagion of revolution' was still not spent, imperialism's whisper rose to a roar. The main task of *Race & Class* in the 1980s was to analyse the powerful new forces arrayed against liberation.

The liberation of productive forces

*'The destiny of Third World peoples has once more moved into the hands of a new capitalist world order and intellectuals no longer speak truth to power.'*¹⁷

Born as industrial capitalism was dying and the Bretton Woods economic order was being dismantled, *Race & Class* has quite literally grown up with the acceleration of the globalisation of capital and the technological revolution. In an early editorial, Sivanandan warned that international monopoly capital would lead to 'a more repressive international order' as the state showed a new willingness to intervene on behalf of capital and move against 'those rightless sections' of the working class 'defined as migrant or foreign'.¹⁸ The new economic and political developments that enabled capital to 'discriminate in order to exploit' highlighted the 'common denominators of struggle between the various sections of the working class, between the oppressed and the exploited, between race and class'.

The impact of the new economic order on workers everywhere and their need to forge a common resistance, the way capitalism harnessed racism to its own ends and increasingly used it against migrants and refugees, the growth of authoritarianism at home and abroad (often behind a democratic façade) – these are the core themes which dominate *Race & Class* in the 1980s and '90s. In the pivotal year of 1979, a special issue on the Iranian revolution was immediately followed by an issue containing Sivanandan's path-breaking article on (his words) 'the new world order', a subject he would revisit after a decade of Reaganomics and Thatcherism in 'New circuits of imperialism' (1989) and, ten years after that, in 'Globalism and the Left' (1998). 'Imperialism and disorganic development in the silicon age' (1979) describes what the revolutionary changes in the production process and the changing pattern of exploitation have meant to workers: at the centre, a growth in the ranks of the (disproportionately black and female) casual workers, temporary workers and the never-to-be employed, and, at the periphery,

intense exploitation and 'massive immiseration accompanied by a wholesale attack on the values, relationships, gods that made such immiseration bearable; rulers who rule not for their own people but for someone else – a development that makes no sense, has no bearing on their lives, is disorganic'.¹⁹

For the past twenty years, the journal has revealed how lives around the globe – and the globe itself – have been ravaged by the liberation of productive forces, as 'imperial capital' (aided by the IMF and World Bank) has moved to cheap labour reserves, kept under control by Third World fascist dictatorships. Europe's response to the 'flotsam and jetsam of political refugees'²⁰ and massive population displacement produced by political repression and 'disorganic development' has been, as Sivanandan told an audience in Berlin, 'a new Euro state-racism' that 'bids fair to set us on course to a new Euro-fascism'.²¹ In penetrating special issues, *Race & Class* examined the plunder of the Third World engendered by the 'new conquistadors' of a 'rampant imperialism' (1989 and 1992) and the variations of racism in Europe (1991 and 1997) which have served as the building blocks of an anti-migrant, anti-refugee, fortress Europe at a time when 100 million people are forced to be on the move. Racism is manipulated to disguise the extent to which the global economy has linked the fates of people, North and South, to stratify workers transnationally along class lines in a global social apartheid and to mark out a surplus population, to be jailed or otherwise discarded. Racism renders the 'disposable' Third World work-force in Europe subhuman and invisible, a subject which the journal returns to repeatedly in the 1990s: 'A whole system of exploitation is thus erected on the back of the foreign worker, but racism keeps it from the light of day.'²²

Racism itself is kept from the light of day and, like capitalism, has been rendered all but invisible on the landscape of the 'new times'. Sivanandan's prodigious analysis of how the new productive forces have transformed everything, and what this means for politics, culture and struggle, took shape in two articles, 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle' (1985) and 'All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times' (1990). Having taken 'flight from class', the new social forces dissected in these essays are inward looking and indifferent to the deepening exploitation of Third World peoples and the links connecting racism and imperialism. Sivanandan demonstrates that racism is rendered ahistorical and personal by the identity politics of the new times and the capitulation of the Left. There are no more racist structures to be dismantled or battles for social justice to be fought: race is detached from class and people from their histories, as racism awareness training sessions, multicultural programmes and a culture of ethnicity take the place of community-based struggles. And with the intelligentsia mired in postmodern theory, and the media's information workers

becoming 'collaborators in power'²³ and agents of disinformation, the role of western governments, corporations and financial institutions in the pillage of the Third World is further obscured:

The Third World is no longer out there as an object of struggle; it is here, in the minds of people, as an anodyne to consumption, in the personal politics of the subject – an object of western humanism, the occasion for individual aid, a site for pop culture and pop politics.²⁴

In the Third World itself, there is still revolt – but, in the absence of a guiding ideology and of connections between Black and Third World struggles, and between struggles against capitalism and imperialism – it brings no promise of liberation. Over the past two decades, the journal has sought to take stock of mistakes that were made, and critique the limitations of armed liberation movements and the commandist political culture which stifled popular participation and squandered revolutionary gains. Some reflective pieces, like Chris Searle's essay on Basil Davidson (October–December 1994), look again at past movements to find inspiration for the present from 'the thinkers who are doers' who led them – Cabral, Mondlane, Machel, Neto; others, like Chen Chimutengwende's article on Pan-Africanism (January–March 1997), to find a way forward to a 'second liberation of Africa'. In 1960, Frantz Fanon had warned of 'pseudo states' being formed in which 'people who had given everything in the difficult moments of the struggle for national liberation wonder, with their empty hands and bellies, as to the reality of their victory'.²⁵ Twenty-five years later, *Race & Class* would turn its attention to those 'pseudo states', laying bare imperialism's 'divide and rule' strategies and the use of racism and blatant repression by authoritarian regimes, such as Sri Lanka's, to undermine a collective struggle against neocolonialism. Articles have examined the complexities of the post-revolution era in Eritrea, the collapse of hopes for liberation in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Palestine and various African countries, and the factors leading to 'compromise' in South Africa and Northern Ireland, and where that might lead. Resistance on the ground is described dialectically in relation to the growing class inequalities, the deepening poverty and unemployment, the commodification of culture, the destruction of habitats and human communities. Indigenous and grassroots struggles for cultural expression, self-determination, land, education, health and the environment – these challenges to globalism find their way into practically each issue of *Race & Class* in the 1990s.

But what hopes are there today for resistance to liberate people to control their own lives? In a passage from 'Globalism and the Left', Sivanandan answers this question in a manner which is emblematic of the journal's approach and his own lyrical prose:

The farmers have no land, the workers have no work, the young have no future, the people have no food. The state belongs to the rich, the rich belong to international capital, the intelligentsia aspire to both. Only religion offers hope; only rebellion, release. Hence the insurrection when it comes is not class but mass, sometimes religious, sometimes secular, often both, but always against the state and its imperial masters. But there is no socialist ideology to give it direction, no organic intellectuals to plan its strategies. Hence the rebellions in Zaire, Indonesia, Nigeria end up by bringing back another version of the same old regimes – the second time as farce. And religion, which began as the ‘sigh of the oppressed’, now takes on the force of fundamentalist ideology.²⁶

Beginning with a simple evocation of ‘lived experience’, the cadence of the passage builds up until, in a few sentences, theory and practice merge in an overarching conception of the nature of power and the trajectory and limitations of end-of-century struggles. Marx and Mozart are both brought to mind: one by the allusion, and the breadth of the vision; the other by the seemingly effortless delivery, and the wonder that so much beauty could flow from a single pen. Siva always reminds us that communication is an important tool of struggle. He has mastered the language of his colonial ‘masters’ to communicate with intellectuals and ordinary people alike, and infuses his writing with such grace that we can never forget that beauty, grace and harmony are not mere aesthetic matters, but at the core of the revolutionary project.

Reclaiming history

‘Our problem is to stop the white powers-that-be from de-linking us from ourselves, detaching us from our histories.’²⁷

Race & Class as a journal for ‘Black and Third World liberation’ has done more than document liberation struggles and analyse the forces arrayed against them. It has also, over the span of one hundred issues, endeavoured to decolonise the mind, expose historical myths and the roots of the forces that have shaped the modern world, and reclaim histories that have been lost to view, especially histories of struggle. Without this knowledge and the memory of culture as ‘a determinant of change, a strategy for combat, a weapon for offence’,²⁸ there can be no resistance to the free-market world of ‘I shop, therefore I am’,²⁹ no sense of how to change reality, no hope for liberation.

In his introduction to the issue celebrating the life of Basil Davidson, Sivanandan described how *Race & Class* learned ‘that the people we were fighting for should be the people we were writing for.’³⁰ Writing becomes a tool in the struggle when it illuminates the past to make sense of the present and point the way to a different future. And that

understanding is what the journal has provided, going back, when necessary, to the ancient world to expose present-day distortions and fallacies. The historical roots of modern racism, chattel slavery and colonisation have been unearthed in a special issue on Columbus (1992), and pieces by Jan Carew (1984, 1985, 1988), Basil Davidson (1987) and Jan Pieterse (1986, 1988). Bill Rolston and Milan Rai (1993) have described how Ireland served as a training ground for the conquest of the Americas. Eurocentrism, appropriation and all the other sins of cultural imperialism have been repeatedly exposed – in science and the social sciences, mathematics, language, music, dance, psychology, literature and history – and in his ‘Tales of underdevelopment’ (1987) and ‘Our sciences, their science’ (1993) Maurice Bazin has surveyed the ‘systematic appropriation and use by European ruling classes of all technical resources plundered from Third World peoples’,³¹ looted in the name of a civilising mission. The theft is acknowledged not just for the historical record: setting the record straight can be significant in how people think about their lives and societies. After describing what was destroyed by ‘the much-touted colonial civilising mission’ and the gifts which were forcibly taken from the Caribbean and given to the world, Jan Carew argues that what was lost can be found again if the peoples of the region learn to ‘view culture, history, national identity and development as parts of an organic whole’.³²

Restoring people to their history means restoring them to the notion of culture as a ‘combusting force’,³³ which gives ‘communities of resistance’ their cohesion. From his earliest writings, Sivanandan has described culture as ‘something dynamic, moving, forged in the crucible of struggle, and not some pre-ordained congealed set of artefacts, folklore (which incidentally is what multiculturalism is about).’³⁴ In ‘From resistance to rebellion’ (1982) and other seminal essays documenting black struggles in Britain, he brought to light the way Asian and Afro-Caribbean peoples, united by their common experience of colonialism, were able to organise in their communities to resist state and popular racism and exploitation, and to connect these struggles to the fight against imperialism ‘back home’ and the fight for ‘Black Power’ in the United States.

But, by the 1980s, their communities of resistance had been fragmented and depoliticised by ethnicity, and could no longer be as readily mobilised in common campaigns against immigration raids and deportations and against racial violence on the streets and at the hands of the police. Culture had lost its combusting force and become inward looking and culturally exclusive; ‘communities of resistance’, with their ‘capacity for making other people’s fights one’s own’,³⁵ had no role to play in the navel-gazing exercises of identity politics. And, in the US, the ‘black fundamentalism’ of the Million Man March and male-centred essentialist Afrocentricism posed no challenge to ‘the politics of

expendability³⁶ directed at the black poor. Some of the most important articles in the journal in the 1990s are by Manning Marable, Barbara Ransby, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis (in an interview with Avery Gordon) and others who take the measure of ‘the groundwork for a more secure fascism’³⁷ that characterises American apartheid in a unipolar world, and clear the ground of ‘pseudo solutions’ so that effective new communities of resistance can emerge.³⁸

A world to win

*‘Socialism... is not the past. Socialism is the future.’*³⁹

With the end of the Cold War and Gulf war, the prospects for socialism seemed more remote than ever. Just as the ‘capitulation of the Left’ was removing ‘the whole question of the Third World, of imperialism, of the exploitation of Third World workers’ from political focus, the US was becoming a ‘monolithic power in a monolithic world’.⁴⁰ And if imperialism is not recognised as a ‘legitimate concept’ in the United States, socialism is way beyond the pale – out of sight and, it seems, out of mind.

But however invincible global capitalism might appear, however triumphant the march of market forces, *Race & Class* has refused to accept widening inequalities and the despoliation of the globe as inevitable. Its mission on the edge of the twenty-first century remains what it was twenty-five years ago: ‘to apprehend reality in order to change it’. The change that must be fought for, Sivanandan declared in his 1990 address before the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) in South Africa, is not a compromise with capitalism that tinkers with the economic base, but one which recognises ‘that all inequalities – whether of race, class or gender – are symbiotic of each other, live off each other and are sustained by each other’ and all need to be wiped out:

And black parties are being urged to buy into this system of all things, into the capitalist system, the free enterprise system, the dog-eat-dog system, the system that has systematically enslaved and degraded us. There is no freedom for black people this side of socialism. That is our birthright, that is our tradition, that is where we come from – from that sense of community, of camaraderie, of good neighbourliness – where the individual good comes from the collective good, and the individual is nothing and the community is everything.⁴¹

Nowhere in the journal is socialism the sole focus of an article. Nowhere is it described as an economic system. And nowhere has a detailed blueprint appeared for bringing about the socialist transformation of society, nor indeed for what that society would look like and

how it would work. As early as 1979, in his remembrance of Malcolm Caldwell, Siva warned against such blueprints and the danger of 'seeking refuge in dogma or solace in sectarianism': 'Socialism is still in the making, its story still to unfold. To dogmatise is to write history before it is made – whereas the first duty of a marxist is to make history, not write it.'⁴²

True to his vision, the journal has never given concrete form to the final destination; instead it has fixed on struggles with the capacity to open out into a 'collective good' in which 'our selves can put forth and grow'.⁴³ That is where socialism is to be found: in the doing, the making, the liberating of territory and minds; in the forward movement. As he told the AZAPO convention, 'Socialism is the process through which liberation is won.'⁴⁴

This understanding of socialism as a dynamic of change and becoming has given the journal a unique importance in the post-Cold War 'new times'. Its flexibility and aversion to dogma have enabled it to take up the task which Sivanandan attributed to Detroit auto worker and revolutionary James Boggs, who 'long before the rest of us' saw that 'the onset of the technological revolution was going to bring about such cataclysmic changes in the whole of society, indeed in the whole world order, that we would need to build socialism anew, afresh, from the ground up.'⁴⁵

But how could this be done? When broad sections of the Left have come to terms with market forces, abandoned the notion of 'exploitation', written off the Third World and embraced an inward turning identity politics, what rational hope is there for socialism? And what place is there for a journal so out of step with the 'new times'? Has it not become as much of an anachronism as the spent liberation movements which were its focus?

On the contrary, this epoch of virtual reality, fragmentation and forgetting makes *Race & Class* more timely and indispensable than ever. For the journal has not lost sight of the momentous fact that, however destructive and bleak the times, the liberation of productive forces contains the seeds of socialism, by making possible on a global scale the Marxian vision of 'landscapes of creative leisure for people to be human in'.⁴⁶ In these times when market forces are breaking down communities, when local managerial elites are plundering their economies in the service of the sole superpower, and imperialism itself has all but vanished from view, Siva and the journal repeatedly remind us of 'socialism as a faith, a creed, beliefs, values, traditions: loyalty, comradeship, solidarity, a sense of sacrifice and service, a sense of community, a feel for the less well-off, a passion for justice – the great and simple things that make us human.'⁴⁷

We need reminding of these things in the age of rampant individualism. We also need to know that the struggle for social transformation on

the peripheries is not dead, as indigenous movements in Mexico and of women and peasants in India, and all the other struggles documented by *Race & Class* attest.

How can those of us in imperialism's centres find our own direction through this postmodern morass? *Race & Class* has blazed the way, stressing the importance of fighting on the political terrain: fighting for a cause, not for an identity; fighting to stop racism from developing into fascism; fighting social fragmentation; fighting for rights destroyed by the free market; and, most critically, fighting disinformation so that people can come to understand that the problem is capitalism. By undertaking and winning the small battles, and opening ourselves to other people's struggles, by not postponing socialism (as an end) but rather embracing it as a means, then, together, we can liberate the landscape to be human in.

If we heed Siva, the journey will be its own reward – for we have 'cultures of resistance to create, communities of resistance to build, a world to win'.⁴⁸

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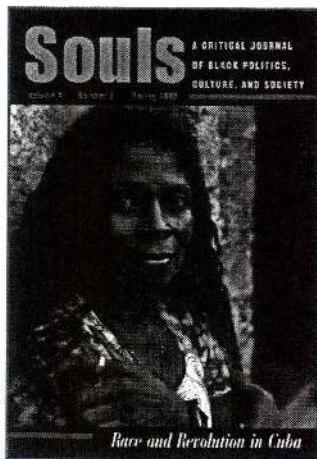
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JAN CAREW

The village and plantation: a metaphor for North-South relations

*I will come out, back to your world of tears,
A stronger soul within a finer frame.*

– Claude McKay, *Baptism*

Sri Lanka, Siva's homeland, hangs like a jewelled pendant from the southern end of the Indian subcontinent with a chain of small islands called 'Adam's Bridge' linking it to the mainland. Since Guyana was also a part of the British empire, I first learnt about Sri Lanka as 'Ceylon' in my geography and history of the British empire texts, just as Siva would have learnt of what was then called 'British Guiana', the only British 'possession' on the South American mainland. The name changes came about with our countries' independence. But, necessary as they were, the legacy of colonial rule would appear and reappear in different guises and continue to torment, fret and spread disorder and violence in the post-independence era. Changing the name of a former colony, adopting a new anthem, a flag and a colour on the map were, in fact, only cosmetic rearrangements. What we would come to know as true, from the many others who fought for their independence, was that these shifts did not alter the fundamental realities of exploitation in our two countries in any significant fashion. Opportunistic neocolonial politicians, making servile anti-communist noises and mouthing worn-out shibboleths about democracy and the Westminster model like a

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mantra, simply slid from colonialism into neocolonialism. They then became ardent protectors of the economic interests of an unholy alliance of Euro-American and Japanese capitalists. In fact, the divide-and-conquer policies of those former colonial masters simply mutated, under the rule of satraps, into a murderous internecine strife.

My first images of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were gleaned from a geography text in which there were pictures of dark-skinned women dressed in saris and picking leaves from *Camellia Sinensis* shrubs on tea plantations that stretched in orderly rows to the rim of the horizon. Supervising those women workers were mounted white, male overseers, wearing pith helmets and dressed in immaculate white suits. Siva, no doubt, saw pictures in his geography text of similar mounted white overseers, supervising dark-skinned male and female cane cutters on sugar plantations in British Guiana. Despite the 10,000 miles, the oceans and continents separating us, we had the same curriculum imposed on us at school, and there were the same ideological and racist underpinnings in the texts we studied.

Geography, which was one of a cluster of subjects listed as 'general science' on our school curriculum, was far from 'scientific' when dealing with the hierarchy of class and colour in colonial societies. But the history we were taught was even more insidious. It was, as W.E.B. DuBois wrote, one in which:

National heroes were created by lopping off their sins and canonizing their virtues, so that Gladstone had no connection with slavery, Chinese Gordon did not get drunk, William Pitt was a great patriot and not an international thief. Education was so arranged that the young learned not necessarily the truth, but that aspect and interpretation of the truth, which the rulers of the world wished them to know and follow.¹

We learnt about our colonial rulers, and hardly anything at all about our country, ourselves or our people. In fact, we were broken from our history when the first European colonisers set foot on our countries. The historic break took place in his homeland, Siva tells us, 'That day in 1505 when the *fidalgo* Don Laurenço de Almeida, resplendent in gold braid and epaulettes and hat plumed with all the birds of paradise, landed on our shores...' ² William Howitt (1792-1879), a righteous English Quaker who visited Australia and the East early in the nineteenth century, gives us another interesting account of the intrusion into Ceylon by a more ruthless Portuguese adventurer than Almeida:

The celebrated Alphonso Albuquerque [who] made the most rapid strides, and extended the conquests of the Portuguese... beyond any other commander... He made a descent on the isle of Ceylon, and detached a fleet to the Moluccas... this celebrated General, whom

the historians in the same breath in which they record [his] unwarrantable acts of violence, robbery and treachery, term an excellent and truly glorious commander!³

After the Portuguese, came the Dutch who, Howitt tells us, fermented 'notorious dissensions...followed by odious oppressions'.⁴ Then the British seized their turn and outlasted the others.

Siva and I began our journeys into the twentieth century from villages bordering on plantations in the British empire, as was the experience of countless others. The events that 'broke us from our history', therefore, were roughly similar. Almeida's intrusion ensured this break in Sri Lanka, while, a century later, Sir Walter Raleigh, obsessed with the dream of finding Eldorado, broke us from our history in Guyana.

Siva was born four centuries after Almeida's fateful intrusion and two decades into the twentieth century. He was also born seven years after the Russian revolution, six years after the first world war, with its apocalyptic killing fields, and which, DuBois noted was 'a war over spheres of influence in Asia and colonies in Africa, and...[in which] both Asia and Africa were called upon to support Europe'.⁵ Thus, Siva left an ancestral village, moved to a colonial city and, eventually, ended up in the capital of a disintegrating empire, where he would remain in exile for most of his adult life.

* * *

The plantation and the village! This is the social, political, economic and historical nexus from which an infinite number of us have emerged. Siva's passionate devotion to socialism has its origins in the best of the communal traditions of his village, that is one of the reasons why he can declare without equivocation that, 'Socialism is a moral creed, a secular faith – tolerant, loving, creative, increasing all to increase the one.'⁶ In addition, his commitment to the liberation of all oppressed peoples has its roots in the tensions between his village, on the one hand, and the plantation as a ruthlessly honed instrument of capitalist exploitation, on the other. Today, that exploitative relationship has become a metaphor for North-South confrontations.

The tensions between the plantation and the village, manifesting themselves in different guises in the society in which he grew up, predisposed him early in life to take sides everywhere he settled during his long exile, with 'The scorned, the rejected/the men hemmed in with the spears/the men of the tattered battalion/that fights "till it dies"', and not with 'The princes and prelates and periwigged charioteers/riding triumphantly laurelled/to lap the fat of the years.'⁷ What was also inescapable was the exposure to the daily round of petty humiliations to which people of colour were subjected throughout the empire, in order

to reinforce British proconsular fantasies of racial and class superiority. The visceral tension and the deep animosity between the village and the plantation, both symbolically and in the reality of day-to-day living, was profound and fundamental. Yet peasant societies, in which the plantation and the village exist side by side, are often studied as if the two existed as separate and largely unrelated entities.

As DuBois noted, Karl Marx, in plumbng the sources of capitalist plunder and exploitation, 'made the great unanswerable charge' when he wrote that:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theater.⁸

Viewed from the distances of a highly industrialised Europe, Marx could only deal in general terms with plantation and slavery; the two did, however, play a central role in the 'momenta of primitive accumulation'. The Portuguese conquest of West Africa, which began early in the fifteenth century, heralded a new era of exploration, colonial expansion, slavery and plunder. During this era, a new racist vocabulary began to appear in the languages of colonisers. 'The Portuguese verb "to work" became "to work like a Moor".⁹ And in the early 1450s: 'On the island of St. Thomas off the coast of Guinea the Portuguese developed a sugar industry, based on the large plantation operated by Negro slave labour.'¹⁰

That experimental sugar plantation would, inadvertently, spawn a wide variety of others across the colonial world for centuries to come. The plantation crops and their by-products would be different – tea, coffee, spices, indigo, sisal, hemp, sago, rubber, palm oil and others – but the more profitable the product, the more ruthlessly the labour producing it was exploited. Nonetheless, for almost two centuries, the sugar plantations of the Caribbean, sustained by the labour of millions of slaves from Africa, were deemed more profitable than all the others in the world combined. The cruel irony of it all was that, when West Indian sugar was toppled from its pinnacle in the world market, the primitive accumulation it had created provided the investment capital that, with gunboats and deadly fire power always lurking in the background, would give new impetus to the expansion and consolidation of colonial power in the islands and mainland territories of the East Indies.

In Sri Lanka, the practice of communal sharing which led to the creation of the village goes back in time for millennia. The Guyanese

village, on the other hand, in which I was born, had been established a mere four generations before, but the people in my village came from traditions as old as Siva's. Our griots were known to proclaim that our traditions were born 'of the breath of gods'. But whether the village was ancient or relatively new, its relationship with the plantation was one of implacable antagonism. The plantation oligarchies saw the villages that adjoined their huge, fenced-in estates as reservoirs of cheap labour. They ensured that the villagers were held in a vice of subsistence farming and share cropping, and that adequate reserves of unemployed, landless peasants were available to do low-paid, seasonal jobs. The plantation owners also controlled the flow of water for irrigation and, in a dog-in-the-manger fashion, commandeered the best arable land for themselves – although only a fraction of their land holdings was used productively. For the victims of these mechanisms of social, political and economic control, however, the villages became secret centres of resistance and repositories of vital elements of indigenous cultures, including myths, folklore, music and epic trickster tales and stories of resistance to tyranny told in languages that were denigrated and, in some instances, prohibited. As if to underline this collective impulse to resist, shortly after the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, villages began to spring up everywhere in the region, like tropical growths after the rains.

The changing demands for labour on plantations throughout the colonial world resulted in the uprooting and resettlement of millions, from one region to the other in the colonies themselves and, in some instances, overseas in far-flung countries of the British, French and Dutch empires. The founders of our villages were descendants of former slaves from Africa but, as new cohorts of indentured labour were introduced from India, China, the Azores and Malta, the newcomers began to spill over into existing villages and, also, to establish villages of their own. But, regardless of race and ethnicity, an unrelenting animus towards the plantation lurked in the hearts of the workers and peasants.

The Tamil and Sinhalese villages in Sri Lanka that Siva knows so well, therefore, were not unlike many of the villages that networked their way along Guyanese coastal lands. The positive legacy bequeathed to us both, though, is that we were born close to a nexus of struggle that compelled us to take sides early in life. This struggle, which continues at the base of a pyramid of exploitation in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the islands of the Pacific, is one that has already changed the world, and it will continue to do so until the widening gulf between the haves and have-nots is closed forever.

* * *

Marx once confessed that he had learnt more about the history of nineteenth-century France from the novels of Balzac than from all of

the learned treatises he had pored over in libraries. Siva's novel, *When Memory Dies*, with its creative insights and profound understanding of the human condition, tells us more about the contemporary history of the Sri Lankan people than stacks of learned tomes and scholarly essays in professional journals. The novel traces three generations of a Sri Lankan extended family. As one turns the pages, the narrative resonates with echoes of ancestral voices that the colonial experience had muted, but which the villagers had, nevertheless, kept alive in the face of daunting odds. This book tunes us into those echoes and, listening, all of a sudden, with an inner ear, we hear those whom we thought had been silenced forever, speaking again. Their voices reach us in muted decibels but, in our mind's ear, they trumpet the message of a people's heroism, courage and stubborn hope. But they also warn that Time has planted seeds of anger in the conquered and colonised earth of the villages and plantations, not only in Sri Lanka, but throughout the colonial world, and when those seeds germinate, the growths that spring from them often produce strange and bitter fruit. We are introduced to Grandfather Pandyan early in the novel, and are told that:

Now the land had been taken from him. His rhythm was broken. Time had become one dimensional, unilinear. He was at outs with the world. But with his son he found another rhythm, a way of keeping step with the new order of things, another measure of time. It was not altogether to his liking, but as he saw this other seed sprout and grow and battle with its own world, he determined to keep faith with it.¹¹

Pandyan comes to life for us quietly, but we immediately recognise him for what he is – a patriarch and an archetypal symbol of continuity – and, pondering over what we recognise, we understand how his people were able to survive through the ages.

But *When Memory Dies* is not a cosy family chronicle because, half-way through, the four horsemen of the apocalypse ride through its pages. Communalism becomes rancid and deformed and, in its deformed state, it is transformed into an instrument for genocide. The author describes the violence and mayhem but, somehow, stands apart from them. A wholesome infusion of love, tenderness, compassion and an invincible commitment to social and political justice humanises the narrative.

Even though it is a work of fiction, the configurations of Siva's early life are clearly delineated in this novel. As one traces those configurations through three generations, they lead one into inner sanctums of steadfastness in the human world, and, induced by the narrative to follow the characters there, one's own resolve is immeasurably strengthened.

There are times when exile dulls the creative spirit and blunts the sharp edge of political commitment, but like José Martí and Victor Serge, no matter how long the exile lasted, Siva's political and creative

writings blend easily and never fail to spring to life on the page. And through those writings, one discerns very clearly that, before he left Sri Lanka for London, he had already forged indissoluble links between 'theory and ideology', and created 'a two-way passage between political analysis and popular experience'. One also discerns that, when he arrived in the country of his exile, he was already well acquainted with the grim realities, the veins and arteries of multiple, layered injustices of class, caste, race and religion. But, while other exiles sought refuge in nostrums of accommodation, he continued to make principled and courageous choices.

When a cultural nationalist asked Frantz Fanon why he had chosen to join the Algerian national liberation struggle and not one in his native Martinique, his immediate rejoinder was that he was fighting for Martinique in Algeria. Siva's life, therefore, which spans three-quarters of the twentieth century, has provided us with equally explicit and eloquent answers to this question. The smell of his earth and the dreams of his people are always with him, but his village also taught him that all peoples have a right to share the waters of the river of life, and to drink with their own cups; and that to ensure an equitable share of these waters for all, one must join the struggles of others anywhere in the world that one finds oneself. This is the only way in which these waters can be controlled at their source, for the good of all.

At a time when large sectors of the Second World have collapsed into the Third, and while rapacious *apparatchiks* who once posed as communists are looting their countries and fleeing into the First, Siva continues to declare, unequivocally, that he is a Marxist, because:

Marxism is a way of understanding, of interpreting the world, in order to change it. It is the only mode of (social) investigation in which the solution is immanent in the analysis. No other mode holds out that possibility. That is what is unique about Marxism. But for such an analysis to be current and up-to-date and yielding of solutions to contemporary problems, it must be prepared to abandon comforting orthodoxies and time-bound dogma... For Marxism, as Braverman points out, 'is not merely an exercise in satisfying intellectual curiosity, nor an academic pursuit, but a theory of revolution, and thus a tool of combat'.¹²

In an age in which the spin-doctoring of truth clogs the information highways, Siva brings a rare clarity and intellectual honesty to the analysis of contemporary social, political, economic, racial and cultural events. And in a world of shifting complexities of economics, and dramatic social political and scientific changes, he strips away the disguises capitalism and imperialism wear, and reaffirms the fact that they still portend riches for a minority and untold misery for the majority of human beings on our planet. At a time when an electronic,

service, communication revolution is speeding along like a runaway locomotive, his analysis of the contemporary North-South conflicts, of a racism that is constantly shifting and mutating, and of the new circuits of imperialism, provides us with new tools of combat. In an age in which new conquistadors are using biotechnology, genetic engineering and manipulating trade agreements in order to globalise intellectual property rights, the metaphor of the plantation and the village assumes a new validity. And Siva's voice joins a chorus of others across the globe to affirm that it is fight-back time, that: 'We have cultures of resistance to create, communities of resistance to build, a world to win.'¹³

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Are the Irish black?

Early in Alan Parker's film *The Commitments*, there is a hilarious scene in which the central character, Jimmy Rabbitte, explains to his newly-recruited musicians the reason they will be playing only soul music:

The Irish are the blacks of Europe, lads. An' Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. An' the northside Dubliners are the blacks o' Dublin. Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud.

The film was based on Roddy Doyle's book of the same name, first published in 1988.¹ Although both book and film were commercially very successful, few people took the reference to the Irish as blacks with any great seriousness. It was little more than a hook on which to hang an enjoyable but thin fictional story-line about a group of young working-class Dubliners' bid for musical fame.

Yet, five years before the publication of Doyle's novel, Sivanandan made a similar reference in a much more serious manner:

Ethnicity was a tool to blunt the edge of black struggle, return 'black' to its constituent parts of Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, Irish – and also, at the same time, allow the nascent black bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie really, to move up in the system.²

How could Sivanandan, or indeed any sensible commentator, see the Irish as 'black'? It is not merely that Ireland, north and south, *looks* so obviously and overwhelmingly white (much to the disorientation of

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some 'revolutionary tourists' in the North who would find things much easier to decipher if only the nationalists and unionists were different colours!). More, there are countless instances in history of the Irish *acting* white. Let me give four examples, chosen more or less at random.

