Understanding POST-COLONIAL IDENTITIES

IRELAND, AFRICA AND THE PACIFIC

Edited by
Dele Layiwola

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POST-COLONIAL IDENTITIES:

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Dedication

To the sweet memory of friends who departed at a moment's wink; for which reason our debt of gratitude to them remains unpaid:

Anthony Avoseh,	1958 - 1982
C.L.R. James,	1901 – 1989
Samuel Beckett,	1906 – 1989
Tom Murphy of Barr Errach, Eire,	1947 – 1992
Motola Johnson,	1903 – 1999
Daniel Ayodele Carew,	1933 – 1999
Charles Barber,	1915 – 2000

Preface

The basis for the present anthology goes back to 1988 when a group of Africanists at the University of Ibadan thought that the debate about post-coloniality had yet to represent the balance of gender in its realistic proportion. It was then decided to institute a series of debates whereby the discourse of post-coloniality could reflect, in all its shades, its impact on women, children and the disabled. In actual fact, no area of subaltern studies (including the seminal disciplines of gay and gender studies) is complete without a comprehensive implication of other components of minor (or children's) studies and the study of other disabled, disadvantaged social groupings. Disability would then mean those subjects of challenge or affliction, including dyslexics and schizophrenics, the physically blind or lame or indeed anyone or group with the tendency to be ignored, taken for granted, 'abused' or 'looked down upon'.

It is true that the different fields of study endeavour which articulate the predicament of the 'historically subjugated', for want of a better term, have done their individually diverse researches in comparative isolation. But the time has come to bring the micro-disciplines together to 'sum up', as it were, the present state of the field. From the various centres spin off the centrifugal equivalents of margins or peripheries. And within the interstices of this broad inter-disciplinarity, there are often complementary as well as contradictory 'appearances' which have to be harmonized for the better understanding of macro-cultures, sub-cultures and the mind-boggling world of spatially indefinable territories created by consumerist patterns in industrial states and in modernity. The twenty-first century, without a shadow of doubt, will be a world predicated upon trans-territoriality and transnationality. Ironically within the broad challenges of the transnational will also emerge an attendant periphery or clusters of peripheries seeking to hold on to their own narrow, self-enabling but marginal nationalities even within the more developed economies of the world.

There would, therefore, appear to be a certain constructuration of reality as defined by the study of minors and minorities in concept and in scale. Where a margin or periphery is blurred or undefined, then the centre itself is inchoate and amorphous. In any case, for as long as the struggle over and about territories or resources and space have subsisted, for so long have there been a centre of torque between that which is pulled and twisted and that which pulls it. Our first conceptual framework of this notion at Ibadan was to experiment with women in a certain economic context; women and access to credit in the various banks and finance houses. These have tended to be the mushrooming indices of most newfangled, monetized economies of the modern third world. But this has often turned out to be a constant factor among macro-nationalities in the developed world. The brass tacks are the groundswell of evidence on who has access to what; especially with regard to loans, credit and finance. Or is this not the bottom line between the rich and the poor? Our thoughts at the time coincided with those of other well-known institutions who funded the one issue of *African Notes* devoted to that phase of the project.

Beyond the purview of minted commerce would be the shift to the cloudy superstructure of ideas – what is the nexus of control in the merchandising of ideas, the academy, research, arts and science? Who controls what and who dominates or manipulates the resources of science, technology and research? It has always been axiomatic that whoever is wise to dominate the intellect and the academy – the resources of mind – would create the dominant culture(s) of the century. It then means that one form of mastery or dominion in one field generates the basis for dominance in a myriad others. This is the dynamics of how culture is molded and redefined every micro-hour in our world. Those cultures thereby create their peripheries of identities. The matter may be a little more complex than I have defined here but the operational pattern is sure to be along the outlines of such relations.

The whole field of post-colonial studies, at its most profound, does not dwell on peoples and individuals (for there are no post-colonials by physiognomy!) but on the cultural relations and relativities that define our lives in the language of exchange. The whole rhetoric of

culture, anarchy and ideology relate more to what people do than to human beings as beings in themselves. We are all conceived as commodities of exchange, gain or pilferage. What makes one white, black, yellow, Irish, Jew, disadvantaged or prosperous is, therefore, largely based on which side of the exchange one has been historically conditioned to pitch one's tent. On another level, as in the case of gender, it is that ideological underpinning which assigns one to the invented notions of what one is thought to be. The whole world of ideas is thus governed by the notorious obsession with inventions, creations and recreations of matter, ideas and persons in the material world and assigning arbitrary tags on to them.

On a more complex level, the tagging is not even done by the inventor but by a different set of self-appointed, self-acclaimed professionals who take on the 'product', by second remove, and create their own myths and legends in the scheme of invented nomenclature. But even those of us who come, by virtue of industrialization, to consume and assimilate the products have our ways of creatively 'digesting' them. This complex nexus of contradictions continues to ensure that the debate around post-colonial studies may take on different tags depending on the dynamics of the generation. There, certainly, can be no dearth of argumentation and discourse over new or fallow territories.

Years after the seminars in Ibadan, I was fortunate to be visiting the University of Ulster at Coleraine in County Derry, Northern Ireland during the 1995/96 academic year. It was there that Professor Robert Welch accosted me with the idea of organizing a conference on post-coloniality at the Armagh campus of the Queen's University of Belfast. The terrain was not familiar but I later learned that Dr G.A. Baird, Secretary to the Academic Council, was to negotiate a modest grant to keep me in an alcove office of the old infirmary, now housing Armagh campus. I was to work on and broker the conference within five months without the chance of an extension beyond the sixth month. The toll was phenomenal on the one-man conference faculty! The manager of the one-building campus, Gary Sloan, and his assistant, Tess Hurson, were to be my primary hosts. They left me with a personal computer

and a fax machine. The congenial community of Armagh became my real host. The international symposium took place at Armagh on the 30th of September, 1996. For the event Dennis Brutus, humanist and poet-laureate, fore-sent the opening poem, "Some Defiant Flicker''. The symposium was a further distillation of our Ibadan experiments. All through the period, the Collection Development Librarian at Ibadan, Mrs Adejoke Scott-Emuakpor, gave invaluable library and bibliographical support. Mr C.G. Sloan of Colby Park, Belfast, assisted by Mr John Nixen, helped with logistics. Messrs Ciaran Carson and Damian Smyth both helped to source further supplementary conference funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The unique experiences of Irish scholars and bards added a particularly illuminating texture to our understanding, which had hitherto been based on what the African Studies cabal at Ibadan initiated. I am grateful to Dr. Tim Cribb of Churchill College, Cambridge who ensured that Declan Kiberd attended the conference. Dr Lapsley's distinctly varied experiences brought colour to the Armagh conference. So did the contributions of all the other scholars represented in the present anthology. The Very Reverend M.A. Cassidy kindly made the inimitable Robinson Library available for crucial sessions of the meeting.

To join the Ibadan and Armagh papers, I have brought others whose interest I had enlisted all along. I am grateful that Bill Ashcroft, Dan Baron Cohen and 'Marisa' Turano honoured their promises to contribute to an anthology on the subject.

I thought that a whole new area of twenty-first century territoriality was the ubiquitous, even notorious, Internet which as a branch of informatics, has now established its own hegemony over men, women and society. It promises to liberate as much as it threatens to stifle. The expository balance which a male scholar and a female media executive brought to bear on the present anthology blazes a trail of its own. And it is my hope that extended discourses will emerge in the future to harness the liberating resources of the web and cyberspace for the benefit of societies emerging from economic stagnation, social

depression, political repression and the scourge of shifty-eyed cartels of underdevelopment. It is clear from Folorunso's paper that the industry and technology of print which have dominated civilization during the last five centuries are beginning to adapt to informatics in a way not thought of before now. Afterall, it is this escritorial advantage that often delineates societies of self-invention from those of Homer and orality. The fact that one dominates the world with an authorial 'I' and the other answers with a disempowered 'we' in the factories and the market places makes all the difference. This is the import of Dennis Brutus' assertion at the Armagh conference that "Colonialism, these days, is accomplished not with military precision but with the precision of the pen whereby a dash of the pen or a touch of a computer button can move vast amounts of capital over mind-boggling distances between the north and south only in a few seconds." But the jostling for space, which Tipton discusses also, liberates and enforces the 'I' on territory of the 'ours' beyond the threshold of the 'mine'. Information and technology, as our millennium testifies, liberates across cultures and guarantees new forms of identity paradigms. It is the full responsibility of our humanity to own up for the use to which the Internet is put or subjected.

By way of methodology, the collation here is not based on topics or geographical grouping. Rather, the criteria are more on certain inter-textual affinities in the temperament and exposition of the authors and their papers. For a place like Ireland, a certain feeling of nostalgia was inherent as in nationalistic African literatures of the 1950s and the 60s. But this is further complicated by the fact that the language of expression had been English all along, so that it is not so much to discover a *tongue* as to discover a *voice*. Those literatures of Africa from Equiano, Fagunwa, Tutuola, Mphalele, Achebe, Soyinka, Samkange, Nwapa, Okara and many others often had, at times remotely, the search of a new tongue as their focus. Those of Ireland were making efforts to retrieve a voice once lost or muffled. But common to both traditions is the search for a true vision and re-definition in a world constantly re-invented by forces external to their dreams. Against a stable and configured past is the murky, somewhat

inchoate present, out of which little sense can be made for reconstruction. W.B.Yeats, more than any other, envisaged a reconstruction from the historical pedigree of Plotinus to the time of Parnell that can be sufficiently consistent, articulate and modern. The present state is that of unease which prompted one of the speakers at the Armagh conference to remark that: "Apart from the mutual experience of a temperate climate, Ireland shares nothing else with Western Europe." Strong words, but a paradoxical truth.

There is the sense of ambiguity and a forcible attempt at definition, which is the basis of unease in the contributions, which emphasizes the notion of ambiguity. Declan Kiberd best alludes to it in the *deraciné* status of Fanon who, in Martinique, thought himself French and white, only to be seen as West Indian when he arrived to his studies in France. The self is torn between the way it is, or thinks it is, and the way it is seen or invented by the forces without. Much of what we see in the second section is the notion of masks and shadows as in the contributions of Toland, Lapsley, Thacker, Kiberd, King, Davies and Graham. For Graham, it is ephemera – transient and short-lived and written off in pamphlets, calendars and graph(itti). Toland, King and Lapsley bring particular, socialized and concrete examples to bear on the complexity of the concept of status and citizenship in space, time and idea.

The pressures on Irish social life and literature are tangible and there is in this fact a certain puzzle. Interminable creativity – direct, effluent – is fostered under this life-threatening pressure. The artist in that social and material situation lives almost at the brink of self-dissolution with art and creativity as the substitute for the life he would never live, and the fulfilment he may never attain. This is a truly tragic imagination, fecundating darkly but profoundly; this also is the homestead of muses. He is a knowing citizen, constantly uprooted as he is planted in a geographical milieu to which he believes himself tied for good. This, in classical Irish parlance, is a person of the *sidhe*. The flavour of the literature, whether it is British or Irish in content, is truly unique as it is startling. Even in the analysis of Beckett by Davies, it is the story of an art in search of culture and rootedness, the effort of an

epical hero mired in the boglands. There is nothing in my analysis, which points at despair; rather, all that is said is that the human condition, with or without a natural identity, is a complex, inviolable web. Its literature reflects this complexity but, in a certain way, redolent with a deceptively simplistic, seductive logic. More concretely, as realized literature in performance, James King portrays it as exhibiting a palpable tension between the stage and its audience, between reading and writing, and between image and reflection.

The section designated as Pacific/Atlantic comprises three very interesting but different papers. The style and logic of the papers are as far apart as the expanse of the seas mentioned. Of the three contributors, only Ashcroft is permanently based in the South Pacific area. But then his paper picks on the whole of the Commonwealth rather than the Pacific Rim alone. His paper is an incisive criticism of the concept of the empire as a self-proclaimed modem of 'high' culture confronting the popular culture of America. He argues, quite convincingly and with verve, that the bearing and proclivity of English Language/Literature education is a direct derivative of the cultural domination of colonialism. He links, with typical perspicacity, the thesis of the colonial officer, Thomas Macauley, with the ostensibly more intellectual preoccupation of Mathew Arnold and Sir Henry Newbolt. He concludes with the over-arching thesis that the future of English masquerading as the proxy of model cultural studies is doomed to extinction within the next century. The cultural and scientific evolution along his backyard in China, Japan and Southeast Asia probably further sharpens his focus with this prognostication. It is quite interesting and path-breaking that an Australasian could see the Commonwealth in this perspective. One could argue that afterall, the geography of his location, livelihood and mother tongue places him nearer the heart of the empire. But his perceptual tangent brings him closer to Africa, India or the Caribbean. The only point of departure is that the analysis of culture as art and as a way of life is conceptually predicated on the chirographic idea of art as 'written' rather than equally as 'spoken' or performed. That section balances this with the novel example of scripting, textual decoding and performance that Dan

Baron Cohen enunciates in his development theatre for the facilitated and the facilitator. Quite coincidentally, this experimental theatre was conducted from a workshop in New South Wales bringing a spatial, but not a temporal relationship, with Ashcroft's contribution.

Turano, writing originally in Italian, describes her paper as an analysis of literary anthropology. She subtly portrays a certain state of asphyxia-inducing memory where caste, class and property play a prominent role. Maybe this derives from the displaced physicality of Henrique Texeira de Sousa, the author himself, who leaves Cape Verde to live as an exile in Lisbon. This is presented as a notion of conceptual as well as material transformation or displacement. This concept originates a set of centripetal motions within a periphery, which continually gravitates towards a centre as in the travel, return, death, and rebirth of its denizens.

The section on Africa is an aggregation of all the foregone, which have been more largely debated in the sphere of post-colonial theorizing in the last three decades. The womanist response of Chesaina from Kenya is a most welcome inclusion. The same for the area of praxis as represented in art history by Adepegba and in Literature by Wumi Raji. Fresh and original as Kasule's contribution is, he exaggerates - perhaps for effect - the European marginalization of a writer like Wole Soyinka whose writings are so compelling and cosmopolitan that they cannot be successfully ignored.

In conclusion, the whole notion of an empire essentially creates an oasis of mixed inculturation in which people mingle to recreate, re-negotiate and reaggregate insularity, notional purity or ethnic supremacy. The empire, in bringing units together on terms of unequal relationship creates a false cultural pool ostensibly for self-enrichment but with an inadvertent, in-built notion of self-abnegation. From the very point of unequal relationship, there is set up, due to imbalance, an instant centrifugal pull towards an undefined periphery; attempting to re-define a new territoriality or balance or even re-validate the *status quo ante*. This is similar to the laws of motion that Isaac Newton so well described. From the nexus of these counterbalancing effects

emerge new alliances, acculturation and transnationality. The post-colonial is therefore the summary of polyphony. In the words of Ashcroft:

> Curiously, their marginalization and exclusion from the canon has provided the ground for a much more heterogeneous conception of the cultural text.

The empire dies; a new, alternative empire is born; long live the empire!

Ibadan, Nigeria
Easter, 1997

Dele Layiwola

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of defiant vitality
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from a cavernous skull
shrunk to calcined thinness
eyes glare, plead, twinkle
in appeal, denunciation:
halloween's pumpkin mask
of play, horror and grisly humor.
All Saints and the unavailing reprise
of All-Souls, doomed and damned.

Seattle: 9/20/96
4.30 am

Dennis Brutus

PART ONE

THE PACIFIC; THE ATLANTIC

Oceans of the Middle Passage

1

POST-COLONIALITY AND THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH

Bill Ashcroft

One hundred years ago a Jewish medievalist was appointed the first English lecturer at Cambridge. Two years before that, the English school had been established at Oxford, although it wasn't until 1917 that the first Oxford Chair of English placed the final imprimatur on a discipline which had gained a strategic authority in the cultural dominance of the British empire. The discipline of English, then, is extremely recent, and my proposition is that it will not last another hundred years, — that in 2096 it will not exist.

This essay attempts to ask why. Why has a subject which has performed such a central function in the discursive and hegemonic dominance of empire such a limited future? Why has a subject which has inscribed not only the professional identities of generations of scholars and teachers, but also the cultural identity, the cultural aspiration of a very large part of the globe doomed to extinction? The answer of course lies in its origin and the very nature of its power.

But an important subsidiary question is: "How our we to locate our own professional enterprise, that is, how are we to locate ourselves, at this mid-point in its history?'' "What do we think we are doing?'' We, all of us, whether students or teachers, are so engrossed in the task of gaining control of our subject that we cannot see how it has invented us. We have become the object of our subject, for that is its discursive function, to construct us into social identities which gain not only their character but even their substance from the professional task which has fixed us and the disciplinary ideology which has interpellated us. Nowhere is this more obvious than in those individuals most effectively socialized by the discipline, its professional elites. Perhaps nowhere is it more obvious than in the discipline of English itself, with its manifest

impression of antiquity, its air of cultural pretension, its assumption of cultural value. Perhaps nowhere is it more obvious than in those centres of disciplinary and cultural power ('Oxbridge' et al) where antiquity and prestige go hand in hand.

The professional identities we construct have a lot to do with the way we perceive this demise. From my point of view, of course, the end of English is far from being a gloomy prospect, because it demonstrates a dynamism that this discipline of textual study may have in spite of itself. The unravelling of English has been occurring for quite some time on two fronts: firstly the Arnoldian idea of Culture of which the discipline is based is being replaced by a broader sense of cultural textuality, a breaking down of the distinction between 'high and popular' in cultural analysis; secondly the monolithic unity of aesthetic and cultural assumptions which has provided its canonical authority has been challenged by the vast array of post-colonial literatures in English which have emerged as a direct result of cultural colonization. These two developments have been firmly deployed in the last ten years or so around the discourses of Cultural Studies and post-colonialism, and I want to propose that not only do the interests of post-colonialism and the emerging discipline of Cultural Studies converge, but that they have been linked from the very beginning of the study of 'English'.

When we examine the surprisingly recent development of this field called English Literature we discover how firmly it is rooted in the cultural relationships established by British imperialism. Not only is the very idea of 'Culture' a result of the European political subjugation of the rest of the world, but the construction of Europe itself is inextricably bound up with the historical reality of colonialism and the almost total invisibility of the colonized peoples to European art and philosophy.

A question asked by many people is: "Why has cultural studies developed out of English departments?" The answer is simply that the discipline of English was conceived, initiated and implemented as a program of cultural study. Virtually from its inception it existed as a promotion of English National Culture under the guise of the

advancement of civilization. Most histories of cultural studies focus on the work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson in the fifties and sixties, and the establishment of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964. But I want to suggest that in fact the founding document of cultural studies is Lord Macaulay's Minute to Parliament in 1835.

This document, Guari Viswanathan tells us, signified the rise to prominence of the Anglicists over the Orientalists in the British administration of India. The Charter Act of 1813, devolving responsibility for Indian education on the colonial administration, led to a struggle between the two approaches, ultimately resolved by Macaulay's Minute, in which we find stated not just the assumptions of the Anglicists, but the profoundly universalist assumptions of English national culture itself. "We must educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue", says Macaulay, with breathtaking confidence.

> The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence... with the most profound speculation on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade .... Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations.[1]

The advancement of any colonized people could only occur, it was claimed, under the auspices of English language and culture, and it was on English literature that the burden of imparting civilized values was to rest. It worked so well as a form of cultural studies because "the strategy of locating authority in the texts of English literature all but

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[1] Thomas Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education" (1836) in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 428.

effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation and class and race oppression behind European world dominance".[2] English literature "functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state."[3] One could add that without the profoundly universalist assumptions of English literature and the dissemination of these through education, colonial administrations would not have been able to invoke such widespread complicity.

Consequently, English Literature became a prominent agent of colonial control. Indeed, it can be said that English literary study really began in earnest once its function as a discipline of cultural studies had been established, and its ability to 'civilize' the lower classes had thus been triumphantly revealed. To locate the beginning of English at the moment of Macaulay's Minute is to some extent to display the provisionality of beginnings, for this beginning is preceded by a significant prehistory in the emergence of *Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in Scotland and the teaching of literature in the Dissenting Academies. The explicit cultural imperialism of English is preceded by a different cultural movement issuing from the desire, in Scottish cultural life of the eighteenth century, for 'improvement', the desire for a civilizing purgation of the language and culture, a removal of barbaric Scottishisms and a cultivation of a 'British' intellectual purity.[4]

This movement within Scotland towards improvement and civilization which led to the birth of the subject we now call English is very different from that movement initiated by Macaulay's Minute which actively propagated English throughout the empire. But the two movements reflect a dynamic which has continued in the post-colonial world to the present. This Scottish movement of improvement and purification is centripetal, self directed, focused on the centre as object; the movement initiated by Macaulay is centrifugal, outward moving, enfolding, seeing the centre as subject.

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[2] Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in India', *Oxford Literary Review* (9. 1 & 2, 1987), p. 22

[3] Ibid. p. 23

[4] See Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992)

Now the crucial thing is that English literature is not just the historical confluence of these centripetal and centrifugal movements which resulted in the institutionalisation of English, but the fact that the emerging discipline is one site amongst many others in the colonized world of their continual circulation and interaction. Because we are used to seeing the course of empires as centrifugal, outward moving, imposing cultural values through a domination of cultural institutions and a coercion effected through cultural discourse, we overlook the fact that the continual centripetal movement towards improvement, betterment and self creation, towards a 'proper language', a 'global economy', 'international standards' – the cultural identification initiated by the colonized themselves – is a much more pervasive operation of hegemonic affiliation. The further complication is that each of these processes of cultural circulation generate their own forms of resistance. But as a focus of desire, English literature operated as a very dense and over determined site for both these movements of cultural identification. Scotland and India model two processes of hegemony which continue to operate in the post-colonial world to the present, confirming English literature as the embodiment of universal, transcendent values, the site of an aesthetic prominence, and the object of cultural desire.

The ideological function of English can be seen to be repeated in all post-colonial societies, in very different pedagogic situations. Literature, by definition, excluded local writing. The matter was put succinctly by Edmund Gosse commenting on Robert Louis Stephenson's return to Samoa. "Samoa might be a nice place to visit but it cannot be the place to write. A two mile radius of Charing Cross is the area I suspect." [5] George Lamming talks about the effect of this in his essay, "The Occasion for Speaking", in which he says that the recognition in America and the considerable financial rewards this brought his writing were of little consequence compared to the

[5] Thanks to Roslyn Jolley for this information.

recognition by the literary establishment in London.[6] If we think this is out of date, consider the symbol chosen by the 'Image Committee' of my Australian university to advertise post-graduate degrees in English in 1997 – a picture of Elizabeth II's coronation crown.