First, the Irish were the backbone of the British army throughout the empire during the nineteenth century. 'In 1840 the British army contained 47,394 men from England, 13,388 from Scotland and 39,193 from Ireland, a highly disproportionate contribution. In the private army maintained by the East India Company, the Irish were even more heavily represented, making up half the European contingent.'³

Second, there are countless examples in Irish history of Irish revolutionaries failing the anti-racist litmus test. Take the most obvious example, that of John Mitchel, Young Irelander, writer, activist, exiled to Tasmania for his insurrectionary activities in 1848. Having escaped the British, he ended up a slave owner in Tennessee, founder and editor of *The Southern Citizen*, a self-styled organ of 'extreme Southern sentiment'. In 1857, he wrote:

I consider Negro slavery here the best state of existence for the Negro and the best for his master; and I consider that taking Negroes out of their brutal slavery in Africa and promoting them to a human and reasonable slavery here is also good.⁴

He was later jailed for his refusal to give up his slaves. His parochialism was in stark contrast to the universalism of black leaders in the US, such as Marcus Garvey. At the Second Convention of his Universal Negro Improvement Association in New York City in August 1921:

Resolutions were passed and cables sent to Mahatma Gandhi, sympathizing with him in his efforts for a free India; Eamon De Valera, in his fight for Irish independence; and to King George V of England, stating that nothing would please the Negro peoples more (except the freedom of Africa) than the emancipation of Ireland, India and Egypt.⁵

Third, native-born Irish people were involved in the armed forces of the United States from the earliest days, a fact alluded to in John Ford's film *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. In one scene in the film, a group of cavalry men sing the stirring Irish rebel song, 'The bold Fenian men' for a general. That general was Philip Sheridan, born in Killinkere, County Cavan. Historically, Sheridan was centrally involved in the massacre of countless Native Americans and is reputedly the originator of the infamous statement that 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian'.

Fourth, Irish Americans have not always been at the forefront of the fight against racism in their adopted homeland. If anything, Irish American politicians and police have often been noted for their racist views and actions. Take 'Bull' Connor, for example, the prototypical

Southern racist cop of the civil rights era. A more recent example is that of the gunning down of Amadou Diallo in New York in February 1999. Three of the four policemen charged with second-degree murder over his death have Irish names.

On the other hand, there are counters to each of these examples.

First, Irish men in the British army were often a very unstable, potentially disloyal force, from the point of view of imperialism. The infiltration of the army by the Irish revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) or Fenians, was a great source of worry to generals and politicians. In 1865, it was estimated that there were 15,000 IRB members in the British army.⁶ Later, in 1920, the Connaught Rangers, an Irish regiment in the British army, mutinied in India in protest at British atrocities in Ireland.⁷ Such political activism apart, the preponderance of Irish in the British army in the mid-nineteenth century was perhaps less a sign of ideological conviction than of the fact that it is usually the poorest who end up as foot soldiers in armies.

Second, for every example of a revolutionary who was progressive on Irish affairs while being racist, there is another person who managed to generalise their opposition to imperialism and repression in order to identify with those in other struggles – from James Connolly and Roger Casement at the turn of the twentieth century to Bernadette Devlin:

I was not very long there until, like water, I found my own level. ‘My people’ – the people who knew about oppression, discrimination, prejudice, poverty and the frustration and despair that they produce – were not Irish Americans. They were black, Puerto Rican, Chicano. And those who were supposed to be ‘my people’, the Irish Americans who knew about English misrule and the Famine and supported the civil rights movement at home, and knew that Partition and England were the cause of the problem, looked and sounded to me like Orangemen. They said exactly the same things about blacks that the loyalists said about us at home. In New York I was given the key to the city by the mayor, an honour not to be sneezed at. I gave it to the Black Panthers.⁸

Third, in 1992, Joanne Tall, a member of the Oglala Sioux nation which had been massacred by general Philip Sheridan and his troops over a century before, came to Sheridan’s birthplace in County Cavan. In a formal ceremony of reconciliation, she planted a tree and was offered an apology by local people.⁹

And, fourth, there are notable exceptions to the rule of racist Irish American cops and politicians. Take the case of Paul O’Dwyer, born in poverty in Bohola, County Mayo, in 1907. As a prominent lawyer and activist in New York, he supported most of the unpopular political causes of the twentieth century, including cases of communists and Irish activists. During the Kennedy administration, he was crucially involved

in the black civil rights issue, using the law to extend the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to the disenfranchised.¹⁰

* * *

That Ireland should show up such extremes of attitudes and behaviour should come as no surprise to those who have read Frantz Fanon or Albert Memmi. The coloniser and colonised are locked in an intimate embrace, what O'Dowd terms 'reciprocal reciprocity'.¹¹ Neither can exist without the other, no matter how much they despise the other.

For the colonised, there are two possible responses to the colonial situation; first is assimilation. 'There is a tempting model close at hand, the colonizer... The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.'¹² According to Memmi, the failure of assimilation reveals that there is, in the last analysis, only one plausible response left – revolt.

Revolt is the only way out of the colonized situation, and the colonized realizes it sooner or later... The colonial situation, by its own internal inevitability, brings on revolt. For the colonial condition cannot be adjusted to; like an iron collar, it can only be broken.¹³

Somewhere in this spectrum between the twin poles of assimilation and revolt rest the myriad responses of the colonised to their situation, and therein is the explanation of the often contradictory attitudes and behaviour of colonised peoples.

As England's first and oldest colony, Ireland displayed this schizophrenia no more or less than other and later colonies. And in that simple summary of a global relationship is the kernel of Sivanandan's point about the 'blackness' of the Irish struggle. Ireland had been part of the British empire along with – and before – Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Struggles for emancipation in Ireland have prefigured those elsewhere. Moreover, attempts to suppress the Irish and others in the empire have often fed off each other, with similar or identical strategies, tactics, laws, repression and personnel appearing time after time.¹⁴

But this is a point not merely about history; it is an analysis which insists that contemporary Ireland cannot be understood simply through the prism of capital/class – we need also the filter of race/colonialism/imperialism.

In the last two decades or so, this is not a conclusion which has been acceptable in official discourse in Ireland. The South is presented as a sovereign state which has spawned in recent years a vibrant economy, the 'Celtic tiger'.¹⁵ The northern conflict has been represented as a tribal squabble, even if the assessment has been dressed in the more academic concept of 'ethnicity'. There is, of course, an alternative, albeit minority, view which sees the South as a postcolonial state caught between First and Third worlds. This view does not rest on the success or otherwise of

the economy, but on a wider analysis of the society's position in the modern world.

Irish political institutions, political culture, language and habits have, I would argue, more in common with many Latin American and indeed Eastern European countries than with our Western European neighbours... Far from being ashamed of our colonial past, we should be happy to acknowledge and even embrace Ireland's status as a post-colonial society. Not only are fellow former colonies the centre of fresh thinking about politics in the world today, they are also the power-house of the most innovative art and culture, especially in the fields of literature and popular music. This is a far more exciting club to want to belong to than the complacent and paralyzed world of the former colonialist, and present-day imperialist, powers.¹⁶

In the alternative view, the North and its problems are seen as deriving not from internal factors and relationships but from the struggle to undo the structures bequeathed by colonialism – in particular, partition and sectarianism.

From the standpoint of the alternative position, one of the most inspiring consequences is the great sense of recognition one experiences when observing other postcolonial societies and situations. For example, in March 1999, a mural was painted on the lower Ormeau Road in Belfast. On one side, it shows a portrait of Stephen Lawrence underneath the caption 'institutionalised racism' and, on the other, a portrait of Robert Hamill underneath the caption 'insitutionalised sectarianism'. On 27 April 1997, Robert Hamill, a 25-year-old nationalist from Portadown, County Armagh, was kicked to death by a group of about 30 loyalists in the centre of the town as he returned home from a night drinking and dancing. A few yards from the incident, four RUC (police) personnel, armed with pistols and machine guns, watched but did not intervene, even as Robert's relatives pounded on the sides of their Land-rover, screaming for help.¹⁷ The most that can be said in defence of the RUC is that they were scared of being injured themselves if they intervened, but that still does not explain why they did not call for reinforcements or even step out of the vehicle and fire warning shots in the air. How can one explain the clear lack of a sense of urgency? The likelihood is that at the forefront of their assessment of the situation was a conclusion that this was just one more sectarian skirmish on the bleak streets of Portadown. They did not see the incident as an assault. As revealed by the Macpherson inquiry, this is precisely one of the central issues in explaining the inefficient, lackadaisical and antagonistic response of police personnel who arrived on the scene of the racist assault on Stephen Lawrence. Nationalists and republicans in the North of Ireland are quick to see the similarity and to display their conclusion on the walls.

The sense of recognition is not merely an acknowledgement of shared victimhood, but also of similar struggles in other societies. This is why many in the North of Ireland have watched with intense interest the unfolding process of attempting to build a new society in South Africa. The issue of truth commissions has had distinct resonance in the Irish situation; almost 400 of the dead in the North, approximately 10 per cent of all victims, were killed by state forces, yet there have only been twenty-one prosecutions, culminating in seven convictions for murder and attempted murder.¹⁸ The call for a truth commission on the Irish conflict is seen by some simply as revenge or a politically motivated attempt to embarrass politicians. But a more sophisticated assessment sees that, in Ireland no less than in South Africa, confronting the past is an essential step on the way to a better future. Not that such an exercise is either simple or painless, as revealed in the impassioned account by Antjie Krog, poet and broadcaster, of the South African experience. It is clear that following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) daily and writing a book was an emotionally draining experience for her. She asks critical questions of the ANC, not merely about its past actions, but also about the substance of its commitment to revealing the whole truth. She is dismissive of the half-hearted and opportunistic 'conversions' of those in the South African Defence Forces in return for a chance of amnesty. And she weeps unashamedly with the victims, black and white. But her intense disappointment is reserved for the politicians of the National Party and, in particular, De Klerk. His failure to appear in front of the TRC except under duress, compounded by his inability to catch the mood of transformation and tell the truth, is damning. As an Afrikaaner herself, Krog pleads with Afrikaaners to participate in the process of reconciliation.

I wonder about the responsibility of the Leader. Shouldn't he be establishing a space within which we can confront ourselves and our past?...so that we can participate in the building of this country with self-respect and dignity. Can't he just say: 'I didn't know, but I will take the responsibility...for all the atrocities committed under the National Party's rule over the last fifty years. I will lay wreaths where people have been shot, I will collect money for victims, I will ask forgiveness and I will pray'...if you cut yourself off from the process, you will wake up in a foreign country – a country that you don't know and that you will never understand.¹⁹

Again, the sense of recognition is immediate and powerful. Oh, for a leader in the North of Ireland capable of what De Klerk wasn't, namely true leadership of the beneficiaries and supporters of the former status quo into a new era! Oh, even for a liberal unionist like Krog to make such an impassioned plea!

Recognition works both ways. In 1830, the Choctaw tribe was forced

off its land and relocated to Oklahoma. During the Choctaws' long 'march of tears' to their new territory, 14,000 of them died. Seventeen years later, when hearing of the Famine, they collected \$170 and gave it to a fund for those dying of starvation in Ireland.²⁰ As in the past, so today. Just as many people in Ireland can look at Guatemala, Palestine, South Africa and hear echoes, see parallels, so people elsewhere can observe us and recognise similar issues, problems, hopes and fears. That was, in essence, the point of Sivanandan's analysis in 1983. That was the commitment of *Race & Class* through the years; it took up the 'cause of Ireland' when other journals on the Left in Britain were frequently unable or unwilling to do so.²¹

In that mutual sense of internationalism and recognition is the possibility of real support which is intensely personal, even if apparently remote and indirect; there is inspiration and a sense of not being alone. To cite one example: in 1991, I attended a planning meeting for an annual conference of a criminological group to which I had belonged for ten years. The group was international in character and, even though many of the contributions to the conference were from academics, the ethos of the group was much more political. Over time, people came to be very close friends and to look forward to the annual reunion to catch up on news of personal and political developments, compare notes on common issues and share insights. The planning meeting in Amsterdam in 1991, however, turned out to be a severely traumatising experience. The tenor of discussions was very much set by the times – the fall of the Berlin wall, the implosion of the Soviet system, the identity crisis of the Left in Europe, as well as the academic popularity of postmodernism. Fierce arguments erupted at the meeting, ranging over issues of socialism, feminism, nationalism, etc. Eventually people began to state why they continued to belong to the group. I was among those who emphasised the sense of belongingness and solidarity I got from it. At one point, I said that I really looked forward to meeting comrades annually. At that, one of the Dutch postmodernists savaged me for referring to him as a comrade. I returned to Belfast dejected, and then read Sivanandan's 'All that melts into air is solid'. If only I had read it before the meeting! It gave me a deep understanding of the clash of ideologies which I had just experienced; it would have provided the words to retaliate in a situation where I felt paralysed. And it confirmed that the ideals at the heart of socialism, feminism and national liberation were anything but outmoded.

But there are still the values and traditions that have come down to us from the working-class movement: loyalty, comradeship, generosity, a sense of community and a feel for internationalism, an understanding that unity has to be forged and reforged again and again and, above all, a capacity for making other people's fights our own – all the great and simple things that make us human.²²

Are the Irish black? Of course not.²³ But is our struggle like that of anti-colonial peoples elsewhere, despite the different colours of our and their skin? Yes. Are the limitations and possibilities of our solutions mirrored somehow in what they have tried and are trying to accomplish? Yes. Do we need to know where they succeed and fail, and, conversely, do they need to observe our failures and successes? Yes.

Long live *Race & Class*! And to Siva: thanks, comrade!

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A return of service

In 1992, I had the experience of interviewing Sivanandan for a book on black theology in Europe. My concern was to consult a respected elder, whose work had proved a lifeline for many during the upheavals of Thatcherism, for his reading of the 'signs of the times'. The discussion was far ranging, but two themes have always stood out in my mind. The first was his analysis of the destructive impact of information capitalism on the vast majority of black and Third World workers. The second was his rage at the black middle classes who 'sold out' their people in such desperate times. These two things also seemed to be key elements of Sivanandan's recent work and easily connected at a simple level: the role of the educated is to give back to the people who 'paid' for their education. However, on further reflection, what seemed a simple connection opened up deeper questions around contrasting notions of service and responsibility.

What follows is an exploration of those different conceptions of duty and obligation. The argument is that Sivanandan's political and personal morality has its roots in the experience of colonialism and the struggles against it by people in the Third World and their First World counterparts in the Black Power movements of the 1960s. This discussion around the 'politics of existence' allows us better to locate one of the key black intellectuals of the late twentieth century and, perhaps more importantly, to revisit the meanings of black struggle on the doorstep of the twenty-first century.

Although it is now commonplace to talk about the shift from

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industrial to post-industrial society in terms of rise of the service economy, Sivanandan's work makes it clear that this is a very particular notion of service, in a very specific type of economy. As the silicon revolution polarises global social and political inequalities, services are the means by which the new circuits of production, exchange and reproduction are accelerated and their contradictions mediated. Furthermore, for all the hype to the contrary, the seismic shifts accompanying the emergence of information capitalism, have largely reaffirmed and extended traditional hierarchies of power along national and racial lines. Consequently, this new type of service society, where 'the power-line is the colour-line', is new in the sense that it has meant new forms of exploitation and repression for the many. For them, their colour and class lock them into generic 'colour blind' shit work or else 'colour coded' areas of the mass production of data, goods or services. For the few, however, their knowledge work allows them to escape the castles of their skins into the virtual world of information manipulation. In the cyber-marketplace, they are 'supra-ethnics', whose ethnicity both adds a little of the exotic to the 'colourless' information super-highway and positions them as authentic interpreters of, and role models for, the dark world beyond the cast of the Net.

In contrast to these individualised and commodified, if not digitised, conceptions of human value, Sivanandan argues for a morality based upon social justice. The duty of the have-nots is to survive and organise to defend and extend their humanity, while those who have should use their knowledge to challenge the disinformation that characterises information capitalism, on behalf of those it dispossesses. To refuse to do so is an act of betrayal, a betrayal of the possibility, inherent in humankind, to go beyond itself through service to others. For Sivanandan, the pursuit of a more equal, just and free society is the very heart of socialism, while the stubbornness of material injustice and the limitation of love, strength and virtue are its principal enemies.

Although many will be familiar with Sivanandan's ruthless application of this ethic to black and Third World struggles in the age of biotechnology, it always seemed to me as somehow rooted in another time and place. It was only relatively recently that I stumbled across a clue as to its origins, in a rereading of Walter Rodney's *Groundings with My Brothers*. The first thing that struck me was the significant overlap between Rodney's analysis of the dilemmas facing the neocolonial bourgeoisie in the Caribbean in the 1960s with Sivanandan's observations concerning their counterparts in Ceylon around independence and in Britain post-1945. There were also convergences over the need to understand the manufactured complexities of race in colonial societies, in order to solve the practical issues around the mobilisation and organisation of communities of resistance. And both writers highlighted the strategic importance of the Black Power movement to the develop-

ment of anti-colonial and anti-racist theory and practice in the form of revolutionary nationalism.

Given those connections between Rodney and Sivanandan, and the readily identifiable characteristics of Siva's contemporary analysis, it seemed plausible that the seeds of his analysis of information capitalism lay in the anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist movements of the 1960s. If this was the case, then what now appear as new issues around the position of black and Third World workers, *vis-à-vis* a re-forming capitalism and their own middle classes, were prefigured in the experiences of earlier movements, geared towards the creation of democratic, multi-ethnic national communities and viable civil societies. Part of Sivanandan's uniqueness, then, is derived from the fact that he represents a generation of political thinkers whose vision and morality is grounded in the inversion of colonial and neocolonial myths and values, but whose numbers have been decimated by age, assassination and accommodation. If this is the case, then to comprehend and extend their work, one needs to have some grasp of the contradictions of colonial culture which shaped them.

The legacy of colonialism

It was the nature of the colonial regimes, and their metropolitan templates, that shaped the revolutionary analysis and activism of their opponents. The attempt to move through the race and class contradictions inherent in their homelands encouraged Rodney and Sivanandan to develop peculiarly black adaptations of Marxism in the pursuit of non-racial social justice. As part of this effort, both wrestled with the contradictions of the 'coloured intellectual'. In societies based upon race, there was, inevitably, a 'double-consciousness' amongst the educated colonised: as their intimate exposure to the colonialists' culture worked to genetically modify them internally, their class began to separate them from their people, alienated from the land as they were and from the labour of the majority. As stake-holders in the colonial system, however, the petit-bourgeois service class benefited materially and culturally. They were the 'supra-ethnics' of their day, whose education, manners and status set them above the 'great unwashed' from whose ranks they had come. In effect, they gained membership of an empire-wide class of administrators, intellectuals and professionals.

Ironically, these qualifications also ensured that this particular service class was most likely to benefit from the activities of the grass-roots anti-colonial movements, as the retreating imperial powers sought to negotiate with those made in their own image. However, as Sivanandan and Rodney both demonstrated, whereas for the people, independence meant the end of exploitation and oppression, the relatively new nationalist bourgeoisie perceived it more as a change of management,

than structure, of the colonial state. Those who had once administered now governed – nominally on behalf of the people, but to the benefit of multinational corporations and the departing colonial power.

As the elite nationalists struggled to contain the rising demands of the popular classes, the difference between sovereignty and power became apparent. And the race was on between competing elites to gain and maintain state power through ‘service’ to the electorate. However, the rapid exhaustion of the promises of independence served to politicise the majority along the old-established lines of race – a fault line worked at diligently by the ex-colonial power and by recolonising business interests, all the better to divide the people. Consequently, one of the major contradictions of the post-colonial period was the ‘racialisation’ of class struggles and all the attendant confusions and communalisms. But Rodney’s and Sivanandan’s experiences demonstrate the emergence of a more subversive element amongst the colonial middle classes, which sought to expose the naked ambition passed off as the new emperor’s new clothes, and to challenge his reactionary nationalism, whether he posed in a three-piece suit or a bush jacket.

In contrast to the ‘house Negroes’, who wanted the master to leave so that they could live in the big house, there were educated elements who still remembered those they had left in the fields. Both Sivanandan and Rodney point to the importance of poverty in the shaping of their own characters and politics, and the growth which occurred as a result of their efforts to hold together their privileged professional trajectories, while never losing sight of the persistence of injustice and inequality amongst the ‘never-will-haves’. For these thinkers, and others like them, the limitations of colonial society were played out in their own lives, and they found themselves beginning to betray their class and to side with the people. Whether as spontaneous acts of individual bloody-mindedness or else as part of more organised resistance, they entered the masters’ and mistresses’ drawing rooms and institutions, and turned the weapons found there against them. The language, the arrogance and the history of empire, as well as the professional skills gained in its service, were used to undermine the myths of independence, multiracialism and democracy. Their aim was not limited to stripping colonial power of its whiteness or its culture of class, but hinted at the reconstruction of the nation based on the poor and the black, whose experiences of formal freedom had only led to greater dependence and inequality.

Black Power and revolutionary nationalism

The 1950s and 1960s saw the rapid development of nationalist and revolutionary movements in the Third World which reverberated throughout the metropolitan nations. For the most part, these movements were met by economic arm-twisting, diplomatic coercion and

physical repression. But as the idea of Afro-Asian anti-imperialist unity was given flesh, it proved a time of both great vision and darkness. A generation of thinkers and movements were birthed in blood as the seeds of colonial racism bore their fruit in the First and Third Worlds. The experience of the physical conclusions of reactionary nationalisms had a profound effect on theory and practice. Sivanandan fled pogroms in Ceylon to experience the 'race riots' of Notting Hill and a resurgent British fascism, whilst Rodney had witnessed a similar descent into ethnic politics and violence in Guyana, only to meet the imperial racism of Britain and Portugal. Furthermore, the endemic nature of the violence in the US, Europe, Africa and Asia suggested an overarching system, of which racism was an expression.

Sivanandan and Rodney indicate throughout their work the extent to which this rebuilding of the world after the image of the West was undertaken using the 'old' materials of European nationalism and chauvinism. So, despite the promise of a new world order, racism was at the very heart of the development of post-war welfare states, and colonialism the template for those states' responses to the problems of the post-colonial era. Consequently, the construction of progressive Third World and black struggle and identity was premised on a defence against the ruthless articulation of white capitalist power. The meaning of blackness developed in practice during this period differed greatly from the exclusive or essentialist conceptions of the white and black cultural nationalists: it was less a matter of pigmentation than a metaphor for a particular relationship to material power. The colonial experience itself gave the lie to the view that the powerlessness experienced through blackness was simply a matter of melanin mania and racism a *rational* prejudice. Blackness (or, non-whiteness) was a means of understanding a relationship to power and wealth, rather than an end in itself. It was that race/class relationship which formed the basis for the creation of new national identities and the international unity of black and Third World peoples. Both Sivanandan and Rodney saw, urgently, the necessity of an internationalised understanding and practice of Black Power as a response to the concrete question of what to do when peoples have been fragmented and forced at each others' throats. In this perspective, national unity is not genetically coded in race, but is humanly created, through political work and education in communities in a process which accepts specific and particular identities and histories, but aims at openness to other struggles and movements, so as to develop inclusive and participatory models of socialism and citizenship.

However, the nuances of these positions were largely inaccessible to the imaginations of white metropolitan Marxists and socialists, even when they turned their gaze upon the benighted ghettos at home and abroad. To say that the strains of Black Marxism that appeared during the 1960s and '70s challenged the Eurocentrism of metropolitan social-

ism is not to dismiss the struggles of the European working classes, but to contextualise them, so as to understand their contributions and limitations to the pursuit of social justice for all. At one level, this Eurocentrism sprang from captivity to a racist culture which blinded the white Left to the possibility that Third World and black struggles could be anything more than adjuncts to the real business of class struggle waged in the advanced industrial economies. As Sivanandan and others have argued, expressions of class were defined by race, and working-class values refracted through the prism of nationalist considerations. When the contradictions generated by global restructuring were seen to herald the end of traditional working class in the West, there was little conception amongst the Left that it had anything to learn from less 'advanced' workers' struggles and campaigns. For its writers and commentators, the articulation of socialist and non-racial visions and methods of transformation by Rodney, Sivanandan and their like was unacceptable. As blacks, the lessons gained from their colonial experiences and their attempts to 'ground' with ordinary working-class black people threw into stark relief the inadequacy of Eurocentric conceptions of struggle and class. The flight from class analysis, which took place in response to the dual emergence of the so-called 'service societies' and their political counterpoint in the new social movements, closed down any creative understanding of the race and class positions put forward by the revolutionary nationalists. It was the prelude to the Left's collapse into the twin black holes of either postmodern pessimism or the abstracted arithmetic of inequality.

Rodney's and Sivanandan's emphasis on learning from and passing on the histories of working-class people across the world had the potential to turn the old colonial hierarchy upside down. That was the enduring legacy from the generation of scholarship girls and boys who refused to confirm the myths of capitalism in its colonial and neo-colonial forms, but stood beside the working people, armed with experiences and ideas to tear those myths down. And, in the example with which I began this essay, that same challenge is still being mounted, with equal vigour, to the latest manifestation of that same racialised hierarchy of power.

Fighting racism

Teacher and interrupter

While reading Walter Benjamin's luminous little book on the plays and poems of his countryman, Bertolt Brecht, I kept being interrupted in my mind by the writings and dictums of the insurgent librarian, A. Sivanandan. I make no pretence at not being his friend and admirer, and a man to whom I have often gone for advice and clarification, but why should a critical book by one German about another keep referring me back to a Sri Lankan Tamil writer, whose insights found their way into an international political and cultural journal named *Race & Class* over half a century later?

As librarians are so often caricatured (frequently by teachers, members of my own profession, who like to see them staying in their place, crouched before books and stacks, reference cards, Dewey systems or, more recently, wall-to-wall computer resources) as bookish, people of the mind, auxiliaries to teaching and learning rather than their protagonists, it is instructive to meet one who is (to use Benjamin's word) every inch an 'interrupter' as well as a teacher of sharp and rebellious insight. An 'interrupter' always works against creating and sustaining illusion, declared Benjamin, but such an intruding mind always sets down its words and images as a teacher. It is necessary, he wrote, for the writer-as-interrupter 'to have a teacher's attitude... a writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody'.¹ Teaching writers as well as readers – interrupting – pitching his interjections in the world of race and class, action and struggle and not merely in the world of mind and

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culture, Siva the interrupter causes thoughts and actions to take new angles, alternative directions, always with resisting human beings and their communities to the fore.

Interrupting

Sometimes these routes can be newly charted and achieved through a long, powerfully argued article with a strikingly expressed build-up of persuasive and original ideas: as in 'The liberation of the black intellectual',² 'Race, class and the state',³ or 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle'.⁴ Other times, the meaning-kernel of the essay can be expressed in the forging of one or two theme sentences. In his 'Imperialism in the silicon age', now two decades old, Sivanandan foretold a global economic system engendered by the microchip, which now – as then – was an essay of uncommon prophetic insight, epitomised within this single and memorable sentence-paragraph:

A global culture then, to go with a global economy, serviced by a global office the size of a walkie-talkie in your hand – a global assembly line run by global corporations that move from one pool of labour to another, discarding them when done – high technology in the centre, low technology in the peripheries – and a polarisation of the workforce within the centre itself (as between the highly skilled and unskilled or de-skilled) and as between the centre and peripheries, with qualitatively different rates of exploitation that allow the one to feed off the other – a corporate state maintained by surveillance for the developed countries, authoritarian regimes and gun law for the developing.⁵

Such words 'interrupted' routine Marxist thinking and gave impetus to new revolutionary modes of reflection and action. Twenty years later, after untold tomes of imitative writing about 'globalism', Sivanandan can still express the systemic bare bones of the technological revolution in a brevity and a balance of words which the reader can comprehend and remember, almost like a mnemonic:

Its assembly lines are global, its plant is movable, its workforce is flexible. It can produce *ad hoc*, just-in-time and custom-build mass production, without stockpiling or wastage, laying off labour as and when it pleases.⁶

Similarly, the short but characteristically pithy first two sentences to his introduction to *Outcast England: how schools exclude black children* reset the agenda about the struggle against the exclusion of black and working-class children from the British school system, by creating a new and lucid focus about what exclusion really signified within a newly established market system of state education. It is the interrupter at work again:

Exclusion is seldom the measure of a child's capacity to learn; it is an indication, instead, of the teacher's refusal to be challenged. And when you have an educational system which puts a premium not on the educability of the child but on the price of its education, the challenge to the teacher is the financial cost of keeping it in school, not the human cost of keeping it out.⁷

Thus, the interrupter's ideas spring from a realisation of new configurations of events and processes, and the insights that arise from them. Understanding this new reality with fresh meaning, the interrupter charts new directions that point from it: not merely in the abstractions of ideas and mind, or in the chimeras of an artificial culture, but in the real world of human struggle in which fertile new ideas and authentic popular culture are genuinely forged. In the same way that any true teacher knows that an 'interrupter' in the class is frequently the most challenging, stimulating and subversive element, whose interjections may well provoke particular insight precisely because of their audacious seizure of the moment, so thousands of readers of Sivanandan's articles in *Race & Class*, *New Society*, *New Statesman* and the two powerful books that have been spawned from them, have learned that they represent a similar understanding of, and challenge to, a particular conjunction of circumstances. One thinks, for example, of his decisive 'interrupting' of the New Times phenomenon or of racial awareness training, of 'identity politics' and of so much more,⁸ much of which is discussed elsewhere in this issue. But the other side of the 'interrupter', the 'teacher', is also to the fore in Sivanandan's life and work.

Formed as a teacher

In his interview, 'The heart is where the battle is',⁹ Sivanandan affirms that his commitment was originally formed both by the 'mix of cultures fighting for an independent Ceylon' and his own progressive university teachers whose ideas and 'anti-subjugation' emphasis upon struggles for liberty and equality led him 'from the school room to the street' – and caused him to apply their insights to the particular conditions surrounding his generation in colonial Ceylon. They taught him to 'nativise' and 'localise' the poets and novelists of the canon of English literature thrust at students in British colonies from Trinidad to Singapore (and all in between) and to draw out insights that could drive forward the anti-colonial movement. Such meanings would also be fused with the vital cultural resources of Tamil and Sinhalese music and poetry and, in particular, the utterance of the nomadic Sinhalese poets who travelled between villages 'singing out their social poetry from *ola* scrolls in the market place'. It was from such beginnings that Sivanandan moved into teaching. Between 1946 and 1948, he taught civics and English in a small

English-medium school in the tea country to the sons and daughters of poor Sinhalese and Tamil plantation workers, and then in another school in the Kandyan hill country, where his students were predominantly from the local Sinhalese peasantry. Thus, from his boyhood in a northern Tamil village to his education in urban Colombo, he was now brought face to face, through his teaching, with classes full of young people from a community being projected by communalists and colonialists alike as his 'enemy'. These experiences of being integrally involved with such different cultural and social formations, and finding himself teaching within their vortex in a rural classroom, have meant that Sivanandan, despite his relatively short career as a teacher in school, has never stopped being a teacher in his subsequent actions and writings. Pedagogy has been at the heart of his life, be it through the institutions that he has fostered, the movements he has helped to generate or the writings he has set down out of their achievements and consequences. He has never been a teacher above the world, but always firmly meshed inside it, seeking to draw his lessons from within struggle so as to offer strength and strategy. For knowledge – even that arising from a 'colonial' curriculum – has been never an adornment but a tool, never merely an effusion of sophistry but a change-agent of truth and usefulness.

How many times have I heard him quote John Keats, not as a poet who put beautiful or rarefied words together, but as a word-maker who can help us win justice. Like the London poet who has been vaporised by many of those critics who claim to understand him, Sivanandan commits himself to honour 'the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of the imagination'.¹⁰ It is one of his most beloved and commonplace quotations, not merely a slice of verbal insight but a watchword; more than a slogan, a pointer for the whole of life, in all its struggle, hope and promise of future fullness for all oppressed and divided peoples.

'The truth of the imagination'

Sivanandan's attachment to the words of Keats and his own 'heart's affection' for the aspirations of all struggling and working people, black and white, are apparent all through his writings. But what about the 'truth of the imagination', a fusion of words that has provoked a weight of critical discourse? How is this manifested in his work? Centrally, it is revealed in the originality of his writing, his breaking of shibboleths and brave advocacy of strategies which constantly put the struggles of 'communities of resistance' at their heart: communities in British inner cities, in places of defiance across the world, whose peoples, by their commitment to action for justice, are not waiting for 'socialism' to be won and established, but who are making it now, in the very organs of their insurgency.

In expressing this struggle through the agency of the imagination, Sivanandan has often turned to the events of his own life to give a foundation for his insights. For me, he achieved this with rare power through the evocation of his boyhood in his 1980 review of Paul Robeson's writings and speeches.¹¹ I have often listened to veteran anti-colonialists talk about the impact upon them of listening, in person, to Robeson speaking and singing. I can remember an old Jamaican comrade describing the extraordinary effect of Robeson singing unaccompanied at an open air rally in Kingston during the late 1940s and how 'you could hear a pin drop' in that uncanny silence of tens and thousands, broken only by his mighty sound. How the alchemy in his voice turned a crowd into a community, as Neruda might have put it. Perhaps that is why, when I read the autobiography in Sivanandan's review, of a truanting group of boys suddenly hearing that voice from 'a new wireless' owned by the village baker – I was moved so powerfully. And the words were English, with the radio's owner not knowing the language, but suddenly recognising something huge and universal in that voice that unified all languages, all voices. And although, as a reader, I was not there, the imagination that I have and which the writer has used to reach me, takes me there directly. There are few writers who can make that communion so powerfully.

But perhaps all imagination has its birthplace in autobiography, in the real events of a real life, and, when you turn to Sivanandan's fiction, this assumption takes on a particular truth. He has been writing short stories for many years – some of them have been published in Sri Lanka and, at the time of writing this article, a collection is being prepared for publication in Britain. Each story is purposefully short, expressive in its nakedness, sometimes resembling a fable (except that these are of human beings, though sometimes treated as some human beings treat animals), other times almost like parables in their starkness, speaking of an authentic human morality, rather than the practised moralism which becomes a version of hypocrisy.

In these stories,¹² Sivanandan shows that the most startling, though so often hidden, feature of human beings, both individually and collectively, is their vulnerability – their availability, their openness to being used, discarded and destroyed by others. In understanding this, their contemporaries – 'friends', acquaintances, employers, masters, lovers, spouses and, frequently, the organisations and corporations for whom they work – have two possible responses to such virtual unprotectedness: solidarity or exploitation. Love or hate. Respect or contempt. Sivanandan's stories filter this truth through his autobiographical imagination. They strip bare, recreate and dramatise this core vulnerability and the human response to it at some of its most extreme, unforgiving and terrifying moments, when not only the characters' sensitivities, but the very lives of those who manifest it, are at stake. In this sense, the

stories' themes echo those of other 'foreign' writers from colonial lands that have lived lonely in London and written about its effect: Samuel Selvon of Trinidad, Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria or Jean Rhys of Dominica who found how, on the streets and in the bed-sitters of London, 'life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people'.¹³ For Sivanandan, there is the man in the mad house who is the protagonist's brother, the woman in the cell of a one-way marriage; the father and the husband alone, detached in another country's city, offering the worldly goods of his dark and damp bed-sitter to his arrivant family; the wife drained of herself by the incubus of an egocentric artist-husband; another 'lonely Londoner',¹⁴ from Asia, wandering in the museum of his own civilisation – now the feeding ground and source of creative stimulus for the liberal intelligentsia of the power which robbed him of them. Such is the truth of the imagination, expressed in the real streets and real loneliness of the great metropolitan city, before which all those who are colonised must genuflect. And such is the 'heart's affection' that these human beings must speak, must communicate, must resist with their articulate words and human tenacity.

These stories – fragmentations of stamina and human struggle (I use this word, not 'fragments', for fragmentation denotes both artfulness and hope) ask with power (and pain) who is more alive in being alone than an abused human? Who is more naked and needed? And who presents more an opportunity for using and exploiting? Ammunition for reloading? Food for gorging? By asking these things, Sivanandan's stories also ask what strength and happiness there can be in the 'heart's affection'. In love and union when they are freely offered and taken, taken and offered. And these human beings also carry within them, by implication, the systems, the institutions and ways of living and knowing that they have experienced and endured.

Imagination and memory

Many of these stories were written long before Sivanandan turned to the novel-genre to set down the story of a life in imagination and a life in real times, *When Memory Dies*.¹⁵ I have read this epic anti-colonial narrative a number of times, and the more I encounter its truth, the more I see it as a work of creative pedagogy as well as a piece of imaginative fiction. Here, the imagination is not only transforming reality, but enhancing it, empowering it so that the reader can empathise and learn. How much autobiography there is in this novel of an epic period of anti-colonial struggle – and the events that actually happened, and those that have been invented by the imagination, remain, as they must, secrets of the author. Yet what also remains is memory, the hearts' blood of a people, the historical memory which makes from a population a people, as the novel teaches us page in, page out.

I count *When Memory Dies* an authentic epic novel, and not only because it records a particular heroic period of Sri Lankan history when two distinct communities, Sinhalese and Tamil, united to resist British colonialism. For that effort of unity has happened before and since the events set down in the novel, most recently, it seemed to me, on the symbolic field of cricket – a terrain very close to Sivanandan's own heart's affection. In January 1999, the captain of Sri Lanka's international cricket team, the Sinhalese Arjuna Ranatunga, stood up defiantly for his brilliant Tamil team-mate (the only Tamil in the team), the phenomenal spin bowler Muttiah Muralitharan, by removing his team from the field of play in protest at the Adelaide test match. Muralitharan had been no-balled by an Australian umpire, even after the bowler's action had been cleared as legitimate by the International Cricket Council, the world controlling body of the sport. After leading his team to the boundary edge, Ranatunga, the longest-serving captain and player in international cricket, declared: 'I felt I was doing the right thing by a colleague of mine who has been the best bowler Sri Lanka has ever produced'.¹⁶ Beyond the boundary of communalism, Ranatunga's words took me directly back to the first section of *When Memory Dies*, as Sri Lanka's victory over England and Muralitharan's own nineteen-wicket achievement at the Oval in August 1998 did also. For the novel explores and affirms the same unity-in-resistance, six decades before, on the anti-imperialist field of struggle. Sivanandan has always recognised such parallels, in cricket as in other cultural fields of action.

And in reading the opening paragraphs of *When Memory Dies* again, the dominant symbolism of childhood and rain draws me back into the nexus of the anti-colonial and socialist autobiographical novel, directly into the beginnings of Gorky's *Childhood*¹⁷ and Lamming's classic novel of colonial Barbados, *In the Castle of My Skin*.¹⁸ Rain as oppression, rain in the Czarist days in nineteenth-century Russia, in the city of Nizhny Novgorod where the boy watches the funeral of his father on a rainy day in a 'deserted corner' of a cemetery. For Sivanandan, 'My memory begins, as always, with the rain', the monsoon downpour that throws the boy back to his inner loneliness and the condition of his entire people, broken from history by the colonial imposition, their narrative now reduced to 'shards of stories'. For Gorky, the boy protagonist stands 'on a slippery heap of sticky mud' next to the pit of the grave, watching the lowering of his father's coffin in the relentless rain. 'At the bottom was a lot of water, and a few frogs', he writes: 'Two of them had succeeded in climbing on to the yellow coffin lid', while at the graveside Gorky's mother, a policeman and two gravediggers, all 'soaked to the skin', waited. When the policeman gives the word, the mother bursts into tears while 'the gravediggers, bent double, began piling the earth into the grave at great speed. Water squelched. The frogs jumped off the coffin and tried to escape up the sides, but were thrown back by loads of earth.'

Great writing, twice over, united by the rain and its power to subjugate. Fused, too, with Lamming and the momentous and ironic opening of his classic Caribbean novel:

Rain, rain, rain... my mother put her head through the window to let the neighbour know that I was nine, and they flattered me with the consolation that my birthday had brought showers of blessing.

Yet what were these blessings? 'Was it the weather or the village or the human condition in which and in spite of which the poor had sworn their loyalty to life?' And what did the boy remember about his own condition? 'My father who had only fathered the idea of me had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me. And beyond that my memory was a blank.' At the age of nine, memory had died. Lamming's great achievement in *In the Castle of My Skin* is to restore it, as he recounts the courage and betrayals of the Caribbean anti-colonial resistance in 'little England' during the late 1930s – a parallel to Sivanandan's narrative in *When Memory Dies* and bracing the latter with other outstanding novels of the anti-colonial tradition.

Lessons from Mrs Bandara

For me, as a lifelong teacher, one of the most startling and endearing characters in Sivanandan's novel is the teacher, Mrs Bandara. In the third section of *When Memory Dies*, the young graduate, Vijay, is offered his first teaching post in her school in his boyhood town of Kurunegala. As a head teacher, she had openly campaigned against the 'venality' of an imposed curriculum, daily directed towards exams, jobs and government contracts, and 'had fought the waves of reaction that swept over the school from the world outside', even though, by the time of Vijay's arrival in the school, she is weary and close to professional exhaustion. For Vijay, his energy and enthusiasm are for returning to the source, and 'to teach and take a hand in events'. It is the '70s, and youth is urgent in many parts of the world. When he meets his own students' bigoted accusations that 'Tamils are taking over our country', along with Sinhalese nationalist tracts and propaganda using Buddhism to make communalist violence against Tamils (pamphlets with titles such as *The Unseen Enemy of the Sinhalese* and *Buddhists Beware*), it moves him to work within the teachers' union to develop a non-communal curriculum. Already, a nationalist curriculum is depicting in its textbooks the 'people of Lanka – all Sinhalese?' As Vijay exclaims, 'Does nobody else live in this country?'

All this, of course, is powerfully familiar to teachers in England, struggling against the increasing narrowness and nationalism of the so-called National Curriculum, imposed by the Conservatives and uncompromisingly upheld and vindicated by their 'New Labour' successors.

In Mrs Bandara's case, the government takes her school away: 'she had been warned, time and again, to bring the school in line with government policy'. Despite her age and tiredness, she refuses to serve, and the place-woman Miss Piyaseeli takes over. Mrs Bandara tries not to be a rebel, but cannot help but become one. She harbours basic and decent dreams for her students, 'like that they should grow tall and straight and loving and just, as only humans could'. She believes in the 'heart's affection', too, and knows how the established curriculum of school can fast become a national memory: distort it and it leads to a people's pain and agony. "We lost our history once", she declares, "and we are killing each other off trying to find it, and now we are to lose it again?" To Sinhalese nationalism, Brooke Bond and Del Monte: they become the curriculum developers of the new communalist era.

For me, reading this in England in the last years of the twentieth century, it made more than sense and relevance: it made communion – as Shell, Macdonald's and multinational banks queue up for control of urban schools in the so-called Education Action Zones. I connected Mrs Bandara with other teachers in literature who also said no; who made their revolt against racism, against imperialism, against versions of ideas and knowledge which suppress and deny the humanity of those to whom they are taught. Those, in short, who worked in their classrooms of the world with intimations of Sivanandan's true words in their brains, to pursue the education of children by 'the eliciting of every conceivable possibility of the human mind and soul': for children are 'the measure of our possibilities, their minds such forests of imagination'.¹⁹ Who could cut them down?

Sivanandan's colleagues

Colleagues of Sivanandan and Mrs Bandara, of course, teach in many places. She would have recognised the New Zealander, Blair Peach, who crossed two hemispheres to teach in a small special school in East London, became a loving, committed teacher who continually challenged racism in the curriculum and in the streets outside the school, and was killed by London's Metropolitan Police at a demonstration against the racist National Front in Southall, west London, in April 1979. After his death, in a moving tribute printed in his funeral brochure, one of his ex-students wrote that Peach was 'a man of high ideals, but ideals are no good if they are not put in practice. He always practised what he preached. I know I will never forget him and he will always be remembered as a friend of the people.'²⁰ It is for teachers, for teachers in particular, as custodians of knowledge and creative language, always to set word with action.

Another – fictional – force for emulation, yet embodying a truth for all teachers, is found in Mildred D. Taylor's Mississippi young people's

novel from the 1930s, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.²¹ Mrs Logan, the mother of the protagonist, Cassie, is a teacher in a black school in a violently divided racist society where white children have a different, much more privileged version of education than the leftover resources offered to their black counterparts. Black teachers in black schools had to imbue a sense of fear and white superiority into the minds of their students through a Jim Crow curriculum. But Mrs Logan also will not serve. When the white members of the school board eavesdrop on her classes of black history, they hear things not in the approved text books:

‘This book’s approved by the Board of Education and you’re expected to teach what’s in it.’

‘I can’t do that.’

‘And why not?’

Mama, her back straight and her eyes fixed on the men, answered, ‘Because all that’s in that book isn’t true.’

Such defiance makes her a sister of Mrs Bandara, and an inspiration to those of us who, daily in the classroom, are faced with the narrowness of the curriculum we are instructed to deliver.

In Africa, too, such teachers teach on and struggle on, in villages and cities all through the continent. David Mulwa’s brilliant novel of a colonial boyhood in Kenya, *Master and Servant*,²² demonstrates this with power in his story of education and miseducation. Kituku, the narrator, is a student in a grim protestant school. He is tutored to hate his own culture, demean his people, worship the white coloniser and contemptuously dismiss his own language. For he is taught – and the same happens much throughout today’s ‘decolonised’ world – British colonialism ‘had brought us lights to banish all our darkness’, a lesson forced into young Kenyans by cane, protestant manual and slogans such as: ‘In this school you must speak English. Avoid vernacular, it makes you stupid.’ It is an education of self-hatred and agony, designed to make its African students disappear and count for nothing. They are ‘just black men who, like the darkness, don’t matter’.

Within this bleak negation of an education that Mrs Bandara would have recognised, the student looks for other teachers. For, having learned lies, he now needs to unlearn, away from the colonial school. Understanding that ‘no knowledge is worth anything if it was forced and pained into you’, Kituku turns to his guardian’s servant, Hamad. A secret fugitive from the colonial police, Hamad has committed the ultimate anti-imperialist act and killed a white settler who was mercilessly beating a young African woman. Thus it is Hamad who becomes Kituku’s true teacher, teaching him about real life and rebellion, about the production of food, about music, song, love and suffering; about loyalty and determination.

Yet it is Hamad who ironically calls Kituku his young teacher, for

while the servant teaches Kituku the mysteries and beauties of his guitar and his 'simple convictions', the young student teaches his mentor literacy and numeracy. And it is Hamad's lover, Eileen, who teaches Kituku that knowledge is nothing if it does not cause the human being to do, to work and create the basic things which all need. 'Little scholar', she exhorts the boy, 'learn to do things with all those explanations of yours!' It could be the Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire talking or writing – it could certainly be Sivanandan – for, what is teaching and learning without doing and the searching for alternatives to make the doing more useful, more contributory to the struggling people of the world?

How many times do we, as teachers, wish that such colleagues as Mrs Logan, Hamad, Blair Peach, Freire or Mrs Bandara were teaching in the classroom next door, or were there to share a coffee with us in the staffroom during the next break? Or what about Union, the teacher from Pepetela's novel of the Angolan war for independence, *Ngunga's Adventures*?²³ He takes in and cares for the cynical wandering orphan of war, Ngunga, and, through his selflessness, clear pedagogy and humane example, inspires new hope in the despairing boy. As they learn together and fight together against the Portuguese colonial army, Union is captured and hauled away into a helicopter. Wrestling his captors who pull him into the machine's door, Union shouts out to his young student: 'Never forget that you are a pioneer of the MPLA! Struggle wherever you are, Ngunga!' It is a lesson that stays fast in Ngunga's mind, and is there for the reader too.

And the best of teachers can achieve this. Sivanandan is amongst them, and in concluding this essay I want to recall two examples of how his advice and creative imagination have had a weighty impact on my own thinking and acting. In 1978, I returned to England after two years of teaching in newly-independent Mozambique. It had been a momentous learning experience for me. I had been deeply impressed and inspired by Frelimo's achievements, in particular, their exemplary stand against racism – having inherited a political and social reality riven with it, and building a new society, as they were, next to the monstrous apartheid state.²⁴ Naively, I thought I could not only apply Frelimo's example but import many of its realities into the anti-racist struggle in Britain. I had a long discussion with Sivanandan and other comrades in the Institute. Their arguments about the dangers and folly of importing mechanisms from another context, that all struggles have to be addressed absolutely within their own very particular circumstances, have never left me, and have often served me in most useful stead, during years of trying to build anti-racist initiatives in many places in England.

But, finally, let me return to Mrs Bandara. For this particular character of Sivanandan's creation has stood alongside me with particular meaning and comradeship. I was reading *When Memory Dies* again, while having to deal with criticisms of my work as a teacher educator

from OFSTED inspectors and other agencies of professional surveillance. One particular cluster of sentences in a report on my work seemed also to speak directly to Mrs Bandara and her other colleagues across the world that I have invoked. Writing of the 'requirement' for all of my students' lessons to be referenced to 'National Curriculum' (NC) demands and planned within its parameters, an inspector made his, and the government's, point in this way:

There needs to be a full integration of the NC and an end to the feeling of it being a 'bolt-on'... Whatever the course tutor's reservations about the National Curriculum, it is a legal requirement and the course must acknowledge this and prepare students for it fully, so that they are both teaching what is intrinsically worthwhile and able to identify and justify it in terms of NC orders.

Such commentaries of condemnation and invocations of government 'orders' (and implicitly threats), are commonplace for any teacher who adopts a critical attitude towards National Curriculum hegemony, or seeks to broaden out his or her courses to include texts, knowledge or material that does not fit within its exclusive confines, or adopts an internationalist course foundation. What do teachers do, submit or struggle, obey or defy? Many have gone under, that is certainly true. But while considering these words, I returned to *When Memory Dies*. I read the chapters on the Kurunegala school, and of the courage of Mrs Bandara. After reading that, there was only one way to face: towards hope and, necessarily too, towards struggle – in curriculum terms and on the teaching terrain, as in all other contexts. I thought of all the other brave and determined teachers, both fictionally imagined and real, in many places and from many realities, who had taught and inspired me. Sivanandan is one of those, which is why I have always read his work and listened to his voice, knowing him as an interrupter of illusion, an architect of the imagination, a human of hope.

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Postmodernism in Educational Theory

Education and the Politics of Resistance

edited by Dave Hill, Peter McLaren, Mike Cole and Glenn Rikowski

Postmodernism heralds the end of grand theories like Marxism and liberalism, scoring any notion of a united feminist challenge to patriarchy, of united anti-racist struggle and of united working-class movements against capitalist exploitation and oppression. Here writers argue that postmodernism provides neither a viable educational politics, nor a foundation for effective radical educational practice. In place of postmodernism, the book outlines a 'politics of human resistance' which puts the challenge to capital(ism) and its attendant inequalities firmly on the agenda.

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The surrogate university

There is a line from Camus which Sivanandan is apt to quote when pondering a rift with a friend who has politically strayed. In a letter written to a German friend who had joined the Nazi party, Camus declared, 'I want to destroy you in your power without mutilating you in your soul' – giving expression to an emotional (as opposed to an abstract) view of justice which links personal values to political loyalties. In this Festschrift, other commentators have written on the impact of Sivanandan's political and creative writings, but I want to write, from the viewpoint of someone who joined the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in the early 1980s (and was therefore not a party to the initial struggle to transform the Institute), about something less tangible – namely, Sivanandan's impact on the political culture of the IRR and his understanding of the relationship between the personal and the political.

Does the mode in which we work at the IRR and *Race & Class* have something to say about the nature of political engagement? As we move into the twenty-first century, is it possible to create radical organisations which avoid the excesses of left-wing political parties but still remain effective in challenging state power? Can there be political camaraderie and loyalty to a political line without a mass party?

Giving voice to the voiceless

'It was', wrote Stuart Hall of the successful palace revolution at the Institute of Race Relations in 1972, 'an inspired act of piracy which

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should illuminate our paths' and be 'regularly celebrated'.¹ But the appropriation by the IRR staff of a high-profile policy institute has never been given its due on the British Left, not least by those radical historians who pride themselves on unearthing the unorthodox stories of dissent which lie buried under more traditional readings of left history.

This is particularly disturbing because the Institute's transformation and subsequent political trajectory is exactly that of unorthodox dissent. At a time when the heat of Black Power, civil rights and anti-colonial movements was still being felt, Sivanandan's capture of the IRR, after a protracted battle with management, was to launch him on a journey without maps. Until that point, the battles of the IRR staff had been directed more against the policies and research methods of the old Institute than towards the development of an alternative vision for a new Institute (although the struggle over the independence of *Race Today* certainly had intimations of what was to come).² Thus, once the battle for the control of the Institute had been finally won, the staff had no pre-packaged blueprint for the future. Now in possession of a slimmed-down and financially ill-resourced Institute, the few remaining staff made a huge leap into uncharted territory. Looking at it from the outside, and nearly thirty years later, the hijacking of the Institute seems in many ways a crazy act of faith. The philosophy, policies and practice of the new Institute would have to be forged anew, even as the staff steered it in a new direction. These pioneers of the new Institute must have known what they were united against, but been less clear where they were bound – or, indeed, what bound them together, save a hatred of racism.

From the standpoint of someone who joined the IRR ten years later, what was passed on to me from the staff involved in the initial transformation of the Institute (three of whom, Jenny Bourne, Hazel Waters and Sivanandan, were on the staff then and remain today) was their passion for public service, their desire to give voice to the voiceless and their pioneering and undogmatic approach to analysing and conceptualising race and class issues. It is this political sensibility, even more than adherence to a political line, that binds new generations of activists and thinkers to the IRR and to *Race & Class*.

What does public service in the IRR context actually mean? Public service, after all, is a concept one would normally associate with those in large public bodies, such as elected councillors in local authorities, charity workers administering the transfer of resources to working-class communities, community workers giving legal and civil advice. The IRR provides none of these; it is not a grassroots organisation. We are removed from the public in many respects and, seemingly, do not administer a direct, material service.

But we are removed, I would argue, in order to be better engaged.

Sivanandan in the '60s and '70s put it thus: 'We are a servicing station for black people on their way to liberation. We put the gas in their tanks.' The metaphor of the IRR as a servicing station is useful. While the old IRR serviced the establishment, the IRR today is a depot for community activists, radical scholars and committed administrators to refuel. The gas, in the servicing-station metaphor, would be synonymous with the IRR's publications. For a political party, the rationale for the production of journals and pamphlets would be to promote the political line of the party around which the rank-and-file membership can organise. Our starting point is almost the opposite. It is the individual cases taken up by grassroots activists that inform the work of the IRR in locating such cases within the wider issues of racism, and thereby provide a clearer focus and direction for the struggle against it. Hence, our publications (whether they be on deaths in custody, exclusions of black schoolchildren on the domestic level, or the threat of globalism internationally) turn cases into issues which, in turn, combust into national campaigns, capable of taking on the very institutions and structures which had thrown up those issues in the first place.

Thus, we do not study institutions in the abstract. We do not start from a top-down analysis of capitalism, the state or structures but from observing what these are doing to communities. By studying what is done to ordinary people, on the ground (our case-work) we would, as a by-product, hope to show what that process reveals about the nature of society, and to determine how that society can be changed. 'Seek truths from facts', the Chinese say. But truths don't always emerge from facts unless you have the ability to analyse facts. Unless, like the scientist, you can collect data through observation and analysis or, like the composer, translate musical inspiration into the language of melody and harmony, facts by themselves can obscure; far from clarifying, facts unsifted can mystify social reality. This ability to 'seek truths from facts', is the gift that Siva – arch demystifier, scientist and artistic labourer at one and the same time – seeks to pass down to younger colleagues. It can be somewhat bewildering, his acrobatic ability to juggle facts. Every hypothesis is tested out in ongoing discussions until you can make that qualitative leap into a concept which allows you, for instance, to sum up myriad perspectives on the modern world as 'The threat of globalism' or apply the precision of logic to the writing of an editorial. For an editorial is not like an article: it is not painted in bright colours with bold brush strokes on a large canvas, but etched in black ink on a small sheet of paper, a simple line drawing where all pattern, all shading, is excised for the sake of the perfect clarity of the continuous line.

Everyone who works at the IRR is part and parcel of this process of intellectual growth. But to be at ease in this unique intellectual and creative culture, one requirement needs to be fulfilled – the ability to discard dogma. If your first motivation is a desire to service anti-racist

struggles, this frees you from the dogma of ideologues, as a dispassionate and clear-eyed approach to race issues teaches that: 'Racism does not stay still, it changes shape, size, contours, purpose, function – with changes in the economy, the social structure, the system and, above all, the challenges, the resistances to that system'.³ Furthermore, a commitment to the fight against racial injustice rather than the struggle to build a political party (or, for that matter, a movement based on identity politics), opens you out to all other injustices. A desire to 'give voice to the voiceless' opens you out to a political sensibility that overcomes any competing desire to be the director and arbiter of that voice.

A society of great friends?

There is a tendency amongst left-wing political parties, in Britain at least, to see the personal growth of the individual as unimportant. Whereas in the earlier part of the twentieth century, labour movements and political parties set great store on political education in its broadest possible sense and valued the transforming power of knowledge, there is scant evidence today of a vibrant and liberatory left-wing political culture, nurturing the individual's thirst for knowledge and desire for self-improvement. Left-wing political parties today have a ready supply of young recruits, but an extraordinary turnover of members. What binds youth to the party machine in the first place – the excitement of activism and the certainties of a sectarian political line – most often leads to 'burn out' and disillusionment in middle-age. No longer, like Raphael Samuel's post-war communists, does the party provide membership of a 'society of great friends', a 'moral vocation as well as a political practice', a 'surrogate for university', if a 'more spiritual version of it'.⁴

It was partly in response to the top-down authoritarianism of left-wing parties that many activists, particularly feminists, turned towards alternative modes of organising, forming themselves into collectives in the 1960s and '70s. Although in the environmental and anti-nuclear movements, some new organisational models have taken root, many other valiant attempts to carve out an alternative political culture were swept away by the new current of identity and life-style politics. Whereas the leaderships of left-wing parties, whatever their limitations, are at least committed to mobilising their rank-and-file members against state power, the organisations generated by identity politics too often fell apart in acrimonious struggles between individuals who located power not in the structures of society but in oppressive and hierarchical personal relations. And, while the left-wing party political model demanded the sacrifice of the self for the greater good of the party, identity politics led to personal egotism and the fetishisation of the self. Life-style politics generated self-indulgence and self-satisfaction, not

the wider quest for self-development associated with earlier socialist traditions.

Thus, in differing ways, both the left-wing party model and identity politics betray liberatory and creative socialist traditions, breaking with the belief that the struggle for the collective good and for the realisation of the self are part of the same continuum. For those working with Sivanandan, it is at times enormously amusing, at others extremely irritating, to see him pigeon-holed by critics as economically determinist or class reductionist, as though he spends his working time labouring in isolation over heavy economic texts. Those who imagine that Siva drills his colleagues in theories of labour or the concept of surplus value may be disappointed to learn that we are more familiar with Macavity the mystery cat and Skimbleshanks than Trotsky and Lenin. Or that, in respect of the wider question of how you should live your life, Sivanandan takes his line from Wilde ('The supreme vice is shallowness. Everything that is realised is right'), Browning ('a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?'), Dylan Thomas ('Do not go gentle into that good night, rage, rage against the dying of the light'), rather than Marx or Engels.

The personal is the political

In 'All that melts into air is solid', 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', and many other essays, Sivanandan mounts a searing critique of cultural politics. But these vital political interventions could never have been launched from the ivory tower of academic learning. It was the day-to-day experience of creating, from scratch, an Institute against racism which provided Sivanandan with the alternative practice to weigh cultural politics against; and it was his belief in the principles of collectivity which, in turn, made resistance to identity politics inevitable. Identity politics runs against the grain of everything the IRR stands for – but its rejection does not imply a retreat into orthodox class politics. Far from being party hacks or dogmatic Marxists with no concern for the individual, IRR staff cherish the view that politics has jurisdiction over every department of social life, that the political is the personal, not the personal political, what you do is who you are, that you live your socialism instead of preaching it.

It is, perhaps, in our hesitant and clumsy strivings towards a harmony in our working practices between the needs of the collective and the aspirations of the individual that the IRR's approach differs from that of culturalists or of leftist parties. There are many arguments within the IRR collective, and quite often angry exchanges over personal style, but these lead not to fragmentation and personal power struggles but towards a greater unity of purpose and the growth of the individual. And when division is inevitable, such as the division over *Race Today*, it

has not led to the kind of bitter public schisms that, too often, characterise the British Left. Differences should never be personalised. Sivanandan has taught us that. And when paths part, there may still be ways of coming together, albeit down different routes or 'at the point of rendezvous'.

There are no careerists within the IRR collective, yet there is ambition – the ambition to transcend the limitations of the individual in the knowledge that 'we need to confirm and be confirmed by each other', that it is 'only in the collective good that our selves can put forth and grow'.⁵ While collective working entails breaking down internal hierarchies and eschewing power relations, this does not mean that we all do the same tasks in the belief that this makes for equality (or efficiency). On the contrary, the advancement of the collective good must start from the premise 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'. It means being aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses, how to get the best out of one another, how to harness attributes for the good of the whole organisation at the same time as recognising that people's needs and abilities change. But, while the individual can grow, growth does not occur in isolation, through the fetishisation of self, but through the dynamics of our relations with one another. Thus, the collective good can never be an abstract, dehumanised goal, but is always rooted in the human soil of personal relations. Hence, personal relations, much more than a political line, bind us to IRR and to one another.

The danger, though, in collectives such as ours – and we have at times had to fight this trend – is that we replace the fetishisation of the self with the fetishisation of the collective, developing a purist, inward-looking mentality. For though the concept of public service is vital in ensuring that we do not become a self-serving clique, it is not enough to anchor us in the struggle for socialism. While each of us engages in some way or another with communities of resistance, we should not, in so doing, seek to prescribe their approach. Rather, such participation should feed into the IRR, enabling it to work the better for the benefit of social movements. Sivanandan may not have been a shop steward or a rank-and-file organiser, but it is inconceivable that he could have written 'From resistance to rebellion' if he had not been actively engaged in the struggle himself. At every key moment, he has been there, not to lead but to give service – from the fights against police racism of the late '60s and early '70s (e.g., over Aseta Simms, the Oval 4), the self-defence campaigns of the '70s and '80s (e.g., Virk brothers, Bradford 12) to the fight for refugee rights across Europe of the 1990s. And there, too, at the founding of all the genuinely independent and community-based initiatives against racism, from the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) and the Black Unity and Freedom Party to Searchlight, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and, most recently, the Nat-

ional Civil Rights Movement. Sivanandan has not only written about black history and anti-racist struggles; he links them. The very opposite of Macavity – for when a racist's crimes uncovered, Sivanandan *was* there!

All this has not been without cost, without sacrifice. Perhaps most in terms of his creative writings (his first novel, published at the age of 73, was not the product of normal creative working conditions; instead it was written in spurts over a twenty-year period, and only when gaps appeared in his normal round of political and administrative responsibilities), but also in terms of what he might have given to the political development of the country of his birth, Sri Lanka. All such sacrifices have been to the IRR's and *Race & Class's* gain. In terms of the intellectual and moral development of his colleagues, his influence has been immense. And I write as someone whose education was so basic, and sense of self-worth so fragile, that I would have been incapable of contemplating writing, let alone writing a literate article, when I joined the IRR in 1983.

But his influence, of course, ranges far wider than the staff who work with him on a day to day level. In a world where the values associated with a broad humanist education are dying, the IRR, and most particularly *Race & Class*, attempts to provide an education that is political and creative, which incorporates the great left thinkers, as well as the utopian and visionary poets. A kind of surrogate university for those who still have open minds. Appropriate, then, that Sivanandan should receive an honorary doctorate from the Open University in 1995 – and apposite, too, his comment that 'an open university cannot function without open minds'. For, as he declared in his speech of acceptance, the IRR also aims at a 'broader education – against prejudice and bigotry and injustice. Without that framework to set our scholarship in, all education, I dare say, would be reduced to learning without enlightenment, information without knowledge, knowledge without wisdom.'

One of the most extraordinary features of working at the Institute is the fact that people who normally have no connection with one another whatsoever – committed administrators and labour tribunes, teachers and social workers, political activists and radical scholars – can find common cause on the issue of race and a common venue at the IRR. An open mind recognises that every emancipatory political tradition has its finest flower, but Siva brings them together in a fresher, more fragrant bouquet. The IRR is small, yes; without visible influence, yes. Certainly no leftist party with a huge membership. But a kind of 'virtual party' whose members, who are not members but old-fashioned believers in the morality and personal values that stem from internationalism, can, on passing each other by, doff their hats and, with certainty, say, 'there goes a fellow traveller'.