The conviction of literature's efficacy in imparting Culture to its readers found in Matthew Arnold its most influential voice. His book. *Culture and Anarchy,*[7] was concerned with the growth of philistine culture which was accelerating with the spread of literacy and democracy, thus eroding the separation between the 'cultured' and the masses. State sponsorship of education was to be the mechanism by which culture could be preserved and extended to resist the descent towards an increasingly mechanical and materialist civilization. The 'civilising' function of the study of literature was now harnessed in earnest to preserve English national culture in Britain. The link between the idea of 'civilization', the idea of a unitary English national culture, and the prestige of antiquity became focused in the discipline of English, in which an arbitrary and ostensively indicated set of cultural and aesthetic values were held to be universal.

Clearly the prestige of English goes hand in hand with a particular view of culture – a particular form of culturalism. This is one, as Raymond Williams elaborates, in which 'Culture' is regarded as 'Art' rather than a 'way of life'. So as a form of cultural studies, the discipline of English, the repository of civilized and universal values depends heavily on the interpretation of 'Culture and value which Arnold formulated. But the force and tenacity of Arnold's influence lies in the fact that he created a *vocabulary* of criticism which entered the language and even today manages to take a firm hold of cultural discourse. This is why in Australia in the 1980's a Professor of the History of Ideas, Eugene Kamenka, could say, quite unselfconsciously:

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[6] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. Michigan Press, 1992) p. 26

[7] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) ed. J. Dover Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

> Culture rests on the motto that nothing human is alien to me; it thrives on admiration for, and emulation of, the best that has been thought and said, felt and done anywhere... For culture is not only firmly international in its nature and effects, it makes people and peoples 'transcend' themselves and their seemingly narrow, time and space-bound capacities.[8]

It would be hard to find a more succinct recapitulation of the Arnoldian myth of culture. This essay, so resonantly couched in Arnoldian vocabulary, demonstrates, a century and a half later, the stunning success of the project of cultural studies initiated by Macaulay's Minute. Culture elevates; it is universal, transhuman, unassailable. The cultures of the Nigerian, the Sri Lankan, the Barbadian (or indeed the Canadian or Australian) are completely suppressed.

The conflation of the 'best cultural values that civilization has to offer' and English literature, (i.e., the 'culture and civilization' form of culturalism) is present from Macaulay through Arnold, but it is in the Newbolt Report that it becomes an issue of national policy. From a post-World War 1 fear, among other things, of the power of Teutonic scholarship, and particularly of its tradition of philology, Henry Newbolt was commissioned in 1919 to conduct an enquiry into the state of English. The report, published in 1921 as *The Teaching of English in England,* became a best-seller and established the study of English literature firmly at the centre of the English and colonial education systems. The language of the report makes it clear from which springs it drew ideological sustenance.

> ...what we are looking for now is not merely a means of education, one chamber in the structure which we are hoping to rebuild, but the true starting point and foundation from which all the rest must spring....[9] If we use English literature

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[8] Eugene Kamenka, 'Culture and Australian Culture', *Australian Cultural History* 3 (1984), p. 1.

[9] Great Britain, *The Teaching of English in England: Being the report of the departmental committee appointed by the president of the board of education to*

> as a means of contact with great minds, a channel by which to draw upon their experience with profit and delight, and a bond of sympathy between the members of a human society, we shall succeed, as the best teachers of the Classics have often succeeded in their more limited field.[10]

Ian Hunter has suggested that English was not so much a means of ideological control as a moral technology,[11] something we find emphasised in this report, but I would suggest that in practice the moral technology was heavily in the service of ideology: the two cannot be extricated. The moral dominance of English thus so powerfully confirmed in the twenties provided a fertile ground for the influential culturalism of F.R. Leavis. If we can characterize English culturalism as an emerging struggle between two definitions of culture, (which Raymond Williams terms 'art' or 'way of life') we find it most acutely expressed in Leavis. For him, a common culture, that of the pre-industrial organic community, and its continuing echo in the legacy of the English language, becomes pitted against modern industrial civilization in both its capitalist and communist forms. In Leavis' programme the literary intelligentsia were to be mobilized against philistine modernity, calling into their service the universal cultural values embodied in English.

The thirties and forties became a watershed in this struggle between high and popular culture, largely, I think owing to the increasing cultural dominance of America. It is commonplace these days to cast Leavis in the role of villain. But in terms of the cultural struggle being engaged over English his position was extremely complex. Macaulay had already initiated the link between 'high' culture and the English tradition by grandly announcing the roots of English literature as extending somehow back to Classical times. But in

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inquire into the position of English in the educational system of England. Committee chaired by Sir Henry Newbolt, (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1921), p. 14.

[10] Ibid., p. 15

[11] Ian Hunter, "English in Australia", *Meanjin*' Vol. 47 no. 4 (Summer) 1988 pp. 723-744

Leavis the defence of the unified pre-industrial English became a defence of high culture against (largely American) popular culture. Leavis and Denys Thompson's *Culture and Environment* in 1933[12] and Q.D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1932[13] represented major assaults by the *Scrutiny* school. In essence Leavis voices a cultural struggle between two imperial powers. And while America gained control over popular culture (to the extent that it could be said that the popular culture of the world today is American popular culture) Europe, and in English speaking colonies, England, maintained firm control over High Culture.

In some respects Leavis' battle reflects the predicament of decolonising countries trying to carve a cultural space for themselves against an overwhelming imperial presence. The difference was that the long history of cultural study in Britain and the shared dominance of European philosophical and cultural values meant that it operated from a position of power. The armory in the battle consisted of weapons from the Arnoldian vocabulary – mass culture versus Culture, the shallow versus the deep, the popular versus the timeless, the local versus the universal. If the world could not resist the dominance of American *popular* culture, the Arnoldian view of *high* culture still holds sway at a level almost too deep to be expunged. Ironically, the manifestly culturalist operation of English Studies throughout the Empire generated a sense of local writing in the colonies as densely culturally grounded. Indeed, this cultural localism was the repeated cause of the exclusion of local writing from English Literature. Consequently, the very success of the ideological project of English literature, the success of its function as a moral technology, the success of its embodiment of the rhetoric of empire is the source of its demise.

From this watershed period the program of English cultural studies embodied in English takes two directions: literary criticism becomes dominated by New Criticism, which, although it has its roots

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[12] F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: the Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933).

[13] Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932).

in Richard's Practical Criticism, is in fact an *American* inspired interpretative method by which imperial or English national cultural values are expunged from the reading of texts. Whereas Richards' scientific and psychological reading experiments, by not producing a coherent methodology or school, seemed marooned in English cultural history, it became the intellectual energy behind the division of English into cultural studies and new criticism.

New Criticism, of course, builds upon Richards' scientism and Leavisite textual analysis to confirm literature as a discrete discourse devoid of even the cultural implications of traditional historical scholarship. Most curiously it comes to confirm the imperialist notion of Literature because it elides the cultural differences between texts. A form of criticism that can be said to have had a post-colonial impetus[14] ended up with a strongly canonical effect. In a sense the door clanged shut on the culturalist dimension of literary studies with the advent of this meticulous and text-absorbed methodology. Whatever our view of Leavis there is no questioning the fact that he took the culturalist dimension of English seriously. For the Scrutiny school, what people read was intimately bound up with the rest of their cultural experience.

New Criticism didn't affect canonical notions since it could simple be performed on all the usual texts, as could deconstruction which followed it in the seventies.[15] It did in fact confirm canonical

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[14] New Criticism can be seen to be a product of an American attempt to establish the legitimacy of its literary canon against the dominance of the English tradition. As Kenneth Dauber asserts, the Americans, lacking a tradition, and distrusting literature as an institution, could never believe in the reality of received 'categorizations'. New Criticism methodized the disbelief, 'to force us to begin again with each work'. Kenneth Dauber, 'Criticisms of American Literature', *Diacritics* 7 (March, 1977).

[15] In fact we can trace Lacan's critique of Saussure to the fifties, and locate the origins of Deconstruction during a time when New Criticism was dominant. But the popularity of post-structuralism in America (and the English-speaking world) can be generally dated from the 1969 symposium at Johns Hopkins University entitled 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' at which Derrida delivered his seminal paper, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (eds), *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1970)

notions of value because great texts were those which offered themselves to extensive textual analysis. As far as academic literary criticism was concerned, the catastrophic consequences of New Criticism, and its heir, Deconstruction, were that literary theory and literary criticism as practised in the academy 'for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the results of human work.' [16] These apparently radical methodologies served increasingly over the next thirty years to cut the literary text off from cultural considerations. Their inevitable consequence has been to confirm that literature, as an example of something called high culture, is marginal to the everyday concerns of society.

While New Criticism quickly rose to prominence in America during this time the struggle over the interpretation of culture remained unresolved in Britain. The concept of the Great Tradition remained firmly entrenched alongside the upstart New Criticism owing mainly to the resilience of the Arnoldian critical vocabulary and the success of the Newbolt inspired placement of English at the centre of the British and colonial education systems. It was as though the dual character of culture as it exists in culturalism became divided at this time between the culturalist contestants. While English remains the repository of high cultural values, of the notion of culture as art, its inability and unwillingness to account for the culture, the way of life, of the vast majority of English society leads to the emergence of British Cultural Studies in 1957, the founding text of which is Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*[17] in which we can see the interests of the 'culture and civilization' school of Leavis transforming into the interests of cultural studies.

Raymond Williams' publication of *Culture and Society* in 1958,[18] revealing, as it does, the link between cultural products and cultural relations, probably had a more profound influence on the development

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[16] Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (New York: Vintage, 1983), p. 4

[17] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

[18] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

of British cultural studies than any other text. Like Hoggart, Williams reveals a complicated relationship with Leavisism, since he uses literary analysis which also hinges on a nostalgic feel for the culture being analysed. But in Williams the three fundamental questions of cultural studies come together: What is culture? What is the text? What is the relation between culture and ideology?

For the first question Williams gives some impressive definitions:

> Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact and discovery, writing themselves into the land.[19]

> Culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.[20]

The analysis of culture, then, is the 'study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life', attempting to 'discover the nature of the organisation which is the complex of these relationships'.[21] The most crucial aspect of Williams's analysis, I think, is the bringing together of the two notions of culture resident in culturalism, a feature which is not entirely taken up by the developing discipline of cultural studies, where an interest in the lived cultures of particular classes was quickly overtaken by an intense interest in the mass media. But the next two questions did not become theorized until

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[19] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989).

[20] Ibid. 311.

[21] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 63.

the encounter between culturalism and structuralism. Nor did this book invoke the question which has become the most energetic one in recent cultural studies beyond the British model: What are the politics of cultural difference?

It is obvious then that the event which many take to be the birth of British cultural studies, the establishment of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, had a very long gestation. Thomas Babbington Macaulay's chickens had now finally come home to roost. It is no accident that Stuart Hall, director from 1969, is West Indian; for the liminal perspective of the colonized becomes very useful for seeing the problematic division in English culturalism and the affiliative network by which the State commands cultural production. With this in mind we might even say that British Cultural Studies is a major example of the process of 'transculturation' outlined by Pratt,[22] a circulation of a marginalized post-colonial perspective back into English cultural life; a recirculation of the idea of the irrelevance of a canonical English literature to cultural life in general. However, the very strong focus of Cultural Studies upon popular culture and the mass media reveals the way in which the binary division of English culturalism still operates implicitly in British Cultural Studies.

POST-COLONIAL CULTURAL STUDIES

Criticism throughout the English speaking world was affected both by the Culturalist rationale of English Studies and by the rise of New Criticism. But the writing itself seemed to occupy a different site because the division between culture as art and culture as a way of life becomes immediately eroded when colonized peoples appropriate cultural discourses such as literary writing. It is eroded because in these cultures such a distinction between definitions of culture becomes a deeply ontological one. For these societies, culture as timeless, universal and authoritative is simply unattainable except by a process of the most parodic mimicry in which the imperial centre embodies all

[22] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

cultural aspirations. As Kamenka makes very clear, if culture is universal it must exclude your specifically regional art. The glowingly humanist credo – 'nothing human is alien to me' – only operates by incorporating an extensive array of quite specific exclusions; for you cannot have Culture that is Ugandan, Australian or Canadian. Post-colonial literatures, by definition, cannot be great or universal; so they become much more obviously an aspect of a 'way of life.'

Post-colonial cultural discourses of all kinds problematize the distinction between culture as 'art' and cultures as 'ways of life' and indeed problematize the concept of culture itself. For when decolonizing countries appropriate cultural discourse they must either appropriate the whole of its universalist ideology and become, for instance, 'more English than the English', or appropriate it in a way that confirms all intellectual and artistic discourse as aspects of the way of life, strands of the cultural texture, intimately and inextricably connected in the textual fabric of the society. Curiously their marginalisation and exclusion from the canon has provided the ground for a much more heterogeneous conception of the cultural text.

Post-colonialism and cultural studies share a commitment to textual materiality. Roland Barthes' view of the text as a methodological field distinct from the work which can be held in the hand, is a very useful basis for the analysis of culture. The text which only exists as the movement of a discourse 'is also experienced only in an activity of production'. Barthes' metaphor of the text as a *network* which issues from innumerable centres of culture[23] demonstrates that textuality cannot be confined to discrete cultural productions. So, in a sense, the notion of textuality as a semiotic field, a tissue field, of quotations, is a natural ally of the view of culture as a network of practices – a "way of life". But it is also an ally of that tendency Edward Said called the 'worldliness of the text'. [24] For although the text is an infinite deferment, without source or origin, it is still the

[23] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' (1971) in Rick Rylance (ed.), *Debating Texts* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1987), pp. 117-122.

[24] Said, Ibid., pp.31-53.

fabric of those human lives in whom the political realities of cultures are worked out. Writing itself is affiliative rather than filiative with experience; it 'counters nature'. But in this affiliation with the social world, this production of experience, Said sees one of the most resonant confirmations of the text's worldliness.

What continues to hold concepts like 'literature' in place is a massive structure of cultural power; directed in educational, publishing and economic institutions. Post-colonial literary critics quickly come to realise that they are constantly thrown into conflict with this ideologically and institutionally buttressed category of literature because of its roots in the universalist ideology of English culturalism.[25] Almost by definition, writing in post-colonial societies becomes inextricable from a network of cultural practices; exclusion from canonicity confirms its worldliness.

In its engagement with the culturalist myth of 'literature' then, post-colonialism brings to cultural studies its own well established concepts of diversity, particularity and local difference. The global term 'culture' only becomes comprehensible as a conceptualisation of local 'cultures'. Consequently the egregious distinction between 'High' and 'popular' culture, is traversed by the much more energetic and contested politics of cultural difference. Cultural Studies, on the other hand, tends implicitly to support this distinction since it tends to funnel cultural analysis into the complex but circumscribed fields of mass media and popular culture. The issue of cultural difference, particularly as it is mediated in textuality suggests that in most cultures there is no supportable distinction between 'high' and 'low' -- culture is culture. Thus we may see more clearly that notions of high culture are the simple, and not always hidden, agents of cultural imperialism.

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[25]The subterranean power and tenacity of this ideology comes back to us every time we introduce a text like *Things Fall Apart* to the evaluative framework of students.

A very good example of this can be found in recent work on Samoan culture.[26] Analysis of the textual construction of culture in contemporary Samoa involves an examination of language use in law courts and village judicial meetings, written literature, music, drama, radio, television, oratory. Each one of these categories consists of both formal and informal domains, but even the most formal textual domain is intersected with hybrid cultural forms of discourse which diffuse any potential for hierarchical stratification. At no point, either in the production or consumption of culture can a clear distinction of 'high' and 'low' be made, not only because the hybrid is so dominant but because this very hybridity makes it difficult to locate writers or readers, performers or viewers, producers or consumers in any fixed social hierarchy. The Samoan example suggests that the division of culture between 'art' and 'way of life,' between 'high' and 'low' collapses in post-colonial societies because the social and institutional frameworks which buttress this distinction are less clear.

Post-colonial cultural studies tends to recognize the way in which intellectual endeavour is compromised and contained by State power as it is mediated through intellectual work. Bringing to mind Adorno's thesis of the state production of culture, Edward Said says:

> To a great extent culture, cultural formations, and intellectuals exist by virtue of a very interesting network of relationships with the State's almost absolute power.[27]

This is a set of relationships about which all contemporary left criticism, according to Said, and indeed all literary study, remains stunningly silent.

> On the contrary, nearly everyone producing literary or cultural studies makes no allowance for the truth that all intellectual work occurs somewhere, at some time, on some

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[26] Emma Kruse Vaai, *Producing the Text of Culture: The Appropriation of English in Contemporary Samoa.* Unpublished PhD Thesis: School of English, University of NSW.

[27] Said, Ibid., p.169.

very precisely mapped-out and permissable terrain, which is ultimately contained by the State.[28]

This is, I think, a huge and depressing claim about contemporary intellectual production, but it is precisely this realisation which is obscured by the disciplinary structure of knowledge and particularly the disciplinary study of literature. As Said goes on to point out, even if we want to claim that 'culture' as aesthetic production subsists on its own, according to an art-for-art's sake theory, no one is prepared to show how that independence was gained nor, more importantly, how it was maintained.

Now the value of what we can call post-colonial cultural production lies not in its freedom from these conditions of production, but from the fact that its containment is so glaringly obvious. No writer picking up a pen to write in a colonial language can avoid at some stage coming to terms with the irony of this practice. No post-colonial intellectual, no artist, no critic can avoid the fact that this production is occuring on some already determined discursive space. The terrain is not just contained by the nation state but by the continuing imperial reality of global capital. The post-colonial intellectual simply cannot avoid the fact that this work is 'occuring at some place at some time in a mapped-out and permissable terrain' because the reality of place and the reality of publishing requirements, markets, form some of the defining conditions of its production and the ideological containment produces the tension against which it must constantly test itself. As is the theoretical ambition in cultural studies, the politics of the analysis and the politics of intellectual work are inseparable.

This, then, suggests the political efficacy of the post-colonial perspective for contemporary cultural studies, a perspective somewhat sharpened by its distance from the 'centre'. The post-colonial intellectual, and by extension post-colonial horizons to cultural studies, must contend with the conditions of their own containment, must perform a self-conscious reflection upon their own conditions of production. Indeed, the ironies of post-colonial cultural production, and

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[28] Ibid., p.169.

particularly the tensions inherent in language appropriation, make this difficult to avoid.

THE FUNCTION OF POST-COLONIAL THEORY

So, with this rapid unravelling of English literature and its reconstruction as a network of local post-colonial practices, what intellectual identity is the post-colonial critic to construct for him or herself? To put more personally an earlier question I asked: "What do I think I am doing?" Because the post-colonial critic, whether an academic or not, is an institutionally constructed subject, the relation of this practice to the status of the discipline is both troubling and metonymic. As Barbara Christian points out, post-colonial writers have always written theory; it just hasn't been recognised as such.[29] But although post-colonial theory was not an invention of the academy, it was, paradoxically, only its confirmation as an elite discourse within the academy that allowed it to achieve any sort of recognition or authority. This has had the rather ambiguous result of allowing the voice of the culturally marginalised and dispossessed to be heard, often for the first time, but often also within the frame of a theory which has leached that voice of all its materiality and political urgency. On the other hand a recurrent oppositional essentialism which would, understandably, reject Western discourse, reject English, reject literature, reject imperialism, finds itself locked into an illusory and self-congratulatory rhetoric which fails to see the protean nature of imperial power.

Interestingly there are modes of critical practice which mirror the choices offered to any project of political decolonisation, all of which have their particular value. There is a choice corresponding to what we could call colonialist discourse theory, a broadly poststructuralist based analysis of colonial discourse which demonstrates the already present dynamic of resistance in such things as mimicry and hybridity; there is a choice corresponding to what might be called resistance or oppositional theory which is often essentialist in its racial and cultural

[29] Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory", *Cultural Critique*, 6: 52-63

assumptions. However I want to locate my own theoretical position between these two poles, a theory which confirms the agency of the decolonizing subject while acknowledging that the protean adaptability of imperial power cannot be simply dismissed.

Now one of the interesting things about being a post-colonial critic, as in any area of political discourse, is observing the copious amounts of creative abuse all these positions heap upon each other. I have been called 'white'; I have been called 'male'. Simon During calls my post-colonialism *frolich* or 'joyful' post-colonialism; Hodge and Mishra call it 'complicit' rather than oppositional, presumably because it is settler colonial. But if we understand the post-colonial to mean the discourse of the colonized rather than a discourse post-dating colonialism, then post-colonial analysis becomes that which examines the full range of responses to colonialism, from absolute complicity to violent rebellion and all variations in between. There is no post-colonial discourse which is not complicit in some way, and extremely little which is not oppositional. But all of it is about change in some form or other. The theory I espouse therefore, the one which most faithfully engages the actual practice of post-colonial subjects, is a poetics and a politics of *transformation.*

The poetics of transformation examines the ways in which writers and readers contribute constitutively to meaning, how colonised societies appropriate imperial discourses, how they interpolate their voices and concerns into dominant systems of textual production and distribution. A poetics of transformation recognises the myth of parent and child, trunk and branch, stream and tributary by which the post-colonial is marginalised and replaces it with a perception of the rhizomic nature of discursive power and resistance. Transformation recognises that power is a critical part of our cultural life and copes with direct resistance by assuming new forms. But above all, a poetics of transformation recognises the transformative way in which post-colonial texts operate, even those which pose as simply oppositional.

The politics of transformation works constantly within existing discursive and institutional formations to change them, rather than simply to attempt to end them. By taking hold of writing itself, whether

as novel, history, testimonio, political discourse and political structures, interpolating educational discourse and institutions, transforming conceptions of place, even economics, the post-colonial subject unleashes a rapidly circulating transcultural energy. Ultimately a poetics and politics of transformation effects a transformation of the disciplinary field. It is this transformative energy of post-colonial textuality, the appropriations and reconstructions of writers rather than the actions of academics which are transforming cultural discourse; and the cultural location of this textuality is changing the disciplinary field of English.

The power of transformation can be seen in the engagement with language, with literary writing and the whole range of imperial cultural media. Indeed some of the most widespread and influential examples of post-colonial transformation can be seen in the effects upon the English language. But the discipline of English itself is useful as a model of cultural engagement because it shows how a relevant oppositionality is bound to a strategy of transformation. One can either accept the orthodoxy of English literature with its huge edifice of disciplinary and cultural assumptions, as is often still the case in post-colonial societies; one can reject it and leave altogether or one can interpolate a local view of cultural textuality. This does not mean just adding some different courses and different texts to the curriculum, or even changing the name of the discipline, but engaging the underlying assumptions, the ideology and the status of English as a moral technology. In a sense, canonicity and the immensely successful operation of imperial power through English literature has accelerated this process by consistently excluding post-colonial writing until the rearguard action of the Booker Prize. But it has been the processes of textual mimicry and the hybridization of writing rather than rejection which has transformed English.