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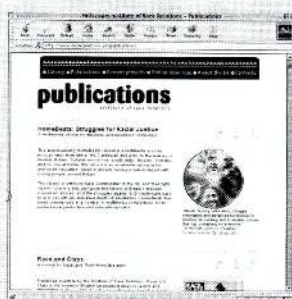
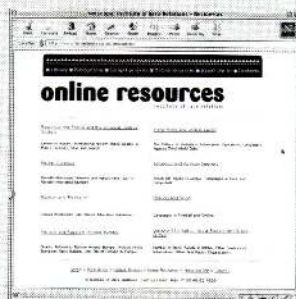
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From chaplaincy towards prophecy: racism and Christian theology over four decades

The polemic – it is not accurate to call it a debate – on immigration which took place after 1958, and which culminated with the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, was at first associated with fringe parliamentary figures such as Norman Pannell and Cyril Osborne, but within a short time their views had become mainstream orthodoxy. The hostility to black immigrants, combined with the need for cheap labour, created a situation where, as the Milner Holland report (on housing in Greater London) was to show, those who were needed in (and in some cases positively recruited for) the labour market found no foothold in the housing market. These were the years when rented housing in Paddington and North Kensington displayed notices: ‘No Coloured. No Irish. No Dogs.’ They were the years of Perc Rachman and the housing racketeering which had been made worse by the Rent Act of 1957. All this was long before Enoch Powell had uttered a word on the subject of race and immigration (though he played his part in drafting the Rent Act).

The misleadingly named ‘Notting Hill riots’ of 1958 formed a significant watershed in attitudes to immigration.¹ Looked at from our present perspective, the ‘riots’ seem rather insignificant and small-scale, though Pilkington calls them ‘some of the worst outbreaks of civil unrest and racial violence in Britain this century’.² But they were significant for two reasons. First, when Lord Justice Salmon sentenced the young men responsible for the attacks on West Indians, he described them as ‘a

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minute and insignificant section of the population'.³ In this way, the current conception of racial prejudice – the word 'racism' was not in the dictionaries at this time – was articulated. The prejudiced and violent were a deplorable blot on the otherwise tolerant and welcoming landscape of Britain, but they were statistically insignificant. Second, the immediate response from the media and some politicians, and the eventual response of the government, was not to act legislatively against racial discrimination or violence, nor to initiate educational strategies, but to control black immigration, working on what Ruth Glass termed 'the number theory of racism'.

The theory is simple. Racism only arises where there are black people to produce it. Therefore, if there are fewer blacks, there will be less racism. If there are no blacks at all, racism will disappear. QED. It was Ruth Glass who pointed out, in her characteristically incisive way, the flaws in the theory:

Were there no racial conflicts in the United States before the 10 per cent black mark was reached? Would harmony be established if half or more of the American black population went away? We had racial disturbances in Britain at various periods – from 1919 in Cardiff and Liverpool to 1958 in Nottingham and Notting Hill when there were only a few coloured people here. The Jewish segment of the German population was one per cent when Hitler decided that zero per cent should be the final solution.⁴

In an earlier letter, she had described the demands for tighter and tighter controls as 'a new doctrine of original sin together with a new faulty political arithmetic'.⁵

The polemic of 1958–62 was marked by two related assumptions: that prejudice was inevitable and therefore some compromise with it was needed, and that the incidence of prejudice was directly related to numbers. Thus, R.A. Butler, the home secretary, told Conservative teachers in 1961: 'if you give the Government a little longer, we shall try to find a solution as friendly to these people as we can, *and not based on colour prejudice alone*' (emphasis added).⁶ After the Labour government's White Paper of 1965, the minister responsible for Commonwealth immigrants, Maurice Foley, claimed that 'the situation was *bound to worsen* as the number of coloured people increased' (emphasis added).⁷ It was the number theory, linked with the unexamined notion that racial discrimination at the doors of Britain was the best way to reduce racial prejudice within Britain, which was to form the basis of British 'firm but fair' policy for years to come. The years from 1958 to 1971 were crucial, and the White Paper of 1965, which explicitly made race the determining factor in numerical control, has been correctly described (by Robert Moore) as 'the foundation document in the history of contemporary racism'.⁸

The years after 1958 were also years in which research on the new immigrants was dominated by the newly formed Institute of Race Relations, which had grown out of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and became an independent body in 1958. Under its director Philip Mason, the Institute, based in Jermyn Street in one of the most affluent districts of the West End where black faces were rarely seen, was a crucial source of information for journalists and students of this growing research area. But it also located the study of race firmly within a cultural climate which supported the established order. Studies focused on black minorities, with little or no attempt to relate them to wider aspects of class and social stratification, still less to the structures of the British state as a whole. The Institute was forbidden by its charter from expressing any 'opinion': it studied racism from many miles above the battle, providing 'neutral' and 'objective' information, what were called 'facts', rather than ideology or opinion.

Much of this was, of course, mystification. Such a value-free, non-ideological position does not exist. Nor was Mason himself averse to expressing his own opinions when it suited him. In an extraordinary article in *The Guardian* in 1965, Mason referred to areas in which over 20 per cent of the population were (black) immigrants (though the 1961 census had shown that there were few enumeration districts in which black people formed more than 15 per cent). He ended his article with the words: 'We are determined to cut down sharply the numbers of entrants *until this mouthful has been digested*' (emphasis added).⁹ The fact that this kind of language passed virtually without comment in a 'liberal' newspaper indicated the way in which standards of acceptability had begun to shift. In the months prior to the 1965 White Paper, Mason was advising the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants not to become a spokesman or champion of the immigrants as against the rest of the community.¹⁰

It was this Institute which provided the context for Sivanandan's early work in London. He often, jokingly but perceptively, described himself at that time as the 'house nigger' in an overwhelmingly white work-force. Subsequent years were to see not only the transformation of the Institute but also the transformation of understanding and commitment among many people, not least within the churches, into the nature of racism itself. They were to see, also, an increased questioning and critique of simplistic notions of scholarly objectivity and neutrality.

* * *

At the time of migration from the Caribbean, it is estimated that around 90 per cent of practising Christians there belonged to five 'mainstream' churches – Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Moravian – and less than 10 per cent to all the other religious groups put

together. The churches, and the Church of England in particular, were, therefore, in a strong position to relate to the newcomers, not least because Anglicanism, particularly in Barbados, had become an integral element within sections of the Caribbean working class to a greater degree than it had among the white working class in English cities. It is probably true to say that the churches were also in a strong position to mobilise opposition to the legislation. Yet the commitment to equality and justice, both at the pastoral and the institutional level, not to mention the willingness to risk conflict with the government, was missing. The story of the failure of churches to engage with their new members on a basis of equality is a tragic one, well documented by Renate and John Wilkinson and others.¹¹ That failure to engage politically with the issues within a class-divided society, a society which black immigrants were entering, was part of a more complex history.

Of course, there were exceptions – some churches which took black people seriously, some church leaders who were active in the anti-racist struggle at an early stage, and so on – but the bulk of church work in relation to black immigrants can best be summed up as one of chaplaincy. There were a number of ‘chaplaincies to coloured people’, and the main focus was on race relations as an aspect of personal relations. The approach was idealist, the language was that of harmony and reconciliation, rather than justice and equality, and there was little sense that anything needed to change other than the individual heart. Much of the literature from church sources was simplistic, often bordering on the sentimental. Clifford Hill’s popular book *Black and White in Harmony* (1958) was typical.¹² Its cover showed a black child and a white child seated at a piano, playing both black and white notes: it was a picture which figured frequently in church discussions in the period.

Three features were conspicuously absent from church concerns. First, there was no sustained critique of the campaign for immigration controls and a general acceptance of the Act in 1962.¹³ Indeed, as far as the hierarchy was concerned, race did not seem to figure as an issue at all. The Archbishop of Canterbury throughout the 1950s, Geoffrey Fisher, was concerned about artificial insemination, premium bonds and homosexuality, but not apparently about race, and even the Lambeth Conference of 1958 took the view that racial discrimination was not widespread in Britain. A review of comments on race by bishops in 1955 showed that dominant themes were the absence of any colour bar, the danger of ‘Little Harlems’ in Britain and the wrongness of ‘mixed’ marriages.¹⁴

Second, there was no recognition of the place of colonialism in shaping church life itself. The failure to welcome, and in some cases the explicit rejection of, black people by the Anglican and other churches has left its effect in the massive growth of the black-led Pentecostal and Adventist churches. As mass religious movements among urban blacks

in Britain, they are a post-immigration, post-racist phenomenon. Having their origins in American fundamentalist missions to the Caribbean, these churches had a theology which was otherworldly, escapist and pietist, rooted in the racially segregated world of Tennessee and other southern states, and ill-equipped (and unwilling) to engage with racism, either theologically or politically. Only in recent years has this begun to change.¹⁵

Third, there was no recognition of the way in which racism exposed other forms of oppression and injustice within the structures of the church. The engagement with these issues was slow to develop and, by the time it began, a generation of black Christians had been lost to the 'mainstream' churches. As Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, said in 1962, the church was 'woefully behind' on the issue of race.¹⁶

Although it had come into use in the 1930s, the word 'racism' was not in most dictionaries until the end of the 1960s.¹⁷ Around this time, the older use of the word, by writers such as Ruth Benedict, to refer to the doctrine of racial superiority, gave way to its use with structural, systemic and institutional connotations. The word was reintroduced to English usage to refer to institutional racism, racism systematically reproduced through an organisation's or a society's ostensibly a-racist practices. (It is an indicator of how slow organisations and the media have been to understand this concept that the term 'institutional racism' is still being debated, in the aftermath of the Macpherson report on the Stephen Lawrence murder, as if it were a new idea.) The shift in usage can be traced fairly precisely to 1969 and to the thinking which led to the establishment of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism in August of that year. Earlier, at its assembly in Uppsala in 1968, the Council had defined racism in terms of pride and doctrine, but the Consultation on Racism, held in Notting Hill in May 1969, moved beyond this, using the term 'institutional racism' and emphasising structural dimensions. It is clear that the Notting Hill consultation marked a turning point in the thinking of many Christians. The consultation saw that racist ideologies were tools in economic, political and military struggles for power, and that, once developed, they had a life of their own. It called the churches to account, insisting 'that they no longer concentrate their attention on improving race relations at an individual level but on striving for racial justice and a new balance of power at the level of institutions'.¹⁸

The ripples of Notting Hill quickly spread around the Christian world. In August 1969, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches stated:

It is no longer sufficient to deal with the race problem at the level of person to person relationships. It is institutional racism as reflected in the economic and political power structures which must be

challenged. Combating racism must entail a redistribution of social, economic and cultural power from the powerful to the powerless.¹⁹

Nevertheless, it took many years for the churches in Britain to take racism with any kind of practical seriousness. In the early 1970s, the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry produced a textbook on *Teaching Christian Ethics* for use in theological colleges. The final draft dealt with the whole area of race in eight lines which included, as its only item of recommended reading, Anthony Richmond's *The Colour Problem*, published by Penguin in 1955! While the published version made some minor changes, mainly in the bibliography, it paid no attention to racism as such. This was the main academic text used in teaching ethics to those preparing for ordained ministry.²⁰

One of the speakers at the Notting Hill consultation was Sivanandan. His speech was personal, passionate and prophetic. He attacked the academic game of abstractions and concepts and urged a return to the personal dimensions of the political, and to the revolutionary nature of the racial experience. In the light of that experience, earlier categories of analysis, including Marxist ones, were called into question.

Siva's complex relationship to Christianity is worth a study in its own right. It involves a passionate hostility at certain points, and a weighty critique combined with a profound insight into the often hidden depths of the Christian spiritual tradition. In a talk given at St Anne's Church, Soho, in 1969, several months after the Notting Hill consultation, he spoke of the dehumanising effect of colonialism, and suggested that the Christian tradition might have contributed to the process at two levels. First, the persistence of the Augustinian body/soul dichotomy had led, in the West in particular, to the reluctance fully to accept the body, with the result that sexual frustration had to be projected elsewhere. The ambivalence about the body was, he suggested, linked with the ambivalence about black people who were portrayed as the carriers of carnality, threatening sexuality and uncontrolled passion. Two years later, the theologian R.A. Lambourne was to speak of 'the fear of flesh and of politics' among Christians, the sense that both were zones of contamination for the spiritual person, making a similar point to that made by Sivanandan.²¹

Second, the notion of God and the angels as blonde white figures, and of the devil as black, had undoubtedly contributed to a mythology in which blackness was linked with the forces of darkness and evil. Since the late 1960s, themes such as these have become commonplace among theologians, figuring prominently, for example, in black womanist theological writing, but there is little evidence that Christians were engaging critically with them at this early period. To this debate, Siva brought an atheist's prophetic fire and the mystical insight of one who was later to write of 'a divinity within myself, a Godhood to which

I can reach, attain... hammering out my Godhood, hammering out my socialist creed and faith'.²²

Prior to the end of the 1960s, the perception of what was termed 'the race problem' in the church consisted of two elements. First, there was a recognition of the reality of prejudice, discrimination and spasmodic racial violence, but these phenomena were seen as regrettable aberrations, blots on the landscape, deviations from the British way of life. All that was needed to remove or reduce them was a good dose of good will and purity of heart. 'Race relations' was seen as one aspect of personal relations. Second, there was a recognition that some insidious groups were active who held a doctrine of racial superiority, but they were not seen as significant. Indeed, to draw attention to them was seen as likely to encourage them. This probably remained the dominant perception for some ten years after the founding of the National Front in 1967.

* * *

It was the coming of Margaret Thatcher and the growth of the 'radical Right' of the social authoritarian tendency and of a new mutation of racism within the Conservative Party, which forced the churches on to the offensive in relation to issues of justice generally, and which, ironically, led to a renewal of Christian social and political critique.²³ However, immediately prior to the Thatcher victory, there had been an important debate within the churches on Gus John's pamphlet, *The New Black Presence in Britain*. The debate on this document in the General Synod on 6 July 1977 was key in preparing the way for later developments. The churches' increased engagement in the Thatcher period with poverty and deprivation, their response to the 1981 urban uprisings, the appointment of a race relations field officer for the Church of England, the General Synod's support for the race relations projects fund of the (then) British Council of Churches, the publication of *Faith in the City*, local churches' concrete struggles over asylum, deportation and sanctuary, the growth of the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice and numerous similar groups within the different denominations – all these helped to raise the profile, and the seriousness, of the churches' increased concern with racial justice. By 1985, the secretary of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants could say that the Church of England was the 'only established institution which has consistently angered the present government and its supporters with its stand on race and immigration issues', while a headline in the *Church Times* ten years later, announcing 'Churches in forefront of antiracism fight' reflected a major shift in consciousness and praxis.²⁴

It is arguable that the church found it easier to respond to issues of racism in 'society', and that there was less perception of the same issues within the church itself. At a meeting of the Roman Catholic area

assembly for East London in 1981, groups reported that little had been done on race issues, that there was difficulty in identifying 'the problem', and that maybe nothing needed doing anyway.²⁵ When a working party of the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility recommended disinvestment from South Africa, the members had their travel expenses paid on Barclays' Bank cheques, the bankers for the central board of finance of the Church of England. As late as 1986, Church House, the national headquarters of the Church of England in Westminster, followed the civil service in everything except equal opportunities policy and ethnic monitoring!

As the transformation of the Institute of Race Relations after 1972 was inextricably bound up with questions of power and interests, so it has been in the churches. As the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff wrote in 1985:

In terms of power, the Church fears all transformations that jeopardise the security of its acquired power... And power itself will never abdicate. It is only shared when it is in jeopardy.

Boff went on to point out – as Sivanandan realised in noting the appeal of racism awareness training to religious people – that churches often think of conversion, or consciousness-raising, in an ahistorical, 'spiritual' way which allows the power structure to remain as it is.

We must... do away with the idealist temptation that is satisfied with raising people's consciousness in order to change the structures of the Church. It is not new ideas but new and different practices (supported by theory) that will modify ecclesial reality.²⁶

On the idealist approach, Boff pointed out, we end up with good individuals with pure intentions who are uncritical towards the institution. As Pascal had observed, evil is never done so perfectly as when it is done with good will and purity of heart.

It is probably still broadly true that most British Christians find it easier to approach race issues from the perspective of personal change. Approaches such as 'race awareness' strike an obvious chord in Christian hearts and find a good reception at retreat and conference centres where heightened consciousness, personal awareness, Myers-Briggs and spiritual formation are high priorities. If racism can be seen, in Amrit Wilson's phrase, as 'a temporarily disfiguring individual disease',²⁷ then the appropriate response is education, therapy, perhaps even Sivanandan's famous 'deodorant stick'.²⁸ In fact, theological activity has continued to be more concerned with cerebral activity, or with the 'experiential' area, than it has with the conflicts of class, power and structure. Somehow, education and therapy are seen as occurring outside of such realities, as if ideological and class interests did not exist. Yet, as two church activists wrote in 1980:

Church circles sometimes seem to imply that if only we communicated more professionally, and expressed ourselves in better English, then everyone would automatically agree. But the problem may be not that people don't understand but that they do.²⁹

I would argue, with some relief, that the last decade has seen some limited movement towards a recognition that personal change is not enough.

There is no doubt that there have been major shifts in Christian anti-racist practice since the early 1980s. Thus, there has been a remarkable change in the seriousness with which church organisations and church leaders have taken such issues as racial attacks, deaths in police custody, and so on. For example, my area, the East End of London, is said to account for one-quarter of all racial attacks in the country, and, while we have seen a decline in some parts of the area, this has been the result of constant vigilance and activity over many years. The record of the local churches in combating the rise of racial violence and of Nazi groupings is better than that of most organisations, not least because the churches, unlike some of the national anti-racist groups, realised the need to work with the local communities at a grassroots and highly contextual level.

The vote for Derek Beackon, the British National Party local council candidate for Millwall in 1993, was described by a Jewish historian as 'more an assertion of community spirit than a protest against immigration'.³⁰ It was the local churches' recognition of this fact, their refusal to be content with a 'Fascists Out' approach, their combination of short-term and long-term strategies, and their commitment to the need for grassroots activity, learning from the local, community-based work of the National Front,³¹ which defeated Beackon. It is true that many of the people in these churches saw their role not in political terms but in terms of their Christian commitment. Yet, whether they were aware of it or not, as Sivanandan observed in 1986, 'there is a politics in stories truthfully told'.³²

Again, there has been a striking change in the way in which churches, nationally and locally, have taken the lead in fighting the asylum laws and in campaigning for the rights of asylum-seekers, the position of refugees, migrant workers, stateless persons and others in conflict with the immigration laws. They constitute a vast population who have been termed 'the lowest of the low'.³³ The sanctuary movement has been part of this, though it should not be isolated. But there are over sixteen million migrants throughout the European Union who form a kind of '13th State', a captive labour force. As internal frontiers are relaxed, the evidence strongly suggests that both external frontier controls and internal surveillance will increase, and that these controls will have their most powerful impact on people of colour. Hence the frequently expressed fear of a 'fortress Europe' committed to keeping out the poor

of the Third World, who are often the victims of past and present European policies.

Writing of the West Indian migrants in those early years, Sivanandan saw that 'it was their labour that was wanted, not their presence'.³⁴ The churches in recent years have, albeit belatedly, realised that the core of immigration policy in Europe is the assumption of the dispensability of human life. The recent Asylum and Immigration Act met with strong opposition from the churches, and local churches are now heavily involved in feeding and supporting many refugees and asylum-seekers who have been deprived of state benefits. The churches' role as advocates for scapegoats and victims of racist immigration policies will become more important as we reach the new millennium, and Christians will need to cooperate closely with people of other faiths, particularly Muslims, who, in many cases, will be the victims of the legislation.³⁵

Not surprisingly, the areas in which least progress has been made in the 'mainstream' churches have been those of class and power. It has been the greatest strength of Sivanandan's thinking to insist on the interconnectedness of race and class, refusing one-dimensional approaches which either speak of 'the declining significance of race'³⁶ or seek to subsume race within a simplistic and outmoded class analysis. The relationship of the churches to working-class and poor people is complex. In some areas, there is evidence that the churches are engaged with and working with what is increasingly termed the 'underclass' to a greater degree than other organisations, and Cornel West has claimed that Christianity is 'a religion specially fitted to the oppressed'.³⁷ That is not by any means the whole story, but it is part of the story, however much the secular Left may find it embarrassing and inconvenient.

Of course, at the end of the day, the issue of power is paramount. Marx pointed out that the Church of England would sooner give up thirty-eight of its thirty-nine articles than one thirty-ninth of its income.³⁸ Today, more and more church members realise the centrality of a commitment to economic and political change, and see this as a theological task. It would be incorrect to see Sivanandan as having exercised a direct influence on this shift in theological thinking. Yet his emphases – on the need both to see the specificity of the racial experience and to relate it to a class analysis, on the theological dimensions of the origins of racism and on the critical distinction between prejudice and systemic racism – have indirectly shaped Christian opinion. But perhaps the most important contribution of Sivanandan's thought is the recognition that 'racism has acted like a litmus paper test; or has, like a barium meal, revealed the flaws in the whole organisation'.³⁹ Not only the institutional churches, not only all organisations, but the 'infected Christianity' which has done so much to foster racism, needs to take these words with the utmost seriousness.⁴⁰

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MELISSA BENN

In the chorus of the partisans

In this postmodern world, where the word has such primacy but in many ways such little weight, writers like Sivanandan can seem to speak to us from a former age, an earlier tradition. Political writing at the end of the century is frequently the province of the ironist and the sceptic; the novelist *manqué*, the restless journalist who can cruelly illuminate for us the foibles of the great and the powerful. In the hands of these fine writers, politics itself becomes a kind of bad dream, a shadow dance, a sad joke: peoples do not even exist, the poor do not even make it into the Greek chorus.

But there is a different lineage, an assembly of witnesses to many of the terrors and the truths of the century, that includes writers as diverse as Victor Serge, Martha Gellhorn, Günter Grass, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, John Berger. These witnesses are also poets, novelists and journalists. Unlike the ironists and sceptics, they are fierce, committed and utterly partisan; in their writing they aim to do something other than merely report, something more than spread the wondrous peacock feathers of worldly observation. For these writers, the word itself is a weighty, material instrument in the war against the unjust. As Günter Grass has judiciously observed in his collection of essays, *On Writing and Politics*: 'Writing is not biting your nails or picking your teeth. It is a public activity.'

Siva belongs in this chorus, the chorus of the partisans.

In the case of Siva, the result of this particular form of public activity is palpable, physical. It is as if one can almost touch the density of the

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thought on the page. And their relative rarity increases one's perception of that weight, that density. Siva is the quintessential essayist: he has written no political books: his work has been gathered and published in just two slimmish volumes. He has no mass popular following: he is known mostly to those with some knowledge of the history of black political struggle in this country and abroad. Only the hungriest, most astute television or radio researcher would have him on their contact list. No broadsheet would think to profile the 'tennis playing tiger of Leeke Street', although that is the title, in all its inappropriateness to the political situation in Sri Lanka, which they just might dream up. Apart from the published essays, the rest of his work is available as dog-eared photocopies – in our house, at least – or scattered through the pages of *Race & Class*, the journal of the Institute of Race Relations. But in the mass age of Waterstone's, the bland frequently reading the bland, this *samizdat* quality to Siva's work only adds to one's sense of its true value.

The irony is, Siva is a stylist to rival the most modish of style journalists. Were he on one of the night classes I teach in modern journalism – where, incidentally, my enthusiastic students flood me with the work of the witty and weary political satirists who believe in nothing – I would send him home, course completed, on production of just three paragraphs. He rarely uses an over-long sentence, never a clumsy one. But – the beauty of it is this: his writing is not easy. He is not as accessible as Gellhorn or Grass or even Orwell, although the discipline he brings to his pared-down prose reminds me most sharply of the latter. You cannot run alongside the writing, picking your nails or biting your teeth; some greater mental effort is required, some concentration on the puzzle of facts, figures and fierceness that is being locked into place before your eyes. There are no fragments of autobiography, no anecdotes: the 'I' pronoun is as resolutely absent as the voice of the 'I' suffuses the text: strong, stern, stinging; unmistakable, but ultimately, always, a disciplined instrument in the service of his argument.

* * *

Poetry, John Berger writes, is 'helpless before the facts'.¹ No-one is more respectful of the facts than Siva, yet it was the poetry in his work that first drew my eye to his page. I was lent a copy of his first collection of essays, *A Different Hunger*, by a friend with whom I later fell in love. I read the short pieces first – the political haiku, the novels in miniature on Angela Davis, Jonathan Jackson, Muhammad Ali, Paul Robeson, James Baldwin, all written in the early 1970s. The piece on Angela Davis – article? essay? meditation? – is just three solid and one short paragraphs long: its opening declarative statement bears no direct or apparent connection to Davis herself:

Take a black child. Drop him in the ghetto. School him in the ways of poverty, discrimination and delinquency. When he graduates into crime and steals so much as \$75, incarcerate him. If by some chance he rehabilitates himself in prison – and black rehabilitation means a total and complete understanding of the black condition – keep him there. Inveigle him into tawdry misdemeanours – keep him there. If out of his blackness he finds a larger political credo, stay him from parole, engineer misadventures for himself and his friends – keep him there. If he then makes prison a massive *foco* of resistance, plan his death – keep him there no more, shoot him down.

Grotesque – the recipes for prison and the recipes for justice.²

Of course, this kind of writing is much more than style; it is a poem in itself; all the rhythms in place, lines which could be easily separated, staggered on to the page in traditional ‘poem’ form, if one so chose. No matter. It says what it says. And its starkness does something else: twenty-seven years after it was written, it speaks still of the condition of the black man, here and in the United States; millions of men and no few women incarcerated, rehabilitated, steeped in the culture of crime which is always a thin line from the rebellion of politics in grossly unequal societies.³

So, the poetry is there, first of all, in the way Siva, the writer, himself speaks. I turn the pages of his essays: there are countless examples of that singular voice. ‘There is no set-back in history except that we make it so.’ (On Muhammad Ali.) ‘What Powell says today, the Tories say tomorrow and Labour legislates on the day after.’ (On British immigration policy in the 1970s.) ‘Old Marxists infiltrate; new Marxists hegemonise.’ (On the politics of New Times in the 1980s.) And it is there in the poetry he uses, often from the classic English literary tradition: Shakespeare, Blake, Eliot – the latter, especially, a voice of parallel austerity to his own. Even on a first reading, I sensed something of the complex connections, the rich ironies in this relationship between the poor boy from Ceylon, in his boyhood steeped in the texts of British high culture, who, in his political maturity, both intoned and turned the formal voice of this colonial culture to his own purpose *but not without love*. Put more simply: who would expect to see the Eliot of *The Waste Land* used in service of an argument about race, sex, class and the state in the mid-1970s? But there – ‘like a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire’ – sit Eliot’s jewels in an article on ‘the liberation of the black intellectual’. Siva owes another debt to the poets and polemicists of the colonial world, not the precise, scathing prose of a Naipaul, about whom he has written so precisely and scathingly himself, but the angrier, full-bloodied voices of writers such as Fanon and Aimé Césaire.

So, next to the Shakespeare, Blake, Eliot and Carlyle, adjacent to the

Hegel, Sartre and Gramsci (one can tell a lot about a man from his footnotes) there is employed a short burst of poetic gunfire, such as this, from Aimé Césaire, on the importance of self-acceptance. I quote the quote in full because it has haunted me ever since I first read it, just as it haunts the argument it is set out to support:

I accept... I accept... entirely without reservation...
 my race which no ablution of hyssop mingled
 with lilies can ever purify

my race gnawed by blemishes
 my race ripe grapes from drunken feet
 my queen of spit and leprosies
 my queen of whips and scrofulae
 my queen of squamae and chlosmae
 (O royalty whom I have loved in the far
 gardens of spring lit by chestnut candles!)
 I accept. I accept.⁴

* * *

The best essayist not only knows what to leave out: she also knows exactly when to pounce. Machiavelli, Mary Wollstonecraft, Orwell – they find their moment, they find their prey. The hunting metaphor is apt for Siva: his best essays have the scent of blood on them. ‘Writing against’ is unfashionable in this post-Diana world of emotional literacy which is, in so many ways, just another form of genteelism, or possibly the clothing of indifference in a North American vocabulary. Being never indifferent, some of Siva’s best work has emerged from the imperative of attack: his essay on ‘Challenging racism’ or ‘RAT and the degradation of black struggle’ or his withering assault on the politics of *New Times*, ‘All that melts into air is solid’.

There is a nice paradox to all this. Arising, as these writings do, out of a particular political moment, a moment analysed in all its fullness and complexity, some of these essays stand as among the best accounts of what soon becomes a *historical* moment. It is in their very particularity that they assume universality and the power to endure. If ‘From resistance to rebellion’ remains, nearly twenty years after it was written, a seminal account of the Asian and Caribbean experience in Britain from the post-war period to the early Thatcherite years, it is precisely because it so richly takes up its argument of the period. On the simple face of it, the essay is a chronology, an account of this death, this meeting, this organisation, this Act of Parliament. In fact, all these events are placed upon a wider canvas and that canvas is the monumental struggle, the dialectic, if you prefer, between the forces of British state racism, on the one hand, and the many forms of black resistance, on the other. It is interesting how familiar figures like Enoch Powell and

Martin Luther King find their place – or, in Powell’s case, are put in their place – in this panoramic political perspective. Unlike the lazy journalist who will always return to the rivers of blood or *that* dream to explain entire decades in the lives of peoples, ‘From resistance to rebellion’ reveals the bit parts that both the great and the gross inevitably play in real history.

Similarly, while there are portions in Siva’s essay on *New Times* with which I would disagree – he can wickedly traduce or ignore some of the achievements of modern feminism, for example – I defy anyone to come up with a clearer, more substantial and entertaining account of the popular political moment that was *New Times/Marxism Today*. Like many who were on the new Left in that period, the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, I was intrigued and irritated by *Marxism Today* in equal measure. (The magazine itself had the dubious honour of publishing one of my best and one of my worst articles ever.) True, it took up the rainbow of subjects that made life interesting: sex, shopping, soap operas, sport, post-structuralism. It took the Right seriously, too seriously. It worshipped at the altar of popular culture and became, in its turn, an icon of popular culture itself. *Marxism Today* was the kind of magazine that readers of *The Face* would have in their toilet. But was it good – and I use that word advisedly – politics?

From this opening call to battle; another poem-in-prose, incidentally, Siva resolutely argued it was not:

New Times is a fraud, a counterfeit, a humbug. It palms off Thatcherite values as socialist, shores up the Thatcherite market with the pretended politics of choice, fits out the Thatcherite individual with progressive consumerism, makes consumption itself the stuff of politics. *New Times* is a mirror image of Thatcherism passing for socialism. *New Times* is Thatcherism in drag.⁵

In this essay, one can discern many of the same themes at work from the earliest reviews to the most recent article. The economic determines the political. Culture is never a substitute for politics, and low culture is never a substitute for anything! Politics is not about single issues but the connections one draws between the issue and the out-there; hence, the singular must always become the plural. Think only about identity and you disappear up your own arse. Start with the prosperous and you betray the dispossessed. The dispossessed are our starting point. Stay within the bounds of the national and you miss what is happening out in the world, economically, politically, to the true, new poor. For Siva, I suspect, Marxism is a set of tools, rather than a Truth, but he is one of the few writers who can still talk about capital and labour and the relationship between the two without descending into the cartoon world of the far Left. He is one of the first writers to analyse the new circuits of imperialism, one of the most acute analysts of the new globalism, of

capital's new power to emancipate itself from old, once-organised labour and move to where the new, young, nimble labour is, on the peripheries of the Third World. Not for him, the often shallow, sentimental Live-Aid style politics of famine relief, 'a discourse on Western imperialism...transmogrified into a discourse on Western humanism'.⁶

Oh – and he is funny, very funny.

* * *

But the world is full of analysts; of greed, globalisation, black struggle, national identity, the relationship between politics and culture. Ultimately Siva speaks to us – to me – at a different, deeper level. It is at the level of poetry, if you like, that space and place beneath obvious, graspable meaning, at which his work truly resonates. For here is expressed his theory and practice of the human: his 'visceral hatred of injustice', his instinctual connection to those without resources but with the spirit to resist. (This, as Siva observed, was what was wrong, at heart, literally, with the New Times project: like Blairism which followed it, it was too interested in, became too intimate with, was ultimately tainted by its lust for the movers and shakers of this world.)

There lies his solidarity: that lovely old fashioned word. *1. The fact or quality on the part of communities... of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, esp. in interests, sympathies or aspirations... 3. A form of obligation involving joint and several responsibilities.*

United communities: joint and several responsibilities: our responsibilities to others: our responsibility to ourselves not to become inward-looking, searching for who we are without reference to the world in which we, simply, are. A world in which, through connection to others, action on behalf of those others, in sympathy with those others, we will recreate ourselves anew in the only way that matters. There is no fixed identity to find, nor much mileage to be had, in an endless reflection on ambiguity. The human task is much more simple.

Such moral mandates are frequently the province of the religious; worse, the pious. In Siva's hands they become gloriously secular and movingly stern:

What we have learnt... what we must hold on to, are not the old ways of organisation, the old modes of thought, the old concepts of battle against capital, but the values and traditions that were hammered out on the smithy of those battles: Loyalty, solidarity, camaraderie, unity, all the great and simple things that make us human.⁷

Yes.

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Crossing Lines: Revising U.S. Race Relations

Anthony M. Platt, Elaine Kim, and Susan Roberta Katz (eds.)

This issue of *Social Justice* (Vol. 25, No. 3) appears as the momentous changes of the last 20 years — the decline of the civil rights coalition, the demise of mass movements for social justice, the rise of New Right and neoliberal politics, the dramatically changing demographics of the country, and divisions among various “racial” constituencies — greatly challenge the development of a vision and strategy for achieving social justice. The issue takes modest steps toward addressing how we might begin to forge new alliances in the post-civil rights era. Most contributions call for a much more complex understanding of race relations and a need to transcend one-dimensional causality and single-issue politics.

ELAINE H. KIM: *“At Least You’re Not Black”: Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations*

FERNANDO E. GAPASIN: *Local Union Transformation: Analyzing Issues of Race, Gender, Class & Democracy*

LISA LOWE: *Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural Politics*

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Race and social policy: Sivanandan's 'grounded theory'

In some respects, it may seem foolhardy to attempt to trace the influence of Sivanandan's work on the development of race and wider social policy in Britain. He has, after all, been unrelenting in his critique of the state for its practice and sanctioning of racism, through such measures as immigration laws. And the transformation of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in the early 1970s, in which Siva played such a pre-eminent part, was to a great extent premised on a challenge to the type of policy research that body had performed, in particular in the Survey of Race Relations and the production of *Colour and Citizenship* in 1969.¹ That research had been based on a model of attempting directly to influence policy by bringing 'social facts' to bear on policy-makers in Parliament, among ministers and their civil servants, and in the circle of establishment 'learned societies' and pressure groups that surrounded them. These members of the British political elite were seen as basically decent and open to rational persuasion, even if they were concerned about the social problems and prejudices that might be stirred up among ordinary citizens if the pressure of 'immigrant' numbers became too great. Thus, as well as plying them with research evidence to support policies of social tolerance, it was thought necessary to concede to them some illiberal restrictions on immigration, so as to ensure that those same policies might have time and space to prevail.

But if the transformation of the IRR had been a revolt against one particular type of policy-oriented research, it was not – as it was often portrayed – anti-research or anti-intellectual in character. Rather, the

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new IRR set about creating a different style, direction and method of social research. In place of the dispassionate, removed style of the old IRR researchers and their false objectivity, the new IRR's research would be openly activist, yet at the same time seek to uphold high standards of objectivity. If the old IRR had directed its research towards the political elite, the new IRR would take its direction from those who suffered the effects of racism. It was to become a 'think tank' for the oppressed and powerless, a 'servicing station for black people on their way to liberation'. And if conventional social research could only deal with the 'facts' it had indirectly created, through its surveys and use of secondary statistics, to suit its own (and the government's) purposes, the IRR would, in future, draw its empirical evidence directly from the experiences and struggles of black people.

In the process, the IRR under Sivanandan's leadership established its own unique method of social research and analysis. It was based on a meticulous accumulation, through press reports and contacts maintained with community and campaigning groups throughout the country, of facts and cases relating to black people's struggles for existence and resistance to racism. Sivanandan would never allow the IRR to be selective in its choice of facts. Indeed, those who dismiss its research as politically-committed and therefore inevitably biased ignore not only the inherent bias of most conventional policy-oriented research (in taking its direction from the concerns of the state) but also Siva's consistent demand for integrity and truth in the IRR's work. One has only to witness his wrath at anyone who seeks to rely on half-truths or who suppresses inconvenient facts to uphold a particular political line. Put another way, awkward facts for Siva are not something to be overlooked for the sake of political correctness but, rather, a spur for developing new lines of analysis, the better to demonstrate the twists and contradictions of racism.

But it is his particular genius for creatively marshalling facts and cases in such a way that issues and analytical insights emerge almost seamlessly from the narrative, illuminating the wider social and political contours of racism, that has set the IRR's research on such issues as policing of the black community,² racial attacks,³ racism in the media,⁴ and black deaths in custody⁵ apart from more ordinary, academic and policy research. Sociologists have a term – 'grounded theory' – for what the IRR has managed in practice to achieve in so much of its research. And the reason why the IRR has succeeded where virtually every sociologist has failed is precisely because its research is not only theoretically but politically grounded in its subject, black people and their struggles. Academics have been reluctant to acknowledge Sivanandan's and the IRR's work, no doubt out of pique at being outshone by its sheer quality, creativity, and capacity to inspire their students to challenge their own teachers.

But can such committed research be said to have had an influence on policy? I would contend that Siva's and the IRR's work has impacted on policy in at least three ways. First, at key points over the past twenty-five years, Siva's analyses have had a direct effect on the way in which issues of racism have been debated and discussed, not just among black and opposition groups but more widely. He has, in effect, fundamentally redefined the terms of the debates on race and social policy. Specific instances that can be cited are his single-handed creation, in particular in *Race, Class and the State*,⁶ of a political economy of British racism; the critique of multicultural policies in education and his advocacy of a shift towards anti-racism, and his assault on 'ethnicism' and 'racism awareness' as the base for oppositional race policy in the era of Thatcherism.

Second, the IRR has influenced policy more indirectly, in part by feeding its analysis back into the political campaigns of black groups who have taken up many of the issues first identified in its publications. To the extent that race policy has been determined in response to black political campaigns (if only to contain them), then the IRR has helped to shape such policy by itself informing the black struggle.

Third, the IRR and Sivanandan in particular have had an influence not so much on the architects of social policy as on its grassroots practitioners, subverting and transforming policy from the ground up. One only has to witness Siva talking to an audience of teachers, social workers, church people, or even race relations professionals, to see the excitement he generates in giving them new eyes with which to see and reassess their own roles in the implementation of policy. For, even flawed policies can be transformed into effective anti-racism in the hands of practitioners who have been given new ways of understanding racism and how to fight it. And it has never been part of Siva's position to be 'purist and stand outside', recognising that black people 'can't fight the system barehanded'.⁷

From the sociology to the political economy of racism

But all this derived, ultimately, from the 'thinking in order to do' rubric of the transformed Institute and its journal, *Race & Class*. If Sivanandan's *Race and Resistance*⁸ charted the story of that transformation and its guiding principles, *Race, Class and the State* effected something even greater. This was no less than the transformation of the whole bag of clichés, *ad hoc* commonplaces, stereotypes and unexamined assumptions that passed for the post-war liberal consensus on 'race' in Britain, into a political economy of racism which meshed together economic imperative, state social policy, administrative edict and colonial pragmatism into a comprehensive, purposive analysis that made utter and coherent sense of the apparently disparate and contradictory. Hitherto,

economic arguments had been restricted to a focus on the economic motives of immigrants, in terms of the 'push-pull' factors behind their migration – 'pushed' out by unemployment and poor social conditions in their home countries and 'pulled' to Britain by individual economic opportunities. Or there were the sterile attempts to measure the economic benefits or losses to the British economy at the level of such mundane calculations as individual immigrants' remittances to their countries of origin.

Otherwise, race relations were conceptualised almost entirely in cultural and social psychological terms; it was the *strangeness* of the 'dark strangers' that was looked on askance by the mass of British people. So what was needed was for the 'coloured' immigrants to acculturate and adjust, to take on British ways – and controlling their numbers, of course, helped.

Only latterly did wider social issues such as housing, education and welfare begin to figure in this analysis, and, again, the issue was seen as that of ensuring that immigrants would take advantage of the beneficence of the welfare state, rather than that of their being systematically denied access to it. Discrimination, if seen as a problem at all, was something that occurred primarily through ignorance, and that in the private sector, not among the 'enlightened' public services. Moreover, if (despite immigration controls) the build up of immigrant numbers became too concentrated in some inner-city areas, so as to overwhelm the capacity of the social and welfare services to absorb them, they could be dispersed, if necessary, to the New Towns.⁹ In short, the study of race relations up to the mid-1970s had located the problem among the 'immigrants' themselves (their alien habits, their numbers, their concentration) and perhaps among a small minority of prejudiced whites (who because they were a minority – and the sociologists' attitude surveys proved it – could be ignored as politically marginal).

The publication of *Race, Class and the State* presented a whole different level of analysis, turning received wisdom on its head. It is hard to overstate how fundamental the shift was from focusing on 'immigrants' as the problem to focusing on the state. As Stuart Hall has acknowledged, it 'inserted the black question into the very centre of a growing and wide-ranging concern – novel at the time – with shifts in the strategy of the state.'¹⁰ It also demonstrated Sivanandan's 'capacity to go directly for the seminal issue, and to give that issue an original formulation'.¹¹ And, unlike the cultural study writers that were to emerge from under Stuart Hall's own wing in the following years, in Siva's hands, original formulations did not mean adopting concepts so abstract as to obscure their meaning from ordinary readers or make them irrelevant to their everyday concerns. To the contrary, Siva's conceptualisations were at once original, wide-ranging in their ability to explain seemingly unrelated facts, and stated simply, even starkly. Thus,

the mundane 'push-pull' analysis of earlier studies became transformed into a dynamic continuum between colonialism and metropolitan capitalism:

Colonialism had already underdeveloped these countries and thrown up a reserve army of labour which now waited in readiness to serve the needs of the metropolitan economy. To put it more graphically, colonialism perverts the economy of the colonies to its own ends, drains their wealth into the coffers of the metropolitan country and leaves them at independence with a large labour force and no capital with which to make that labour productive.¹²

Siva was subsequently to coin a slogan that expressed this even more simply and graphically – 'we are here because you were there' – which, of course, like most of his slogans passed into common usage.

Again, he demonstrated that the workings of the market in Britain ensured that 'the jobs which "coloured immigrants" found themselves in were largely unskilled and low status ones for which white labour was unavailable or which white workers were unwilling to fill', which, in turn, explained their geographical distribution and concentration:

since the opportunities of such work obtained chiefly in the already overcrowded conurbations, immigrants came to occupy some of the worst housing in the country. The situation was further exacerbated by the exorbitant rents charged by slum landlords.¹³

And who benefited?

Everyone made money on the immigrant worker – from the big-time capitalist to the slum landlord – from exploiting his labour, his colour, his customs, his culture. He himself had cost the country nothing. He had been paid for by the country of his origin – reared and raised, as capitalist under-development had willed it, for the labour markets of Europe.¹⁴

So much for the gurus of the Institute of Economic Affairs and their attempts to show how immigrants represented an economic drain on the British economy.

Sivanandan's work is sometimes dismissed as economically determinist, but this is to ignore the political in his unique brand of political economy. Having shifted, as has been said, the focus from the 'immigrants' as a problem on to the nature of the state, he then developed the analysis to provide a searing account of the differential impact of immigration on the various classes in Britain:

the profit from immigrant labour had not benefited the whole society, but only certain sectors of it (including some sections of the white working class) whereas the infrastructural 'costs' of immigrant

labour had been borne by those in greatest need. That is not to say the immigrants (qua immigrants) had caused social problems... but that forced concentration of immigrants in the deprived and decaying areas of big cities high-lighted (and reinforced) existing social deprivation; racism defined them as its cause. To put it crudely, the economic benefits of immigration had gone to capital, the social costs had gone to labour, but the resulting conflict between the two had been mediated by a common 'ideology' of racism.¹⁵

For the first time, the political elite in Britain had been identified as central to the issue of racism, not because of some failure of morality and political will, but as a result of the pursuit of their economic and political interests. The elite were no longer to be pandered to in order to gain their 'sympathy' (or even plied with research) but were to become a focus for resistance.

Race, Class and the State also provided one of the first truly analytical accounts of institutional racism (previously the term had been used more as a slogan than a tool of analysis) in its dissection of the development of immigration controls in the 1960s. Rather than being a moral aberration on the part of an otherwise decent and liberal establishment, immigration controls, in Sivanandan's account, marked a shift in the nature of racism in Britain:

The basic intention of the government... was to anchor in legislation an institutionalised system of discrimination against foreign labour, but because the labour happened to be black, it ended up institutionalising racism instead. Instead of institutionalising discrimination against labour, it institutionalised discrimination against a whole people, irrespective of class. In trying to banish racism to the gates, it had confirmed it within the city walls.¹⁶

And in this context the much bemoaned – by liberal scholars and policy-makers – failure of anti-discrimination legislation was shown in a blinding new light:

Basically the [1968 Race Relations] Act was not an act but an attitude. But it was never meant to be anything else. Anti-discriminatory legislation was not meant to chastise the wicked or to effect justice for the blacks... there have been protestations that the [Race Relations] Board has failed. Failed for the mass of blacks, yes. But it succeeded in what the state meant it to do: to justify the ways of the state to local and sectional interests – and to create, in the process, a class of coloured collaborators who would in time justify the ways of the state to the blacks.¹⁷

There is a risk in all such structuralist analysis of writing away any hope of resistance, of making capital and the state seem omnipotent,

able to absorb or crush any source of opposition. Even Sivanandan can, at times, in his anxiety to make his arguments as clear and graphic as possible, err in this direction, as when he predicted that the 1976 Race Relations Act would 'carry the fight against discrimination into every area of society' in order 'to enforce the law', or that racism would 'die in order that capital might survive'.¹⁸ Of course, he subsequently reformulated this latter proposition when he explained that:

Racism does not stand still; it changes shape, size, contours, purpose, function – with changes in the economy, the social structure, the system and, above all, the challenges, the resistances to that system.¹⁹

For, always in his writing, Sivanandan seeks out the contradictions that will, in turn, throw up new sources and possibilities of resistance. Whatever its rhetorical exaggerations, *Race, Class and the State* was remarkable most of all for its identification of the emerging resistance of black youth as the new source of political struggle around racism in the late 1970s and 1980s. In a section that is often quoted for the poetry of its opening sentence ('Listen to the voice, the anxieties of the state'), he went on to explain:

the anxiety of the state about rebellious black youth stems not from the rhetoric of professional black militants (whose dissidence it can accommodate and legitimise within the system) but from the fear of the mass politics it may generate in the black underclass and in that other discriminated minority the migrant workers.²⁰

Here we see the premonition of the urban rebellions to come, of Scarman's explicit acknowledgement of 'racial disadvantage' (but not racism) as a continuing source of social and political unrest, of the need for the state to contain and control 'never employed' black youth, and the emergence of the police as the 'authoritarian wedge' of an ever more repressive state.

After *Race, Class and the State*, it was no longer possible to consider race relations as divorced from either wider economic structures or from public policy. Even the government was to abandon attempts to justify immigration controls as a form of social intervention; their purpose as a crude measure of economic management was made explicit in the official demonisation of the 'economic refugee'. And it was Sivanandan, political economist *par excellence*, who pointed to the economic fallacy of this proposition:

it is capital, multinational capital, that throws them up on Europe's shores in the first place. Requiring regimes that are hospitable to their investment, provide markets for their goods, yield labour for their activities, multinational corporations predicate the dictatorships that imperialism sets up for them... The fascist dictatorships and the

authoritarian democracies that Western powers set up in the Third World countries in their own economic and political interests are also those that provide the West with the flexible labour force it needs to run post-industrial society. Racism is the control mechanism that keeps that labour force within social and political bounds.²¹

Sivanandan's analysis also influenced a shift of the political opposition around race on to the state. The idea that the public sector and government policy was somehow exempt from racism and discriminatory practices was no longer sustainable. As he explained, racism had been institutionalised in the state initially through immigration and nationality legislation, and had, in the process, been institutionalised in every other organ and policy of the state: in policing (sus laws, stop and search, 'swamps'), education (ESN schools, bussing), housing (residential 'catch 22s'), etc. And it was such institutional racism that, in turn, gave a fillip to popular racism and made it respectable. Hence racism, in its strictest sense, refers 'to structures and institutions with power to discriminate. What individuals display is racialism, prejudiced attitudes, which give them no intrinsic power over non-whites. That power is derived from racist laws, constitutional conventions, judicial precedents, institutional practices – all of which have the imprimatur of the state.'²²

In short, Sivanandan had put state racism on the agenda and refocused not only black oppositional politics but also the efforts of those working against racism within the interstices of the state itself into changing and combating its policies and practices.

Resisting the counter-revolutionaries

It did not take long for the assorted apologists, obscurantists and careerists to emerge to seek to cloud the clarity of Sivanandan's vision and political focus on the state. They came from the establishment (Scarman, a liberal judge appointed by the most illiberal of administrations), from the intellectual and political Left and from among the rising black bourgeoisie.

Among the institutions of the state, education was the first to come under close scrutiny for its racism. This was partly because it had the most immediate contact with the 'second generation' of black youth and, therefore, could be seen as pivotal in diverting them away from revolt and the 'vicious downward spiral of deprivation'.²³ (Never mind that the schools had singularly failed much of the white working class, despite efforts at introducing comprehensive education.) But it was also because education had been one of the key sites of black political struggle in the 1960s and 1970s, among West Indians in the fight against their children being treated as ineducable and labelled as 'educationally sub-normal', and with Asians in opposing dispersal policies to lessen

their presence in local schools. A committee, initially under the chairmanship of Anthony Rampton, was set up to examine the 'educational needs and attainments of children from all ethnic minority groups'.

In response, the IRR developed a new form of policy intervention. Its evidence to the Rampton Committee did not so much address the terms of reference given to it by the state as challenge those terms and reconceptualise them from the standpoint of a different reality, that of the black experience. And the evidence itself was addressed not solely to the work of the Committee (there to be nit-picked apart and otherwise left to gather dust on a shelf) but became a campaigning tool in the wider political struggle.

The IRR's evidence to the Rampton Committee is of particular significance as a direct assault on the culturally-determined policies of ethnicity that were the state's response to black resistance in the 1970s and 1980s, and the more so for its introduction of the alternative strategy of anti-racism. Again, the fallacy of 'multiculturalism' and the logic of anti-racism were simply stated, rendering the complex a matter of common sense:

Our concern...is not centrally with multicultural, multiethnic education, but with anti-racist education (which by its very nature would include the study of other cultures). Just to learn about other peoples' cultures, though, is not to learn about the racism of one's own. To learn about the racism of one's own culture, on the other hand, is to approach other cultures objectively.²⁴

From this kernel of truth, Siva and the IRR have forged lines of resistance to a whole gamut of both state and would-be oppositional policies and programmes – in the Scarman report,²⁵ Labour local authority ethnic policies,²⁶ the politics of New Times²⁷ and of New Labour, and racism awareness training.²⁸ Space does not allow each of these devastating assaults to be traced here, although, because of its resonances both back to the earlier critique of multicultural education and forward to the Macpherson report²⁹ and its recommendations on education, one passage on racism awareness training is worth quoting at length:

RAT eschews the most violent, virulent form of racism, the seed-bed of fascism, that of the white working class – which, contrary to RAT belief, is racist precisely because it is powerless, economically and politically, and violent because the only power it has is personal power. Quite clearly, it would be hopeless to try to change the attitudes and behaviour of the poorest and most deprived section of the white population without first changing the material conditions of their existence. But, at that point of recognition, RAT averts its face and, protesting that such racism is extreme and exceptional, teaches teachers to avert their faces, too. And that, in inner-city

schools, where racism affords the white child the only sport and release from its hopeless reality, is to educate it for fascism.³⁰

That was written in 1985, and eight years later its truth tragically came home to roost on the streets of Eltham.

What is remarkable is that, even against the combined forces of such counter-revolutionary thinking and policies, the candle of anti-racism has been kept burning. Of course, this has been due in no little part to the devastating policies of the Thatcher years and her elimination of a whole range of intermediary institutions which had come to host and support culturalist and ethnic race policies. Under Thatcher, nothing was to stand between the government's authoritarian policies and the dispossessed, other than the police. Equally, New Labour's constitutional and social programmes are about recreating a range of mediating institutions, so as once again to accommodate and absorb any disillusionment and political dissidence its wider economic policies might engender. This is the risk, in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, that ethnic programmes and RAT may find a new lifeline in New Labour.

Yet, the acknowledgement of 'institutional racism' and the need for 'anti-racism' that appear in the Macpherson report stand as a tribute to Siva's and the IRR's work over the past twenty-five years. Needless to say, one will find not a single reference to this work in the official report. But this is in the nature of the IRR's method – quietly its work influences those who work on the ground in the black community organising various forms of resistance, and they, in turn, carry the IRR's analyses forward through their campaigns into the official corridors of power. That is all the appreciation that Sivanandan would want.

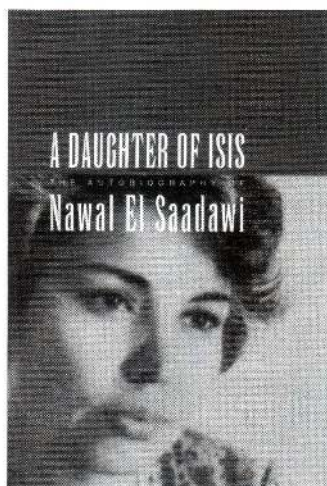
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A DAUGHTER OF ISIS

The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi



'Against the white sand, the contours of my father's body were well defined, emphasized its existence, an independent, solid existence in a world where everything was liquid, where the blue of the sea melted into the blue of the sky with nothing between. This independent existence was to become the outer world, the world of my father, of land, country, religion, language, moral codes. It was to become the world around me. A world made of male bodies in which my female body lived.'

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To be or not to be Black

Being the high-minded chap he is, Siva will probably not approve, but I do need to begin this essay on a personal note. I came to Britain in 1972 from Uganda, a few months before Idi Amin threw out Ugandan Asians *en masse*. His take-over of the country a couple of years previously had been facilitated by the very efficient British, American and Israeli governments, who believed that putting an illiterate soldier in power would give them greater influence and stop the drive towards socialism in East Africa, which was well on its way in Tanzania and seemed to be gathering momentum under the leadership of President Milton Obote. The West was more concerned about this than the fact that he had already started the killing of thousands of Ugandans for political reasons. While Obote was in Singapore at the Commonwealth Leaders' Conference, singing defiant pro-Soviet songs, he was duly replaced, without much obvious resistance. In the days following the coup, you couldn't take two steps without encountering smiling men from all three 'friendly' countries, walking the streets as if they owned them. Their cuddly bear (a peculiarly western fixation this, to pretend that one of the most ferocious animals in the world can be turned into a soft, yellow toy) then turned into the beast it was meant to be.

What happened then, what had happened in the decade before 1972, and what happened subsequently in Uganda and to Ugandan Asians in this country, can be seen as a parable which encapsulates all the issues

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thrown up in the idea of blackness as an identity. It may also provide clues as to why that powerful term 'black' has lost its essence and its position today. This is a story of race, imperialism, immigration, capitalism and the unholy game of politics on all fronts. It is also a symbol of how our essential awareness of these facts, that deep historical knowledge, is fading and what that means for all our communities.

We were thrown out because we were richer than black Africans, because we thought we were superior to them, because we viewed whiteness as the colour of heaven and because, unlike our brethren in South Africa, few of us were part of any independence struggles and when freedom came we (reluctantly) accepted it and re-established our economic comfort zones as if nothing had changed. We were, of course, set up by the imperialists as the middlemen, with small enough commercial ambitions to make good without thinking too much about how we should be doing good, too. Whites were the real *bwanas*, the big economic exploiters, but nobody saw money constantly being handed over by weary black hands to white ones. However, almost every shop transaction in the country displayed the searing image of poor black money passing over to service middle-class Asian lives. This was visible capitalism and it was widely resented, in spite of the goods and services that were being provided in exchange. Until the 1950s at least, Asians on the whole did not live ostentatiously, and in the rural areas there was equal respect between the two groups as each struggled to survive under colonialism. But this changed and, as affluence built up, Asians moved to the capital and other towns and came to see their destiny in terms of racial hierarchies. Soon, our only relationships with Africans were those of master and servant, and the capital belonged to us.¹

In all but name, we lived apartheid lives until independence and even beyond. Schools, hospitals, homes were divided along racial and class lines and it was only in the mid-1960s that my school started admitting black children. Because it had to. The education we had was responsible for the various ways in which we allowed ourselves to become a part of the imperial project, and this affects us still. In 1968, I played Juliet to a black Romeo in a school play and my father did not speak to me again until he died. And he was, in principle, an egalitarian, a socialist, not to mention a failed businessman to whom money meant little. In 1995, I co-authored a book on mixed race relationships in Britain and talked to a Ugandan Asian father who had thrown out his young daughter because she had a black boyfriend. The father said that the boyfriend was a monkey, that black people were not yet human.² What Amin did to us was wrong and unforgivable and for his own ignoble reasons. He wanted to gain cheap popularity and had his eye on Asian money. But he was only able to do this because there was massive support for his actions from ordinary Africans who could no longer accept the terms of

our presence and the life-styles we brandished before them. We did not think of ourselves as black and that was, at least in part, responsible for our expulsion.

* * *

It could all have turned out quite differently. There were real possibilities which were, alas, never to go any further because of the appalling leadership we had all suffered since independence. I include here not only Obote, Amin and their cronies but our Asian leaders who did nothing to educate us out of our love for empire-land. I went to Makerere University where black and Asian and white intellectuals started to create something different. *Transition*, an inspiring magazine with writers like the extraordinary Rajat Neogy (whose writing was beautiful and incendiary, just like the best of Sivanandan's) was one expression of that energy and optimism. Paul Theroux has written about these times and what they felt like. But they were short-lived and, when the end came, it broke our dreams and black lives, the best brains among them.

I think that what is still not understood is that East African Asians were no longer really Indians or Pakistanis after so many generations in Africa, though we liked to pretend we were whenever complexity got too much. So our Asian schools would import underpaid 'pure' Indian teachers to show us the right way. We laughed at their stupid accents, and their authenticity did not rub off. For the reasons I have described above, we never thought of ourselves as African either. But, crucially, unlike many other subject people, we admired our masters much more than we resented them. Even as we were beginning to learn about what had been done to our countries and our souls by white ambition and greed (I was devouring Baldwin, Senghor, Gandhi, by this time), green and pleasant England continued to hold us in thrall. Underneath our thoughts lay longings of wishing to come here, to be at the heart of greatness. My people were completely ill-prepared, therefore, for the moment which brought us here to face brute, naked, verbally crude racism. I looked back recently at some of the television footage of the times. Mothers in flimsy saris and clutching plastic bags, and their children looking on bewildered, as hundreds of Smithfield butchers and others like dockers shouted at them, telling them to go back where they had come from. There were white mothers screaming abuse, over the heads of their babies in push-chairs, and grannies seemed to be having a good day out too.

We were the last of the always-called 'floods', children of the empire who arrived from various parts of the world. After us, only one or two other groups were allowed entry in substantial numbers. In the 1980s, some 20,000 Vietnamese were allowed in because Thatcher hated communism more than she resented non-white immigration. Almost on arrival, you began to get a profound understanding of the impeccable way the colonial system had divided and ruled us all. You saw, too, how

so many of the ex-colonial people and later their children were to be consigned to living among the poorest already in this country, with minimal resources. But it was the searing experience of racism here on this island which provided the real wake-up call. Some kind of movement began within ourselves and amongst many of us, which brought us together and activated the spirit of resistance under the common term 'black'.

I cannot overstate the importance of this, or the pain the transformation involved for East African Asians. But it happened for many of us, and the new understanding and resulting political energy served us well for at least a decade. We owed much of this to brilliant leaders like Sivanandan, Bhikhu Parekh and Stuart Hall. We fought against the National Front, against Thatcher, against police brutality under that banner and that defiant identity.

For me, reading Siva in those early years after I arrived here was like finding a lighthouse. I was confused, angry, humiliated, disappointed but unclear why. Even more seriously, I did not know what I could do to survive an inner chaos which was still mixed up with a terrible desire to belong, to become acceptable. If there is one essay that gave me my answers and probably changed me forever, it was Sivanandan on the liberation of the black intellectual.³ He understood me like I did not understand myself, and certainly more than any of my tutors at Oxford where I was then, or my Ugandan Asian friends from back home. I felt stifled by the airless, lightless English department, where arrogance was the product which was being bought and sold, and which might have been revealed for what it was if the doors and windows had been thrown open. They did not like someone of my colour in their corridors. It might have been all right if I had been Indira Gandhi. Siva wrote:

Even as the 'coloured' intellectual enters the mother country, he is entered into another world where his colour and not his intellect or his status begins to define his life – he is entered into another relationship with himself.

Or herself, of course. The essay went on:

The certainty finally dawns on him that his colour is the only measure of his worth, the sole criterion of his being. Whatever his claims to white culture and white values, whatever his adherence to white norms, he is first and last a no-good nigger, a bleeding wog or just a plain black bastard.

The real revelation, reading this precise, unflinching prose, was that it named what we were experiencing, but did not yet know how to describe.

This was five years after we had arrived, by which time systems of inequality which were in our own heads were beginning to crumble

noisily, but it was hard to think beyond the commotion. We still needed to come to that deep understanding that a 'nigger' and a 'wog' were one; that to be Asian was no different from being black or, vice versa, when it came to white society that we were all black. And that we should proudly embrace this unity instead of seeking corners of exception the way we had done for centuries, be it as intellectuals ('But I am not a wog. Can you not hear my BBC accent and see my striped suit?') or through colour ('My skin is pale brown or light black. I am not like Blake's blighted all-black child') or through money ('Those lazy Bangladeshis. They are not like us Indians. Look at them. Living like animals. And look at us, good little millionaires already').

In time that understanding did come, and some of us found it possible and even liberating to embrace this unity. I was in Southall when we marched against the National Front (NF) in April 1979, that fateful day when Blair Peach was killed. I will never forget the sight of black and white citizens marching together with such commitment, such force, that the NF never really tried to come back into that area again. The Grunwick dispute was another moment of incredible strength and awakening. An Asian woman, who looked and dressed just like my mother, in her cardi and sari, taking on the bosses, unions and politicians with support from all the black communities, showed me what could be done. What needed to be done. Siva again taught us how to think about what was unfolding at the time. His analysis of Grunwick⁴ reminded those of us in the Asian community who needed a different history and heritage from the usual narratives of rich business families making it even bigger, that we had strong and defiant working people, too, who did not always do the bidding of the inner or outer establishments.

In the 1980s, I worked for the Inner London Education Authority and, by 1984, there was an accepted, easy, organic use of the term and meaning of 'Black' within the authority, within schools and even at times among politicians. Something extraordinary had been achieved, and the Institute of Race Relations under Sivanandan had much to do with this achievement.

Today, they seem halcyon days. But only in part. Much of what we built was resting on rocky foundations. There were many in all the visible communities – especially in the older generation – who were unhappy with the term 'Black', feeling it did not properly represent their deepest cultural and religious affiliations. Others objected because they had not properly unlearned the intercommunal and racial prejudices imbibed before independence. These divisions have got even worse in recent years, not just between black and Asian Britons but within those groups, too. There are young Asians who resent being called 'Asian' for the same reasons their parents did not like to be called 'Black'. They are Indians, Gujaratis, Hindus, Shia Muslims, Khalistanis, anything that

separates them and gives them special privileges instead of uniting them with others to take on the real battles for equality.⁵ Sivanandan and others have argued that the reasons for this splitting off are essentially to do with increasing powerlessness and poverty among those failed by the Thatcher and then Blair 'revolutions'. He is right to remind us of what happens in societies moving irresistibly to the Right. But I think that these explanations in themselves cannot fully account for what is happening.