An example of this was the successful advocacy by James Ngugi, Taban Lo Liyong and Henry Owuor Anyumba in 1968 of the abolition of the English department in the University of Nairobi which was

replaced with a Department of African Languages and Literature.[30] This was a key moment in the transformation, not only of the institutional structure of the discipline but of the nature and function of literature itself: an abrogation of the canonical notion of literary excellence buttressing the ideology of English and its replacement with a view of creative writing as a form of cultural textuality, a strand within a heterogeneous network of cultural practices. It was an act which became repeated in post-colonial societies throughout the world. As an act of resistance it was classically ambivalent, relying on a reconceptualizing of the purposes and activities of existing structures, on mimicking established institutional functions.

Ngugi's own major gesture of resistance -- refusing to write in English in favour of his Gikuyu mother tongue -- although performed as an unequivocal act of rejection, still appropriated the novel form which is alien to Gikuyu culture, still interpolated its message into world publishing by means of translations. Such gestures have been important ways of transforming the field of literary study, and whatever the rhetoric surrounding them they are never simply oppositional but profoundly transformative. The transformations of post-colonial literary study, therefore, have not been limited to the body of writing made available for study but in the ways in which they are read, the ways in which such writings are located in the network of cultural practices which constitutes the cultural text.

What then of the future? If we face the fact of the invention of English as the prestigious civilising mode of cultural study, and add to that the further recognition that most of the imaginative writing in 'English' in the world occurs outside England, then we are faced with the exciting prospect of this writing being a useful access to the broad text of post-colonial cultures. My own vision for cultural studies into the next century is that it reopens the door that clanged shut on literature in the fifties. Culture includes *all* cultural practices and products, and the assessment of the processes of their production,

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[30] Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972)

consumption, the process of their representation and exchange, and the interrelationship of all these. But most significantly, post-colonial writing, because it is conceived in a dynamic of political and cultural engagement at both the discursive and institutional level, is peculiarly placed to initiate cultural transformation, because political and social change only occur because they occur in the minds of those who imagine a different kind of world.

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REFLECTIONS UPON THEATRE-FOR-DEVELOPMENT: THE FACILITATOR

Dan Baron Cohen

I'm sure that's him. Sitting at the end of the row. Can't be. He looks too ordinary. Too small. Too isolated. But that's definitely the famous salt and pepper mane. Constantly caressing. Observing. Reflecting. Don't want to stare. Feels almost adolescent! I wonder what's delaying us? Everyone must be here. The place's packed. Everyone looks animated – flushed with anticipation. He seems almost detached. What's he thinking? He wont be intimidated by this vast auditorium. He always makes the largest gathering seem intimate. Accessible. His own. Ours. And though he'd scold me for feeling this, secretly I'm excited. I've not seen him for what? It must be three years. In that time he's fought and accidentally won an election! Published the rainbow of desire and developed the new legislative theatre. I'd never admit it openly but – well just the opportunity to hear him speak – in person – that's what convinced me to come. Of course, the rest of it's interesting, but him. I'm sure it's the same for everyone. To be in his presence. It's like bearing witness. Being present at a momentous event. The fascination of living myth. I wish I'd secured a place in his workshop – I signed up as early as I could. I've heard it was always closed to the organizers and their friends. Fair enough I suppose. They've done all this work. Brought him here. But for $37000! And a five-star hotel! A far cry from the life of the oppressed! From working underground. Being jailed and forced into exile. But then he's suffered. Needs the cash for his company. Feels no qualms about fleecing the rich to feed the poor. And anyway, it' ll be worth it. You overlook the contradictions when you're meeting the messiah. Hearing the new parables as they form. Their gesture and geste! The printed text simply doesn't compare.

It was extraordinary hearing him speak for the first time. The wooden guns and the end of agitprop. The fat woman and the evolution of forum. The death of the televocal-actor-protagonist and the birth of the spect-actor. His storytelling was compelling! So passionate and seductive! Well he's a latin! An orator! A spectacular performer! Laughing. Weaving stories and ideas. Almost dancing – no, conducting! And he probably needs the peace and quiet of a hotel to write and keep in touch with the world. People like him never stop. Hardly sleep. Too creative. And too painfully aware of their own significance and mortality. But I'd still rather he mingled. Breakfasted with us. Sat in workshops just like he's sitting there now. Listening to the new voices. Finding out about other innovations and studying how they were inspired. That's what I'd do. That's what I do. But then I'm not him. And – I was right! It is him! They're taking him up to the stage now. Greeting people as he goes. A kiss. A hug. The long reunion embrace. Old friends. Workshop participants. He seems to know everyone! Old and young. He's almost old and young himself! That mane he keeps tossing. Running his hands through. His baggy suit and craggy smile. Even from back here you can see the twinkle in his eyes! He so instinctively takes the joker's position. The figurenposition loved by devils and machiavels! Pointing at the mic center-stage and then a sweeping gesture towards the audience. Is there something wrong with the technology or is he looking to subvert it? Locate it in the joker's corner? A wave. This time at the center of the hall. Can he really know so many people?

I'd feel shy approaching him. Here. If I knew him to speak to. Too public. Almost ostentatious. As though you were fawning. Or flaunting a privileged intimacy. Another wave! At the back! Surely he cant see that far! Is this how he domesticates such vast spaces? A technique to transform huge auditoria into studios and sitting rooms? Interesting how space works. Whatever. They seem ready now anyway. Struck some agreement with the tape-recorder. The mic's still in the center but at the edge of the stage. The grey suit's obviously going to introduce him. He just looks so relaxed. Almost cheeky. Like his election cartoon. The enfant terrible standing in the corner. Waiting to

be forgiven. No, celebrated. I hope they don't do anything gauche – like make him an honorary fellow. Here we go. The raised hand. The hush. Yes. Yes. Extraordinary. Seminal. Global. Priviledge. Yes. We know. We paid. Why must they do this? These conventions only – just hand over the mic! He looks so removed. So focused. Is he embarrassed? And ... and at last! The old smile. Yes, We can hear you. The hall. The mic. We understand. From Brazil. The 3rd world and 1st world nation. Heard that one in 92. Relaxed laughter. Must be people here who've never – he cant be serious! How it all began? Just in case we've never – well, alright. But keep it short. We've only an hour. No denying it. He is good. Charming as always! Poetic and philosophical and – so mischievous! So profound and yet so accessible. So fluent and yet so spontaneous. This is – Intolerable! People are snorting with pleasure and clapping as though they've never heard any of these stories before! Or read them! The miners' lamps and the death of theatre. Knowing laughter and appreciative applause. What about the brutalizing necessity of having to die underground everyday, just to live? Now the wooden guns and the end of agitprop. Delight and yes, grateful applause! Do you know the violence of poverty! Or the tragic necessity of armed struggle! Why is no-one whispering? Why is no-one restless? Why is no-one crying stop! Stop sensationalizing misfortune! Stop trivializing the epic! Stop appropriating the narratives of the oppressed into your own grand narrative! And besides! We all know your theatre-biography! We've heard all this before! Your ideas straddle the world! Your games are played in classrooms and communities across the globe! We've come to hear about the new methods. The new difficulties. The challenge of theatre-in-power! If you've nothing new to share, move aside! Still more laughter! More applause! Am I the only person ready to explode? This woman in India. That worker in Brazil. You've become that televocal actor — magnified by the combined gaze and permission of international delegates! This audience is infatuated! This is no oppressed delegating its power of action to the stage! This is a celebration of the politically astute and cosmopolitan discourse of post-modern authority! The reluctant candidate? The accidental leader? The soliloquy of power that cannot admit it accuses itself to rationalize rather than transform the

world! You've become the charismatic and iconic performance of salaried conscience! The act of transubstantiation that turns conflict and inner contradiction into public confession and rainbows of desire! Cry stop? Interrupt the high priest of intervention? The bread doesn't accuse the wine of deception!

Of course they wont cry stop!

To intervene would mean having to question our relationship to the child prostitutes on smokey mountain. Not just weeping for them. Having to question our relationship to those who lie drunk in the hidden ghettoes of our cities. Not just dance to their drums in the foyers of our consciences and malls. Surely there are others here who – but I can shout stop! I can intervene! I can ask: why didn't you begin by exposing and sharing the mic rather than by apologising for and monopolizing its power? Why didn't you subvert the patriarchitecture of this hall rather than humanizing and indulging its authority? If you're going to collude in your own commodification, step aside. There are important new questions to be faced. Better make notes. There will be others thinking the same. They'll offer support if it becomes overwhelming. Performance. Charisma. Commodity. Authority. Monologue. So much to say! Will I – and now the story of the fat woman! And the birth of forum theatre! The same inflection! The same construction! The same punchlines! Not even a revaluation in the context of new workshop experiences or insights! And we collude in his commodification through our silence! That's what I'll say. Simply that. I must speak out! The audience must take responsibility for the action on the stage! But oh how this context forbids it! Do I dare speak out? Now he's asking the fat woman to her strategy, dramatizing her size and her frustration. Are we laughing at his charming helplessness – or at his caricature of her rage? No-one else seems agitated? What if I'm the only voice of dissent? What if I'm mistaken? I might be completely misinterpreting his intentions. Misjudging the situation and the audience's appreciation. Perhaps I should just quietly exit-

Madam, I beg you! You are obviously angry! We are obviously misunderstanding you! Please do not just walk away! If we cannot

present a solution to your problem, come and demonstrate your proposal on the stage! This is your forum! And she turns! And she approaches! And I am trembling at this eeeeenormous woman shaking and trembling with anger!

Again! That appreciative laughter! Whether it's performance or his exaggerated fear, our laughter is trivializing the depth of her passion and rage! I must cry out! Why aren't we talking about the anecdote's opposition between your rational innocence and her lumpen realism? It's so patronizing! So offensive! I've never noticed it before! And now, once again, she looks murderous! And again, roaring laughter! It's smothering a critical contradiction within your story! That this oppressed woman uses violence – not speech – to resolve her problem! A violent action which for her is rational, realistic and articulate! But a solution which your forum theatre excludes as irrational and inarticulate! Not magical but unacceptable. Says who? This must be said! Who's determining what's an acceptable or unacceptable solution? Who legitimises what's moral or rational? And can an outsider ever be qualified to judge! Dare I say all this? To him! Yes! We are protagonists! Haven't we been rehearsing for this very moment for years! I don't need support! I don't need permission! Just interrupt! Speak for all those who are thinking the same but who've been paralysed by his charisma and authority!

Shout 'stop'!

Stop now and tell us about the rainbow of desire. Is there a therapeutic intervention which deals with the difficulties of sustained developmental projects, not just the suicidal void of the guilt-ridden first world? Or legislative theatre. Or even your most recent workshop difficulties. We all know they exist! We've all experienced them! Enough of this triumphalist history and celebration of your own charming naivete! Question the ethics of invisible theatre! The ethics of provisional intervention, inadequately supported! Too confrontational! It is obscene! Now she's ... Speak now! My heart's beating so fast I can hardly breathe! Surely the people around me can hear it pounding

away! But we're losing valuable time – no worse! I'm colluding in the most insidious and deplorable process of disempowerment and appropriation! Say that too! Say that this is why we must all continuously keep intervening! Say how we're always vulnerable to the allure of power – I'm going to pass out!

Mention the allure of the affirming parent. The status of the chosen. The caressing promise, the erotic idealism and the loving gaze of the heroic liberator. The very intoxication of power itself! Feeling faint. Now she's beating her husband. Laughter all round! Resounding applause! Speak out now no matter how dry your throat! Raise your hand! It doesn't matter if you cannot still its tremor! In this vast auditorium, a trembling hand accompanied even by a decisive squawk will speak volumes! You can and must interrupt god! Take long deep breaths. Will I be accused of deposing the king to appoint myself? Condemned as exhibitionist? Mocked and humiliated into apologetic silence? How will he react? Has he not suffered? Does he not deserve the affirmation? The affection? The applause? He's done time. Been forced into exile. Dedicated his life to the project of liberation. Is that not all the more reason? Perhaps I should find a more appropriate space. More dialogic. More personal. Questions at the end. The debate tomorrow. Much more. Wont be vulnerable to misunderstanding. Time to reflect and prepare. Wont cause conflict or discomfort – coward! Sustaining not exposing authority! If he's authentic and still sincere – he'll approve the intervention! Acknowledge its integrity! Turn it into an anecdote. Another $37000 anecdote! Of liberation! Enough! I will speak! I must! Raise – what? What's that? Run out of time. Return to legislative theatre tomorrow. View some forum theatre in the foyer outside. And –

Sustained applause! Thunderous applause! Some are cheering! And now they're all standing. Damn! Damn damn damn! Missed the moment! Lost the opportunity for an epic intervention! Of magnified significance! In the forum of the powerful! It would've ricochetted around the world. Would've stimulated debate and even the emergence of a more radical – wait. It might be better anonymous. Small. Ordinary. More intimately shared. Even whispered.

Is anyone else sitting?

Reflections Upon Theatre-For-Development: The Facilitated

Alright everyone. Quieten down. Sit up straight. Now today we're going to begin a new project called theatre of the oppressed. We're going to just understand what that means this morning, and then over the next six weeks we're going to prepare a piece of forum theatre – theatre where the audience plays an active role – are you listening over there? Where the audience plays an active role in shaping the outcome of the play. Now before I explain or we find out what theatre of the oppressed and forum theatre are like, I'd like to introduce you to our visitor Dan.

Thirty faces turned towards me, some only now aware that a stranger was sitting in their midst. I smiled and gave a silent thumbs-up. The bolder and more playful returned my gesture and welcomed me by name. A matronly, middle-aged woman looked across indifferently from her corner and returned to the notebook in her lap. The assessor, I thought, as I wheeled my gaze around a circle of what appeared to contain every race in the world, back to where the teacher was sitting.

I know very little about Dan other than he is a community theatre writer and director who has worked in Northern Ireland and now lives in Wales. When we met this morning, he told me he'd like to see how we're using drama in our schools here in Queensland. You're the third group he'll meet, and the last. Is that alright?

A brazen thumbs up and an impulsive Irish greeting from a young fella somewhere to the right brought laughter all round. I grinned my appreciation, wondering how many of these young Australians knew of their Gaelic and Celtic origins, and how many of these could read the dissident living histories inscribed in their features and names. I recalled the two earlier classes and made a mental note. Only an archeological theatre, not a theatre of guilt would guarantee reconciliation and change. The awkward silence which greets monologue brought my attention back to the studio.

A theatre that changes our situation through dialogue and rehearsal of different choices. I'll be the joker figure. Now for this to be effective and authentic, you need to speak about your own experience, and since we all share an experience of school, we'll focus today on your experience of this school. The one rule is that you can say anything as long as you don't mention any teachers' names, and you can't swear of course. Is that clear?

Scattered furtive conversations.

Listen up! Only one of us can speak at any time. Now we can just sit here in silence if you're going to talk among yourselves.

Sullen silence.

Right. What does the word oppression mean to you?

A few motivated hands.

Racism.

Good. Anyone else?

Sexism and all that kinda stuff.

Good. And?

Renewed personal conversations and the stiffening of limbs.

Hold on! Now listen! All of you!

Silence.

I'm not going to say this again. I want complete silence when someone's talking! It's discourteous not to listen when someone's speaking. Now sit up. Sit up straight now!

Straight backs and crossed legs,

Any other definitions of oppression?

Silence.

Emma?

Not being able to go out –

Good. Joanne?

Not being able to do what you want –

Yes, Damian?

Having to wear school uniform –

Fine. Carlos?

Not being able to say what you want –

Censorship. Good. What about abuses of power here in the school?

Averted eyes. Indifferent bodies.

Do you experience injustice here in school?

Reserved hubbub of agreement and flicker of engagement.

What kind of injustice?

Well you know Mr –

I said no names. I have to work with these people. And besides they're not here to defend themselves. Go on.

Seeping indifference. Bodies sprawled out. A favourite.

Well some teachers patronize us –

How do you –

Or humiliate us publicly –

Are you two listening? Right that's it! Silence!

Silence. The teacher looks at his watch.

Can no one give me a more profound example of injustice, here in –

A sudden knocking. All heads turn towards the door. A ripple of excitement. The assessor leans forward. A knock again. The teacher looks knowingly as his circle and stands. He walks past a black box which stands flush against the wall to the corner and opens the door. No-one. He turns to his class dramatically as if to underline something, shuts the door and walks to the black box. He tilts back one of its halves, a four by four by one wooden rostrum, and peers inside. He closes the box and shrugs blankly to the class. As he returns to his place in the ragged circle, he asks firmly –

Now. A more profound example of injustice –

Another knock and an almost audible quickening of breath around the circle.

An example of oppression which exposes –

Sir! Sean knows! Ask him!

I look around confused at the now vital bodies.

There sir! In the box! Look –

An arc of fingers pointing at a white hand sticking out of the black box, pointing towards the ceiling. The teacher continued.

Which exposes the ways in which oppression remains intact, invisible, even unspeakable.

The white hand disappeared and the pointing fingers slowly wilted back into a mass of disappointment.

Let's go back to what you were saying about humiliation, Emma.

Silence. I couldn't take my eyes off the rostra.

Emma?

Just you know, how, how we go all quiet and, and everyone, I don't know sir, how ...

Tension. The black box slowly opened and a tall pupil in shorts appeared, answering as he gangled out and approached the class.

How we internalize authority through fear of rejection and isolation and collude in the censorship of ourselves and others.

Sean sat cross-legged in the space opened up for him in the circle by evident admirers. The teacher scanned the circle.

Have you decided to join us Sean?

A broad smile, at once shy, intelligent and defiant.

What were you saying Emma-

The most profound oppression is how we oppress ourselves sir –

I didn't see your hand up Sean.

Silence.

The joker doesn't have to raise his hand.

Intuitive instant understanding. The teacher looked at me. At the assessor scribbling in her notebook. And then directly at Sean.

If you want to be a part of our circle Sean, you have to agree to our rules –

Sean winked at his class-mates and raised his hand.

Yes, Sean.

By not seeing how we collude.

Silence, Sean raised his hand again.

Yes, Sean.

Anyway, if it's so safe, why aren't they testing their bombs in Paris?

Complete focus.

Sean-

And suddenly, the bell and a blur of jackets and bags. I watched Sean return to the black box as though he were looking for something. The teacher signed the assessor's notebook and gestured to me to join him. He was exhausted.

Let's grab a coffee and you can give me your reflection on the workshop.

3

A VOICE FROM THE DIASPORA: *ILHEU DE CONTENDA*

By Maria Rosaria Turano[#]

While walking along the streets of the capital of the Cape Verde archipelago with a Capeverdean friend of mine, she happened to notice the name of a new shop – "Pelourinho" (a stone stele widely known as a place where slaves were punished). She explained that in Cape Verde the name "Pelourinho" means also market, meeting place. Then she remarked that unluckily, in the archipelago, historical names are no longer in use: *our past is dead; there is no memory of the past.*

By a "strange" coincidence, just a few minutes earlier, I was lingering on a passage of the novel, *Ilheu de Contenda*, in which a character exclaims: "Memory is life."

It was not only a happy coincidence between orality and writing but mainly an appeal to memory.

* * * * * * * * * *

Before analyzing the text, I would like to point out some methodological references which led me to study the literary text – a novel in this case – as a relevant socio-anthropological document.

Literary anthropology in the last decades has rightly entered the anthropological discipline as a field of analysis in most cases seen as oral literature. Literary anthropology applied to written literature has emerged only lately.

A novel of memory by Henrique Teixeira de Sousa, a Lisbon-based Cape Verdean writer. Translation from the Italian by Giovanna Gallo

The act of writing a literary work may be regarded, in some instances, as a vehicle for the memory of the society and thus as an immediate reference to the socio-cultural background of those groups which are the objects of memory: the literary work seen as a historic-anthropological memory referring not only to those writings which are by tradition relevant such as memoirs, diaries, biographies, but even to great epic cycles, narratives of family histories, social novels.

Such an anthropological perspective can be applied not only to those narratives which clearly follow "realistic" aesthetic canons, but even to narratives which are not explicitly related to such aesthetics. The proustian "recherche" – a landmark in the narrative of memory – becomes a terrifying fresco of that type of society where the author himself belongs, a document showing relationships, mentalities, world-views, as well as aspects of material life.

We may say that, from a literary perspective, the literary creation is analyzed at its point of arrival – that is, as an individual creative work; but it can also be reconsidered from its starting point – that is, the moment when the author grasps the existing common experience thus becoming an anthropological testimony of the group. The literary work is employed by Teixeira de Sousa as a filter to analyze how the memory virtually reconstructs and reshapes the existing culture thus refounding it by means of a literary artifact. The reminiscence is expressed through the written narrative: the memory is something personal, though speaking for a common memory. The individual stories are interwoven with the stories of the various groups and, if the social memory is transmitted through the stories of life, then the individual narrative becomes a way of conveying the common memory which is one of the basic elements of identity and can be seen as the historic awareness of the culture. Teixeira de Sousa's narrative expresses itself in the form of *the story of life*: the singular person used by the narrator becomes the plural voice of the community.

The story of life, as an investigative method, used by sociologists and resumed by anthropologists, becomes a crucial moment for the knowledge of the group, and a hermeneutic moment for ethno-biography. In addition to this social insight seen in its constructive,

destructive and representative mechanisms, Teixeira de Sousa accurately describes in a quasi-scientific manner (the author is a physician) social relations, events, passions, customs, traditions, mentalities, giving also a colourful picture of the material culture (we remember with pleasure his gastronomic descriptions). Thus Teixeira de Sousa, the story-teller, becomes a real informer/ethnographer of a world, the world of the white agrarian class: through reminiscences the memory plays the role of a "builder" either of identity or of literature.

Ilheu de Contenda is the first novel of a trilogy on the social structure of the island of Fogo published in 1978. It is set in the Cape Verde archipelago in the 1950s. It was followed by *Xaguate* in 1988, dealing with the island in the decade of the 1980s; while the third, *Na Ribeira de Deus*, which appeared in 1992, is set in a much earlier period, the 1920s. Even though the first, *Ilheu de Contenda*, came out in 1978, three years after the writer settled in Lisbon, the novel was, according to Teixeira de Sousa, entirely written in Cape Verde.

The novel begins with a highly symbolic event: the death of Dona Michaela Medina da Veiga, generally known as Nha Caela, mistress of the *sobrado* (mansion house) and owner of a huge estate, the last Medina da Veiga to possess the whole family assets.

The ritual demise takes place just in "Ilheu de Contenda", the big *sobrado* of the estate (a big house of two storeys and ten rooms in addition to the corridors and the *dependences* in the courtyard) which is the symbol of the ruling class. In the final part of the novel we come to know of the sale (to an emigrant on his home-coming from America) and of the real dismantlement of the centuries-old furnishings of the city *sobrado*: the decline of the old agrarian class and the rise of a new mulatto merchant class.