* * *

We have had an explosion in the growth in cultural politics, where the focus is no longer on equality but on difference, diversity and complexity because the needs of the communities and their strategies have become more complex. In part, it is of course a response to the erosion of the welfare state. But other reasons also matter. The label 'Black' has been reclaimed by many Africans and Afro-Caribbeans who feel that the word relates to a common history of slavery. The Asians who reject it do so because they feel it no longer 'fits' their own sense of who they are and because many of them feel let down by anti-racist Afro-Caribbeans who used the 'unity' simply to further themselves and leave Asians out in the cold. This showdown has not been painless and it continues. 'Asian' and 'black' have become the used currency. Or had, until the Rushdie crisis when British Muslims felt so alone, so isolated – no black Britons and hardly any other Asians supported their cause – so particularly targeted that they began to describe themselves as British Muslims, with many among the young vociferously rejecting the term 'Asian'. Their argument is that this identification best describes how they think about themselves and that it releases them from the Indian subcontinent, leaving them free to develop a European Muslim identity.⁶ Their parents and grandparents are still tied culturally to the old countries. For younger generations, this is now only a mythical connection or one which makes little sense.

The debates and developments have caused a weakening of unity and, as Sivanandan says, it has led to people fighting one another over 'issues that transgress their identities and therefore their allegiances, rather than opposing the larger tyrannies of the state which affect them all.'⁷ But it has also liberated people from the constraints of single identities imposed upon others and assumed to be static. We are more than simple political creatures, and culture and religion have a more central position in people's lives than those on the Left have ever understood. Perhaps we needed to have allowed for this more. I regret the breakdown of unity deeply. It served us all well. When I see the appalling fragmentation that is both a cause and reflection of what we have lost, I despair. As Siva himself now accepts (with pain and rage): 'So Bangladeshis don't go to help refugees, Pakistanis don't help Somalis. We are even finding African-Caribbean youth in racist gangs

beating up Asians and Asians involved in attacks on Somalis... We must organise not for culture but against racism.' I think we need to fight against racism *and* for cultural integrity. We may have lost the term, but there must be a way of getting back the spirit of unity which accepts difference but does not surrender to it; which builds a common basis without demanding that we all wear the same uniform. We also need to engage with the changing landscapes of class and devolution, both of which will have an influence on our lives on this island. The point is never to forget that racism and exclusion are the key issues to tackle. Others, like identity, while also profoundly important, are secondary and can be discussed not as an alternative to anti-racism, but as a complex addition to it. But to achieve this, we need to take much more honest account of fissures between our people. In 1992, Sivanandan wrote that 'internecine wars between Africans, African-Caribbeans and Asians... need not concern us'. I know that in his more recent writings he has shown a great deal of concern about these wars and how he, too, believes that this is an issue we are all bound now to confront, especially as it is the young who are most ensnared in the destructive politics of ethnic hatreds. Discussing this openly will be painful and dangerous, but the way to do this, as Siva says, is 'to examine our faults and foibles, not expose them'.

So, in this my tribute to Siva, I wish to say that without him, Stuart and Bhikhu, people like me would not have woken up. I keep reading him and finding answers to many questions, even as I disagree with him. I thank him for my inner liberation, although I have changed and learnt other things along the way. I still call myself Black when I am looking at the politics of our society. I call myself Asian or Muslim when discussing cultural identities and injustices which are operating against a cultural or religious group. I prefer to use descriptions like 'British black', 'British Asian', 'Chinese British' because I feel that the British identity is now an umbrella term which gathers under it a large number of biracial and combined ethnicity people, as well as all kinds of ethnic and religious groups, including the English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Polish, Turkish, Jewish, Chinese and a host of other people. One day soon, it will become commonplace (I hope) to use 'English British' or 'Scots British', too, which would finally make us all equal, at least in name. And this makes sense of our position in Europe. Within the European Union, there are no majority groups, so the usage of 'minority' to describe people of colour is again inaccurate and unhelpful. But all this flux and all this change makes it even more important to hold on to that core self, that blackness we created out of old broken bits. That is all we have to distinguish us from others who have lost their way – people like Naipaul⁸ (and, I would argue, Rushdie) who fought colonialism, only to embrace the leftovers of it. I may be many other things but, at my deepest level, I am black and I am sound. That's what matters.

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INSIGHTS FROM THE
ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

COLIN PRESCOD

The Black intellectual, liberated

There is a generation of Black British community activists who emerged politically in the heady days of the late 1970s and early 1980s, for whom Sivanandan is possibly the most original influence in their lives. They were social workers, teachers, undergraduates and their lecturers, youth leaders, organisers of defence campaigns and members of emerging Black youth and feminist organisations at the grassroots, up and down the country – new generations of youth with Caribbean, Asian and African backgrounds. If they were close to the street, if they were trying to make sense of what was happening as, after 1979, Thatcherism began to bite, they were reading Sivanandan. Photocopies of his articles from *Race & Class* and well-worn copies of his IRR pamphlets were circulated amongst those who read. For those who wouldn't, or couldn't, read, hearing and seeing him speak was their inspiration. And he is a marvellous speaker, a rare combination of analyst, polemicist and orator – and a caller to arms. In fact, he writes in an idiom that rides on the rhythms of his conversational speech. The style is related to a rule of thumb for avoiding the turgid. In his own writing, just as with his editing of the writing of others, he cuts out the mortis that so often accompanies the self-conscious rigor (his joke!) of high academe. And this has marked him out from the other, more academically oriented, influential figures on the radical British scene since the 1960s.

Something of the calm authority with which he told our story, of how he insisted on grasping the meaning behind the immediate pain and irritation of experiencing racism, steadied us – steeled us. It was he who

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announced, in the telling and retelling of our particular British story, that we had moved from 'resistance to rebellion'. And it was he who cautioned against the siren seductions of consumerism, poignantly describing what ailed and goaded the souls of inner-city, working-class, Black folk and, at the same time, identifying their demands outside the frame of begging bowl, welfare cheque appeals as 'a different hunger'. For those who recall the first half of the 1980s as a watershed in Black British politics, Sivanandan was father, elder to them all.

Here was a Marxist who was not intimidated by taunts of revisionism, because he was a Marxist only, as if this is only an only, in the sense of using Marx's tools to analyse and unlock the conundrums of capitalism on a world scale. But what a craftsman he has been in the use of those tools. His anti-racism and his fierce opposition to the obscenities of injustice have always been inextricably bound up with a profound anti-imperialism – since imperialism, through its colonial and neocolonial successes, has been the major inventor and reinforcer of institutionalised racism on a global scale. And central to the analysis that he presents to new generations of British Black community has been the insistence that, although they might be pinned with the minority labels attached to their presences in the White centres of global capitalism, they are, in fact, part and parcel of the world's great majority – peasant and working-class, non-White masses. For as long as they remember, even as they first-foot in the First World, that they still have one foot in the Third World, they retain their authority to make radical demands of 'the system'.

Of course, there were and have been other significant figures presenting their analyses of the post-war Black British experience, but none have made their interventionist intention so transparent. The radical sociologists-cum-cultural analysts simply describe and follow after what emerges from the mass. Sivanandan has always given the impression of getting behind movements and campaigns in order to help push them forward. It was Sivanandan, unseen, who gave his willing ear and wise counsel to the courageous young founders of the Southall Monitoring Group and the Newham Monitoring Project on his doorstep in London, just as, half a generation later, he is still responding to the direct questions brought by the new organisers of community defence campaigns against discrimination and attacks on the fascist-infested estates of Tower Hamlets. With his unflinching ability to move seamlessly between theory and practice, and to travel from the particular experience of grievance or abuse to the general political context and back again to the particular organisational task, he would invent on-the-spot tool kits for these activists. It was he who made them understand that they would achieve the best political results only to the extent that they turned incidents into cases, made cases into campaigns, pushed campaigns until they became social issues and joined social issues with political movements.

It was this grounding with the brothers and sisters that gave him the authority to speak forthrightly to whole communities when, in the mid-1980s, they began to divide themselves into ghetto-ethnicities, often as a means of obtaining state hand-outs. He urged resisters to look every gift horse in the mouth and to bite the hand that fed where necessary. They had to be the beggars who would be the choosers. Then as now, he flipped everything, turned things over. He castigated self-styled and media-appointed community leaders, exposing their self-interest in using ethnic labels not only to access resources but also as a means of making the laziest appeals to what were uprooted, destabilised communities in transition, carrying humiliated colonial heritages and loaded with what the sociologists called crises of identity.

In the babel of our time, Sivanandan's has been the voice in the wilderness, warning of the weakening of political community that would accompany the shift to ethnicising our protest and struggle. And he has said this loudly into communities as well as into conferences of the welfare establishment – for the influential King's Fund health brokers, as for CCETSW, the setters of professional community work agendas. His has been a distinctive, unequivocal voice, where others who really knew better have lacked the courage and integrity to make the same public stand. The 1980s was also an era in which many of us sold out.

* * *

Today, in the late 1990s, it is not uncommon to hear some of the very same folks whose political, intellectual and even academic authority stands on ground cleared and laid by the Institute of Race Relations under Sivanandan's careful eye, distancing themselves, by any means possible, from the relations that reared them. Jumped-up and impatient to build reputations even over the character-assassinated bodies of those who opened the way, politically, for their opportunist careers – they are embarrassed now by that which has kept faith with the spirit of resistance without which we could not have shifted the racist line in late twentieth-century Britain. They want to 'pass' now. They want to grasp the new opportunities of the new opportunist era. They do not wish to be restricted for manoeuvre by the passionate militancy of some old Black line. And the new world of equal opportunism has indeed delivered a variegated black (with a small 'b') middle class. A class which officiates in a culture that works with race as a taken-for-granted fact of life, a middle class of people who have settled for living within racialised discourse and fragmented community, as long as they can pursue their individual material successes. For some of them, the very idea of Black and the notion of intervening from a Black perspective has become uncomfortable – Asians who would rather be colour-coded 'Brown' than Black; Caribbeans who would exclude any other peoples from their invented ethnic-ghetto of Blackness.

Sivanandan is one who has constantly underlined the distinctiveness and inventiveness of the 'Black' forged in late twentieth-century Britain. More than mere skin colour or ethnic flavour, and more than merely a victim reaction to racism read as a fact of life, it is the colour of those who have had no option but to stand against racism. Its target is not just racial discrimination but also the system of class within which racism is articulated. Its first constituency is working-class Black community but it extends to all who suffer and would resist injustice. All of which exposes the pathetic sophistry and academic posturing of those who attack what they see as the essentialist and constricting invocations of Blackness, in order not to engage in struggle.

Those who have managed to stay with the pace will have witnessed the barely restrained ferocity with which Sivanandan struggles with and for the souls of those Black and White folk who would join the cause of Blackness. This is all of a piece with a tireless responsibility to and for everyone with whom he has worked closely and a deep loyalty to fallen working-class heroes like Brother Herman, founder of the 1970s 'Harambee' refuge for Black youth under attack and Shujaa (once Wesley Dick), veteran of the Spaghetti House siege in 1975, the first and possibly only British Black Power attempt to rob the commercial to feed the political. Just so, they will have watched him nurture a wealth of young fighters now delivered unto the task of keeping the faith and resisting the encroachments of corrupted political culture.

Coda

I joined the Institute of Race Relations in the mid-1970s. Over time, I would come to know that the sharpness of the line in everything that came out of the IRR was guided by Sivanandan's meticulous attention to making our publications relevant and accessible to the people with whom we sided. I would come to know, too, that the wealth and worth of the wonderful library collection was down to his assiduous librarianship.

Under his directorship, the IRR has come to be more and more an institute against racism, but without ever changing its name. This direction was first signalled in a now famous moment of transformation in the early 1970s, when the staff and some of the progressive individuals from its management took over the Institute's library, drove out the money-spinning neocolonialist founders from their own temple to race and, surviving on a shoe string, began to change its purpose and use. That story has been told in more than one place, but nowhere more engagingly than in the booklet *Race and Resistance: the IRR story*. Less dramatic, but equally significant, was the move in the 1970s from calling the Institute's journal *Race* to *Race & Class*. At last, the IRR was flying its true colours.

The novel as emancipation

Communalism, socialism and liberation in *When Memory Dies*

'There have been no race riots in Sri Lanka since independence', wrote Sivanandan in 1984. 'What there has been is a series of increasingly virulent pogroms against the Tamil people by the Sinhala state, resulting in the degeneracy of Sinhala society and its rapid descent into barbarism.'¹ In fact, this descent into barbarism was only just beginning at the time that Sivanandan's article appeared in *Race & Class*. As the Tamil resistance fought back against the actions of the Sinhalese state, the conflict grew into a full-fledged civil war, reaching its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is estimated that 50–100,000 people, most of them Tamil, have died in the civil war since 1983. Hundreds of thousands more have been forced to flee their homes, becoming refugees in their own country or joining the growing Tamil diaspora around the world.² Sumantra Bose tells us that a 1992 Sri Lankan government report revealed that 'an estimated 487,000 children in the north-east had been "affected" by the conflict'.³

From July 1987 to March 1990, the regional superpower, India, committed some 102,000 troops in an attempt, first, to broker an agreement between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE (the Tamil 'Tigers') and, subsequently, to crush the guerrilla movement altogether. Needless to say, the misnamed Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) achieved neither of its objectives, experiencing instead a humiliating defeat at the hands of the guerrillas. Since the withdrawal of Indian troops from 'their Vietnam', the Sri Lankan military has escalated its savage campaign against the Tamils, committing tens of thousands of

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troops in its effort to 'go ahead and finish off the terrorists in the battlefield', in the words of deputy foreign minister Lakshman Kiriella.

The Tamil militants, organised into various groups such as LTTE, PLOTE, EROS, TELO, EPRLF and ENDLF,⁴ have fought as much amongst themselves as against the Sinhalese military, with the LTTE dominating the Tamil nationalist movement. Sumantra Bose points out that 'only the EROS has survived the Tigers' deliberate and sinister policy of getting rid of all potential and actual competitors for Tamil popular support. The most celebrated of the Tamil "inter-group" clashes was in May 1986, when the Tigers virtually wiped out TELO's political leadership and fighting cadre.'⁵ In fact, as early as 1985, 'Tamil rebels for the first time attacked and killed Sinhalese civilians', and, as Stanley Tambiah argues, 'they lost their "moral advantage" in the contest by imitating the indiscriminate violence of their enemy'.⁶ Since then, the LTTE has continued its courageous resistance to the state-sponsored pogroms, but has progressively alienated itself from the vast majority of ordinary Tamils.

Looking back on the past from the perspective of the present, today's 'ethnic conflicts' – whether one is referring to the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda, India or Sri Lanka – are often seen as the result of centuries-old hatreds and hostilities. Indeed, such a view finds its most vocal proponents in the leaders of various groups involved in these conflicts. Ethno-religious nationalisms invariably project the 'nation' back into the past, and the nationalisms of the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka are no exception.⁷ However, nationalism, communalism and fascism are all eminently modern phenomena and need to be dealt with as such. When, how, and why did these particular forms of mass politics emerge? What were the historical, social and cultural conditions that led to their rise? What role was played in this process by different classes and social formations? And can we envision a future that is a viable alternative to what seems like an intractable present?

History from below

Winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia region) for a first novel, *When Memory Dies* is a monumental work, breathtaking in its scope and ambition. What makes it a novel of epic proportions is both its historical sweep (in this it is reminiscent of the novels of the Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer⁸) and its analytical depth. Its chief accomplishment is the manner in which it lays bare the processes of history – history *as* process – while at the same time grappling with the intimate experiences of those involved in making history.

S. W. Perera has pointed out that *When Memory Dies* 'presents subaltern perspectives, foregrounds subaltern themes, focuses on subaltern characters, and formulates subaltern solutions to the problems be-

setting the island'.⁹ This subaltern perspective is reinforced in the novel by the manner of its narration. Events of national and historical import are presented in terms of their significance and impact at street level and, even here, the novel focuses our attention on the psychology and activity of individual players. Strikes begin and end in the space of a few paragraphs; key characters are murdered in incidents that take up a couple of pages, but the cumulative impact of these numerous, historically untold, unrecorded incidents is an intimate picture of the steady and inexorable ethnicisation of Sri Lankan culture and politics. In other words, *When Memory Dies* presents us with a fictionalised 'history from below': probing the depths of memory and history, it shatters the myth of the inevitability of the present and revisits the past to reveal the complex of human actions that went into making the present. In doing so, the novel not only points to what might have been but leaves us with a hope for what could still be, despite Sri Lankan society's slide towards communalism and fascism.¹⁰

In its recuperation of the historical-realist narrative, in its profound humanism and in its insistence on the recoverability of history, *When Memory Dies* is a crucial intervention into the field of postcolonial writing in English. It resists 'post-modern cop-outs', as the quote from John Berger says on the back cover, and forces us to take stock of a seemingly hopeless political situation. Despite its vivid depiction of the horrors of racism and state terror, and of the inexcusable betrayals of the Left, it holds out a hope for socialism at a time when much of academia has all but given up the project of socialism as utopian. Its artistic integrity lies in the fact that it does this not by proposing simple 'solutions', but through an unstinting affirmation of a revolutionary, democratic vision.

The novel takes us through three generations of a Sri Lankan family, roughly from the turn of the century to the present. Book One deals with the period from the early 1920s to the eve of independence. Book Two spans roughly the decade following independence, while Book Three brings the narrative up to the early 1980s. The three sections show a remarkable symmetry in theme, structure and character development. In each of them, a relatively naive male protagonist – Sahadevan in Book One, Rajan in Book Two and Vijay in Book Three – comes to political consciousness through his interactions with numerous others. The interplay of characters with different political backgrounds allows us to develop a critical understanding of their politics, and in each section of the novel, one or two characters (S. W., Lal and Lali, Uncle Para and Padma) are clearly marked out as the educators of the protagonist. Each section is carefully structured, slowly building up to a climax and ending in a tragic death; a death, moreover, which is fundamental in transforming the consciousness of the players in the scene.

Against the backdrop of these structural symmetries, the novel takes

on a breathtakingly diverse set of political and ideological questions and shows a remarkable sensitivity to the workings of various political tendencies, from S. W.'s syndicalism to Goonesinha's Labour Party politics; from the virulent Sinhalese nationalism of the SLFP to the capitulation to communal politics of the Trotskyite LSSP; from the politics of the PLF insurrection to the 'socialism' advocated by 'the Boys'.¹¹ Throughout the novel, the emphasis is less on the official programmatic rhetoric of these tendencies than on their concrete manifestations in popular consciousness and behaviour. The common thread that binds together Sivanandan's critique of these tendencies is a revolutionary socialist vision that animates the politics of *When Memory Dies*; a vision best expressed by Vijay:

The answer was quite simply that the people themselves should take power...ordinary people, and in Sri Lanka that meant workers, peasants, fisherfolk, market women, artisans. But for them to want to do that, each of them, each of these groups had to be shown how the new society could improve their own lives while improving the lives of others. (271)¹²

Colonialism and anti-colonial resistance: the origins of communalism

The growth of communalism and racism in Sri Lanka and the ethnicisation of the state and polity in later years cannot be explained without an understanding of the impact of colonial rule. Perhaps the most evocative and lyrical sections of *When Memory Dies* are to be found precisely in its descriptions of the impact of colonialism and modernisation on the Sri Lankan countryside. Sivanandan succeeds in giving us a sense of the upheaval this caused without, however, romanticising the pre-colonial past. Sahadevan's father, Pandyan, is a peasant who is coming to terms with this transition:

Respect and security... As a young man he had rejected them both. He had fought and accepted and revelled in the recurring drought and the untimely rain. He had wept when the crops failed him and rejoiced when they broke through the barren land against all the dictates of heaven. And he had celebrated his own strength at having brought them through against the will of the gods before whom only a moment before he had lain an abject supplicant. Up one moment, down the next, an endless love affair with the land and sky, without a progression or an end, and yet moving in a spiral upwards through a re-volution of time.

Now the land had been taken from him. His rhythm was broken. Time had become one-dimensional, unilinear. He was at outs with the world. (11)

Yet, the process of modernisation and urbanisation was never 'complete'. In the colonial context, it developed according to the needs of colonial capital and not of the native population. 'The type of capitalism that developed in Sri Lanka under the British', writes Sivanandan elsewhere, 'had a differential impact on the different social formations and made capitalism's uneven development more uneven still. And what it could not cohere through organic capitalist development, it unified through administrative diktat.'¹³ This uneven and contradictory process is most clearly seen in the introduction of railways and roads that connected distant parts of the country to one another. Early in the novel, S. W. tries to explain this to a naive Sahadevan: 'Once we were the granary of the East, now all we have to eat is tea, and rubber.' He continues:

I am not saying that everything [the British] did is bad. But we must ask ourselves why they did it, we cannot just believe what they say. They say they are bringing civilisation to us, with railways and roads, when what they are really doing is transporting the wealth out of the country. I am not saying that railways are a bad thing; after all, I am a railwayman myself, but we would have come to it in our own time, at our own speed. (38)

Crucially, S. W. does not deny the importance of modernisation and industry; rather, he points to the fact that this development only served to more efficiently exploit the island's resources for the benefit of the colonisers.

The British withdrew from Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) in 1948 and left behind a system of government that had already been marked by the incipient communalism that would, within a decade, transform this South Asian island country into a cauldron of ethnic strife. The communal lines had been drawn by the colonial authorities in their attempt to foster linguistic and 'racial' divisions amongst the subject population. From communal representation on the Legislative Council to the classification and categorisation of various sections of the native population into different 'races', colonial policies reified and institutionalised particular cultural, linguistic and customary differences.¹⁴ At the same time, colonialism brought the entire island under one centralised government for the first time in its history. As Sivanandan put it, the colonial government 'divided in order to rule what it integrated in order to exploit'.¹⁵

The backdrop to Book One is the resistance to colonial rule that was forged in the course of various working-class struggles, as well as the weaknesses of that resistance. Elsewhere, Sivanandan has pointed out that colonial capitalism in Sri Lanka produced neither a confident bourgeoisie nor a proletariat schooled in the strategies of class struggle.¹⁶ Neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class, then, was able

to build a mass-based, secular, national liberation movement, unlike in India, where this task had been undertaken by the Indian National Congress. As Rajan comments in Book Two of the novel,

the struggle for freedom was associated with Gandhi and Nehru and the Indian National Congress. Our leaders stood on the sidelines awaiting the outcome, offering up prayers and petitions to Her Majesty's Government the while. The Ceylon National Congress had sold out, my father said; all they were interested in was to hold on to their lands and privileges. They did not care about ordinary people, and the people in turn did not have a say in their country's independence: it was all being done somewhere above their heads. (146)

But the novel is sensitive, nevertheless, to various forms of resistance to colonialism that did occur. S. W. recounts, for example, the theological debates that took place between Buddhist monks and the Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. In the first section of *When Memory Dies*, however, Sivanandan's emphasis is on the unity and solidarity – amongst the lower classes and across 'ethnic' and linguistic boundaries – that existed despite the divisive policies of colonial rule. Sahadevan, a Tamil, is befriended by the Sinhalese Tissa and subsequently adopted by the Wijepalas. The bonds that develop between Saha and Tissa and between Saha and his foster-parents are perhaps the most convincing ones in the novel. In part, this is due to the attention that Sivanandan pays to the differences in food, custom, language and dress that mark the two communities. Tissa's love-affair with Soonoo, a Muslim, and his taking her brother Sultan under his wing, point to the easy intermingling that was possible before religion and language became politicised.

We are presented here with essentially two models of emancipatory politics. On the one hand, there is the union militancy and syndicalism of S. W., while, on the other, there is the Labourite gradualism represented by A. E. Goonesinha. Where Saha, the central character of this section of the novel, grows close to S. W. and comes to understand his politics and principles, Tissa grows steadily closer to Goonesinha (the 'Chief' as Tissa calls him). S. W. is the more organic of the two leaders; a rank-and-file rail worker himself, he has led strikes in the past and sees workers' self-activity as the path to liberation. Indeed, it is his experience as a union militant that has led him to this conclusion. Reminiscing about a striker who had been jailed, he says:

What was important was that by standing up to an unjust law, he taught others to stand up too. Just that one act is enough to remember him by. So many other acts flowed from that, so many strikes from that printers' strike – laundrymen, builders, cycle workers, carters. People were becoming more confident in their own power to

change things. And they saw that when they stood together, they had nothing to fear. (55)

S. W. constantly draws attention to this self-activity of the exploited, reminding Saha of their unremembered histories: 'There were rebellions [against the British] going on all the time... But your school history books wouldn't tell you that, would they? After all, they are written by the English. Soon no one will know the true story of our country' (40). And, again, he argues that the real heroes were the strike leaders 'and the people, the ordinary people, who suffered a lot of hardship in helping the strikers. It is their sacrifices that made things better for the rest of us.' (56)

Tissa's mentor, A. E. Goonesinha, the self-styled leader of the Ceylon Labour Union, is initially given to militant speeches that impress even S.W. – indeed, he calls for and leads a general strike – but soon gets taken in by the politics of the British Labour Party. The move towards parliamentarism is rightly seen as opportunistic by the more politically conscious characters. On hearing that Goonesinha had accepted an invitation by the Labour Party to attend the Commonwealth Labour Party Conference, Para remarks, 'If that isn't riding two horses – in opposite directions – I don't know what is.' (84) Tissa, enamoured of Goonesinha's 'pragmatism' (Tissa's term), adopts a mechanical, stageist approach to liberation: 'It's all a part of the strategy', he tells Saha,

'First we get the workers into unions, like our Labour Union; then we get the unions into a federation, like the TUC; then we get the vote, and then, and then' – Tissa leant forward on his chair counting out the stages on his fingers – 'they vote for their party, the Labour Party; and then the Party has the power to help them'. (105)

We clearly see here Tissa and Goonesinha's slavish adherence to the practices of the British Labour Party. S. W. is thus harshly critical of Goonesinha: 'I don't know whether I trust him or not... All I know is that he is not a worker. And he is trying to organize the workers. From the outside in.' (56) Lal echoes these words later in the novel when, ashamed of the Marxist LSSP¹⁷ to which he once belonged, he writes in a letter to Rajan: 'unless we throw up our own leaders, not borrow them from the upper classes, we will never have a revolutionary party.' (230) At the same time, however, S. W.'s abstention from politics is not quite convincing as an alternative either. He takes a stand against the general strike called by Goonesinha on the grounds that 'the workers were not ready for it', and this alienates him from his potential allies. One might even argue that his abstention from political struggle (despite his principled commitment to economic struggles) is precisely what leaves the door open for Goonesinha's opportunism. By the end of the novel, not only is S.W. forgotten, but there is little that remains of his political legacy.

At the end of Book One, Tissa's illusions in Goonesinha's leadership and strategy are shattered. Goonesinha is beaten up by the police and, when workers stage a demonstration to protest the attack, the police open fire, killing Sultan. Tissa looks up to see 'his Chief standing on the top step above him, beside a white man in a white suit' and comes to understand the price to be paid for the compromises that Goonesinha has made. The somewhat melodramatic tragedy of Sultan's death, and Tissa's and Saha's grief over it, further reinforce the potential for inter-ethnic unity that existed before independence.

The failure of the Left and the rise of communalism

Book Two of *When Memory Dies* shows the development of communal consciousness not only among the elites but among the petty-bourgeois and lower classes as well. Rajan, the narrator of the novel, is the principal character of this section. Politically naive, he comes into contact with Lal, an S. W.-type figure who is a member of the LSSP. We come to know of the mistakes made by the Ceylonese Left through Lal rather than Rajan. Rajan thus serves as a foil to Lal's and Lali's political commitment.

In 1956, the LSSP and the Communist Party (CP), both of which had dominated the Tamil vote a decade earlier, began to retreat in the face of the growth of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), a virulently anti-Tamil party. Lal recognises the right-wing populism of the SLFP when, in an argument with his friend Dr. Fonseka, he says: 'You know your trouble, don't you? You are confusing race and class, like your whole bloody party, so that you can keep your class while shouting race.' (202) With the SLFP promising to impose Sinhala-only legislation, the LSSP, competing in the electoral arena and giving up all pretence of being a revolutionary party, jumped onto the bandwagon of communalism. Lal ascribes this to the LSSP's move towards parliamentarism. 'Once we start playing parliamentary games we are finished', he tells Rajan. 'Tactics become goals. Elections, from being a vehicle for politicizing the masses so that they can take power, become a way of manipulating them so that the leaders can take power.' (185) Although the Left now denounced the imposition of Sinhala-only, its 'critical support' of the SLFP had lost it its credibility. The correct course for the Left would have been to fight against the racism of the SLFP and its proto-fascist supporters on the basis of class solidarity across religious and linguistic lines, and to remain an independent revolutionary force. Its capitulation to communalism, however, signalled the death of any genuine alternative to the incipient fascism that would result in massive anti-Tamil pogroms in the coming years.

The struggle – or the absence of it – over Sinhala-only legislation reveals the process by which actions taken by the state dialectically

relate to the ethnicisation of popular consciousness. As Lal points out to a sceptical Rajan, in the combination of language and religion, 'Banda [Bandaranaike] has found the perfect formula for a ready-made majority' (204). Soon after this conversation takes place, we are taken on to the streets to witness the first few anti-Tamil actions. Even at this stage, however, the novel draws attention to the contradictions that continue to exist, despite the hegemony that communal politics has gained at the top of society. Rajan encounters a Sinhalese who addresses him in Tamil, and leaves him with 'Don't give up hope, *thambi* [brother], the fight is just beginning' (205).

While Lal despairs of his party's capitulation to communalism, it is his sister, Lali, who gains an intimate understanding of the realities of life among the Tamil population. Thus Lal, increasingly cut off from the people, thinks that 'this Sinhala-Tamil business' will 'blow over'. Lali, on the other hand, understands Uncle Para's argument that their society is heading towards 'communal war'. (221) It is people like Uncle Para that she sees as the hope for the future: 'They were the real backbone of the country. They were the real custodians of our history and our culture, and they were everywhere. There was hope for the country yet.' (217) Later in the novel, we find the grounds for such optimism gradually withering away, as older characters like Para have fewer and fewer links with a younger generation of activists and progressively function more as critics and commentators than as actors on the stage of history.

Notwithstanding Lali's optimism, then, *When Memory Dies* presents us with no miracle solutions, and the harsh reality of the anti-Tamil pogroms of 1956 and 1958 comes home to the reader at the end of Book Two, when Lali is gang-raped and murdered by a group of Sinhalese men. This is the most poignant moment in the book and highlights the horrors as well as the fallacies of Sinhalese nationalism. When confronted with the thugs, Rajan is initially able to fool them into thinking that he is either Sinhalese or Muslim. Their inability to categorise him accurately points again to the fluidity of identity in a multiethnic society, and the only way for them to be sure is to challenge him to recite a Buddhist *gatha*. His Tamil name is, of course, the final giveaway. The violence of the thugs, which is at first directed against Rajan, in a bitter twist of irony turns upon his Sinhalese wife, Lali, who is raped and mutilated.

This horrific conclusion to Book Two leaves us with little hope for the future. But we are also left with a feeling that things could have been different. The betrayals of the Left come in for severe criticism in the novel; further, it is against the backdrop of these betrayals that Book Three depicts the rise of mass anti-Tamil hysteria, on the one hand, and militant Tamil nationalism, on the other.

The Tamil response: from liberation to terror

Vijay is presented here as a last hope for a united Sinhala-Tamil struggle for socialism and liberation. Early in his life, he comes under the influence of Padma, a member of the clandestine People's Liberation Front (PLF).¹⁸ Although Sivanandan curiously does not spend much time in the novel on the politics of the PLF or of the failed insurrection led by it in 1971, its impact on Vijay's political development is delineated quite carefully.¹⁹ It certainly radicalises his understanding of Sri Lankan politics. Of the political parties, 'One lot feeds us on American flour', Padma tells him, 'the other lot on patriotism. And the socialists feed us every five years with revolution to get elected. And now... the patriots and the socialists are getting together to feed us patriotic socialism.' (250) Moreover, the intellectuals and academics who had supported or participated in the insurrection are now a demoralised lot, completely cut off from popular struggle. Vijay's visit to the University of Peradeniya serves as an occasion for Sivanandan to provide a blistering critique of armchair radicalism.

Vijay's search for alternatives leads him to an organisation called Rights and Justice which recognises that the growing polarisation in Sri Lankan society requires new strategies of organising. They decide to send Vijay to meet with 'the Boys', the new Tamil guerrillas in the north. Just as the PLF had been an organisation with a degree of popular support ('The group's name was on everybody's lips, and people marvelled that it should be their children who were taking up the fight' (250)), so also 'the Boys' at first inspired the people around them. The rise of the Tamil New Tigers (who would later become the LTTE) in the 1970s was a response to the savage attacks against the Tamils that were being carried out by the Sinhalese state and fascist goon squads on the ground. It followed, then, that these rebels were at first welcomed by the Tamil community:

Yes, Para had been proud of them, then, proud of the way they had brought back legend to a people starved of heroes and fed on fear, and prouder still of the practical way they had gone about relieving people's hardships with food redistribution centres and medical supplies and nurseries. (394)

Progressively, however, the politics of the guerrilla groups began to unravel. *When Memory Dies* is thus clearly sympathetic to the Tamil cause, and has a definitely partisan tone, but it is not blind to the errors of 'the Boys' either. Whereas in Book Two, the potential for working-class unity is squandered – and in fact sabotaged – by the Marxist Left, in Book Three, it is Tamil nationalism that comes in for criticism.