The story unravels between Nha Caela's death, set in the country *sobrado*, "Ilheu de Contenda", and her son Eusebio's retirement in it; the story of the de-segregation of a big family, emblem of a whole class. At the beginning the novel is set in the big country house: there Eusebio defines and lets us know the family situation (all its members are out of the country), their assets (due to be mortgaged), their financial situation (in the red) and his resolution to devote himself

completely to agriculture. Such a decision takes its shape in the evolution of the novel only to be accomplished at the end when the action is set once more in the *sobrado* of "Ilheu de Contenda", exactly where the novel begins. The end of an era, the beginning of another. Eusebio's homecoming takes the value of both a defeat and a retreat but, at the same time, it also means a change in his values:

> The carpenters hammered and hammered and their pitiless beats reverberated downstairs in the studio, enveloping Eusebio's heart with anguish [...] To Eusebio this was one of the different ways of dying while staying alive. From this moment on, all the family heritage would be fragmented and submitted to the turmoil of others' ambitions. Today a part of the property "Feijoal" would be lost; so would tomorrow "Achada Canto; and the day after tomorrow "Lagariça". Little by little all the estate would go into strangers' hands, for all the heirs lived outside the country [...] Once retired to "Ilheu de Contenda", he would try not to become aware of the foreseen dissipation [...] The carpenters gave him no respite [...] Those ancient objects must be worth a lot if they deserved so much care to be boxed. Most of them came from far-off places, from their ancestors [...] One day he overheard his brother talking with his daughter about the antiques they were collecting and packing in the house. They were charmed even by an old basin. The dinner-set then was almost enlightening. Suddenly the nephew could not restrain from shouting that the object must be worth a fortune. It was in this way that Eusebio came to know the value of all those objects [...] although the hammering continued. Luckily "Ilheu de Contenda" was waiting for him, the ancient rampart of his father's family, where he would never be deprived of his peace and security. (pp.202-4)

Between the two main events, at the beginning and at the end of the novel, stories of the various groups unravel while individual stories are woven. The actions which take place in the novel are not really essential to the main plot as the story-line is very simple: death of the

old landowner, division of the property and retreat of the main character into the past. Whereas, these actions constitute a significant contribution to the enrichment of the great socio-anthropological fresco which *Ilheu de Contenda* represents. Nha Caela's funeral, for example, is told in detail; the narrative action becomes a means to describe a funeral rite. Between the two poles, the key-event is represented by the arrival from Lisbon of Eusebio's brother, Alberto, with his daughter. Then we witness the division of the family assets, which symbolizes the break with the past, while new visions arise, expressed most of all by Alberto's daughter who will be the major mover of the change of perspectives, horizons, values and behaviours in Chiquinho, Eusebio's illegitimate son. Chiquinho embodies the continuity in change, at least from a literary point of view.

The choice of the name is not fortuitous. The name Chiquinho takes the value of a literary link (it is evident the reference to the *Chiquinho* by B. Lopes) a Capeverdean literary peculiarity, I would say, not only literary but even a socio-anthropological peculiarity. Chiquinho, in fact, having met his cousin from Lisbon, attains his autonomy from his father and chooses the way of migration to America:

> When he finished reading the book, he went back to linger on the words written on the first page: "To Chico, remembering you, from your cousin Esmeralda" [...] Curiously, the novel was also called *Chiquinho* [...] That part of the book was quite sad, it made him remember the famine which struck the island of Fogo in '41. Chiquinho was only a child at the time, but he had a perfect memory of people suffering from famine [...] The character of the novel, Chiquinho, in despair for such a terrible calamity, left for America [...] Also our Chiquinho, in the flesh, would do the same. Perhaps he would follow the same route. Whatever might happen, the boy left behind the grinding poverty of São Nicolau, and gained that rich land, where even a simple worker... could afford a car. While in Cape Verde life was ever insecure, one day the draught, one day the black beast,

> another day the grasshoppers, the west wind, or anything else that came to destroy the hopes of a year's work. Small islands with nothing else but a treacherous agriculture and women giving birth to children every day, and population increasing with no certain resource. For this reason workers were taken to São Tomé. For this reason many people left for America, Guinea, Angola, Dakar [...] Chiquinho had planned an exciting adventure; north-north-east would be the route, the same route that had brought the character of the novel to America. (p.285)

Another death marks in a symbolical way the end of an era characterized by migrations of seamen and whalers towards the coasts of Argentina and America in general. It is the death of another character who lives in a world of past memories, Nha Mariguinha, a Chilean woman who, at the age of fourteen, had married a Capeverdean ship's captain, and had become a widow at the age of twenty as a result of a shipwreck. This is one of the most lyrical passages of the novel, a passage full of *saudade*, the typical Capeverdean feeling of nostalgia:

> A night which would never give way to dawn. A night troubled by a thunderstorm which was throwing everything about, out there. And Nha Mariquinha's body laying on the bed, laying peacefully like a boat just anchored in a harbour. The slopes of the Andes must be covered with snow by now. But they were no longer so in the eyes of the one who remembered them every day. The beaches of Santiago [Chile], the goat-milk boiled with china bark, the bearded captains coming ashore in search of burning brunettes; everything was now gone for ever in the naked quiet of the death lit by two candles flickering discretely. (p.214)

Another character, Filisberto, Eusebio's cousin, represents extreme degradation ("I think it to be the authentic end of a race, stated Ovidio") and this sense of degradation could be extended to a whole social class. Filisberto is disapproved of and almost despised by his own family. He is immoral, with no ideals, ever looking for personal gain (as, for example, when he succeeeds in obtaining cousin Noca's

heritage and later he leaves it in a state of miserable squalor when he realizes that his hopes have gone for ever); with no respect for the other people (but he pays dear for his seduction of the maid-servant); with no gratefulness (owing to his unhidden racism towards negroes and mulattos, he continues to hate the physician who has saved his daughter's life, calling him "Negro otrevido de cabelo cus-cus" and reporting him to the PIDE [Portuguese political police] for crimes he has never committed).

Filisberto, however, is guilty of even worse crimes: he becomes an informer of PIDE and will soon join the recruitment of workers for São Tomé, the migration sadly famous for the highly precarious and dangerous conditions of the trade.

Nha Noca, Nha Caela's cousin, is the character expressing the memory as a static preservation of the past. She is the keeper of the knowledge of the family ties; she is the only person who can find family ancestors and descendants. Nha Noca, shut in her immoderate pride of caste, cannot bear the social changes:

> A thousand times better my wild Fogo of the past than what it is today.[...] Fogo has vanished into nothingness. That's Fogo – pointing towards Anacleto's *sobrado* – That's Fogo now, monkeys pretending to be people"[...] Gerolamo laughed heartly at the old relative's remark, unable to hide his anger against the mulattos, above all the mulattos. Yes, because the other poor people continued to be humble and respectful: they kept their place. Now these mules, neither horses or donkeys, were becoming more and more daring. (p.132)

We could briefly point out that if the island of Fogo presents certain cultural traits and a social organization which differentiate it from the other islands in the archipelago, it is marked by creolization to the same extent as its sister islands. As a matter of fact, a mulatto merchant class can emerge because it is a completely new class (also in an ethnic sense) with creative opportunities of expansion and new forms of power and cultural achievements.

Eusebio is the "museum of memory" either because the narrative action is punctuated with memories, or because the character embodies the sense of preservation, I would say a static "museumization" of one's own identity.

The big tree of the estate (the theme of the tree is recurrent in H. Teixeira de Sousa's novels) which materializes in Eusebio's memory represents the past, with its big trunk and its foliage thriving in "Ilheu de Contenda" where he had spent his childhood.

> Walking along the path he came across the giant tree: the same imposing size of trunk, the same branches he had known as a child. The hoers used to rest there for lunch. There the rebellious slaves were tied and flogged with quince rods. Great-great-grandfather, Alfonso Sanches de Veiga, had flogged a lot of people there. This tree had witnessed the birth of almost all his race, on his father's side, thus becoming a family blazon, a respectable presence.[...] He remembered that once, when they were all children, they would cry for fear of the flood roaring down in the valley in a night of savage rain.[...] Then Tareja started telling a story. (p.81)

Eusebio's memories are often oriented towards women's world, as in the case of his friend, Soila:

> They had known each other since their childhood; so many times they had played together in the shade of Nha Mariquinha's acacia.[...] She must have been two years younger than himself, always so sweet, so wise.[(p.29)

His first sexual experience:

> He adored the smell of rubber trees, expecially when they began to turn yellow. That smell reminded him of his first sexual intercourse. It was under the foliage of a rubber tree that he happened to know his first woman[...] For ever he would associate the presence of rubber trees with his voluptuousness on that far-off afternoon of his youth. (pp.83-84)

Or when he first meets Belinha, his lover:

> She appeared in the studio in a very short dress of Indian fabric showing her legs; always smiling, an open countenance. He was sitting at his desk when the young woman arrived. And he noticed her small size only when he rose from the desk. All of a sudden he felt the desire to raise her from the floor and to hold her tight in his arms. (p.44)

There are two references in the novel to a genre of music of the archipelago, the *morna*: first, as historical reminiscences of a *mornista*, Manuel Corcunda; and then, as a quotation of a renowned *morna* "Hora di bai" (The Hour of Leaving), when, at the end of the novel, every character leaves: so does the physician; so Eusebio's brother, Alberto, with his daughter; and so does Chiquinho. The employment of the *morna* has not only a value of farewell but even a value of synthesis and revival of a whole culture:

Hora di bai
hora di sofrimento
hora di bai ja bo triste
é hora di sentimento

Hora di bai
hora di dor
j'a'm q'rê
pa el ca manchê!
Di cada bez
qui'm ta lembrâ
ma'm q'rê
fica'm morrê!

The hour of leaving
the hour of suffering
the hour of leaving already sad
is the hour of feeling

The hour of leaving
the hour of pain
the desire
of a tomorrow that will never be!
every time
I remember
and desire
I can't but die!

TEXTUAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES

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On the themes dealt with in the novel by Teixeira de Sousa, there are a number of critical essays, such as "A estrutura social de Ilha de Fogo em 1940" in *Claridade*, n°5, September 1947, "Sobrados, lojas e funcos" in *Claridade*, n°8, May 1958, "Cartas de Lisboa. A emigração para S. Tomé" in *Cabo Verde*, A. VII, n°92, 1957.

See also M. VEIGA 's text, *A Sementeiru*, Lisboa, 1994, containing an essay on *A leitura do inteligével em Ilheu de Contenda*, in which I found several analogies with my analysis of the novel.

PART TWO

IRELAND NORTH AND SOUTH

Art in a Territory full of Memory and Nostalgia

4

ON NATIONAL CULTURE: WHITE SKIN, WHITE MASKS?

Declan Kiberd

Frantz Fanon's account of *liberation* in the third phase of decolonisation was anything but detailed in outline, perhaps because it was more a utopian inference than a recollection of lived experience. The dream of creating *ex nihilo* a new species of man or woman, capable in inventing themselves rather than being the effects of others, was too easily assumed to be about to become a reality.

A major reason for this may be found in Fanon's *deracine* status: he grew up in Martinique, thinking himself French and White, only to discover that he was a West Indian to those whom he met after his arrival as a student in Paris. Thereafter, he lost all sense of local particularisms (a phrase he used with contempt in The *Wretched of the Earth* to describe the nationalist phase). According to the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi: ''Fanon's private dream is that, though henceforth hating France and the French, he will never return to *négritude* and the West Indies... never again set foot in Martinique.'' In that, he had much in common with early writers of the Irish Renaissance such as Oscar Wilde: for Wilde was another instance of the colonial intellectual who came to the metropolitan center only to discover that he was Irish, not English, and who evolved there a vision which, lacking local specificity and addressing itself more to an English than an Irish audience, found in the end ''an equal welcome in all countries''.

In both writers' texts, there is a dramatic sense of struggle with inherited form, a sense of the artist submitting to received forms with an over-determination that verges on parody or downright disavowal. Wilde's hilarious mimicry of the well-made play is a little like Fanon's use of Hegel and Sartre. In either case, the writer adopts the protective coloration of a prestigious "European'' mode, and then proceeds to

improvise within it a little space for his own expressive freedom. The same techniques were adopted by Yeats, as he subjected the shakespearean form to the disruptions of the Cuchulain cycle. Equally, the tension so often set up by Yeats between the title of a poem and its following text provides a blatant example of this battle with available modes, a mockery of the expectations accompanying the poem which he announces but then refuses to write in works like "The Second Coming'' or " Easter 1916''.

The rationale for all this was announced by Wilde when he said that one's first duty in life was to adopt a pose, and what the second was nobody had yet found out. By this formula, a writer slipped into an available persona or mode in hopes of learning something new about himself. Such a strategy was similar to the adoption of the apparatus of the colonizer in Fanon's second phase. Central to Fanon's analysis, however, was the assurance that this was all but a transitional playing out of adolescent roles: a moment would come, however delayed, when the masks were set aside to reveal the face beneath.

For many intellectuals, the act of writing, of imagining oneself in somebody else's shoes, became a prelude to revolution. So, by a rather obvious paradox, it became necessary for people to wear a mask as a precondition of finally disclosing a face.

The first mask was that of the *assimilé:* and Wilde's example existed to prove that it need not be abject at all, for the mask could be worn with a mockery that shaded into insolence. If the representatives out in the occupied territories were often the rejects of the imperial culture back home, sent to impersonate those types they had manifestly failed to be, then they were already taken in a state of high anxiety upon arrival. This was one reason why the English, wherever they went, gave the impression of a people forever at play, eternally acting an over-the-top drama called *Mad Dogs and Englishmen.*

A further reason was detected by Fanon as the fundamental contradiction of the colonial mission: any successful attempt to erase the "difference of the natives, either by extermination or assimilation, could only result in the erasure of the category colonizer. The master created the slave, observed Fanon in a sly parody of Hegel, and the

slave in turn defined the master: for the master to abolish the native was to do away with the very grounds of his own being. The ambivalence of feeling which ensued led to the familiar wavering in government policy. The 'natives' couldn't be ruled by out-and-out coercion (for in that case the raw underlying reality of the imperial mission would be clear to all), nor could they be completely assimilated (for then the very grounds of difference would be ceded). The native was expected to ratify the ruler's self by emulating it, but whenever he refused to pander to this narcissistic fantasy, he could be brutalized to such a degree that he would seem far more different in the end.

The historian Richard Ned Lebow has contended that the invention of the stereotyped "Paddy" or "Sambo" allowed for a negotiation of these anxieties, insofar as these figures provided targets for the approved release of aggression. The notion of an idle, lawless, superstitious Paddy, for example, protected an administrator from a knowledge likely to cause stress, that knowledge of the discrepancy between Christian avowal and colonial practice, or, repeatedly in the Irish context, between the official goal of reconciliation and the frequent outbursts of martial law. This stereotype had the merit of allowing a relationship: but, according to Lebow, it left its authors in a perceptual prison which blinded them to the turn which events were taking. Hesitations revealed in the official personality could be exploited by natives astute enough to mimic *either* the ideal Englishman each was supposed to become *or* the hopeless Paddy/Sambo each was held actually to be. Wilde turned in the former performance, as has been shown, and the experience of the younger Senghor, teaching their language to the most able French children, provided another instance: generations of natives did the latter, pretending to be the kind of person their masters believed them to be. In Fanon's famous description of the consciously play-acting "nigger" may be noted a tell-tale excess of energy, a parody of overdetermination which raises similar suspicions. The "extravaganza" mounted by J.M. Synge in celebration of a patricide *In the Playboy of the Western World,* and framed by his reservations about factitious eloquence, seems a rather *literary* instance of the technique: but it may

be found also in the very different world of political detainees under interrogation, as Edward Said reported of a famous exchange between an Israeli policeman and a Palestinian suspect: "the ideological mufflers of the interrogator's mind are so powerful as to shut out any alertness to the Palestinian parody of terrorism: each line he speaks repeats and, by rhetorical overkill, overdoes what his interrogator wants from him".

This type of "answering back", taking on the protective coloration of approved, official forms, could not easily be detected as such, much less punished. Once adopted in a strategic encounter with the occupier, it could take on a momentum of its own among the people, who often developed a tendency to return to one another, with minor alterations, a version of what the interlocutor had already said: for the guardedness of conversation in a colony was legendary. It was a device often deployed in India, as the acute ear of E.M. Forster received it. At the garden-party in *A Passage to India*, even those English ladies who wish to know the land and people better are frustrated by the refusal of the local women to reveal themselves. Instead, the Englishwomen come up against " the echoing walls of their own civility", and this in a book where snakes are seen to adopt the same sort of protective mimicry to secure themselves from human attack. That book's central epiphany is the famou s echo from the Marabat Caves, the symbolic point being, as one Englishman recognizes, that though the original sound of English people at home is always good, the echoing falseness which they induce in themselves and their subject's in a colony is bad. That echo could come in two ways: as the abject deference of the *assmilé,* or in the polar defiance of the nationalist.

The stereotype of the native, "as anxious as it is assertive", has been compared by Homi Bhabha to the sexual fetish. The Fetishist's mastery of the Other, he recalls, is no sooner asserted than it is lost, in a perpetual act of displacement.

The fetishism and the mimicry led to the creation of a native who was almost English but never quite so, what Bhabha jokingly calls "not quite/not white". As well as feeling ratified by this apprentice straining

so visibly to be like themselves, the colonizers felt more often threatened and mocked: for if the impersonation could be so easily and so nonchalantly done, then the fear was that it was only that, an act which concealed no real essence in the colonizer himself. Interestingly, T.E. Lawrence reported that the English tended to regard imitation as parody, where the French preferred to take it as a compliment.

The more like the master the native became, the less willing was the master to accept the presentation: and that unease, disabling enough for an administrator out in Africa or India, took on an extra terror in the neighbouring island of Ireland. In 1860, the novelist Charles Kingsley went through just such a process of identification and disavowal in post-Famine Connaught, a pathology complicated by the fears so recently unleashed by Darwinian evolutionists, and he wrote a letter home to his wife:

> ...But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.

Even more remarkable was the returned Indian civil servant who met Horace Plunkett in the west of Ireland in 1891 and confided in him that he could not bear to treat the Irish "like white men".

What unnerved such visitors was the moment when "the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed". In that instant, the movements of disavowal which attended the master's performance were repeated and even magnified in those of the subject, for mimicry " emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (disavowal by the master of the ideal type he is supposed to represent, by the colonized of that which is represented). It was "a sign of the inappropriate". The onlooker had to guess at the native's hidden intention, much as English administrators tried to figure out the

meaning of the ever-changing Irish Question, or as English audiences struggled to decipher the latent meanings in experimental Irish texts. It was but a short step from the recognition that the observed could turn observer to an awareness that the natives might have an alternative set of criteria, by which their masters could be judged vain, foolish even weak.

In short, there was locked into the colonial culture " an insurgent counter-appeal'', which every so often had caused members of the garrison to go over to the other side, or at least to remember that they also had a country. Each of these defectors – and they began as far back as Jonathan Swift – discovered at some point that they were the effects of a flawed colonial mimesis, "in which to be Anglicised was *emphatically* not to be English''. Hence, Douglas Hyde's famous appeal to the Irish that, since they would not or could not be English, they should not be anglicized, but instead throw in their lot with the native culture. Otherwise, they would be mere mimic-men, pitiful illustrations of that famous minute of Lord Macaulay which recommended that a class of interpreters be placed between the English and the millions whom they governed, native in blood but "English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect''.

Homi Bhabha's investigation of such mimicry is subtle and deft, but he carried it even farther to argue that the truly unnerving element of this encounter was its revelation to the occupier that he had no self, no identity at all, and that the mimicry engaged in by colonizer and colonized alike was structured over a painful absence. In other words, there was *only ever* a mask, which existed to conceal the absence of a face. To the native, the suggestion that the center of meaning was always elsewhere seemed normal, but to the master this was frightening stuff: the knowledge, reported by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, that there might be no authority whatever behind his performance. Such a model has its attractions and indeed a certain beauty at the level of theory, but what it describes at this point is not the way that history happens. There is in the world an English personality-type and a countervailing native identity which, even though it cannot always define itself for interviewers can nonetheless feel its own oppression.

Its tragedy is to suffer, while not retaining any assured sense of the self that is suffering. Nor could Bhabha's model account for such phenomena as Ashis Nandy's revolutionary feedback (already discussed), or for the refusal of the rebels described by Fanon and said to be broken under interrogation. Some part of the self in all these models remains untouched by oppression: and this may even be true of Bhabha's own protagonist – for what self opts to perform the mimicry which he so devastatingly describes? To suggest the workings of an agency without a subject, as he does, is to impute to the colonial encounter a randomness which anyone still caught up in it will find hard to credit.

In Ireland, mimicry eventuated in two traditions: a political resemblance called nationalism (which tended to repeat old models) and a literary movement dubbed Irish Modernism (which tended to subvert them). In either case, such mimicry returned the initiative to the colonial subject: and this allowed writers to disrupt the master-narratives of the neighbouring island with their own secret knowledge. It was at this juncture that many began to contemplate what Fanon, decades later, would describe as the liberationist phase.

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5

JOHN TOLAND: IRISH SKIN, BRITISH MASK?[1]

Philip McGuinness

At the height of its power in the late 19th century, the British Empire was the largest empire ever known to humanity. This was a remarkable feat for a small island off North-West Europe which only became a political entity in 1707. While Englishness may well be one of the oldest national identities, it is clear that the British identity is relatively new. Anyone interested in post-colonialism must surely also find it interesting to look at the roots of colonial Britain: voicing the temporal margins, if you like.

An examination of the life and times of Jon Toland (1670-1722) offers us an interesting pathway into the construction of the British imperial identity. He was deeply involved in securing the Protestant nature of the British Crown in 1701. Admirers of Joyce's short story, 'The Dead', in his *Dubliners* will be well aware of how insulting the phrase 'West Briton' can be in Ireland (or 'West Brit' today), yet we may well have Toland to thank for the first description of Ireland as 'West Britain'. As I will discuss, Toland is deeply implicated in both the secular radical and the sectarian imperial histories of both Britain and Ireland.

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[1] This essay is a condensed version of my essay, "Looking for a Mainland: John Toland and Irish Politics", in Harrison, Alan; Kearney, Richard & McGuinness, Philip, provisionally entitled *A New Edition of John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious* [in press]. Detailed footnotes can be found there. 'Protestant' refers to members of the Church of Ireland or Church of England [Anglicans and Episcopalians]. 'Protestant' is a more all-encompassing term and refers to Christians who support[ed] the Reformation: Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodist, etc. I use 'Presbyterian' and 'Dissenter' interchangeably.

John Toland was probably born near Clonmany in Inishowen, Co. Donegal into a Catholic Irish-speaking environment. Mystery shrouds his early background, but he may well have been the bastard son of a priest. As a child Toland courted infamy by arguing about theology with the local priest. He converted to Protestantism at the age of fifteen. He attended Glasgow University and soon discarded any Episcopalian tendencies, becoming a Dissenter or Presbyterian. Toland received his MA from Edinburgh University the day before the battle of the Boyne in 1690. He seems to have returned to Ireland only once afterwards, in 1697, when it is thought he was hoping for preferment in Dublin governmental circles. After the burning of *Christianity Not Mysterious*, his most famous or infamous book, he left Ireland for good. To crown a life of intrigue and Grub Street hackery, he was impoverished in 1720 with the bursting of the South Sea Bubble. John Toland died in 1722 and his body lies in an unmarked pauper's grave in Putney.

Toland was both 'a mick on the make' – to use Roy Foster's memorable phrase – and his own worst enemy. He was a relentless propounder of heterodox religious and political ideas but this radicalism, coupled with an inability to defer to a person's social status, effectively precluded upward mobility. It was Toland who coined the word *pantheist*. John Locke was the first person to use the epithet *freethinker*. He was describing Toland. As Catholic, Protestant, Dissenter and Freethinker, John Toland fits uncomfortably into any narrow pigeon-holing of Irish writers. This literate servant of the rich and powerful in England is in every splinter of Stephen Dedalus' cracked looking-glass.

John Toland's writings were as influential in his day as they are neglected now. He has left us what the Irish poet John Hewitt called 'a now-unfrequented legacy of excellently disputatious prose'. In English history Toland is important as a transmitter of the political ideas of the Commonwealth-Protectorate into the eighteenth-century. Radicalism and Protestantism were compatible in eighteenth-century England but much less so in Penal-Law Ireland. When we examine Toland's life and writings from an Irish perspective we see that he can be viewed as

both Radical and Reactionary; an *either-or* view of his political outlook will **not** suffice.

II

In Ireland, Toland was well-known to progressives in Dublin. Robert Molesworth was an occasional patron of Toland who was also acquainted with William Molyneux.

Dublin's Wood Street Presbyterian congregation was important in introducing English republican and theological ideas to Ireland. This church had actually been set up by Cromwell in the 1640s. Dr. Daniel Williams was an early patron of Toland in London in the 1690s. He had earlier been minister at Wood Street.

There are intriguing connections of varying strength between John Toland and some of the most influential participants in the Ulster Enlightenment. Toland was a student in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Leyden in Holland. These three centres of learning were a sort of theological Ulster Way for many northerners, denied education in Trinity College Dublin because of their religious convictions. One such northerner was Rev. Samuel Haliday. He became minister at Belfast First Presbyterian Church at Rosemary Street in 1720 but refused to sign the West minster Confession of Faith. This refusal to sign led to a split in Irish Presbyterianism between Subscribing and Non-Subscribing adherents, a split which lasts to this day.

Haliday was a friend of the philosopher Francis Hutcheson, educator of many of the Irish Presbyterians who played an obstetrical role in both the American War of Independence and in the United Irishmen. Hutcheson was strongly influenced by James Harrington, endorsing Harrington's ideas in his lectures. Harrington's collected political writings had been edited by Toland in 1700. When Francis Hutcheson writes in his *Inquiry* that:

> 'All strict attachment of party, sects, factions, have but an imperfect species of beauty'

we surely see the influence of Toland.

In 1720 Toland privately published *Pantheisticon* which can be viewed as an attempt by Toland to create a liturgy for a pantheist sect. It is not the sort of book that one would expect respectable citizens and churchgoers to have in their possession, unless that church itself was a radical one. It is surprising, then, to find not only the names of two of Belfast's most respectable inhabitants – Alexander Haliday (son of the above-mentioned Samuel) and William Bruce – inscribed as owners on one copy, but that this same copy of *Pantheisticon* had actually been the property of the above-mentioned Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church.[2] The ownership of such a book speaks volumes for the spirit of tolerance which was found in some Presbyterian churches in late eighteenth-century Ireland.

Samuel Haliday was succeeded at Rosemary Street by Thomas Drennan. Although Wolfe Tone gave the Society of United Irishmen its title, it was William Drennan – son of Thomas – who first proposed such a society. ATQ Stewart has suggested that Freemasonry played an extremely important part in enabling Catholic and Protestant to come together in the United Irishmen. A Masonic lodge in Penal Law Ireland was practically the only institution where Catholic and Protestant could meet as equals. Indeed, Drennan's preferred name for the United Irishmen – 'The Irish Brotherhood' – is redolent of Masonic language. Margaret Jacob has argued that John Toland is a key figure in the spread of radical Masonry in the early eighteenth century. It is possible that Toland's *Panteheisticon* was the tract for some sort of Masonic ritual. Perhaps it is not so surprising to find *Pantheisticon* in the possession of some of Belfast's leading citizens.

The Age of Reason found many northern Dissenters ready to unite under the common name of Irishman with their Catholic and Protestant fellow-islanders. John Toland is a vital link in the transmission and development of ideas which contributed to the Enlightenment all over Europe. He was admired by Voltaire, and debated with Leibniz and

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[2] This copy of *Pantheisticon* is now in the library at Queen's University, Belfast.

Locke. It is fitting that David Berman has called Toland 'the father of Irish philosophy'.

A hallmark of Toland's writing is his sympathy for minorities. He mixed freely with French Huguenot refugees in London and Holland. In his *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews* (written in 1714), Toland argued – as did Harrington in his *Oceana* – that encouraging Jewish immigration into Britain and Ireland would harness their entrepreneurial skills for the good of both islands. What the above two communities shared was a freedom from priestly tyranny and a consequent intimacy with rational progress, which Toland identified with Protestantism. In consequence, his political preoccupations centre on how to preserve Protestant power in England.

Compared to the position of the above minorities in England, the situation in Ireland was fundamentally different. The (Protestant) minority there held the reins of power over the impoverished Catholic and Presbyterian majority. Toland saw this minority as being the only hope for progress in Ireland. In a 1720 pamphlet called *Reasons why An Act for better securing the Dependency of Ireland upon the Crown of Great Britain should not pass into a law,* Toland opposed any attempt to dilute the power of the Irish Parliament, stating that, should such dilution occur:

> ... Ireland wou'd thus become ... the most deplorable scene of wrongs in the Universe.

In opposing the shackling of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, Toland is anticipating the stances taken by both the Orange Order towards the Act of Union in 1801 and the Unionist Party towards the abolition of Stormont in 1972. Few – if any – commentators have discussed the significance of *Reasons* in Toland's political thought. This oversight has led to erroneous interpretations of Toland's views on Ireland. For example, Caroline Robbins, in *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth man,* says that Toland supported the right of the Irish to make laws of their own devising, but she doesn't point out that Toland's Irish body politic was purely Protestant.

The following quotation from *Reasons* firmly places Toland's sentiments with the post-1690 elite in Ireland:

> Nothing shou'd be attempted that might bring about the possibility of a Union of civil interests between the Protestants and Papists of Ireland, whose antipathies and animosities all sound Politicians will ever labor to keep alive.

It seems that Toland was only too happy to see the fomenting of sectarian hatred in Ireland as a strategy for maintaining Protestant supremacy.

John Toland may have actually been a belated supporter of Cromwell's policy in Ireland. Although Pierre Desmaizeaux (biographer of Toland and executor of his will) called this 'a ridiculous story', it may not be a completely outlandish one. If true, we have Toland sharing his admiration for Cromwell with Ian Paisley. It is difficult to imagine Toland supporting the slaughter at Drogheda unless he had an overwhelming sense of loathing for his own background.

In 1701 – six years before the Act of Union between England, Wales and Scotland – Toland suggested in his *Limitations for the Next Foreign Successor* that 'West Britain' be used to describe Ireland. Toland is urging England to regard Ireland as an integral part of a future British state, hence the name 'West Britain'. (Incidentally, Toland also proposed that Scotland be renamed 'North Britain'.) This new British identity offered to marginal men not from England (such as Toland) the opportunity of raising their status. But whose status in this New Jerusalem would be reduced? Nobody's, according to Toland also in *Limitations:*

> As for Ireland in particular... it's unreasonable that our own Offspring who conquered that Country, or our Children or Brethren who from time to time transplant themselves thither, should be looked upon to be in the same condition with the native Irish whom they conquered, and lose the Birthright of *Englishmen.*

Toland here addresses the Protestant settler class in Ireland, accepting their right to remain English in order to distinguish themselves from the natives. Thus was the class system on this island based on our legacy of colonialism: the 19th-century ruling class saw themselves as the *Anglo*-Irish, not the *Brito*-Irish. Interestingly, many black people in England regard themselves as Black *British* rather than Black *English*. It would seem that colonizers are English, and colonized are British.

One can find traces of imperialism in Toland's world-view. The supremacy of a Protestant state translated logically into deserved world hegemony. In his introduction to Harrington's *Oceana* in 1700 he states:

> ... the whole Variety of things wherewith the Earth is stock't had bin principally design'd for our profit or delight, and no more of 'em allowed to the rest of Men, than what they must necessarily use as our Purveyors or Labourers. [London is] a new Rome in the West [deserving] like the old one, to become the Sovereign Mistress of the Universe.

[Toland's Rome is, of course, Cicero's Rome and not the Vatican.]

John Toland was not behind the door when it came to virulent anti-French pamphleteering. Toland – by his enthusiastic embrace of Protestantism, Francophobia and proto-imperialism – is one of the earliest persons to see himself as completely British.[3]

IV

John Toland has set us what seems an unresolvable paradox: the profound truths of toleration and reason embedded in his writings have informed some of the most radical thinkers of 18th-century Ireland and Europe, yet Toland also appears as a leading strategist of Protestant

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[3] I must say here that I found Linda Colley's book, *Britons: Forging the Nation* to be a profoundly educating book on the role of Protestantism in the construction of British identity. Incidentally, Conor Cruise O'Brien has probed the Catholic roots of Irish nationalism in his *Ancestral Voices*, which I also recommend.

sectarian politics. It is as if Toland was having his cake in Garvaghy and eating it in Drumcree. Can we reconcile our picture of Toland as Radical and Reactionary in Ireland?

Toland assumed radicalism was possible only if Catholicism was kept underfoot, hence his opposition to France, Rome and the 'native Irish'. However, Toland believed that protestant sects could also produce popes! He states in the preface to *Christianity Not Mysterious* that:

> Since Religion is calculated for reasonable Creatures, 'tis Conviction and not Authority that should bear Weight with them. A wise and good Man . . . knows no Difference between Popish Infallibility, and being oblig'd blindly to acquiesce in the Decisions of fallible Protestants.

On another occasion he says:

> There may very well be such a thing as Protestant Popery ...

and, again:

> Popery in reality is nothing else, but the Clergy's assuming a Right to think for the Laity.

We now approach the true significance of the reaction in Ireland to *Christianity Not Mysterious*. To suggest that the post-1690s Irish ruling class were as much adherents of popery as were the Catholics was the ultimate heresy because it decisively undermined the moral justification for Protestant rule in Ireland. Scurrilous stories were put out about Toland's background in attempts to discredit him. We find Swift calling Toland:

> The great Oracle of the *Anti-Christians*, ...an *Irish* Priest, the Son of an *Irish* Priest.

The problems posed by his nebulous origins prompted Toland to garner a certificate from the Franciscans at the Irish College in Prague stating that he was from the Ó Tuathalláin bardic family of Donegal. One can be almost certain that the monks knew well of Toland's hostility to Rome, but they were also Ulstermen, perhaps secretly proud of Toland's subversive effect on Protestantism in Ireland. In his

Nazarenus of 1718 Toland describes the Pope as having 'betray'd the country [i.e. Ireland] to the English'. This reflects unfavourably on the English as well as the Pope. It is no surprise, then that the Dublin elite burned *Christianity Not Mysterious* and hounded Toland out of the island. Richard Kearney calls this anti-Toland hysteria 'a token of Irish colonial insecurity'. He also sees Toland as a symbol both of duality and duplicity.

A.T.Q. Stewart once said that in Ireland 'all history is applied history'. One could also say this about philosophy in Ireland: *Christianity Not Mysterious* sparked off the most productive era in Irish philosophy which included such luminaries as George Berkeley, Francis Hutcheson and Edmund Burke. What was really being debated, however, was the ownership of political power in Ascendancy Ireland. In his lifetime, Toland rejected the politico-religious background of his childhood. Denied entry to the English nation because of his Irishness, he aligned himself with protestant Britain. Perhaps Toland can be regarded as the first Brit. However, with the reshuffled allegiances of both Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter in Ireland and Catholic and Revolutionary in France towards the end of the eighteenth-century, Toland has also become an Irish radical in spite of himself.

6

THE NORTHERN IRISH DILEMMA: A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON POST-COLONIAL INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES

Rev. Dr. David Lapsley

I was born and brought up in the north-west of Ulster. My father had moved from Donegal into Derry, where he worked for most of his life in the same shop, first as assistant, then as manager, and finally for a few years as its owner. My mother was the daughter of a small farmer in the Sperrin country of Tyrone. They survived the stringencies of the recession years by dint of hard work and unyielding frugality. They rented the small houses in which we lived, and consequently never had a municipal vote. They were Presbyterians and devout Christians whose piety was matched by their probity.

My father left Donegal in 1919 as a result of threats of violence to his family. He saw the border as necessary for his protection, but lamented the division of the country, and in particular the separation of Derry and Donegal. He voted Unionist, but was highly critical of the local Unionist party. He was offended by its gerrymandering, but was even more unforgiving of the stuffy nepotism of the Londonderry bourgeoisie. When mischievously pressed by his sons on the Christian morality of voting for a party he so plainly despised, he made a reply that still seems to me to be a classic expression of the frustrations of the working-class Protestant. "The border protects me," he said, "and I'll vote for the party that guarantees that protection. But there's nothing in the Bible that says I either have to like or respect the people I vote for." Influences like these have contributed to the fact that I have never voted Unionist in my life. Nor have I voted Nationalist. Labour at one time provided a congenial alternative, and to-day I have to find solace in the Alliance party.

I spent much of my childhood and youth on my grandparents' farm in the Sperrins between Donemana and Plumbridge. It was a different world from the city in every respect. I learned what it meant to relate to the land, to hear myths and old cures, and to respect superstitions about fairy rings in the grass. The language was a rich mixture of Elizabethan English and Irish idiom. There were songs and stories when neighbours called to cailey. Some of them were Catholic, although my grandfather and my uncles were Orangemen. I did not feel alienated from the "chapel folk"; I had no deep friendships with any of them but no estrangement. I could understand their hunger for land, and why they would bid for vacant farms, and I could understand also why "our side" would line up to block them. The I.R.A. was sporadically active, and spoken about in anger, and the "B Specials" were invoked as the defenders. Truth to tell I was scared of both of them, but they lurked in my consciousness like cops and robbers more ritualized than real.

My parents were both ambitious for education for their children. For them it was the path to deliverance from being poor. It turned out to be more. It introduced me to the Classics and to English literature, and exposed me to the turbulance of ideas. I remember a line from Arnold Wesker's play, "Roots", in which the daughter, Beatie, about to leave her humdrum home, upbraids her mother with the remarkable judgement, "Mother, you've got no majesty." My parents had dignity, and I got my whiff of majesty from the Sperrins, even if it was more in my imagination than in the mean white-washed houses and the middens, frowned upon by dark hill and heather. Part of my history was there. The burning question was what to make of it in telling me who I was, and assuring me of every person's right to majesty.

After training for the Presbyterian ministry I spent ten years from 1953 – 1963 in the lovely little County Down town of Killyleagh. They were delightful years graced by marriage and the birth of our two children. But for both Mary and myself there was a deepening awareness that our lives were being squeezed out to the fringes of society. I seemed to spend much of my time presiding over rites of passage and giving regular routine spiritual massages for the well-being

of the mostly good and kindly. Frustrations were setting the scene for the radical experience of life and work in Jamaica.

X

Jamaica, when we arrived in March 1963, was eight months into independence. There was the unmistakeable air of celebration both of new political status, and of the stimulus to explore those black African roots and associations which first slavery and then colonialism had stifled. There were also liberating external factors at work. American cultural and commercial colonialism was recognized as a threat to Central America and the Caribbean. Cuba's successful resistance was received by many new nations as an encouragement, especially after Guatemala's democractically elected Government had been subverted by the C.I.A. This was an interpretation at first alien to my own inculturation, but there was enough concensus in Jamaica to force me to examine from a new perspective the ideological battle between communism and capitalism. The unacceptable face of both disposed of most of the last traces of my political naivety.

In my own field of theology, the Latin American liberation theologians were asking searching questions of Western Christendom's treatment of the poor. A radically different prioritization of values was being offered, in which philosophy– based modes of European thinking were being weighed and found wanting. Liberationists put praxis at the heart of the process. Their way of doing theology was *to act* in obedience to the gospel's commands on behalf of the poor, and then *to reflect* critically upon the praxis. This meant among other things that the norms or ethical conduct moved from premises dictated by dogma, to words and action appropriate to the context, in support of the gospel's definition of salvation as "saving health for the whole person''.

For an Ulster Presbyterian this meant a painful transfer of emphasis from the head to the heart, and an uncomfortable call to cut oneself adrift from safe moorings. It also implied that the good was often to be defined as the better of two bad options. For example, in the quest for liberation from cruel oppression, the better way was

sometimes seen as engagemet in violence on behalf of the down-trodden. The puritan code imprinted within me resisted this strand of thinking, and even yet I cannot accept violence, especially against the person, as moral. But to sustain this position I have been forced to ask myself about institutional violence in every form, from the just war to commercial exploitation. I can never again look at the struggles of the oppressed without reminding myself that in the context of the violence done to them, their's is likely to be the lesser of two evils.

Black power became a force to be reckoned with in the America of the sixties. A version of it had been promulgated in Jamaica for many years, mostly through the teachings of Marcus Garvey. Rastafarianism with its heady mixture of cultic practices, Old Testament texts applied to Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, the use of ganja – the holy weed or tree of life, and infectious buoyancy was not only appealing to the Black dispossessed, but by the end of the sixties had a considerable following among young professionals and intellectuals. It was also strongly propelled by Reggae music and loaded lyrics. Bob Marley's song, based on Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon..." is a powerful example of a prophetic counter-culture. New energies were being released in Jamaica calling the Black under-class to a new self esteem.

For the first two years of our stay in Jamaica my family and I lived in a small house in a village in the rural heart of the island. The local people were mostly black: many were illiterate, but all were eager for dialogue. My whiteness did not seem to be a barrier. Their opinions were freely offered and my perspectives were being constantly challenged. We were privileged to hear the heart-beats of a community. Later when we moved to Kingston we were better able to contextualise the analyses of Jamaica's intellectuals and artists, many of whom were only one generation removed from their rural roots. The processes of their thinking summoned me to a new examination of my own cultural and political inheritance. Many elements in the Jamaican experience began to resonate with my own. I have isolated three which particularly stimulated my reflections.

1. *Status:*

Paulo Freire, the revolutionary educator, proposed in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that persons and societies had not achieved their true status of freedom until they became subjects of their own history, rather than the objects of the intentions of others. Ulster Protestants had always been lumped together as the planters, the colonizers who had taken over and controlled the land. I began to see that this was true only of a very small number. My forebears in Donegal and in Tyrone had never enjoyed control of the land they farmed. Until the middle of this century they held no title to it, and little guarantee of secure tenancy. They were more accurately to be described as the planted, never quite free to be subjects, and never totally secure in their own minds. We constantly needed to reassure ourselves and therefore adopted triumphalist postures, staking out our territory by marching round it, singing songs of ancient victories at Derry and the Boyne. But the sense of who we were in cultural terms had been damaged, maybe for some destroyed. We have become haunted by questions. Who are we? Who are our kinsfolk if our next door neighbours resent us? Do the English really love us, or want us?

It also struck me that if the ordinary Protestant is the planted, then the ordinary Catholic is the supplanted. He had been pushed aside in his own land at the Plantation, and had become a minority within it since 1922. This conferred on the Catholic population the powerful possibility of being the victim. Their songs throbbed with the haunting strains of noble martyrdom; they were the downtrodden who lost the land but retained the language and the legends of their saints and scholars. The first two stanzas of John Hewitt's poem, "Once Alien Here", describes the gap in cultural inheritance and awareness:

> Once alien here my fathers built their house,
> claimed, drained and gave the land the shapes of use,
> and for their urgent labour grudged no more
> than shuffled pennies from the hoarded store
> of well rubbed words that had left their overtones
> in the ripe England of the moulded downs.

The sullen Irish limping to the hills
bore with them the enchantments and the spells
that in the clans' free days hung gay and rich
on every twig of every thorny hedge,
and gave the rain-pocked stone a meaning past
the blurred engraving of the fibrous root.

The poem's last lines point hopefully to a resolution. The word that leads us to it is "identified":

... the graver English, lyric Irish tongue,
must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
till thought and image may, identified,
find easy voice to utter each aright.

(*The selected John Hewitt, ed.* Alan Warner)

2. Identity:

Early in my stay in Jamaica I had been told that previous generations had called God "Big Pa-Pa" and Queen Victoria "Big Ma-Ma". Certainly the centre of the world was perceived to be London, and English inculturation was pervasive. Churches made no concessions to the tropics in their imported hymnody. We "ploughed the fields and scattered the good seed on the land", and thanked the Lord who sent "the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain". So when black Jamaicans flocked to Britain in the nineteen fifties, and found themselves to be not at all welcome or at home, they felt bitterly betrayed. Already their African heritage had not only been largely eroded, but much of it despised. Indeed the Creole language spoken as their first language by 90% of the population, and which owed much to African origins, was rejected as a proper form of speech even in West Indian society. Many teachers told me that they could only teach English effectively if they approached it as a second language.

Independence prompted a great search for the African past. Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement gained new credibility, and the Rastafarians, for so long treated with fear or derision, were no longer dismissed out of hand. There was intense sociological interest in

African rites which for centuries had been regarded as pollutants of Christian worship. Primitive art and wood carving derived from African forms became best selling items, not only to tourists, but also to Jamaican banks and other institutions. Olive Lewin's Jamaican Folk Singers were but one result of scholarly research into ethno-musicology, which unravelled the inter-weaving of old English melodies with African rhythms. Poets and authors began to celebrate the use of Jamaican dialect. A parallel tradition was being excavated, and a past that offered tantalizing possibilities was emerging. Edward Braithwaite, the Barbadian poet and historian, wrote: "The alternative tradition is belly centred; in the beat, the drum, the apparent bawdy ... this region, as opposed to the middle class Romantic/Victorian virtues of the head, is the center of Sparrow's art, the source of Louise Bennett's vitality; it is the blood beat of ska and jazz .... And behind the whole revolt, this assertion of an alternative, there lies the deep rhythmical and formal influence of Africa."