Although the events of this section of the novel unfold against the backdrop of increasing anti-Tamil violence perpetrated by both the

Sinhalese state and fascist goon squads, Sinhalese activists like Vijay, Dhanapala, Sarath and Damayanthi are shown in a favourable light as they attempt to build the bridges that would be necessary for united working-class resistance. At first 'the Boys' are receptive. But the increasingly vicious anti-Tamil pogroms, culminating in the burning of the Jaffna library in 1981, make such bridge building increasingly difficult. The militarism of 'the Boys' gets sharpened in the wake of the pogroms and with the militarism comes factionalism and, in its wake, terrorism. As Sarath, a member of the group Vijay is working with, says, the Tamil youth militants:

are not fighting out of theory, but of necessity... They have nothing and they have grown up having nothing, a whole generation of them. And they see even the little they have to make something of their lives with, like education, being taken away from them... That is when they pick up the gun. (305)

Uncle Para, too, turns away from 'the Boys', for:

they had begun to fight each other over who could serve the people better, which faction, which dogma, till the people mattered no more ...and the army came back...and the war had to be fought all over again...only this time there were no people in it, only armies and warlords and fiefs and kingdoms...and the redistribution centres became places of ransom, medicines ceased to arrive and the nurseries grew into nurseries of war. (394)

Para's death, and then Vijay's, magnify the tragedy of the novel. The memories of working-class unity have by now been all but erased. A conversation between Para and Vijay gets to the heart of the matter: 'When memory dies, a people die', says Uncle Para. 'What if we make up false memories?' asks Vijay, to which Para replies, 'That is worse, that is murder.' (335) The inexorable process of ethnicisation that had begun a few decades ago now seems to have a life of its own:

Language, race and religion were becoming so intricately woven into each other that in touching one you set off the others. Each in its own right, it was true, connected man to himself, to his fellows and to the hereafter, but in symbiosis they locked him up again in a righteousness of the self and the arrogance of nation, and collapsed the hereafter into the now. And it was from such closed circuits of passion that fascism drew its power. The Tamils were merely the first to be caught up in its forcefield. Their turn would come. (311)

Thus, while Sivanandan clearly sympathises with the Tamil cause, he is also harshly critical of their aims and methods, and recognises that, being caught up in this 'forcefield,' a liberation movement could easily succumb to the same indiscriminate violence that it is fighting against.

In particular, he draws attention to the top-down vision of 'socialism' that the Tamil guerrilla fighters advocate. Yogi is a member of the militant (and ironically named) Liberation Fighters for Eelam (LIFE), which clearly stands in for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), cyanide capsules and all. In an exchange between Yogi and Vijay, the latter asks, 'Do you think you can take power on behalf of the people and then hand it over to them?' He goes on to explain: 'It never happens like that, you know, Yogi. That way socialism never comes. Those who take power don't give it'. When Yogi claims that socialism 'will bloody well have to wait... till after the liberation', Vijay responds, 'That way liberation never comes, and you know it. Socialism is the path to liberation, not just its end.' (406) Vijay's argument gets to the heart of Sivanandan's critique of the LTTE. Its proclaimed goal is socialism, but its top-down strategy and terrorist tactics are at odds with this goal. Back in 1984, Sivanandan had argued in the pages of this journal that 'whatever the goal [of the Tamil fighters] in view, their immediate and inevitable task is to continue their unrelenting war against the fascist state.'²⁰ In *When Memory Dies*, however, he seems to have developed a sharper critique of their politics while remaining sympathetic to their cause. Thus, in contrast to the heavy-handed and exclusivist militarism of the guerrillas, the arguments of Lal and Lali, Para and Vijay, allow a vision of 'socialism from below' to run like a refrain through the novel. But the realisation of this vision is contingent upon the unity and solidarity across ethnic and linguistic lines that, not so long ago, did in fact exist.

S. W. Perera, in a review of the novel, has drawn attention to the fact that two principal characters, Para and Vijay, are portrayed as bastards:

Para, Saha's half-brother, is the product of Pandyan and the midwife, and Saha's 'son' [Vijay] is not his own but Lali's child by Sena... Such a strategy allows the author to challenge the notion of a pure race and to focus on the intersections among races rather than the binary opposition favoured by those who wish to maintain differences between them; in other words, Sivanandan... gives hybridity a positive value.²¹

It is significant, then, that in Book Three we witness the deaths of both these characters. While Para's is a natural death (and perhaps symbolises the passing away of an older, secular cultural ethos), Vijay is shot and killed by his cousin, Ravi, the self-styled Commander of LIFE. Yogi's taking over from Ravi in the wake of the killing comes as little comfort for the readers or for Meena, who tells Ravi, 'You have killed the only decent thing left in this land... We'll never be whole again.' (411) This is indeed a bleak ending for a novel of resistance.

A novel that so honestly confronts the realities of fascism and the egregious errors of those who could have prevented its rise, might well

have succumbed to a sense of helplessness in the face of the larger processes of history. The supreme achievement of *When Memory Dies*, however, lies in its effective resurrection of the memory of past struggles and of a pre-communalist history. Thus, in all its tragedy, it reminds us of Marx's famous passage from the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.²²

If it was human agency, then, that so critically failed to present an alternative to the barbarism of the present, revisiting the past to unearth the errors and failures is a necessary first step towards reconstructing a truly liberatory socialist politics for the future. In this project of re-presenting history, *When Memory Dies* plays an indispensable role.

References

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- 1 A. Sivanandan, 'Sri Lanka: racism and the politics of underdevelopment', *Race & Class* (Vol. 26, no. 1, 1984), p.1.
- 2 S. J. Tambiah, 'Ethnic fratricide in Sri Lanka: an update', in Remo Guidieri et al, eds., *Ethnicities and Nations* (Houston, 1988), p. 297.
- 3 Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 86.
- 4 These are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front, respectively.
- 5 Sumantra Bose, op. cit., p. 88 n. 8.
- 6 S. J. Tambiah, op. cit., p. 296.
- 7 See Elizabeth Nissán and R. L. Stirrat, 'The generation of communal identities' in Jonathan Spencer, ed., *Sri Lanka: history and the roots of conflict* (London and New York, 1990), p. 26.
- 8 Tim Brennan makes the same comparison in his review of the novel in *The Nation* (1 June 1998).
- 9 S. W. Perera, 'Attempting the Sri Lankan novel of resistance and reconciliation: A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* (Vol. 23, nos. 1-2, 1997).
- 10 'Communalism' itself is a much debated term. Sivanandan points out, for instance, that the term does not allow for an adequately historical understanding of the kinds of anti-Tamil pogroms that are carried out by the Sri Lankan state (op. cit., p. 26). It would be desirable to provide a critique of the usage of this term, but this is beyond my scope here. I therefore use the term 'communalism' throughout this paper with imaginary quotation marks.
- 11 Respectively, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Lanka Sama Samaj Party and People's Liberation Front, i.e., Janatha Vimukti Peramuna or JVP.
- 12 To avoid excessive endnotes, all page references to *When Memory Dies* are given in parentheses within the main text. References are to the Arcadia Books edition

(London, 1997).

- 13 A. Sivanandan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 14 See Elizabeth Nissan and R. L. Stirrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.
- 15 A. Sivanandan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 The 'Trotskyist' Lanka Sama Samaj Party, which in 1956 shamelessly joined with Bandaranaike's Sinhala nationalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) on the grounds that, as Sivanandan puts it, 'if the SLFP was not quite socialist, the UNP was certainly capitalist!' (*op. cit.*, p. 12) This misidentification of the SLFP's right-wing populism as some sort of left-of-centre anti-capitalism seems quite common in the literature on Sri Lankan politics to this day. See, for instance, R. Hoole et al, *The Broken Palmyra* (California, 1990), p. 27, where the authors list the SLFP as one of the 'parties of the Left' that the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) had discussions with.
- 18 The Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP).
- 19 Perhaps this has to do with the complicated politics of the JVP. An account of the insurrection can be found in Fred Halliday, 'The Ceylonese Insurrection', *New Left Review* (No. 69, September-October 1971). Sivanandan rightly calls this account 'acute, but in hindsight optimistic'. Sumantra Bose argues, for instance, that the JVP's "'ideology" consisted primarily of an exceptionally virulent and xenophobic Sinhalese chauvinism, which its leaders combined with a totally garbled and incoherent "Marxism" into a particularly sour cocktail' (*op. cit.* p. 67, n. 14). And yet, it is clear that the 1971 insurrection did in fact tap into the anger of tens of thousands of unemployed and disillusioned youth, both Sinhala and Tamil. In *When Memory Dies*, we see the newly politicised Tamil guerrillas trying to learn from Vijay's experiences in the JVP insurrection.
- 20 A. Sivanandan, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- 21 S. W. Perera, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- 22 Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, 1966), p. 15.

Unmaking the present, remaking memory: Sri Lankan stories and a politics of coexistence

Hatton was a tea-town. People did not choose to live in Hatton, they were posted there, and left it as quickly as they decently could. Except, that is, for the coolies, who lived and perished among the tea-bushes and nourished them with their remains when they were dead. Even the one proper road that ran through Hatton entered it with a rush and... left it precipitately. On either side of the road were bunched the lodgings of the artisans... and on its tributary stood the houses of the professionals. Behind and beyond them rose row upon row of interminable tea-bushes reaching upto the skyline... And somewhere in between, in a break in the bushes... huddled the dark, dank line-rooms of the coolies.¹

I was born near Hatton and lived in its adjacent hills until, at the age of eight, I was sent away to school. My parents, it is true, had not chosen Hatton, but were chosen by it. Weary of years in 'government service', they simply decided not to move on when the inevitable transfer came. We lived on the top of a hill in an area carefully demarcated as 'Fruit Hill'. There wasn't a tea-bush in sight, but the brute reality of tea pervaded our lives all the same.

Our connection with Jaffna seemed remote. An annual crate of mangoes arrived by train, and was shared among friends not lucky enough to have family there. We were 'Tamils'. The women, men and children who had toiled for generations in these hills were 'Indians'. Infinite – though unacknowledged – labour was expended in distinguishing us from them.

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The language they spoke was 'Indian Tamil', even if we could not deny that their names sounded a lot like ours.

Class, not ethnicity or religion, formed the daily allegiances and obvious identifications of our lives. Every year the 'Indians' held their festivals of fire and drums, which I watched as alien, terrifying spectacles. But *Vesak*, the *Id*, *Deepavali* and Easter were true red-letter days. At *Ramazan* I eagerly awaited the wide basins of *buriyani*, studded with golden eggs, that would arrive from each Muslim household we knew. At Hindu and Buddhist New Year, although we were neither, we girls had new clothes in the year's auspicious colour.

Tamil, my official mother tongue, was the language I came to speak third in life. The language I spoke first of all was Sinhala, the language of Ellen Atapattu, my ayah. One of the few stories I know about her is that before I was born, or when I was too young to remember, she saved us from the language thugs who attacked our house because of the Tamil lettering on the sign outside my father's surgery. The 'thugs', by day my father's respectful patients, had visited him earlier to ask if he could remove the sign so they wouldn't have to tar it like all the other Tamil houses and shops. It seems they had their own kind of honour, as he had his when he refused.

Caught between different sorts of honour, Ellen, ayah, confronted the mobs that night. A tiny, grey-haired, unlettered woman, she defied the champions of her ancient language and religion. She routed them that time, but tarbrush campaigns and other, more violent, attacks against Tamils were a regular feature of the late 1950s and early '60s. These were not spontaneous 'riots', as they came to be misleadingly described, but organised campaigns of intimidation, co-ordinated with the introduction of new discriminatory language and citizenship laws. One time, my mother says, the men tarred the sign, but after a few months notified my father he could replace it. When he refused, they cleaned it themselves. But there must have been another time they tarred the sign again, later, because in my memory the Tamil lettering remains permanently blackened on my father's neatly polished, once trilingual, brass Doctor's sign until, several years later, after he had died, we moved away.

* * *

The author was not known to him, but the story, that of a country doctor in England, seemed more familiar. These others, Hardy and Forster and them, he reflected, familiarized us with their cities and villages... through their tales, but the tales themselves had nothing to say to us... They had a language perhaps and a history that were spread so wide that they could talk of Northanger Abbey or Howards End or Hyde Park and the whole world would understand. It was

*common currency. We had no history or we had several, mostly not of our doing, or we had forgotten that part of it which was, or it was a part too late to remember: it could only unmake the present.*²

In the Peabody Museum at Harvard University is an often-reproduced photographic collage, *Types of the Native Races met with in Ceylon*. It represents 'types' of 'races' such as 'Malay girl', 'Kandyan villager', 'Jaffna Tamil (high caste)', 'Sinhalese postman', 'Moorman from coast of India', 'Colombo Chetty (Shroff)'. The collage exemplifies the logic of categorisation and apartness that has dominated official thinking about Sri Lankan peoples from colonial times. But disregard the ethnographic trappings, and the photographs in the collection defy their title, displaying, not a range of racial 'types', but some bodies arrayed in the props and clichés of the exotic orient. Look again, and the bodies in the collage are pushing back, making mock of the ludicrous anthropological precision of their labels.

From colonial Ceylon to republican Sri Lanka, the logic of apartness and separation, of distinct racial 'types' and categories, has provided a continuity to official policy-making. From the trusted British adage of 'divide and rule' to the post-independence state's practice of systematic linguistic, religious and regional discrimination was an easy, though by no means inevitable, transition. Independence marked the end of a long process during which multiple points of identification and difference between peoples (along lines of language, geography, religion, gender, class, caste) were re-ordered into four distinct groupings: 'Burger', 'Muslim', 'Tamil', 'Sinhala'. A clumsy amalgam of sometimes contradictory racial, ethnic and religious elements,³ these categories were given fixity on the flag of the new nation. Each group had its designated colour and allotted space: no leaks, no overlaps.

Ambiguity survived in our readings of this seemingly transparent text: are Tamils the maroon or the orange? the Sinhala the gold or the maroon? green must stand for the Muslims, but then where are the Burgers? Also, we were well aware, the solid categories so confidently represented on the flag were capable of both infinite splitting and infinite multiplication: 'up-country', 'low-country' and 'coastal' Sinhala; 'Jaffna', 'Colombo' and 'Batticaloa' Tamil, as well as 'Indian Tamil' and 'Ceylon' Tamil; 'Muslims' could be 'Moors', 'Indian Muslims' or 'Malays', and 'Burgers' 'Portuguese' or 'Dutch' Burgers. These identities and groupings didn't even begin to account for ramifications of caste and religion.

But somewhere in the collaboration between colonial bureaucrats and the locals who would replace them, ethnicity had become naturalised, marked as the primary category of official identification. The exchange between these compulsory official identities and the collective and private subjectivities that they both produced and were produced

by, the ways in which identification as ‘Burger’, ‘Sinhala’, ‘Muslim’ or ‘Tamil’ came to be assumed as central to – even constitutive of – our identities, is a long and complex story. It is, in great part, the story of the post-independence state, its adoption of a politics of ethno-nationalism, and the blatant ‘competitive chauvinism’ of its key political parties.⁴ State practices of linguistic and religious discrimination impacted on all minoritised groups, but were directed with particular violence at Tamil-speaking peoples, through the illegitimisation of the ‘Indian’ Tamils in the hills and the ‘internal colonisation’ of Tamil-dominated regions in the North and East. Put another way, the post-independence chauvinism of the state recast the multiplicity of Sri Lanka into a binary struggle between essentialised ‘Sinhala’ and ‘Tamil’ antagonists. In turn, policies of state-sponsored Sinhala nationalism produced their obverse – a Tamil nationalism, coupled with demands for a ‘separate state’ or ‘partition’ of Tamil regions.

This will to partition us is an old trick in which politicians of every cast have received support from a variety of learned collaborators. Valentine Daniel has discussed, for example, how westernised discourses of anthropology and history were employed to produce a teleological narrative of the nation, ‘dwarfing, thereby, all uncertainties and ambiguities about its people’s past’.⁵ Areas of cultural, linguistic and religious overlap, of common regional affiliations and daily interactions in shared spaces, are overwritten by the organisation of a various population into distinct racial/ethnic categories, hierarchically positioned in the space and time of a singular national story. This is a narrative characterised by claims of primacy and belatedness (who came when) and accusations of illegitimacy (the ‘Dravidian’ invader, the ‘illicit immigrant’, the ‘*kalla thoni*’) which, in turn, give rise to oppositional counter-claims of racial/ethnic essentialism.

The naturalisation of a narrative of distinguishable ‘racial types’, and its widespread adoption as an explanatory model for contemporary political conflict, are exemplified in an article published in the *New York Times*, that newspaper of global record, when Sri Lanka briefly made the world’s front pages after the 1983 pogroms: ‘The Sinhalese and Tamils are divided not only by religion but by ethnic background: the Sinhalese are of Aryan stock, the Tamils are of darker-skinned Dravidian extraction.’⁶ As easy as that, and what encrusted snaggles of history are quickly shaved out of our lives. To the dispassionate gaze of the ethnographer and his present-day incarnation, the foreign correspondent, our story is plain to tell: different racial beginnings, religion, language and culture, all signalled by a visible and measurable difference of skin colour.

Against these official narratives of partition are complex, intertwined histories and enmeshed, interlocking identities – a dense, untidy tapestry of interactions, peaceful and otherwise, of people in Sri Lanka.

These intractable, difficult stories of entwined pasts and futures have recently begun to be acknowledged. To speak only of work in English, since 1983 a valuable collection of theoretical writings has been compiled, painstakingly attempting to deconstruct the narratives of 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' racial types, to reveal the ideological investments that sustain these dominant narratives of separation, and to gesture towards the alternative histories that they overwrite.⁷

These alternative stories are also being mapped, more slowly, in a fiction beginning to break from the aesthetic and political givens of the novel in England. Vijay reflects in *When Memory Dies*, 'they could talk of Northanger Abbey or Howards End or Hyde Park and the whole world would understand. It was common currency. We had no history or we had several, mostly not of our doing, or we had forgotten that part of it which was, or it was a part too late to remember: it could only unmake the present.' To unmake the present is to refuse its dominant constructions and the orthodoxies that organise how the present is understood and made sense of. The challenge of giving *currency* is to make culturally intelligible in a wider context, the context of neo-colonialism, other understandings of the past, alternative stories that re-order the present, that insist there is no single story, that acknowledge multiple hierarchies and inequalities in Sri Lankan history, and yet simultaneously represent a web of interactions that crisscrosses and traverses the various divides.

In recent years, several successful novels have opened out questions of Sri Lankan cultural identity – Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef* and *Monkfish Moon*. Their publication in the West, and packaging under the increasingly depoliticising label of 'post-colonial literature', however, often enables their recuperation into disembodied, ahistorical celebrations of 'hybridity' or 'multiculturalism'.⁸ Equally seductive is an uncritical nostalgia that reads these texts as invoking the cosmopolitanism of better times, forgetful of the fractures of class, caste, region and language upon which it rested.

Between representations of the easy cosmopolitanism of the anglicised, Colombo-centred elites and the essentialist exclusions of Sinhala and Tamil nationalism is what can be named a practice of coexistence. Coexistence encompasses the range of quotidian transactions within shared spaces, both symbolic and physical: the embodied activities of travelling and trading; of eating, working and celebrating; of invoking, appeasing and casting out the same demons and deities. Above all, it refers to the parallel and intersecting trajectories of everyday desires, aspirations and struggles, the daily proximities of peoples who have lived together over centuries, in love and war.

Coexistence, in this understanding, does not preclude violence or conflict, but excludes literal or symbolic casting-out as a response to

conflict. As Ram Manikkalingam points out in his discussion of the form of Tamil nationalism he calls 'Tigerism', the denial of coexistence at the level of the racial/ethnic group inevitably leads to the denial of coexistence within the group that is so constructed:

The Tigers invented a new Tamil identity by, simultaneously, drawing upon and denying history. This identity claims to be tied to history on the basis of language, region and tradition. But the Tigers are anti-historical in that they are committed to denying that the Tamil identity also includes a history of co-existence with other communities. The denial of pluralism among communities is only a step away from the denial of pluralism within a community. Thus one invention of this newly invented Tamil identity... is that the Tigers have to deny and eliminate real or potential differences... and interests among Tamils. The monolithic unity violently asserted by the Tigers is both the cause of and consequence of Tamil essentialism, and ultimately culminated in a new political ideology – Tigerism.⁹

This analysis can be extended to the Sinhala counterparts of 'Tigerism' that seek the erasure of difference by other means, most obviously through the various forms of violence available to the state. In response to these forms of essentialist violence, to acknowledge histories of coexistence is a necessary first step towards an active *politics* of coexistence, a politics that involves unmaking the anti-historical absolutism of the present, and remaking, or re-membering, other understandings of the past.

In their principled opposition to the absolutism represented by 'Tigerism', writers from a range of political positions have begun to represent and re-member new narratives of Tamil identity. One recent example, in spite of its conservative politics and alarmingly reactionary social vision, is Ratnajeevan Hoole's *An Exile's Return* which deconstructs cherished myths about distinctively Tamil characteristics and exposes the tensions and contradictions within Jaffna Tamil identities. A resolutely anti-nostalgic author, Hoole forewarns us that his book 'is not about an idealised Jaffna where one is served sliced mangoes by a loving grandmother'.¹⁰ But although this obsessive, encyclopaedic study refuses the notion of a singular, romanticised Tamil identity and debunks the posturings of expatriate middle-class Tamil nationalism, it remains entirely silent about a political direction for the present. The book ends with the protagonist's return from a comfortable life in the US to a more satisfying, if uncertain, future in Colombo, but fails to address the political implications of this ending. Hoole's implicit acknowledgment of coexistence remains an unexamined and depoliticised one.

In contrast to the texts mentioned above, the major achievement of *When Memory Dies* is its mapping of the everyday coexistence of Sri

Lankan peoples across classes, regions and ethnicities. Even as the novel tracks the historical stages by which attempts to sustain an anti-essentialist politics were foreclosed through the 'competitive chauvinism' of the various Sinhala-nationalist parties, it simultaneously registers the possibility of other choices, the directions not taken which have added up to the making of the present. In doing so, it also builds a case for a future politics of coexistence, by re-membering the pieces (anti-colonial activism, workers' rights, universal education, anti-communalism) jettisoned along the way.

Andy Higginbottom's review of *When Memory Dies*, published in the magazine *Hot Spring*, a publication highly supportive of the LTTE, claims that, in its last section, *When Memory Dies* 'seems to veer towards a strained pacifism'.¹¹ Higginbottom's misrecognition of a politics of coexistence as 'pacifism' suggests the extent of work to be done to give currency and cultural intelligibility to a non-absolutist politics. The possibility of asserting Tamil rights and aspirations, while rejecting ethno-nationalism and affirming a politics of coexistence, Manikkalingam suggests, is currently prevented by the dominance of 'Tigerism'. This is the possibility fleetingly imagined at the close of *When Memory Dies*.

Translating an acknowledgment of coexistence into a viable politics for the future is the formidable task that confronts opponents of both Tigerism and its Sinhala counterparts. Efforts such as *The Broken Palmyrah*, a work of extraordinary courage by four Jaffna University academics, testify that the politics of absolutism have been continually subject to challenge and refutation. It is now just short of ten years since the murder, in September 1989, of Rajani Thiranagama, one of the key figures in the production of *The Broken Palmyrah*. In a postscript, completed shortly before her killing, Thiranagama wrote, in a section entitled 'The future':

The present belongs to the forces of reaction. What is the future for this beleaguered land?... For the people, any solution to the brutal and intense violence has to come from within the communities and cannot be imposed from outside. The development of these internal structures is a long and arduous task, a process which is only just beginning to be comprehended.¹²

Ten years later, the present still belongs to the forces of reaction. But, trusting in the conviction of Thiranagama, who wrote about the politics of a desperately entangled war with a clear-eyed, yet passionate, acumen that remains unequalled, I note the beginning of a process of comprehending what needs to be done. The insights of *When Memory Dies* are indispensable to that process.

References

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- 2 *Ibid.* p. 289.
- 3 For an excellent discussion of the formation of 'Muslim', for example, see Qadri Ismail's 'Unmooring identity: the antinomies of elite Muslim self representation in modern Sri Lanka', in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds., *Unmaking the Nation* (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1995), pp. 55-105.
- 4 For a discussion of the 'competitive chauvinism', especially between the UNP and SLFP, see Sumantra Bose's discussion in *States, Nations, Sovereignty* (New Delhi, Sage, 1994), pp. 58-80.
- 5 E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996) p. 50.
- 6 'Recent fighting in Sri Lanka dims hope for peace', *New York Times* (22 April 1984).
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- 8 For example, see Neluka Silva's essay on 'Running in the family', *Frontline* (Vol. 16, no. 4, 13-26 February 1999).
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- 11 Andy Higginbottom, 'Sri Lanka: three works of fiction', *Hot Spring* (May-June 1997), pp. 25-6. I am grateful to Ernest MacIntyre for discussing this review with me.
- 12 Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan and Rajani Thiranagama, *The Broken Palmyrah* (Claremont, Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1992), p. 417.

Tributes

Tributes

From Wilfred Wood

It speaks volumes that one finds it impossible to think of the Institute of Race Relations without thinking of Siva – both have served and are serving the cause of humanity well. On my first visit to the Institute's library, then in Jermyn Street, to see its director Philip Mason in 1963, I do not recall meeting or making special note of Siva, but this failure has certainly been made good in later years! I visited the library often and directed others to it, and always Siva was unobtrusively (hard to believe?) helpful. Later, I was invited by professor Hugh Tinker to stand for election to the Council of the Institute, and was duly elected.

The turbulent days leading up to that momentous Council meeting in 1972, when the staff invaded the meeting, suspecting that there were plans afoot to sack professor Tinker as director, are documented elsewhere. The director's 'offence' seemed to be his refusal to curb the research into the involvement of the transnational corporations (some of whom were generous funders of the Institute) in the pillage of Africa – subtle and not so subtle. The staff refused to budge from the room except to answer the telephone from a journalist wanting to speak to a Council member who had promised him a story which would follow from the Council's meeting. The journalist was rather aggrieved because he was on his deadline and the story was not yet forthcoming! After that meeting, fourteen of the twenty-one Council members resigned, leaving a rump, including myself. As I had topped the polls in previous elections to the Council, I was asked by the others to assume the chairmanship, and this, after a canvass of the 400 plus members of the Institute, I duly did.

Those were interesting times in Britain. Ian Smith's rebellious racist regime in Rhodesia and South Africa's murderous apartheid regime enjoyed much support in influential circles in this country, and hostility to the presence of black people here was not exclusive to any one political party or social class. Experience told us that suggestions that black people's best interests lay in alignment with the various 'isms' on offer – Marxism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism – were not credible. But efforts at solidarity within the 'immigrant' communities could scarce withstand the practised and destructive arts of manipulation, enticement and exploitation developed over decades of colonial rule. One had to be a true believer in the humanity of black people to have hope.

Siva was a believer. It showed in his opportunistic challenges and encouragement to every black person who darkened the doors of the

Institute's building to become involved both practically and intellectually, in the struggle for black pride and black achievement. It was not that he did not welcome white allies, but those were subjected to an assayer's fire which sorted out the dross from the gold. After all these years, the gold is still there!

Under Siva's leadership, the Institute has done far more than is recognised by its beneficiaries to help black people strive to take our place equally alongside others in all the areas of decision-making which affect our lives. There is still a long way to go, but it would be even longer but for Siva. If he did not exist, it would certainly be in our best interest to invent him. Viva Siva!

Rt Revd Dr Wilfred Wood is Bishop of Croydon and President of the Institute of Race Relations.

From Mike Marqusee

*'None can usurp this height,' returned that shade,
'But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.'*

– Keats, *The Fall of Hyperion*

Back in the 1930s, the critic Cyril Connolly wrote a book called *Enemies of Promise*, in which he catalogued the traps awaiting the unwary seeker after literary glory. Chief among the entanglements which Connolly predicted would waylay the aspirant novelist or poet were academia and journalism.

These days, academia and the media (a more nebulous category into which journalism has now largely dissolved) have become what might be called the 'enemies of protest', seductive but dangerous niches for all those who seek to sustain an honest intellectual engagement with the world – in the hope of changing it for the better. Of course, we all have to make a living somehow, but the roll call of erstwhile left intellectuals who have, over the course of the last two decades, abandoned their activism for the comforts of either or both of these institutions, and subsequently lost their political and moral compass, is too long and painful to ignore.

These days, the habit of speaking truth to power is regarded as mad or sad, *passé* or primitive. Certainly, it is an unwise course for anyone seeking the rewards and comforts offered by a society increasingly dedicated to the enhancement of the wealth and privileges of a small minority.

A. Sivanandan is one of the few to have resisted these blandishments. The corruption of the intelligentsia has deep social and material

sources, as Sivanandan would be the first to remind us. But it is important to remember that corruption is not inevitable and that there is a choice, as Siva's own life and works prove. He is that rare thing, a public intellectual who has refused to shape his thinking according to ideological fashion, or tailor his message in the interests of political expediency. His work is a standing rebuke to Britain's ever growing army of *zeitgeist* chasers.

How has Siva done it? When so many others have fallen by the way, how has he maintained his commitment and his vision?

First, he has sustained a profound and compassionate engagement with the dispossessed, the voiceless, the despised. He has seen himself as a committed partisan in a global struggle for social justice. He has remained alert and responsive to movements of resistance, wherever they may spring up, and whatever orthodoxies (left or right) they may challenge.

Second, he has retained a bracing contempt for the servants of power, especially those who mark time in the media or academia or the quangos of the race relations industry. The '*trahison des clercs*' against which he has righteously railed has never infected him. That takes strength of spirit as well as intellectual rigour, and is an achievement in itself.

Third, his intellect has been informed by a flinty scepticism towards received ideas and an insistence on confronting reality, however painful. He has adopted the spirit and method of Marxism while training a searching beam on its inadequacies, unanswered questions or anachronistic assumptions. There aren't too many writers who could have debunked both the 'hokum of New Times' and the Left's complacency about globalisation. As a theoretician, he has been an adept navigator through the confusing crosscurrents of class and race, the local and the global. And his course has been kept true by a necessary impatience with any retreat from confrontation with the structures of oppression.

Most importantly, he has refused to compartmentalise himself or his world. To paraphrase C.L.R. James, Siva's career raises the question: what do they know of theory, who only theory know? Scholar and activist, polemicist and institution builder, poet and theoretician, not to mention cricket-lover, Siva has never worried about the demarcations, and nor should we. He has refused to be one of those whom Hugh Macdiarmid described as 'in petty grooves confined'. He has refused to concede that any field of study is alien to the socialist-activist-intellectual.

Reflecting this desire to remain whole is Siva's relish for language, a trait all too rare on the Left. It was his care in the choice of words, and the insistence that political writing should move as well as inform, which first attracted me to Siva's essays. His sensitivity to style and suspicion of arcane jargon fortified him in resisting the indolent charms of

postmodernism and the obscurantism of much 'critical theory'. Here his democratic and his aesthetic impulses have been happily married, which is one reason why students ploughing through recent texts on race and identity turn to his work with a sigh of relief.

Siva's novel, *When Memory Dies*, is the finest fruit of both his love-affair with language and his insistence on seeing and explaining life as a whole. It is not only a masterful study of the interaction of class and race, his great theme, but also a rare literary representation of the lives and feelings of political actors, of people who dedicate themselves to a cause and whose fate – psychological as well as material – is inseparable from that cause. He knows what it's like to live with ideas and ideals in the bones, to be driven by them and to pay a price for them.

When Memory Dies is also an act of recovery, through language, of a past both painful and precious. Touch, taste, smell, sight, sound – all the senses are invoked and all the resources of English prose deployed in a sustained attempt to salvage from historic tragedy what Blake called the 'minute particulars' of human existence. It is a testimony to the engagement of the whole human being – not just the analytical faculties – in social struggle. As such, its publication highlighted the parochialism and cynicism which weakens so much contemporary fiction.