Louise Bennett, Jamaican author, wit and story teller, pointed out that dialect should never have been intellectually despised, even by Europeans. "If you reject dialect" she said,

> "Yu wi haffe get de Oxford book
> O' English verse and tear
> Out Chaucer, Burns, Lady Grizelle
> An plenty of Shakespeare."

I found myself caught up in this ferment, this search for neglected elements of self-hood. I began to do a little searching for myself. Like West Indians, I too had been conditioned into Britishness. But I was becoming unsure of what that meant. Where was my kinship? Certainly not with the English or the Welsh. The Scots perhaps? But for all the Scottish influences in speech inflection and Presbyterian doctrine, the Scots were still across the water. I had seldom if ever been known as Irish in Ireland, but now in Jamaica I was never called anything else. I found that description apt, because Jamaicans found me different from the English and the Welsh and the Scots. I began to think of myself as Irish, not only because of my distinctiveness, but because in a new and powerful way, I was acknowledging a kinship with the land. I knew,

living abroad and far from home, that I more deeply belonged to the place of my birth and upbringing and education. I smelt peat smoke, and potatoes in the drills, fetid in the heavy air of autumn, as I sat on my Jamaican verandah.

The title of Orlando Patterson's novel, An *Absence of Ruins*, is tantalizing and suggestive. I could feel the sorrow of black West Indians for being deprived of reminders of the noble past. But I was not like them; I was surrounded by ruins in Ireland. The question was which of them could I justly claim as belonging to my past? Was it the great fort of Grianan over the Donegal border from Derry or the ruins of my grandfather's house reputedly burned down by the I.R.A., or the mean wall-steads of cottar houses, skeletons of decline in the rushy Sperin hills? One thing was certain, I had a share in all of them, and they were distinctively Irish. Yet the ruins divide us in Ireland, often provoking bitter memories. The stones of our past, fashioned by Celt, Norman and Briton, now gentled in decay, speak to all of us in Ireland of a history that is our story, however and whenever we came. They at once bring together a focus for identity, and a question about relating. Will to-morrow's ruins be the charred remains of homes and pubs and shops destroyed by hate – telling that we had no majesty?

3. Relationships

The struggle for freedom in the West Indies was complex. Political independence was at one level the major goal; but at another, perhaps deeper, level the sorting of relationships had to be accomplished before freedom could be truly celebrated. Relationships with the past was an obvious starting point. For Afro-West Indians slavery was the matrix which had poisoned their development and had left them hurt and angry. I was at first amazed that one hundred and fifty years after emancipation, the scars were still so raw. Self esteem in terms of colour, culture, social standing, personal dignity, sexuality had been crudely negated. Full emancipation from slavery was only achieved with the advent of Black Power and "Black is Beautiful" and victories for Civil Rights in America. The freedom to forgive had to be worked through anger expressed – the dialogue of "your eyes and my eyes mus' mek four".

The biggest step forward however had to be in relating to African origins. In this regard the contribution of Rastafarianism has been of immense significance, perhaps more as a metaphor than as a historic analysis. Theirs is a fundamentalist approach, claiming a definable and available homeland, a black God, doctrines and practices to sustain their beliefs. Their cult has released immense energies far beyond the music of Bob Marley, especially among the black dispossessed. I found a new gravitas among the "brethren" when I re-visited Jamaica in 1995. Some of them occupy senior positions in the professions and in management: they no longer feel it necessary as part of their freedom to express hostility to whites, and they have integrated into Jamaican society in a way I did not think possible in the sixties and seventies.

Other West Indians, however, cannot be so assertive. Derek Walcott recognized cultural and racial duality when he wrote: "Our origins are subdued in the blood- it is for our poets to provoke them to speak." In his poem, "A Far Cry from Africa", he shares the confusion of his own "subdued origins" when he describes his attitude to the Mau-Mau crisis in Kenya in these lines:

"I who am poisoned by the blood of both
Where shall I turn, divided in the vein?"

In his plays Walcott skilfully uses dialect, while in his poems the images are as often drawn in vivid and sophisticated English.

Edward Braithwaite, after living for eight years in Ghana, wrote "Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly, I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners .... The problem now was how to relate this new awareness to the existing, inherited non-African consciousness of educated West Indian society. How does the artist work and function within a plurally fragmented world?" In his poems Braithwaite enthroned his African past, no longer subdued, and at the same time honoured his Black West Indian present.

The rhythms of Africa he reproduced in the beat of drums, as we can hear in this excerpt from "Gong Gong":

God is dumb .
Until the drum
speaks,

The drum
is dumb
until the gong-gong leads

it. Man made,
the gong-gong's
iron eyes

of music
walk us through the humble
dead to meet

the dumb
blind drum
where Odomankoma speaks.

The Creole speech and intonations of the Rastafarians are brilliantly reproduced in this excerpt from "Rights of Passage":

Rise, rise
Locks-
man, Solo
man, wise
man, rise rise
leh we
laugh dem, mock
dem, stop
dem, kill
dem an' go back,
back, back to the black
man lan'
back back
to Af –
rica.

Asian Indians had been brought to West Indian cane fields, as indentured labourers after emancipation, much to the anger of the freed slaves, whose bargaining power was thereby nullified. Resentment was still much in evidence, especially in Guyana, and to a lesser extent, in Trinidad where the Indian population had subsequently prospered. Indians, who had not suffered the humiliation of slavery, had kept their culture, religion and languages. They kept apart for a long time especially from the Afro-West Indians. In Jamaica the motto of the independent nation is "Out of Many One People", an ideal not at all easy to achieve, when to the mix is added whites, light-skinned brown people, Chinese, Lebanese. Gradually minority communities have entered into every section of national life and activity. The problems of relationships between differing ethnic and cultural origins have not been easy. Education has helped; sport has also brought people together; religion has not been a hindrance; and poets and writers, notably from the Indian perspective (V.S. Naipaul) have led the way, perhaps the "unconscious artist" most of all, communicating in reggae and calypso in the rhythm and tongue of the people. Relating has grown with self esteem and the common aims of nationhood.

Although the circumstances of my own "subdued origins" differed from the West Indian, there were nonetheless parallels from which I could learn. Status and identity were only part of the lesson; how to relate with my past and with my nationalist neighbour was a bigger venture. Part of my problem as an Ulster Protestant of planted stock is that I have no pre-Plantation heritage. I have no Africa or India to affirm me with an ennobling mythology. I have been conditioned to call myself British, but the description is meaningless in terms of blood or origin. It is confined to a fractured culture which serves to re-inforce my difference from the nationalist/Catholic Ulster dweller. The litany of victories over Catholic armies and of recurring skirmishes with the devious Irish is disorienting rather than enhancing. By it I am drawn into cultural schizophrenia. Loyalty to the Crown, being Protestant, is a fragile and tenuous relating, while my political union with Westminster expresses my opposition to republican Irishness rather than my kinship

with Britishness. The Stormont Parliament has been at best inadequate and at worst inimical to proper community relations.

Yet I cannot and would not want to deny my Britishness. If it has not provided me with origins or mythology, it has enriched me with the English language and with that valuable something imprecisely named as "ethos". Like Walcott and Braithwaite I want to explore status and identity in terms of the space I fill, but I cannot impoverish myself by denying a reality which is British. I have been forced to ask in Walcott's words, because

> "I am poisoned by the blood of both,
>
> where shall I turn, divided to the vein?"

We in Northern Ireland suffer from our own bondages. Just structures must create the space for real emancipation. We will not be free from the past until we can both accept and forgive it, and in doing so, accept and forgive each other. Hopefully the process is getting beyond the stage of catharsis so that honest dialogue can take place and new constructs emerge. Politicians, so far notably lacking in imagination and generosity, can do no more than provide better balanced institutions. We need the prophets, men and women whose minds and bellies, insights and passions lead us to more comprehensive definitions of belonging; who will make music of the flat vowels of Belfast and the hearty abruptness of village greeting; who find harmony in the boron and the flute band; whose speech and lyrics are carried by Scots phrases and Irish idiom, English language fortified to warm the heart. We need the poets and musicians, the writers and the preachers who will explore our kinship, and acknowledge that we who are implacably opposed are even more implacably joined.

When we, planter and Gael, planted and supplanted, Catholic, Protestant, dissenter and unbeliever, can recognize ourselves as subjects, and deal as subjects with each other, then a new and less terrible beauty can be born.

7

"INDOORS/OUTDOORS/ABROAD: AMBIVALENT SPACES IN JEAN RHYS"

Andrew Thacker

Edward Said, discussing the transportation of Magwitch in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, comments tellingly upon the relation between metropolitan center and imperial dominions implied in this incident:

"Subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed to 'return' to metropolitan space".[1] Anna Morgan, the white West Indian heroine of Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and the novelist herself, are also subject to this interdiction. Anna is literally allowed to return to England, the land of her supposed origins in terms of family, language and culture, and this difference perhaps marks one historical change in imperial/metropolitan relations by the early twentieth century. But the figural meanings of returning are more significant here, for Anna is perceived as profoundly not English: she is called the "hottentot" by the other girls in her touring company (*Voyage*, 12)[2] and her non-standard accent is often commented upon. Ryhs's depiction of the drama of return appears to demonstrate the profound difficulty that we have conventionally understood modernist writing to have with the notion of home: alienation in the modernist city, or the hostile, beliefless, modern world, seems only a metaphoric version of this spatial alienation from home articulated in Anna's return to the metropolitan homeland. Or as Rhys later commented upon her own early experiences in London: "I would never be part of anything. I

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[1] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), p.xvii.

[2] I will refer, in the main text, to Rhys's books in the following way: *Voyage*, *Voyage in the Dark*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); *Mackenzie*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); *Quartet*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); *Smile*, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); *Tigers*, *Tigers are Better Looking*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); *Letters*, *Letters 1931-1966*, eds. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)

would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing... I am a stranger and I always will be." (*Smile*, 124)

In this paper I want to look at how the experiences of home, homecoming and displacement in Rhys's fiction are mapped onto her depiction of the spaces of the cities of London and Paris, and how they seem to complicate the account I have just given about modernism and alienation. This is part of a wider project trying to think spatially about Anglo-American and Irish modernist fiction; an attempt to consider the various roles of space, location and geography in the constitution of the modernist writings of Joyce, Woolf, Forster and Conrad. Damp hotel rooms, dingy cafes, cramped railway carriages, rainy streets, cities of light, exotic foreign lands, the consciousnesses of morbid individuals: these are some of the spaces that are central to this fiction. Much modernist fiction seems unable to keep discrete the different forms of space it encounters, even though for many writers there is a desperate desire to maintain spatial borders and boundaries, and in this sense the writing illustrates what David Harvey calls the disorientating "time-space compression" of modernity.[3] Movement across and between spaces produces that keenly felt sense of disorientation in the modernist text – at once both thrilling and anxious. One of the most interesting features about this, I think, is that of the gendering of these experiences of spatial disorientation: often, but not invariably, this turmoil is viewed negatively by male writers, more positively by female writers. Or more precisely that the experience of modernist flux and disorientation is often associated with some sense of femininity, whereas form, control and spatial fixity are often gendered as masculine. Modernist literary space – the space of narrative itself – registers these diverse social spaces; it traces the various movements between and across them; it tries to find formal strategies to represent

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[3] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1989), pp.260-83.

these disorientating, thrilling and anxious kinds of experience; and it is often gender categories that are utilized in these strategies. [4]

Ambivalence about particular places and spaces seems the keynote of Rhys's texts, and is shown in her treatment of locations such as cafes that are both outside and inside. Unable to locate herself either in Dominica or England, her ambivalence about both her national and gender identity seems to be mapped onto her depiction of particular spaces. But this makes it sound too neat, as if psychic unease about one's identity is simply figured in a set of external tropes. Instead Rhys's texts explore a whole series of limit-spaces, between self and other, home and abroad, interiority and exteriority, and metropolis and imperial margin. Her depiction of these liminal sites is primarily characterized by a movement across and between these spaces, and it is this geographical shifting, at once both exhilarating and disturbing, that locates her work firmly within modernist fictions of the urban experience.

Helen Carr has recently noted that "Jean Rhys's cannot be considered exclusively as a Caribbean writer, or as a woman writer, a novelist of the demi-monde, or as a modernist".[5] Problems of categorization thus parallel the disruption of boundaries in her own texts. In terms of Rhys and the city the trouble lies in deciding whether the rootless life of the modernist city is experienced as just a new form of Rhys's primal feeling of being a stranger, or whether the city experience of dislocation throws into relief the experience of exile. If the latter view is dominant then the city encounter with alienation, exile and polyglossia[6] is actually what presents Rhys with a voice and a

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[4] For further discussion of this point see my "Imagist Travels in Modernist Space", *Textual Practice 7:2* (1993), 224-46.

[5] Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys*, Writers and their Work Series, (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996), p. xiv.

[6] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik note that the macaronic quality of *Good Morning, Mid night* shows "the voice of someone at home in both languages [French and English] but who has no real sense of worthor 'home' in either country". See Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction*, (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 136. The link between experimental linguistic practices and gathering of migrants in Western cities in the early twentieth century is

vocabulary for these sensations of displacement. It is difficult to decide which of these two readings of Rhys and the city is more correct: perhaps both narrative strategies are operating simultaneously. The city is a metaphor for other experiences of being a stranger, but also a very material presence in her fiction, offering locations from which Rhys can begin to explore her relation to the idea of "home" and place. Again perhaps the key is the movement across and between spaces: the traversing of limits and borders, as exemplified in the way that Anna's consciousness in *Voyage in the Dark* constantly shifts between her present life in London and her past experiences in Dominica.

Rhys described *Voyage* as being "something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists – side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was-is"[7] Problems with conventional notions of time mean that instead of plain linear developments Rhys's texts often offer narratives stressing spatial connection or its lack by reference to specific places.[8] For instance, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), when Julia returns to London from Paris the chiming of a church clock makes her feel that time has stood still: "She felt her life had moved in a circle... she had returned to her starting point, in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before". (*Mackenzie*, 48) Rhys's comments are echoed in Rachel Bowlby's reading of *Good Morning Midnight*, where, Bowlby argues, the heroine Sasha is unable to differentiate between discrete times, between the past, present and future. Bowlby notes that this parallels a uniformity of places: all hotel rooms, streets and cities are the same for her, part of what Bowlby diagnoses as a fundamental impasse, both narrative and psychic, in the novel.[9] Arguably *Voyage*, composed some years earlier,

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explored in Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, (London: Verso, 1989), 45-6.

[7] Jean Rhys, *Letters* (Feb. 18, 1934), p. 24.

[8] Rhys is always very precise about the names of roads and cafes in her novels.

[9] Rachel Bowlby, "The Impasse: Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight*" in *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 36. Rhys's representations of Paris and London are, contrary to Bowlby, quite different, with Paris often perceived as more positive, especially in *Mackenzie*.

is not only structured around this notion of impasse, even though the same monotony of rooms and streets is ritually described. Voyage is very much the dominant metaphor, but it is a kind of spatialised journey through Anna's mind, where the past is her vivid life in Dominica, and the present is her dreary existence in England. The novel exhibits a confusing movement between and across different spaces, hence evoking Anna's bewilderment at what happens to her. Anna's mind moves too much between places – the past and the present, London and the Caribbean – and is unable to maintain any fixed sense of position or structure for these places and memories. For Anna, therefore, the past becomes as real as the present, not because her life has no sense of change (as with Sasha in *Good Morning Midnight*) but because she cannot fit the different parts of her life into a proper structure, so that "what was - is." Her psychic space, that is, is in a process of flux and movement, being inhabited and overwhelmed by the vivacious imagery of other past lives and places, and unable to draw limits around these locations.

Many of Anna's memories have the quality of what Freud calls "screen memories", memories of childhood that are, in fact, only displaced versions of the real childhood memories that have been more deeply repressed. Freud questions whether "we have any memories at all from our childhood: memories relating to our childhood may be all that we possess".[10] Freud's theory suggests a primary lack at the heart of our memories, that there is a psychic space to which we can never directly return. This seems to capture something of Anna's state in *Voyage in the Dark*. The novel opens with the image of a stark break within herself: "It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different". *(Voyage, 7)* This psychic splitting is brought about by Anna's experience of the cold, grey monotony of the English city in contrast to the sensual images of (unnamed) Dominica: "Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a

[10] Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899), *Collected Papers* vol.5, ed. James Strachey, (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 69

dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together." *(Voyage, 8)* These sorts of divisions – the "Two Tunes" of the original title of the novel – run through the book, and are figured in a number of other images – the dark high wall that Anna cannot get over or past, or the numerous mirrors into which she gazes, commenting upon how she seems to be "looking at somebody else" *(Voyage, 21).*

Anna is unable to fit these divided images together, but the more significant point for my argument is the blurring of the boundaries around such images; for it illustrates the disorientation of spaces I see as characteristic of Rhys's modernism. Even in the reference to being unable to distinguish whether England or Dominica is a dream – that quality of being a screen – we discern a disorientation between the inner psychic space of memory and the external space of a country: "out there" is the rather puzzling term used for Dominica rather than "back there", as if Dominica exists as a place just located outside Anna's room. After one incident where she looks in a mirror and then lies down on a bed in a room that has a "secret feeling" we read: "I felt as if I had gone out of myself, as if I were in a dream" *(Voyage, 21).* Her inner sense of self thus shifts over into that of the room itself; she becomes merely an empty room waiting for her lover, Walter, to return.

Anna's sensations of self, other and elsewhere prefigure an argument made by Richard Sennett, one of the most individualistic of recent urban critics, in his *The Conscience of the Eye* (1990). In a discussion of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* Sennett comments upon how, in the modern city, one speaks to those who are other, culturally different, as part of a continual process of attempted relations to the social world outside the atomized urban self: "to sense the other, one must do the work of accepting oneself as incomplete". [11] This experience, whereby a person becomes "like a foreigner to him or herself", is described by Sennett as a "non-linear experience of

[11] Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities.* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 148.

difference'', when the "incomplete self'' must turn outwards the Other in order to progress in understanding:

> This non-linear experience of difference might be thought of as an *émigration extérieure.* One goes to the edge of oneself. But precisely at that edge, one cannot represent oneself to oneself. Instead one sees, talks, or thinks about what is outside, beyond the boundary.[12]

It seems to me that Anna's experiences – and that of other Rhys's heroines – has something of this quality, of trying to cross the limits of her "incomplete self'', but that the attempt is figured slightly differently from Sennett's account. For Rhys what lies outside the boundary of the self is the material nexus of rooms, streets and cafes in the city, rather than her relations with other people. As Julia in *Mr Mackenzie* puts it: "It was always places that she thought of, not people[13]''(*Mackenzie,* 9)

In *Quartet* (1928), for example, the distraught Marya is waiting in a Montparnasse hotel bedroom for her married lover, Heidler (Ford Madox Ford in real life) to appear. Her emotions are represented by the cityscape of trains and advertisements outside, and by the décor of the room itself, with its "vaguely erotic'' wall paper and an atmosphere of "departed and ephemeral loves hung about the bedroom like stale scent'' (*Quartet,* 87). Even the bed itself reminds Marya of countless other *"petites femmes''* before who had waited for male lovers. But it is the music from the street outside, filtering into the room that best shows Marya's "incomplete self'', a tune that she perceives to be "persistent as the hope of happiness'' (*Quartet,* 87). These descriptions display a movement between inside Marya's psychic self and her exterior environment, the outside coming to stand in, spatially, for what she feels internally about her self, hoping for happiness in a room that gloomily represents her miserably marginal existence as yet another of Heidler's mistresses.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Compare Rhys's comment in her autobiography: "The place I live in is terribly important to me, it always has been.'' (*Smile,* 165)

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* we witness the same attempt to cross the limits of the self by means of city landscapes and interiors. At one point Julia, walking through the fog in Tottenham Court Road meets the ghost of herself who looks at her "coldly, without recognizing her'' (*Mackenzie,* 49). In another incident she locks herself away in her room to attempt to avoid her empty existence after being ditched by her lover. But she cannot stay still and "was obliged to walk up and down the room consumed with hatred of the world and everybody in it'' (*Mackenzie,* 9). This restricted movement only mocks her inability to transcend the limitations of her stunted self, and she stops her futile walking to lie on her bed motionless and decides that "the rumble of the life outside was like the sound of the sea which was rising gradually around her'' (*Mackenzie,* 9). Outside the self becomes a region as impossible to reach as that of her inner happiness. Outside, however, always seems to threaten to overwhelm her inner space, as in the frequently employed image of drowning. Julia's pointed comment upon the city is equally apposite as a self-description: ''London was a cold and terrifying place to return to.'' (*Mackenzie,* 55-6). Towards the end of the novel Julia's mind feels "strangely empty. It was an empty room, through which vague memories stalked like giants.'' (*Mackenzie,* 114) Inner and outer are blurred, but once more this process contains an element of threat or violence and the sense that something is absent, a home or an origin to which Julia can return. Often in Rhys's texts we get the impression that once a character crosses a particular border – the threshold of a room – for example, the idea of returning is very problematic.[14] Returning implies that something remains the same to which one returns, a feature absent both for Rhys's sense of belonging and for the city itself, since a city is always in the process of reconstituting and refiguring itself.

The ambiguities of liminal city spaces occur throughout Rhys's fiction and the most common setting is that of the café or sometimes the restaurant, the site for planned or chance meetings with lovers and ex-lovers. Walter Benjamin famously located the nineteenth century

[14] For a good account of the role of rooms and borders in Rhys's work see Horner and Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire*, 133-161.

male *flâneur* in Parisian spaces that were mixture of street and interior, such as the arcades and "the terraces of cafes".[15] Rhys's heroines, however, share a much more uneasy relationship to such locations, with the café sometimes being an escape from the constrictions of the gloomy hotel room or an enclosed haven from empty streets. Early on in *Quartet* Marya walks the Paris streets after her husband is imprisoned for fraud and she becomes aware of a strange sensation: "The Boulevard Arago, like everything else, seemed unreal, fantastic, but also extraordinarily familiar, and she was trying to account for this mysterious impression of familiarity" (*Quartet,* 37). This uncanny moment[16] of the familiar fantastic is yet another manifestation of Mary's subjectivity trying to find a home of sorts in a foreign city. She then walks into a café alone, and is stared at by a man drinking beer who she imagines believes her to be there for a rendezvous. As often in Rhys the woman, unlike Benjamin's *flâneur*, is subject to the gaze of others. But this further unease yields and Marya's café experience becomes more positive:

> She sat there, smoking cigarette after cigarette, long after the large man had disappeared. Every time that the door of the café swung open to admit a customer she saw the crimson light of the tobacco shop opposite and the crimson reflection on the asphalt and she began to picture the endless labyrinth of the Paris streets, glistening hardly, crowded with hurrying people. But now she thought of them without fear, rather with a strange excitement (*Quartet,* 38).

This is a more comforting experience of the city, comforting because of the liminal location of Marya, centred inside the café, but able to peek out at the typical metropolitan maelstrom outside to which she both

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[15] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 37.

[16] The uncanny, argues Freud, is "nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it" ("The 'Uncanny'" (1919) in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, p. 399). Early Freud had referred to a person dreaming of a place or country with his sense of familiarity, a dream Freud interpreted as a fantasy of returning to the mother's body or genitals. Certainly Marya's experience has something of this sense of the reappearance of a lost or fantisised origin.

belongs and does not belong, much as Paris itself had earlier been both familiar and yet not so. Now the city seems exciting rather than fearful, but it is the contradictory combination of the two emotions that makes this passage so typical of many modernist representations of the city.

There is, however, another spatial element to Rhys's textual encounter with the city. Added to the spaces of inside and outside is that of abroad, of another national location which appears as the furthest, but also the closest to home, the most appealing of geographies. Towards the end of *Quartet* Marya, deserted by both lover and husband, explains to a new acquaintance one of the pleasures of café life: "I like sitting on the terrace of a café near a kiosk and looking at the names of the newspapers. Can you see? *Magyar Hirlap, Svenska, Poochi, Pesti Hirlap''* (*Quartet*, 134). The newspapers represent at once the possibility of escape, provoking her to imagine herself in a train "thudding across the great plain of Europe'' (*Quartet,* 136). But they also represent, linguistically, a notion of the foreign, of an abroad that dwells inside the city. The comfort of the café here, then, is its proximity to an outside of the city that exists within that location, a textual sign of a border that can be crossed.

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* Julia has an interesting encounter at Golders Green tube station. After the death of her mother Julia feels as if she was a child and, as she walked to the station, found her relation to other people in the city altered: "She looked into the faces of the people passing, not suspiciously or timidly, as was usual with her, but with a gentle and confident expression.'' (*Mackenzie,* 101). While she waits a man comes onto the platform and sits next to her, asks for directions from Julia and then reveals that he is a stranger to London and does not know his way about. When the train arrives the man sits next to Julia and tries to engage her once more in conversation:

> "It's a bit lonely here for a stranger.''
> He glanced at her sideways as he spoke.
> "Are you a Londoner?''
> "No," said Julia.
> "Ah," he said, "I thought not. I thought you looked a bit as if you were a stranger too." (*Mackenzie,* 102).

The man continues to talk and soon tries to suggest that he and Julia meet for dinner or a drink. Julia, "smiling mechanically", refuses to engage with the stranger, and though she accepts his card, her indifference is embarrassingly revealed to the man when she lets the card fall to the ground where she ignores it as she leaves the train. This curious incident is typical of Rhys's novels in that it is difficult to understand the precise significance of the episode. Although it does not further the narrative, since the man never recurs, it demonstrates once more Julia's seemingly impossible relations with others in the city. It also contains an overlapping series of discourses: sexual, national, and metropolitan. Situated in a distinctively urban location, in transit between spaces, the chance meeting with a stranger seems to explore the conjuncture of the migrant or stranger and the metropolitan centre. Though both Julia and the man are strangers in the city, this does not mean that they can overcome the anomie and reserve that the city requires of its inhabitants in certain of its spaces. Exiles in the city are here shown to remain strangers to each other, and perhaps also, as Sennett claimed, incomplete and strange to themselves. This is an internal border that cannot be as easily crossed as the exterior spaces of the city.

For Rhys, writing out of a peculiar – and hence perhaps normal – colonial context,[17] the imperial unconscious of the European city is often readily represented in the minds of her characters, most notably Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*. (Although we are meant to view Anna's mind as the primary location from which to understand the other spaces – rooms, streets, England, Dominica – the text often makes it difficult to decide from where Anna starts to comprehend her surroundings. Often the active terms of location are inanimate objects such as rooms

[17] Rhys was born in 1890 in Dominica, an island in the West Indies colonized first by the French and then in 1805 by the British and notable for having one of the few sizeable population of native Caribbeans, the Caribs, left in the West Indian islands (see Peter Hulme, "Islands of Enchantment: Extracts from a Caribbean Travel Journey", *New Formations*, 3 (Winter 1987), 93). Rhys's family was part of the very small British colonial presence left on the island. For further information on this aspect of her work see Teresa F.O 'Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986).

and streets. Anna, like other Rhys characters,[18] paradoxically experiences both claustrophobia and agoraphobia (*Voyage*, 120) in the novel, fearing rooms bearing down upon her or the streets that might engulf her (*Voyage*, 151). Both feelings seem more than just projections of her anxieties for it is almost as if her distress is with spatiality itself:

> Then the taxi came; and the houses on either side of the street were small and dark and then they were big and dark but all exactly alike. And I say that all my life I had known that this was going to happen, and that I'd been afraid for a long time. There's fear, of course, with everybody. But now it had grown, it had grown gigantic; it filled me and it filled the whole world. (82)

Fear itself takes on the expansive qualities of the houses here, becoming dark and intimidating, showing the blurring between inner space and that of external reality. Emotions themselves take on spatial characteristics and threaten to overwhelm the fragile inner space of Anna's selfhood.

After being called a tart by her landlady, Anna remembers a story "about the walls of a room getting smaller and small until they crush you to death" (*Voyage*, 26). This thought of intimate space rapidly shifts outdoors: "I believe this damned room's getting smaller and smaller, I thought. And about the rows of houses outside, gimcrack, rotten-looking, and all exactly alike." (*Voyage*, 26) To escape the feeling of claustrophobia Anna voyages outside, trying to find a spatial location to feel at ease in, to assuage her dislike of being called a tart. But she then takes some quinine for her nausea and the narrative shifts rapidly between England and then Dominica. First she thinks: "This is England, and I'm in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed." (*Voyage*, 27) Intimate space merges into a national space and, again, she cannot settle within either. Anna's mind drifts

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[18] See, for example, Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* who feels the dark streets of London as oppressive: "It was the heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls round you, and shut you in so that you felt you could not breathe." (*Mackenzie*, 62)

back to a time when she was ill at home in Dominica, being attended to by the black servant Francine:

> She (Francine) changed the bandage round my head and it was ice-cold and she started fanning me with a palm-leaf fan. And then night outside and voices of people passing in the street – the forlorn sound of voices, thin and sad. And the heat pressing down on you as if it were something alive. I wanted to be black. I always wanted to be black ... Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad (*Voyage,* 27).

Even the journey back to Dominica is fraught and shows Anna unable to fix her identity within any unthreatening spatial location. The text has traversed many different spaces and emotion has been registered through these spaces: the claustrophobia of dingy rooms and dull London streets exemplifies the monotony and constrictions of her life, impelling the desire for difference, for a different space, and for a different identity, here her desire to be racially other in order to be happy. Here we are within the flux of modernism diagnosed and drawn back from by many modernists;[19] Rhys's skill is to represent from within this radical shifting of spatial perspectives. Though colonial space is the endpoint of this particular narrative journey it is clearly shown to be a place of non-existent origins: Anna's fantasy identification with the black Francine is a desire for a perceived authenticity and sense of belonging attached to the signifier of blackness. But it is – like the origins of our childhood screen memories – always absent, and it is that absence that is so often present in Rhys's depictions of the city.

When Rhys, in 1936, returned briefly to Dominica she wrote that she felt she was "at home and not at home".[20] And in a later story, "The Day They Burned the Books", an Englishman infects the Rhys-like narrator with "doubts about 'home', meaning England" (*Tigers,* 38) by saying to her: "'You're not English; you're a horrid colonial.'"

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[19] I'm thinking, for example, of E.M. Forster in *Howards End,* with its nervous depiction of the flux of the modern city.

[20] Cited in Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys*, (London: Penguin, 1992), 354.

To which she replies: "'Well, I don't much want to be English ... It's much more fun to be French or Spanish or something like that." (*Tigers,* 39) The space of home can seemingly, for Rhys or Anna, never be reached; instead she must shuttle between different spatial projections of her identity. She wants to be back but is unsure whether the black people she wants to identify with are those of the African slaves – the 18 year old slave girl Maillotte Boyd whom she abjectly remembers while she loses her virginity to Walter – or those of the indigenous New World Caribs that are now "practically exterminated" (*Voyage,* 91).

Anna's position is perhaps best described by Stuart Hall in an essay where he defines Caribbean identity as possessing "a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity".[21] When Anna meets her racist stepmother Hester, who suggests that Anna is possibly of mixed – "race", she notices and becomes obsessed with an advertisement in a newspaper: "What is Purity? For Thirty Thousand Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa." (*Voyage,* 50) Although the purity may refer at once to her sexual purity and her "fallen" moral, the fact that later we learn her father owned a cocoa plantation makes us read the purity image in terms of her "racial" identity. "I'm a real West Indian,:" (*Voyage,* 47) she has just earlier said to Walter; and indeed, in a sense, she is because of a lack of fixed spatial and hence cultural identity. In this sense the many spaces of Anna's identity can never be synthesised into a singular identity located within one place; her existence is anxiously held within the flux of modernist spaces – psychic, intimate, national and abroad. In this sense Anna's identity is not constituted by connection, but by movement. As Stuart Hall comments of Caribbean identity:

> It is because this New World is constituted for us as a place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother, to go

[21] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 402.

> back to the beginning ... And yet this 'return to the beginning' is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery.[22]

Perhaps the endless quality of this search for identity illuminates the conclusion of *Voyage in the Dark*, where Anna, recovering from an abortion, hears the doctor's words that she will soon be able to "start all over again in no time" and dwells upon these words: "And about starting all over again, all over again..." (*Voyage*, 159). Anna's difficulty lies in accepting this provisional notion of identity through different spaces. Rhys herself had written of her desire as a child to be absorbed into the very earth of Dominica: "to identify with it, or lose myself in it .... This identification or annihilation that I longed for" (*Smile*, 81-2). The end of *Voyage* shows the seeming impossibility of Anna's identification with any specific place, with the original ending of the novel, where she dies after the abortion, having her embrace the other pole of this fruitless desire. In this sense Anna Morgan perhaps typifies the fate of modernism and its representations of the city: unable to find fixity and solidity, but also failing to feel at home with flux and spatial disorientation.

Ford Madox Ford noted the relation between psychic experience and material spaces in his "Preface" to Jean Rhys' first publication, the short stories, *The Left Bank* (1927):

> I tried... very hard to induce the author of *The Left Bank* to introduce some sort of topography of that region... But would she do it? No! With cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work. Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions: the locality in which these things are endured is immaterial. So she hands you the Antilles with its sea and sky – "the loveliest, deepest sea in the world – the Caribbean!" – the effects of landscape on the

[22] Ibid.

> emotions and passions of a child being so penetrative, but lets Montparnasse, or London, or Vienna go. She is probably right. Something human should, indeed, be dearer to one than all the topographies of the world.[23]

I think that Ford is wrong in this judgement, but perhaps only in the sense that he was unable to see the precise fashion in which Rhys handles the relation between emotion and landscape. She does not let the city escape from representation, but rather her mode of urban description always seems strangely filtered through other spaces, most notably that of 'abroad.' In *Voyage in the Dark* she does not write about places or landscapes; she writes in and out of different spaces, shifting between inner, outer and abroad in an attempt to capture a set of emotional responses to the fluctuating experiences of modernity. A voyage, then, through and into modernity, a quest for identity without origin or end, from imperial metropolis to dream-like colony and back again, starting all over again.

Here we have, I think, one reason for current revival in Rhys's work. For in its attention to provisionality, flux and hybridity in terms of cultural identity and belonging it prefigures certain key motifs of postmodernist thought. Whereas certain modernist writers find this prospect – what I have been calling the idea of "flux" – deeply troubling and one which must, if possible, be contained by notions of form, pattern or myth,[24] I think that Rhys's work shows an awareness that this postmodern moment – the fluid movement across many spaces and limits – cannot be avoided or simply contained by modernist form.

I want to end with a description from *Voyage in the Dark* of two impossible spaces, impossible because, in different ways Anna, newly arrived in England, cannot convert either one into a place of identification. Dominica is merely an abstract map reference on a piece

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[23] Ford Madox Ford, "Preface" to jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927)

[24] As for example in the attention to structuring devices of myth or order in works such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*. On this point see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 316-325

of paper; London a place of broken connections shown in the loss of punctuation and the hurried rush of the prose:

> Lying between 15° 10' and 15° 40' N. and 61° 14' and 61o 30' W. 'A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods,' that book said. And all crumpled into hills and mountains as you would crumple a piece of paper in your hand – rounded green hills and sharply-cut mountains.
>
> A curtain fell and then I was here.
>
> ... This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else – (...) I had read about England ever since I could read – smaller and meaner everything is never mind – this is London – hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning down one after the other all alike all stuck together – the streets like smooth shut-in ravines and dark houses frowning down – oh I'm not going to like this place I'm not going to like this place I'm not going to like this place – you'll get used to it Hester kept saying I expect you feel like a fish out of water but you'll soon get used to it (*Voyage,* 15-16).

Neither national space can be adequately grasped by Anna: Dominica is now only an abstracted geographical location or a description in a book viewing the island through the colonial gaze; whereas London is a place of foreboding – dark "ravines" and claustrophobic streets – that can, so far, only be tolerated.[25] The city becomes the site where limits – between inside and outside, self and other, native and stranger – are transgressed, shown here in the stylistic space of the narrative with its rush of impressions and its disconnected sentence structure. Reaching an accommodation with this lack of connection to place is thus the main theme of Rhys's fiction and it is why the spatial flux of the city is such an important image in much of her work. As Rhys comments of Marya, because "she was used to a lack of solidity and of fixed

[25] This description partly comes from Columbus's first report on Dominica to the King of Spain in 1493. See O'Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels,* 13.

backgrounds" (*Quartet,* 14) she did not find the melee of Paris particularly different. Rhys's novels appear engaged in the difficult exploration of movement across and between the spaces of modernism, to be somewhat inside rather than outside the "flux" as it were, and involved in the attempt to dwell and find "home" in this vertiginous environment. Her writing also clearly indicates the need to historically locate the discussion of space within changing relations between metropolis and colony. These are texts where space is gendered quite strongly – although I have not directly addressed that here: agoraphobic reactions to public spaces, unpleasant encounters in the streets of the city, and the sense of confinement felt by Anna in many rooms clearly relate to changing roles for women in new urban spaces. But the city is also a site of possibilities, of the transgression of limits for Rhys's women.

A "negative *flâneuse*" is Rachel Bowlby's apt description of Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight.*[26] Negative because her occupation of city space is always tenuous or temporary. It is also the city where Jean Rhys sees most clearly that "one cannot represent oneself to oneself", and that the ceaseless hubbub of the city is both a metaphoric and a more material version of her own self. This makes her work equivocal in its attitude to the city, an attitude that is most sharply rendered in her representation of liminal urban space itself. Rhys's texts move uneasily between various borders, unable or unwilling to settle on either side of these particular demarcations.

[26] See Bowlby, "The Impasse", p. 53.

8

A THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

James King

In this paper I will consider the mixed effects and perceptions of post-colonialism in Ireland; relate this consideration to a particular play whose characters were embroiled in the consequences of colonization; and describe the controversial response which the play received from people living in a quasi-colonial present. I will outline the methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed, consider its parallels in the controversy, and argue that informed awareness of the principles and practice of this methodology could have been of value to the various parties in the episode.

The South of Ireland appears to be cheerfully post-colonial; happily, with smiling eyes, welcoming members of the English royal family. Whether or not the North of Ireland is post-colonial is a different matter. The answer to this question reflects our state of mind and political attitude and employment prospects. Many Catholic/ Nationalists will have known in the very recent past a real sense of colonization from their lived experience. For others it will be to their political advantage to promote this perception. Catholic/Nationalist families whose homes have been raided by the R.U.C. and British soldiers have experienced the brute force of a hostile, invasive army – the army of an ``alien'' colonial power. At road blocks and in-house searches people felt that they are being punished because of their religion and cultural identity. A name, address or accent was enough to affect the attitude of the questioner.

When Protestants or Unionists were searched at road blocks the relationship was more respectful on both sides. During the recent conflict between security forces and Orange supporters on the parades issue, I heard Apprentice Boys supporters chanting, ``S.S.R.U.C.!'' – a phrase familiar to republicans. Nevertheless it is not a colonial army against whom they were battling but their ``own'' security force. For

most Protestants the situation is post-colonial. They don't experience themselves as planters but as native Ulstermen and women... And yet the Orange cultural identity is colonizer in tone expressed as it is in marches asserting territorial and traditional rights. But we are in a time of cultural revolution and these traditions are being challenged.

In Nationalist areas of Derry, colonized consciousness is graphic and indeed graffitied. A cultural challenge of a different kind emerged from there a few years ago. At the Rialto Theatre in Derry city in July, 1993, Galway's Druid Theatre was staging a production of Vincent Voods' *At the Black Pig's Dyke,* a play which included the theme of the effects of colonization in a divided, rural, border community; land ownership, intimidation and exploitation. The style of the production was innovative and unconventional – drawing upon myth and the pre-colonial folk art form of the mummers play. Altogether an admirable post-colonial conception. Except for the fact that a number of Derry's citizens felt very strongly that one of the characters, an I.R.A. volunteer, was represented as an emotionally disturbed, vengeful psychopath, almost devoid of any political motivation. A characterization consistent with the image which contemporary, British government propagandists would happily have endorsed. The preferred view of the occupying, colonialist power. A few local individuals got together and decided to express their anger in a creative and theatrical form by going onto the stage and doing a short piece at the play's end. They particularly wanted to do this because the play was soon to be taken on an English tour and the playwright's ''revisionist'' view of history would be seen to have the endorsement of a reputable Irish theatre group.

The protesters in a letter to the *Derry Journal* of 9th July, 1993 in writing about their protest, stated" ''(The storyline of the play) attempts to depict in sophisticated naivety the reality of the ongoing conflict in the six counties as an irrational consequence of evil borne in the heart of men. We are asked to collude with the author's view that it is disturbed psychology rather than social injustice that fuelled and still fuels this conflict. Any reference to the British involvement was peripheral and ultimately obscured by the main focus of the play.

The danger of such sophisticated Irish theatre offering tabloid representations of the present situation contributes to a manufactured consensus and debate that marginalizes the rational voices of opposition ... Additionally, the play makes a significant contribution to the cultural revisionism which is rampant in the South.

It was this shared analysis ... that led five community cultural activists to debate and eventually produce a theatrical response which was grafted on to the end of the play ... It is unlikely that our intervention will influence the decision to take the play to England. To think that such a naïve analysis will be presented by Irish people to English audiences is tragic. Hopefully, however, it will produce questions and ongoing discussion within the company and audience who saw it."

Eddie Kerr, a local playwright, was quoted in the same paper: "We have enough statutory censorship in this country without encouraging a similar response from those who should know better. It was this similar type of destructive criticism and emotional gut reaction that drove Joyce, O'Casey and Beckett from Ireland, Bertolt Brecht from Germany and Henrik Ibsen from Norway, and has caused the mass burning of selected books since the Dark Ages.

The obvious outcome of this action will give credence to the stance espoused by revisionists and does not expose them for what they are: merely "the buttresses of injustice".

So even some of the protesters' political and artistic friends objected. Local outrage erupted in the press, on radio, percolated the cafes and foamed throughout the pubs. Because I, myself, loathe and utterly deplore I.R.A. violence, I endorsed the need to see it portrayed in context. I was in support of the protesters' attempt to formulate a creative response. This is taken from my account of the event at the time: "When he appeared on stage (having crept into the wing from the dark auditorium) "Adam" donned a mummer's straw mask; (the stage too was dimly lit at the time) he crouched down awaiting the end of the final speech, temporarily in the mummer's role. Rising to his feet he removed the straw headgear to reveal a union-jack bag mask (which unfortunately resembled a hood because some of the cast thought he

was a U.V.F. gunman) in a butcher-mummer costume. Adam was now in the role of the symbol of British state violence. When the union-jack mask was removed, a clown make-up identical to that of Tom Fool in the play was revealed: the third role.'' Who's fooling who?'' he called. A woman now came on stage, cut the string attached to Adam's meat cleaver, and pronounced the words, "Peace is not the absence of war, it is the absence of conditions which create war.''

The intervention was modeled upon the style and form of the original. This had unforeseen consequences. The final scene is permeated with richly poetic language of violence. Consistent with this context another character, the red, white and blue masked butcher (Adam) appeared on stage, seemingly part of the play. Suddenly he is real; this reality redolent with the emotional resonance of the fiction. The cast associated the real person on stage with the monster they had created in the play (albeit of a different political hue) and reacted in panic. The audience's feelings of puzzlement, confusion, frustration and anger were made volatile by their already heightened feelings. The shocked audience believed that the protesters were aggressive, censorious fascists who had interfered with their right to their own opinion and response to the performance. The protesters believed that the play was censorious because it did not portray the total picture. The protesters believed that they were exerting independence of mind in taking this action. They were empowering themselves by creatively expressing a response to the play which would be shared by many people in the communities where they lived – people who do not usually attend theatres. Notable at the time was the reaction of Derry City Council: a majority, nationalist, council – having replaced the unjust, gerrymandered Unionist and colonialist Londonderry Corporation, former champions of civil rights protest Council members were outraged. Scapegoats were found. Until threatened with legal action they attempted to blacklist organizations to which some of the protesters belonged, even though they were acting as individuals in this protest.

From their colonized perspective the protesters felt that a distorted and colonialist representation of recent history (implicitly distorting the

present reality) had been presented on stage – within earshot but out of sight of the Bogside population whose experience of oppressions first hand – by Irish people on their way to English audiences.

The protesters stepped from the auditorium onto hallowed ground. Spectators became actors; the powerless assumed power, confronting the affront to their history. New victims were created; the cast; the audience; and cosiness in the theatre. The council was punitive. The protest needn't have happened. It probably wouldn't have happened if an opportunity had existed for people to express their response to the play; if there had been a forum for debate. (Indeed I believe that Druid have provided such a forum in the past when performing at Pilot's Row community center in the Bogside). Possibly the play was not perceived by the producer as one which lent itself to debate. Perhaps the auditorium was too large. Whatever the reason it didn't happen. Disgruntled, angry, and feeling helpless the activists devised an alternative channel of communication.

II

In devising Theatre of the Oppressed methods, Augusto Boal created forms in which the audience not only could take to the stage but were motivated so to do. "The conventional theatre ritual is conservative, immobile, opposed to progress. Certainly ... a play can transmit... ideas which are mobilizing. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, we try to invert this immobility, to make the dialogue between stage and audience totally transitive, in both directions: the stage can try to transform the audience, but the audience can also transform everything, try anything. Every oppressed person is a subjugated subversive. His submission is his Cop in the Head, his interjection. But he also possesses the other element, subversion. "Our goal is to dynamise the latter by making the former disappear'' (Boal, 1995). Boal established new conventions. He devised forms in which people (if they weren't already) became conscious of their oppressed condition. And enabled them to articulate means by which they could bring about change,

identify the sources of oppression and rehearse realistic methods to overcome them.