The point is not merely to praise Siva, or even to agree with him, but to emulate those traits which have enabled him to retain his independence of mind and astonishing productivity. He ended a recent article in *Race & Class* with a call for a new generation of 'organic intellectuals'. Those who respond to that challenge will, I am sure, find inspiration for many years to come in his indispensable contribution to the struggle for a truly human world.

Mike Marqusee is a writer and journalist whose latest book is Redemption Song (1999).

From Steve Buckley

Race & Class has been an inspiration to me for most of the 1990s. Its direct and unpretentious style is almost invariably combined with a sense of timing which leaves other, more academic journals struggling for attention. Immediacy, relevance, showing curiosity, speaking directly to the audience, and without presumptions – these are characteristics of the most effective communications media.

Communication is the means by which people create their identity. It underlies our sense of community, our sense of belonging and also our sense of difference. As patterns of communications change, so do the communities with which we identify. The printing press brought about a revolution in the spread of ideas, information and how we organise our

lives. A more far-reaching revolution in communication was heralded at the end of the last century with the advent of electricity and the first experiments in electronic means of communication. This was the beginning of the information revolution – the possibility of communication as both global and instantaneous at the same time.

While this possibility is inherent in the new technologies, it is far from a reality for most of the world's population. There are more telephones in Tokyo than the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. Television is a mass medium only in the most developed countries. Computers and the internet are not accessible to most of the world's poor. The information revolution has led to the integration of the world's banking services, commodity markets, data systems and capital flows but has widened the division between the information haves and the have-nots. Only one electronic communications medium has become both an intimate and pervasive presence throughout the developed world and penetrated into the remotest rural areas of the poorest countries – that is radio.

I was brought up on radio, as most Third World people were, or still are, especially in the rural areas of our countries. I remember when the first wireless came to my village, in North Ceylon – some fifty years ago. I cut school that day and went along with my mates to look at the wonderful machine that had been installed in our local bakery. The owner twiddled the knobs with a flourish, showing his wide-eyed audience how he could bring the whole world to his doorstep. And suddenly he stopped, at an English song, though we did not understand a word. A man was singing a song of his people that sounded so much like the freedom songs of our own – and he sang as though the big heart of the radio itself would break. The man was Paul Robeson. I was to hear him in the flesh at the Albert Hall some thirty years later.

What I learnt that day was that song, music, transcends language, and that songs of freedom, of resistance, have a ring to them and a vibrancy and a vitality – whether it's 'We shall overcome', '*Nkosi Sikele i Afrika*', '*Vandè Matram*', or the 'Red Flag' – that transcend country and cause. But I did not know that one day we will not only be able to receive songs, music, messages, communications, but that we will be able to send them too – transmit them – throughout our countries, all over the world. Speak to each other, exchange ideas, come to know the common dimensions of our struggles, find comradeship in our common resistances.

That was Sivanandan, speaking at the second AMARC European community radio conference in Copenhagen in 1996. The event, organised by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), brought together over 200 communications activists from forty-five countries under the theme, *Voices Without Frontiers*. Its

agenda was to mobilise the community radio movement against racism and for the rights of migrants, refugees and minorities.

Since the early 1980s, popular communications organisations have been reaching out to one another around the world, affirming their common struggle for the right to communicate and building an international grassroots movement. At the local level, community broadcasters are engaged daily in a vast range of local causes and issues. They have built a rich history with a great diversity of forms. The idea, described by Sivanandan, that radio might become a popular participatory medium through which communities can voice their concerns and defend their interests was probably first articulated by Bertolt Brecht in 1930: 'Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable...if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making listeners hear but also speak, not of isolating them but of connecting them.'

The first documented example of radio as a popular communications medium is the remarkable case of the Bolivian miners' radio which emerged fifty years ago in response to the Bolivian tin mining oligarchy. Gumucio Dagron described it:

The origin of the miners' radios began in the 1940s with the birth of Radio Sucre in the mining locality of Cancaniri while, at the same time, Radio Nuevos Horizontes started in the little city of Tupiza in the south of Bolivia. Following the Revolution of 1952, the miners' radios were strengthened by the support of the Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers. By the 1960s, 23 radio stations were operating in practically all the mining centres of Bolivia. Each radio was integrated into the everyday life of the mining encampments. They operated under the direction of the Secretary of Culture in the local mine union and with the financial support of their own workers.

* * *

AMARC is the largest international grassroots organisation working in the communications sphere. It was founded in 1988 and groups together some 3,000 community radio stations world-wide – from those of the Bolivian miners to independent pro-democracy radios in former Yugoslavia, from indigenous people's radios in Australia to urban ghetto radios in the USA. AMARC's second European conference in Copenhagen, 1996, was a key moment and Sivanandan's call to mobilise the 'communications of resistance' could not have been more timely. Community radio broadcasters, aware of their significance as a voice for the marginalised and excluded, were ready to act together on an international platform.

The first joint broadcast took to the airwaves on 21 March 1998 to mark the international day against racism. From a studio in the north of

Paris, Radio Voix Sans Frontières broadcast a pilot six-hour radio campaign via satellite and the internet to community stations across Europe. The broadcast was a unique event, combining the old AM and FM technologies of local radio with the new communication technologies, through wires and outer space, which have made the globalisation of communications a reality. More importantly, it was a focus for action which was both local and international at the same time.

The success of the project inspired Radio Voix Sans Frontières '99, the biggest ever campaign of community radio stations against racism and for the rights of minorities. Harnessing the available communications media, it brought together, in common cause, broadcasters from all regions of the world. For twenty-eight hours, a small community-based studio in east London was the hub of a global communications network operating by satellite on five continents, international short wave and the internet. Programmes received by the internet, telephone and ISDN, and by post on cassette or on mini-disk, were mixed by a production team speaking English, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, Russian, Arabic and Somali, and rebroadcast on satellite, the internet and short wave.

Rather than relaying a centralised production to the world, however, the objective was to mobilise local broadcasters to take action in their own communities. Throughout Europe, community radio stations organised local *Voices Without Frontiers* campaigns. Radio Zid in Sarajevo and Radio B92 in Belgrade dedicated programmes against racism and nationalist extremism. Radio Sherwood in Italy made a special production on the Roma people. Across Russia, the Federation of Local Radios organised a joint broadcast and telephone link-up against fascism and anti-Semitism. Australian community broadcasters relayed the broadcast on their own satellite network. Community radio stations in Angola, Brazil and Portugal reached across three continents to touch one another through telephone, the internet and a common language. In Sivanandan's words at the 1996 AMARC conference:

You cannot communicate freedom without being free yourself. And the strength of that freedom comes from the cause you serve, the people you serve, the community you serve. It comes from taking up small local cases – whether it's the deportation of a refugee, a black death in custody, a campaign to preserve your neighbourhood from the inroads of motorways, a crèche for children or basic rights for working mothers. And enlarging such cases into issues by broadcasting them to other communities fighting similar battles, and turning those issues into causes, and the cause into a movement.

Throughout the world, community broadcasters are consciously taking up the causes and issues of their communities. Globalisation today means the free movement of goods, capital and information, but

it does not mean that these things are available to all and sundry and it brutally obstructs or directs the physical movement of people. Yet somehow, in the possibility of instantaneous global communication, lies a liberating potential, one which envisages the development of a critical understanding of the forces which shape our world today, one in which words and voices, at least, can reach out across frontiers.

Steve Buckley is deputy president of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.

From Herman Ouseley

Reliability and consistency have been the dominant expectations of those who rely on the Institute of Race Relations, *Race & Class* and their director, editor, guru and leader, A. Sivanandan.

In my view, the most enduring of Siva's many attributes is his consistently clear exposition of political shifts, even as they occur, and their impact on the poor and dispossessed. Such shifts have been anticipated in his analyses and are also put in a global context, having regard, on the one hand, to multinational, corporate and political dominance at any given time and, on the other, to communities' organisational capabilities in mounting effective responses.

Consistency over decades doesn't change some things. For instance, while the Stephen Lawrence murder inquiry heard sixteen different definitions of institutional racism, Sivanandan's has stood the test of time and is more relevant than any other. He defines institutional racism as 'that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public and private institutions – reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn.'

It could not be more simply expressed, yet be more fundamentally comprehensive. It does not label people as 'racist' but focuses precisely on what we believe and how we apply such beliefs in the organisations that we work for – more – how those organisations use us in ways that are compatible with our attitudes and beliefs.

I shudder to think what Siva's reactions would have been to Tony Blair's recently expounded view that we will all be middle class soon. Sivanandan's analysis of social class and racism would suggest that such a notion is pie in the sky. The lady of some size will one day sing out a verdict on the present government's performance but, when the jury comes in, will the relatively poor and the oppressed be a thing of the past? Social policy and economic see-saws in the second half of the twentieth century have yielded some shifts in racism and deprivation. An electoral landslide gave New Labour the opening to drop special pleading on behalf of the urban deprived, including the

'ethnics', and, instead, to canvass for an inclusive option to please 'middle' England.

Siva has always identified the 'struggle' as community, grassroots-led and largely against the racist state apparatus of police and immigration, and over housing and education. The lacklustre politics in municipal administration during the first three decades of the post-war period attracted limited attention from radical writers on race – but nothing of significance. However, community activists became concerned with municipal racism during the 1970s and after. Today, municipal government is in a continual spin, moving towards becoming an indirect branch of central government, operating in tandem with newly created private-sector public service providers. In the early post-war period, the obsession of some local councils was with dispersal policies which either kept black households concentrated in the overcrowded private rented sector or which offered access to council housing on a directed basis only to the most undesirable estates and hard-to-let flats. This set the tone for white resentment, racial harassment and terrorism, as well as trapping poor black people and white communities in a dependency culture and cyclical disadvantaged mode. But some began to see municipal politics as one form of empowerment. (Indeed, black people's involvement as locally elected politicians goes way back to the nineteenth century and those pioneers were respected for their organisational and leadership qualities in championing the concerns of deprived people.)

With a developing interest in challenging institutional racism in local councils throughout the first half of the 1970s, more Black and Asian councillors emerged to confront the status quo. Few were visible as senior employees. Some no-go areas of construction, direct labour organisations, refuse collection, street sweeping were white preserves. Prior to the 1976 Race Relations Act, segregation in housing was rife, while local authority-run or subsidised private children's homes were a receptacle for black children. As a consequence, battles about adoption, fostering and institutional care were fought out on ideological and race lines.

Some radical municipal politics of the mid- to late 1970s acknowledged the historic and ongoing racial discrimination against Black, Asian and other minorities, and enabled a handful of progressive administrations to attempt to redress historic racial imbalances. The high point came in the early 1980s with several elected black leaders of local authorities. Merle Amory, Bernie Grant and Linda Bellos were the best known then, while Bernie Grant went on to become Member of Parliament for Tottenham.

But that radical politics also allowed an opening for some zealots to take things to excess. And such excesses, seized on by the tabloid press, led, in the end, to the (self) destruction of progressive initiatives – and gave a stimulus for the current modernisation project of local government.

Siva must have spotted early on the opportunity for alliances with local government, particularly with those members who had a vision and commitment to change the status quo and to change systems to benefit the mass of the people, rather than the few. But Siva's and the IRR's interest in local government and its activities did not become evident until the beginning of the 1980s, when there was a 'coming out' conference held at the University of Sussex. Equality experts and policing advisers in local government also became interested in hearing how the IRR was aligned to, and supportive of, community struggles against racism, racist organisations, racial attacks, state brutality, etc. But Siva has always been consistently clear about those he regards as professional opportunists and careerists who espoused the virtues of multiculturalism, alongside ethnic, identity and skin politics, which all weaken the struggle for justice and divide communities unnecessarily.

The setting up of race equality units, the urban disturbances of 1980 and '81, and the emergence of the GLC in 1981, all focused the IRR's domestic interests on those elements of local government capable of influencing change to better the quality of life for those who are usually excluded from decision-making, and who do not get their fair share of access to resources and opportunities.

The one thing that Siva's consistency has done for those of us who have to compromise with the system on a daily basis in order to survive is to help us stand steadfast in our personal resolve never to dilute our principles or deviate from our purpose. We may, from time to time, face the choice of getting out and leaving the status quo intact. That option is the easy way out. It is also the same for Siva. He has always seen the struggle for justice as being pursued at every level and for everyone's benefit, so long as the principles and purposes remain intact. We can, and do, compromise with the system in order to stay and try to change it for the benefit of those 'usually excluded' groups of people. We do not compromise the principles and the purpose in doing so. Thanks, Siva.

Sir Herman Ouseley is the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality.

From David Edgar

My first encounter with A. Sivanandan was in the mid-1970s, somewhat combative, and based on a misunderstanding. While researching the first draft of a play about the National Front, I had done some research in the IRR building – then shared with the journal *Race Today*. Revising the play a year or two later, I rang the Institute to see if I might consult its files, on what was (for me) the convenient date of the following Friday. I had understood neither that the Institute was a membership

organisation nor that it was normally closed to the public on that day, so was unprepared for Siva's enquiry as to what I thought I had done to deserve someone dragging themselves in to give me free access to the Institute's library on their day off.

I rearranged my visit and sent off a cheque for £25.

From thence our relationship blossomed (I became quite the least qualified member of the Institute Council a year or two later), and I would like to say that my subsequent relationship with Siva and the Institute was free of such difficulties. This is not, of course, so. Having developed some rough theoretical thoughts about historical fascism, I presented them proudly to Siva, assuming that he would immediately put them in his magazine. His response was first to reject any such notion but then to commission a proper article on contemporary fascism which – after a considerable period of editorial intervention – turned into a piece that not only clarified my thinking for my play but also made a contribution (I like to think) to the growing campaign to categorise the National Front as a Nazi organisation.

The fact that few people remember that it was necessary to mount such a campaign is a statement not just about that period but about Siva's unique political talent, which is to prefigure what will become the common sense of the age. Siva is fond of informing the workers of the world that they have nothing to lose but their Keynes; he himself exemplifies Keynes's belief that the ideas of political philosophers can enter the social bloodstream unannounced and unacknowledged, influencing and engaging people who have no idea of their source.

So, in the late 1970s, it was commonplace for social democrats to challenge the idea that there was such a thing as post-war British fascism (seen in fact as an example of left grandiosity) and, on the Marxist Left, to make no distinction between fascism and racism. The insistence that there was a distinct something called post-war British fascism enabled its defeat in the late '70s, and thus contributed to the fact that, alone among major European countries, Britain saw no significant upsurge in support for the extreme Right two decades later. It was also right.

Reading his lead article on globalism in the latest *Race & Class* is a reminder that Siva has not lost his touch. The notion of a transformation of capitalism by the computer was far from being commonly sensible when Siva first articulated it in the autumn of 1979 in 'Imperialism and disorganic development in the silicon age'. Now he defends the notion of 'an epochal change in capitalism – at least as significant as the transition from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism' against what is essentially a backlash against a generally accepted truth.

In between these two campaigns were many others, which I realise (looking back on them) both formed and challenged my own common

sense. Formed through Siva's bold and by no means risk-free attack on racism awareness training and multiculturalism; challenged in his attack on what he saw as the hokum being served up by the magazine *Marxism Today* (a revisionism in which I was at the time participating). As it happens, I see Siva's silicone conceptualisation as a precursor of the theory of post-Fordism, which he articulated as well as anyone in 'New circuits of imperialism': 'The skills have been taken into the machines, leaving it to the unskilled to operate them and the highly skilled to programme them'. Where his challenge formed a necessary corrective was, and is, his insistence on looking at post-Fordism and globalisation from the perspective of what he calls the periphery, 'where capital is at its rawest and most extravagant' and thus where the cutting edge of the class struggle may now be.

So, over the twenty years I sat on the Institute's Council, Siva's thinking informed, deepened and, from time to time, threatened my own. It – and its progenitor – also impressed, entertained and occasionally outraged as well. On paper, Siva's elegant phrase-making always enhances the power of his arguments (I am particularly fond of his use of essentially Jonsonian antitheses: for Scarman, 'infliction had become an affliction', in Brent, 'an issue of class was being fought out on the terrain of race'). In person, the style is more vernacular, akin to his dismissal of community policing as the police playing 'fairy godmother and godfather both at once'. But, while the erudition and the wit appear in the writings aplenty (along with the passion), there is an aggressive impishness which is reserved for person-to-person confrontation in 2-6 Leeke St – in a style of meeting management which (when I was at the receiving end of it) punctured pomposity as effectively as it inspired commitment.

So enjoyable is his company (and the company of the delightful and eccentric group with which he is surrounded) that it's possible to forget the passion and commitment which underlines both the rigour of his writing and the occasional bellicosity of his manner. In 1989, Siva wrote of socialism as 'not just an economic project coming after capitalism, but an ideology of human worth whose time has come... a moral creed, a secular faith – tolerant, loving, creative, increasing all to increase the one'. Ten years on, he calls for 'a political culture that reverses the values of the market and establishes instead the worth and dignity of human life. We need a socialism that puts politics in command.'

Generously amusing, but intellectually rigorous; specific and iconoclastic, but also visionary. If indeed I bought my way into the Institute with a red face and a scribbled cheque, then they added up to a price more than worth paying. There are few people who have changed my views and my life, on paper and in person; Siva is one of that select band.

David Edgar is a playwright and was a member of the IRR Council from 1975-96.

From Anjali Gupta Basu and Biplab Basu

Sivanandan once said that whereas racism has theory, anti-racism is action. For Britain, Sivanandan has been able to personify and combine both. At the same time as defining and critically examining racism and its theoretical justifications, he has not only come from, but has remained within, the active anti-racist struggles of black people. But in Germany, while the theory of racism has remained an intellectual exercise for some, those directly involved in the anti-racist struggle have been relegated to the status of mere informants. Until the fall of the Berlin wall, there was a general consensus in Germany that racism as social phenomenon belonged only to the past. However devastating racism was acknowledged to have been in the (not-too-distant) National-Socialist era, racism, in contemporary German society, was held to have disappeared. This view was current in both parts of Germany. East Germany believed that, simply by virtue of calling itself a socialist state, it had eradicated racism.

In the mid-1970s, the West German government established a Federal Bureau for the Affairs of Foreigners which, for the first time, officially acknowledged the existence of some kind of hostility to non-Germans or foreigners. But such individual prejudices were put down to the lack of knowledge among some Germans about different cultures and customs, which could easily be 'cured' by folklore lessons, promoting multicultural goodwill among all. In the socialist part of Germany, even this was not considered necessary. As socialist egalitarianism did not allow for the existence of racial prejudice, no such hostility could really flourish. And both Germanys failed to acknowledge their debt for the rebuilding of their affluent economies on the backs of migrant workers. West Germany imported cheap labour from southern Europe, Africa and Asia, and pointedly, if euphemistically, referred to the people involved as 'guest workers'. It intended them to leave once their work was done. Some fifteen years after West Germany, East Germany also began importing migrant labour from countries which were formerly colonised (though in comparatively smaller numbers than its capitalist brother – at no time did the numbers exceed 150,000). Their exploitation was ignored, masked by being categorised as pure socialist philanthropy, an act of solidarity in support of the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

The anti-imperialist student movements of the late 1960s failed completely to address the problem of racism. In the 1970s, a few years after the introduction of an Aliens Act (the *Ausländergesetz*) in West Germany, some student, leftist and church activists did take to the streets, demanding its withdrawal. But the links between racism, colonialism and class oppression as analysed and clarified in Sivanandan's proliferation of critical articles, actions and speeches were never

made by anti-racist, feminist or left-wing theorists in Germany. And it was Sivanandan, in fact, who addressed the specific situation in Germany in a speech he made to an anti-racist conference in Berlin, in November 1992:

Countries like West Germany, which had no colonies to speak of, had second-class status woven into the *gastarbeiter* system. An institutionalised system of discrimination was there from the beginning, either written into the constitution itself and/or anchored in legislation relating to foreigners. And so a whole popular culture of xenophobia grew up...sustained by Article 116 of the Constitution, which...bases German citizenship on blood.

Yet the realisation that follows from this, that anti-racist, anti-imperialist and working people's struggles are linked within a single continuum and must inform each other in order not to degenerate into token anti-imperialist or multicultural politics has still to be established in left-wing intellectual circles in Germany.

The fall of the Berlin wall meant that it was no longer possible to see German society as non-racist, prone only to a few individual racial prejudices. For, to this day, the 'glorious' unification of the two Germanys in 1990 continues to translate itself into a massive and deadly onslaught against refugees and immigrant communities all over the country. In Sivanandan's words:

At the point of unification...you get both these racisms (the West German and the East) compounding each other. And the Kohl government, instead of alleviating the economic misery of East Germany which exacerbates racism, exacerbated racism further by... keeping refugees out and making Germany even more German.

United Germany became an even greater nightmare for all those on whose backs the western and eastern German economies have boomed. For all those who happened to be of 'un-Aryan' appearance, it became irrelevant how many generations their families had been living and working in Germany, as their fear for their lives grew daily. The physical onslaught by countless neofascist groups and individuals is, however, only one side of the German coin. The other, even more insidious, side is the translation of racist attitudes into actual judicial legislation and government policies by the very institutions supposedly responsible for safeguarding the democratic rights of all peoples, regardless of race, class, religion or sex. In May 1993, the ruling coalition parties, assisted by the Social Democrats, amended Article 16 of the German Constitution in order to curtail refugees' fundamental right to asylum. Six months later, in November 1993, the *Bundestag* passed a new law, cutting social welfare benefits for asylum-seekers – including allowances for medical treatment – by 20 per cent. From this time onwards,

legislation and social welfare policies towards refugees and asylum-seekers have gone from bad to worse.

When, in 1988, some four or five activists from the left wing of the Green Party in Berlin initiated a telephone hot-line in order to monitor, document, publicise and counteract racism, no-one imagined that, within a few years, the burning of refugee hostels and the cheering on, by good citizens, of fascist gang murders of black people on the streets, would be followed up by even stricter refugee and immigration laws formulated by the state. (The parallel increase in police brutality against black people even forced some moderate politicians and intellectuals, as well as the mainstream media, to adopt – at least sporadically – the term ‘racism’ to explain these puzzling incidents.)

From the beginning of the 1990s, ‘anti-racism’ has become the most fashionable and expanding branch of the social services industry in Germany. Academic high priests suddenly came to realise the need to frame the origins of racism theoretically as well as hypothesise on the ins and outs of its social psychology. Their analyses failed, however, to lead to any active intervention in the undemocratic workings of the state and society. Those of us who attempted critically to examine German traditions, experiences and shortcomings in anti-racist work, were compelled to look to Britain which, in comparison, had long experience in the struggle against racism. At this stage, our acquaintance with Sivanandan and the Institute of Race Relations proved enormously beneficial. Listening to him in private meetings and at public conferences, reading and rereading his articles provided us with desperately needed tools to understand the racism of the ’90s. For example, the clarity of his analysis that:

It is the politicians and the media and the state that create popular racism, and inhere it in the popular culture, and provide, thereby, the breeding ground for fascism. The fight against fascism, therefore, must begin in the fight against racism, in the community, and involve the whole community. Fighting fascism *per se* will not eliminate racism; but eliminating racism would cut the ground from under fascist feet.

His emphasis on drawing lessons out of past anti-racist struggles and his stress on the contribution of the black working class to the trade union movement in Britain has placed the anti-racist movement within a historical context and encouraged those of us who know him to swim against the mainstream tide.

In Germany, the anti-racist scene has, for a long time, been dominated by people who have spoken on us and for us. Sivanandan visited us only twice in Berlin, but he spoke to us and with us:

the way to fight [racism], and stop it from developing into fascism, must be understood in terms of its particular trajectory... the racism

of post-war Europe is not the same as the racism of the colonial period or of Nazi Germany. Racism never stands still: it changes its basis, its function, its thrust at different times in different places in different ways.

Yet the greatest shortcoming of established anti-racist theory in Germany continues to be its failure to perceive that racism is a social institution, serving to fulfil particular functions in a class-divided society. The analyses that Sivanandans around the world have made arise out of their own histories and experiences, and these continue to link up to, remain firmly rooted in and generate anti-racist, anti-imperialist and class struggles, wherever, whenever and on whatever level they need to be fought.

To our cost, we have come to realise that we lack a Sivanandan in the anti-racist movement in Germany.

Biplab Basu and Anjali Gupta Basu are activists in the anti-racist and refugee rights movement, living in Berlin.

From Inpa, Sussi and Tino

Siva – we learn from you that there is nothing greater than the fight for rights wherever.

Goethe once wrote about Kalidasa's *Sakontala*: 'If I want to understand the space and the world with only a name, then I say *Sakontala*, it encompasses everything... (*will ich dien Himmel, die Erde mit einem Namen begreifen, Nenn ich Sakontala dich und so ist alles gesagt...*)'.

If we want to fight against racism
 If we want to be emotional
 If we want to be angry
 If we want to be unrepentant fighters
 Then we say 'Sivanandan'.

Inpa, Sussi and Tino are from a Tamil refugee organisation in Berlin.

From Elizabeth and Cedric Robinson

On the occasion of Sivanandan's 75th birthday, so many images come to mind. Like the man, they range from revolutionary drama to teasing rascality. His fiery denunciation of Britain's existing race relations 'industry' in 1980. His cautionary tale at the dawning of the silicon age

regarding the hyper-exploitation of Asian women in the service of microchip manufacturers. And, more amusingly, his mock horror upon discovering that the man he and his colleague, Colin Prescod, had dishonoured from a public platform was the same chancellor who ultimately would decide to grant (or not!) Cedric's university tenure. His impatience with, and dismissal of, the most pretentious and obfuscating aspects of cultural studies, 'the hokum of New Times'. A photo of Siva with our then five-year-old daughter, Najda, his tongue stuck out in an apparent conspiracy against parental authority. The palpable description of the horror of a woman's rape in Sri Lanka in the midst of, and as a metaphor for, its civil war in his novel, *When Memory Dies*. His 'Letter to God', where he manages to capture the betrayals, humiliations and finally triumph over colonialism in the space of a single page. His embrace (or was it a football tackle?) when Elizabeth first walked through the doors of the Institute of Race Relations. The truly multicultural collective that has been nurtured at the Institute through the years. At the same time, his condemnation of official manifestations of multiculturalism, such as the RAT (race awareness training) schemes.

The litany could continue at some length, but this short list suggests a multi-faceted character which would, at some moments, seem to be at war with itself, never mind a small army of others. Is there some way of accounting for this, for bringing all the bits under one roof? At one moment, he is mischievous and playful, even downright naughty. Remember him humbly proclaiming, 'I am just a simple peasant...', as he leads a pompous adversary into an inescapable analytical trap. At other moments, he is filled with righteous anger, as when he perceives those whom he presumes should be political allies, betraying their cause.

Underlying all of this, there seems to be a profound and abiding suspicion of authority, whether social, historical or political, and sureness that it must be debunked. He seems always finely attuned to the transparency of power, of doctrinal beliefs, of racialism in its many guises. His initial reaction to the arrogance of power is to be amused by the pretentiousness of its claims. And, perhaps characteristically of the classes he represents, he is inclined to poke fun at the perpetrators, to tease and taunt. But his patience is limited and his manner can become fierce and unforgiving when his opponent is unresponsive, or when progressive colleagues begin to mirror the behaviour of the powerful.

All of this might be admirable but insufferable, were it not for another of Siva's enduring qualities. He and the Institute (which truly share identities) have always been prepared to engage with and embrace new realities, to consider the as yet unconsidered. This has been manifested in so many ways. To begin with a personal vignette. Our very first encounter with the collective followed Cedric's submission of an article to *Race & Class*. He was then a young, largely unpublished writer who had butted up against the still too real boundaries of US publish-

ing. Scholarly journals were, at best, timid and, at worst, narrowly self-serving. More popular journals might allow a Black writer to comment on a short list of racial issues, but only rarely and never on anything broadly critical. And leftist journals either failed to consider race at all as it fell outside of conventional class analysis, or marginalised participation by Black authors to race matters, perhaps presuming them incapable of theoretical discussions or broader social, class analysis.

So, following many letters of rejection on posh stationery, imagine receiving a letter in a cheap brown envelope, written on an obviously ancient typewriter. The contents therein were a celebration of *Race & Class* and Cedric having discovered one another, not only an acceptance of the article in question, but also the expressed desire to have a continuing relationship. And a long and cherished relationship it has been.

This attitude has been characteristic of Siva's work and the tasks that the IRR has taken on. Always prepared to consider changing realities, the Institute has repeatedly revised its brief to include women, for example, or the Palestinian struggle. To recognise and expose new 'racisms' such as the current plight of immigrant populations in Europe and elsewhere. At the same time, it has remained alert to the depredations of official power, through the crude instruments of racialised policing, for example.

These same predilections have spurred Siva and his colleagues to explore various ways of engaging young people. In the early 1980s, the Institute published its educational series on racism, using a pictorial and then, in *How Racism Came to Britain*, a cartoon format. In the late 1990s, the CD ROM project, *Homebeats: struggles for racial justice* allowed for the possibility that younger and coming generations might well be absorbing information in different ways. We recently had the pleasure of watching Siva engage University of California students in rapt discussions for several hours as they eagerly jostled with him over the ideas which informed his politics and would inform theirs.

In sum, Sivanandan has been, and remains, an extraordinary intellectual and organisational force-field amongst us. He is surely a seductor, but in the very best sense and for the very best reasons.

Elizabeth Robinson runs the KCSB radio station, University of California and Cedric Robinson is professor in the Black Studies and Political Science departments, University of California, Santa Barbara.

From Basil Davidson

I had the good fortune to get to know Siva sometime near the outset of his time with the race relations project. That was a considerably different Britain, as it seems to me now; and we still had the cold war in

some of its worst destructiveness reaching out ahead of us. There was plenty of reason for pessimism, and not least in the sphere of what were not yet known as ‘community relations’. The work of making inroads into our British racism had scarcely then begun, while ‘institutional racism’ was everywhere in our midst and, for the most, part unrepentant.

But Siva had already thrown himself into the liberating work of cultural change, and he soon put new life into us all. This was partly because he foresaw and saw, very clearly, the nature of the problems of shifting the ‘anti-racist project’ on to a genuinely democratic basis and then maintaining that shift against every kind of opposition; and it was partly because – but here has been another aspect of his admirable stance and courage – Siva could and did deploy, then as always, then as today, his heart-warming affection for everyone who came forward to work alongside him.

Our friend Siva remained himself, in short, but Siva rapidly became Siva’s team as we all now know and share in the benefits of his good companionship. From the first, he has remained an inexhaustible source of good sense and fortitude.

Dear Siva, this ancient member of the team asks to be allowed to add his own word of love and thanks to you.

Basil Davidson is an anti-imperialist scholar and writer who has long fought for the liberation of Africa.

From John Pilger

Sivanandan has understood the related issues of race, class and imperialism more than most of his contemporaries. There have been those who have done almost as well, but not better. His intellect and humanity shine through everything he writes, and he writes with such power and grace; *Race & Class* consistently demonstrates this. I wish him many happy returns, and I thank him for his light in an often surreal political world.

John Pilger is a campaigning journalist, writer and documentary-maker on Third World issues.

From Victoria Brittain

My dear Siva – surely it can’t be that you are 75? For the twenty years I’ve known you, you have always been 75, everyone’s father, everyone’s guru, with the unfailing patience and wisdom which you can only have if

you are 75. The world must be full of people like me who, however small or large their personal experience with you, are endlessly and every day grateful to you for being the example of how a man can be so unswerving a friend, so reliable a teacher, so shrewd a political judge. I know the Institute is all of you, and the warmth of the welcome, those cups of tea, those ideas, papers, magazines, references, which are pressed on the lucky visitor, come from the collective. But for me, you have always been the touchstone, the catalyst, without which the Institute's magic support system could not happen.

I remember well there was a time when I was afraid of you, expecting you to be critical and dismissive of someone lacking your experience, your fluency, your confidence. When I came to London from Africa twenty years ago, after a decade away, it was a cold and bewildering political and intellectual scene in which I felt an alienation and terror I cannot forget. You were the small warm fixed point I discovered then and have counted on ever since.

For me, *When Memory Dies* is all your work and life encapsulated. Others will write about how that work has enriched so many streams of consciousness in this bleak period of post-colonial betrayals and disappointments. It is my privilege that my memories are not just of the work, but of the friend.

Victoria Brittain is Deputy Foreign Editor of The Guardian.

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Compiled by Valerie Allport

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