The "Black Pig's Dyke" episode illustrates the energy which is there when people decide against accepting a passive role and ignore convention. The protesters' energy came from anger at what they saw as a distorted image of their struggle. They needed to correct the distortion. This aim was to present an alternative image; to show what was missing. They brought onto the stage the image of British State violence. The motivation to do this was strong. The *ad hoc* group put a great deal of concentrated effort into constructing props, manufacturing costume, debating ethics, politics, tactics and rehearsing. The protest was not undertaken lightly. They had ignored convention. Boal creates new conventions.

In Boal's forms, the facilitator utilizes methods to deliberately create the process which the *ad hoc* protest group went through in their own spontaneous response. The facilitator builds solidarity in the group; energises the participants (with exercises and games); focuses awareness upon essential themes and motivates to action by enabling the presentation of provocative images and scenarios. (In the *ad hoc* groups case, this scenario was provided by Druid Theatre). The Rialto experience was not Theatre OF the Oppressed; it was theatre BY the oppressed.

It was in the nineteen-sixties that Augusto Boal devised and developed this form of theatre. The Theatre of the Oppressed was named after the work and ideas of Paulo Freire. Boal's work began in Brazil, (where he was imprisoned and tortured for his dissidence), traveled to Portugal, France, and throughout Europe: Britain, Ireland, and world-wide. There are various forms of Theatre of the Oppressed (T.O). Boal developed new methods in response to new problems and changing circumstances – all consistent with his philosophy of theatre and society. If I may metaphorically paraphrase: traditional theatre practice is a colonization of the colluding audience by the performance. In Boal's system the barrier between actor and audience is broken down. The spectators become SPECT-ACTORS. The audience participates in the action to make changes and create new solutions.

The action of intervening, of taking part on stage, and discarding the passive audience role is equally as important as discovering an answer. What matters is refusing to remain colonized.

Some T.O. forms enable participants to deal with the social and political effects of colonization or disempowerment. Other forms, the introspective techniques, relate to the colonization of the mind e.g. the Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire Techniques. Boal had noticed that participants in European T.O. workshops were oppressed by their own internal problems and relationships. Their sense of oppression stemmed from feelings of loneliness, isolation and communication difficulties. People needed to identify and challenge the constraints they carried in their minds and hearts. In the introspective techniques internalized roles, feelings, constraints and projections are externalized, encountered, challenged, accepted and controlled.

Invisible Theatre takes place in the street and other public places. In this method the initiators draw in the audience to participate in a theatrical experience. These SPECT-ACTORS do not realize that they are participating in a performance – which is also a real experience. The aim of the peformance is to highlight oppression in the place where it exists and initiate discussion and action to overcome the oppression. The aim is to create an arena of self-empowerment. This is also one of the aims of the Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre performances may take place in conventional theatre spaces but are more likely to happen in community venues. By means of this method, people explore and test various solutions to social and political oppressions presented in the form of short plays, or anti-models. Image Theatre, particularly useful as a workshop practice allows participants the opportunity to analyze oppressive structures and create new visions avoiding the obscurity and confusion sometimes generated by words.

Currently Augusto Boal is engaged in Legislative Theatre. As a Rio councillor he is entitled to employ staff. Usually councilors employ a secretarial team. Boal's staff is his theatre company. They consult with the electorate in discussion forums to find out which laws the people want to see introduced. The theatre group perform in the Legislature the problems faced by the people and desired changes. If

the appropriate legislation is not voted in the actors return to the people and perform the debate which had taken place. They are kept fully informed and involved as much as possible in the process of local government.

Augusto Boal has created a convention of interference. "In the conventional theatre there is a code: the code of noninterference by the audience. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, there is a proposition: interference, intervention. In the conventional Theatre we present images of the world for contemplation; in the Theatre of the Oppressed, these images are presented to be destroyed and replaced by others.... The rehearsal of the action is in itself an action, the practice of an action then to be practiced in real life. In the conventional theatrical relationship, the actor acts in my place but not in my name ... In a Theatre of the Oppressed anyone can intervene... The goal of the Theatre of the Oppressed is not then to create calm, equilibrium, but rather to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action. Its goal is to dynamise''. (ibid. p. 46) When the convention has been established, as in Forum and Image Theatre, the presentation, though often poignant, is not often as traumatic as the *Black Pig's Dyke* experience.

Augusto Boal has devised frameworks in which participants can exchange alternative perceptions of society, structures, individuals, psychic processes and institutions. Participants are facilitated in expressing dissent. They can experiment with alternative solutions to problems of oppression. They can rehearse tacticts to be used in the real world to bring about effective change. Some of these tactics such as Invisible Theatre where a potentially unpredictable and ungovernable response is possible from the public, safety is established by the actors rehearsing for all imaginable outcomes and maintaining integrity of role.

Is it possible that Boal's arsenal of approaches could have been used to beneficial effect at various stages in the *Black Pig's Dyke saga?*

- In the process of writing the play, had the author attended an Image Theatre workshop on Images of Ireland, participants in

that workshop might have encouraged a much greater reference to the conditions which create the violence of insurgency: i.e. the violence of the security forces and state violence in the form of poverty, political injustice and discrimination.

- In addition to serving a therapeutic function the introspective techniques can be used to enable an actor to deepen and develop the characterization of her/his role. In rehearsals, had the actor playing the Frank Beirne character employed, in role, the Rainbow of Desire techniques complex and political motivations could have been established for his actions. Albeit this would require some rewriting of the script. He does say, ''Where there's planter's there's still politics''. (*At the Black Pig's Dyke,* Vincent Woods, . Fraser and Dunlop). But this scant reference is two-dimensionally overshadowed throughout the play in the vein of, "and while there's still them that'd glawn our women and have the best of them''. (ibid) The revenge motive prevailed.
- A Forum debate after each performance would have contained audience response.
- Had the protesters attended a Forum Theatre workshop during their time of preparation they would have been more sensitive to and aware of the possible effects of their planned actions. A range of alternatives would have been presented to them and their consequences tested and compared.

As an alternative – had the protesters engaged in Invisible Theatre from seats in the audience, simulating expression of spontaneous anger i.e. acting the anger which they had originally experienced, they would have been protected from the consequences of deliberate protest. (Granted they would have created an actual disruption of the play instead of their end of play epilogue).

- The Derry City Council could have permitted a meeting with the group after the incident. (They were asked but refused). In

that event the *ad hoc* players would have had the opportunity to attempt Legislative Theatre.

In this paper I have endeavoured to indicate the broad relevance of Theatre of the Oppressed and its potential in relation to one particular scenario which was permeated by colonialist issues. Boal seems to use the concept of 'osmosis' for such contexts. Theatre of the Oppressed principles and methodology currently are permeating the community arts world locally in the North of Ireland. Many practitioners, perhaps without even realizing their origin, make use of Boal's warm up methods with groups. Tom Magill in Belfast has developed significant work in the Maze prison and with joyriders using Forum Theatre and other techniques. Demos theatre in Derry are developing a form of pub theatre derived from Forum principles. Graeae Theatre, a renowned group of actors with physical disabilities, recently made use of Forum Theatre on a visit to Sligo Arts Festival. My own work in street theatre, in the community and with people with disabilities has been greatly influenced by T.O. principles and strategies. The over-riding principle is that of some of the contributors to "Playing Boal" (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 1994) that practioners develop and adapt these seminal forms in ways which are relevant to their aims and the needs of the people and communities within which they work – to liberate and de-colonize.

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9

SAMUEL BECKETT ON THE THEME OF 'NO CULTURE'

Paul Davies

> The unfriendliness of society to his activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for true liberation. Freed from a false sense of security and community, the artist can abandon his plastic bank-book, just as he has abandoned other forms of security. Both the sense of community and of security depend on the familiar. Free of them, transcendental experiences become possible.
>
> — Rothko

Any post-structuralist and post-modernist critiques of universalizing historical strategies, narratives and rationalizing traditions have the initial effect of creating a desolation. In the wake of such critiques fall traditions of realism, of Western metaphysics, of subjectivity as viewed through a Cartesian lens where the meaning of focus has come to equal force, and the power/knowledge equation is instituted in such form as drew Foucault's notice. However, as Said argued, any resistance to a master-language of literary categorization risks instituting a resistor as masterful in its practices as the oppressor to which it responds. This has eventuated in the establishment of new fixtures in cultural interpretation which, while claiming to reaffirm a cultural and national identity for artists, finally do a minimum to open the perspectives necessary for appreciating highly complex original artists of the imagination.

Beckett's case is particularly interesting in the light of this. We may consider together: the oddly various ways in which Beckett has been categorised in literary history, literary theory and in higher education curricula; the ways Beckett characterized himself; and for

slightly longer the ways in which Beckett's texts inscribe the axiomatic possibility that to Know Culture equals to know truly No Culture. I hope to explain.

We find new fixtures, then, upon the decreliction of old orthodoxies. The word fix is itself a trap. To be fixed up is fine after a long search for a solution; even the quick fix, though second best, is often indispensable. Even leaving aside the equal and opposite sinister meaning of *fix* as corrupt arrangement and moving its signification into subjectivity, say sexual subjectivity, doubt again returns hidden within the possibility of satisfaction. "At one time there was nothing wrong with me", says a Bob Dylan love song, "that you could not fix."[2] But in recording precisely that long-lost confidence, related in a cliche of personal history, there's a pain hidden, which is the trap of the word *fix* no less than of all it denotates. For it is precisely when we can't have things fixed as we might like to and need to, it is then that we say with urgency, we are in fix. Stuck. The significance attached to the term vanishes. Far from promising value added, the rotation of meaning ends in value subtracted. Once stuck, we are in a fixture we can't loosen. We are entering the vocabulary of contemporary cultural theory, or nearly there, beginning to breathe in the threatening climate of fixed positions, binary oppositions, fixations even; the new cultural sin is hypostasis, another synonym for malign fixing. Social and individual responses all fall into this possible danger area. Indeed a lot of the post-colonial theorizing we have grown to accept as an industry with a possibly ethical intention (if not outcome) is devoted to dissolving hypostatised, fixed – fixated – perspectives which legislate human being in terms of stasis (fixedness) rather than process (unfixedness). Conscience, "the horrid image", acts on Macbeth, "doth unfix [his] hair". Fixed resolve gives way to flow.

Let's open out the semantic map somewhat further, to find the obvious relationship between fixed ideas and the urge present in

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[2] Bob Dylan, "Seeing the Real You at Last", *Empire Burlesque* (1984), Columbia CK 40110.

contemporary cultural debate, and especially in public debate, press and media, towards establishing positions. What is your position on this? Have you got an opinion? Have you established a theoretical base? If mouths are for rent, commentary is invoiced.

This question: "What is your position on this?" must, in the end, equilibrate the question: "In which position are you at present fixed?" and it leaves less room – spectacularly less – for the question: "How soon might you change your mind?" In this sense, nothing is more dubious than having one's mind made up – resolution here tails off into, or dovetails into, that disregarding fixedness which attracts the exclusive label *bigot*. Of course, it's not cast as that. It's cast as its opposite, the exercise of free speech in a free space, in a democratic age of information.

Although the debate stages itself in cultural and literary studies as though it is at a level above party politics, nevertheless the recurrent experience of many in the academic community is that they are marshalled, and marshal their modes of communication, in an environment of lines and perspectives which, when rubbed free of their surface deposits are nothing other than party lines, things people feel it's necessary to sign up to. Publishers, interviewing panels, course validation committees, grant awarding bodies, ask repeatedly for the theoretical underpinnings of your enquiry. The enquiry itself is not enough. Whatever may be the practical uses of a criterion of established positions, it brings the possibility of enquiry into hopelessly narrow limits, and it almost always brings anything that proceeds from the actual avant-garde into a system of vested interests where group identity, protection of a field, begins to stand in place of the process and intention of the original inquiry. Although it doesn't always happen, it happens recognizably often.

Pursuing any further musings of this sort we inevitably light upon the ultimate pseudo-Derridean dogma, which is this: all statements in all languages are bound within the system of limitations which our discipline arose to abolish. (Even constating that, the critic is

ringfenced by his or her own categories of exclusion). The punchline: All resistance to this dogma is a case of pot calling kettle black.

We might retort that, as many have argued, there are political and ethical underpinnings that validate the dogma I've just outlined. The crusade against the master/phallus/logos/patriarchal discourse is implicated in nearly all of the ethical justifications of the current dogma that I know. If I personally have an interest in where this double bind will end up, if anywhere, it is an interest in justifications which don't set up a new dogma in place of the old. Where a witness-point might be imagined for which not all communications are inevitably tainted by their own baseness, or, if we wish to bleach that phrase of its humanist colour, not all sign-systems are contingent upon the terms of those systems. So for the purposes of this discussion I don't intend wheeling onstage the great writer Beckett – Hamm's demiurge. I propose him rather as a capable exponent of *unfixing* discourse.

The ways Beckett has been "adopted" – another anodyne variant of fixed – are as oddly numerous as his ability to dispatch them all into the area of irrelevance. He has been eagerly embraced as: one of the greats in English Literature; as a French writer; as an Irish writer; as a European writer; as an Anglo-Irish writer; as a Nobel-prizewinner. As a world writer. The act of embrace and adoption is of course the characteristic operation of a group consciousness which survives by recruiting new membership. The caring and solicitous connotations the words embrace and adopt have a history of shading off into less happy versions: capture and appropriation. Surely this fact is behind Beckett's legendary shyness of the public eye, a proprietorial realist eye which allays its inward insecurity by making things its own. If there was any politically significant statement from Beckett, it was made in this refusal to be domesticated into a theoretical stable. It's notable that his own explanation for writing in French as well as English was that he was seeking a way of writing "without style". Style is equivalent to subjectivity in this equation. Style is to language what self is to individual.

The history of the theory of Western communication has been inevitably the history of realism – the post-renaissance human perspective, on life, on the polis, on the universe and everything. Beckett's entire literary work, but perhaps especially the late fiction, is the most advanced stage in the design of a language laboratory, so to speak, which experiments with the preparation of antidotes to the poison of realism. Beckett foresaw and foresaid the dissolving of history which such thinkers as Foucault and Derrida have made much better known. Both the latter suggested that the Western humanist sequencing of historical events and the act of representing them as a chain of causation is itself the imposition of a type of story into the cultural fabric, the story being the grand narrative of Western metaphysics, as Derrida and Lyotard have called it. Beckett very early on saw that same problem in realist aesthetics, which he called the "vulgarity of plausible concatenation"[2]. Along with his verticalist[3] peers in late 20s Paris, Beckett saw the realist programme as being precisely the repressive and narrow regimen that contemporary thinkers see in the realist account of historical progress. One perhaps wonders, while attending to Beckett's aesthetic choices only, why he should have taken such a harsh stand against realist practices. After all, we might be tempted to say, realism didn't die after Beckett; it has triumphantly soldiered on as the dominant aesthetic in novels, drama, cinema and popular culture, whereas, is Beckett read by anybody much at all?

The harm Beckett saw in realism is the harm of a self-validating but deceptive system of communication and reception, which claims to be truthful in the very moment it deceives. The political underpinning, if you like, of nineteenth and twentieth century realism, and of its colloquial names – 'slice of life', *verismo*, – is the author[ity figure] who says

(i) I am reliable

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[2] Beckett, *Proust and three Dialogues* (London, John Calder, 1969, pp. 81-2)

[3] On Verticalism, see Dougald Macmillan, *Transition 1927-38; History of a Literary Era* (London, John Calder, 1975), pp 62-75

(ii) I know how the world works.

(iii) My account of it is therefore the truth.

(iv) My account of it puts everything in its proper place without mystifying.

(v) My aesthetic practice is able to produce receipts and inventories, and is as far as possible exhaustive.

(vi) It is therefore accountable to you, the public.

Essentially the same guarantees are offered by politicians and historians. They are all realists, and it at just this kind of moment that the aesthetic usage of the word segues into the self-congratulatory usages of the commercial speculator and the politician, who extract votes and sales by saying *Trust us, we are realists.*

I want to suggest that this is precisely why, according to Beckett, to know culture in any depth – after extracting realism, its dominant narrative strategy – is to be faced with NO CULTURE WHATSOEVER. The cultural soup has been evaporated in a kind of crucible. Realist discourse is so important an ingredient in Western culture's image of itself that once it has gone it really looks as if there is nothing left at all. This state of affairs is reflected in the "vertiginous panic" spreading through centres of cultural theory and debate in the last two decades. Far from providing the reassurance that might have been expected from re-stating with almost religious zeal the contours of national and cultural identity, the arenas of debate are on the contrary full of hungry humanists and realists with nothing left to eat. And stabling a unique artistic gesture is itself an act of reification.

A final point on a matter often raised in connection with Beckett. He is famed for giving the world the consciousness of "going on" with "nothing to go on". The locutions

I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on[4]

[4] Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London, Picador (Pan), 1979), p 382

and

> Nothing to express, nothing with which to express, together with the obligation to express.[5]

are legendary. Each new book that came out during his lifetime, each one shorter than the last, was welcomed as proof that the ever less that Beckett could say was somehow preferable to more and more profuse declarations about what could not be said. Nevertheless the question is often asked, especially by those who wonder whether Beckett is overrated: Why didn't he simply stop writing if he had nothing left to say, instead of piddling on in what he himself once called a kind of "strangury"? If, as Wittgenstein so memorably pointed out, "all descriptions are misdescription", and if, as Beckett says in *Worstward* Ho, "Said is missaid", why bother? Just stop, save everyone the trouble. Beckett wondered this in print quite often too.

Non-western perspectives on human being in the world offer modes of reception which have imported the conditionings of realist discourse. When we look at their metaphysics we find a language much less susceptible to the charges made against Western metaphysics with its logocentric/patriarchal/phallocentric orders. Lao tzu in the Tao Te Ching says of perfected being, it does nothing, and through it everything is accomplished. The sufi Ibn 'Arabi speaks of perfected being as "without quality", a substrate for the clear light which the Tibetan Buddhists, along with Shelley, see as lighting the world, "the dome of many-coloured glass", the world that "stains the white radiance of eternity".[6] Beckett's version of this:

> Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on. Then all seen as only then. Undimmed. All undimmed that words dim. All so seen unsaid.[7]

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[5] Beckett, *Proust and three Dialogues,* p 103

[6] Shelley, *Adonais* (1821), lines 460-4

[7] Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London, John Calder, 1991), p 40

Beckett's writings, his language laboratory, works in this manner. When he says Nohow On, he means that there is no how to this existence without colour, movement or quality. It has no trappings. It just is. Why on, then? Because to live is to undergo the process named conception, birth, life, death. And the way it's seen is as something that goes on. The on is the quality, colour, specific contingency of this lived life. Life goes on, as Arnold Schoenberg wrote in his diary. But as the vedantists say, that's the illusory element, the mirage, dream, snake in the piece of rope.

So since all saying is missaying, one might as well go on as stop. But moreover, there may be a real difference between going silent and staying in touch. Emmanuel Levinas observed that

> The greatest virtue of philosophy is that it can put itself in question, try to deconstruct what it has constructed and unsay what is has said. Science, on the contrary, does not try to unsay itself, does not interrogate or challenge its own concepts, terms or foundations: it forges ahead, it progresses.[8]

There in Levinas' description of science is the "going on" of teleology, that other demon of Western realist discourse. But Beckett's going on is something else. It is the unsaying of the said, the loosening of fixture, the reintroduction of mobility. Levinas again:

> Saying is ethical sincerity insofar as it is exposition. As such this saying is irreducible to the ontological definability of the said. Saying is what makes the self-exposure of sincerity possible; it is a way of giving everything, of not keeping anything for oneself. In so far as ontology equates truth with the intelligibility of total presence, it reduces the pure exposure of saying to the totalizing closure of the said. The human being is characterized as human not only because he is being who can speak but also because he is a being who

[8] Levinas, in Richard Kearney (ed), *Dialogues with Conteomporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984), p 63-66

> can lie, who can live in the duplicity of language as the dual possibility of exposure and deception. The animal is incapable of this duplicity; the dog [...] cannot suppress its bark, the bird its song. But man can repress his saying, and this ability to keep silent, to withhold oneself, is the ability to be political. Man can give himself in saying to the point of poetry – or he can withdraw into the non-saying of lies.[9]

(Or – we might wish to interpolate – he can unsay his said, so as to avoid the totalizing closure of the said, the fixed position, the glib statement.)

> Language as saying is an ethical openness to the other; as that which is said – reduced to a fixed identity or synchronized presence – it is an ontological closure to the other.[10]

Refusal to speak is, then, perhaps an ethical evasion. Equally we could say that the mystic, though not of the world, can never really in conscience refuse to be in the world. To trust the said as real is the vulgarity of the realist discourse which fixes and fixates in a totalizing and potentially totalitarian closure. But to *unsay as one says* as Beckett's experiment does is a direct facing, is to "give oneself in saying even to the point of poetry". Is this why Beckett, like many of the most radical of Zen masters, mystics and spiritual teachers, didn't give up speaking altogether?

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

10

PUNCH DRUNK: POST-COLONIALISM, THEORY AND IRISH CULTURAL EPHEMERA

Colin Graham

Beginning his essay, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', Luke Gibbons draws attention to a children's game 'circulated in the "Big Houses" of the Irish Ascendancy'.[1] This purported by its title to give the 'British Empire at a Glance', and as Gibbons notes, it understood the empire in terms of 'white' or 'native' populations. Gibbons points to the fact that:

> When it came to Ireland, the wheel ground to a halt for here was one colony whose subject population was both 'native' and 'white' at the same time. This was one corner of the Empire, apparently, that could not be taken in at a glance.[2]

I want to set against this apparently paradigmatic instance of the representation of Ireland in British, metropolitan terms, another children's game, this one to be found in the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, London. At Bethnal Green there is a jigsaw puzzle, called 'Europe Delineated', which was first manufactured around 1830; it has a map of Europe at its centre with viginettes of European countries around the outside. Each country is represented through some form of indigenous transport and/or work, and is explained by an accompanying text. For Ireland there is a horse and cart with the following text:

> Ireland is a small island about one third the size of Great Britain. The peasantry are very poor and live in small cabins

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[1] Luke Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork University Press, 1996), p. 149.

[2] Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', in op.cit, p. 149

> or huts along with their pigs or whatever animals they keep. We cannot therefore wonder at the homeliness of the conveyance here represented.[3]

I have set these two items of what can only imprecisely be called popular culture against each other not to make a glaringly obvious (and potentially revisionist) point – that Ireland can be understood as European as well as colonial. That, I think, would be a slightly false opposition; one that overestimates the catch-all validation of being European and which underplays the hierarchies within the European itself.[4] However, what is initially useful about these texts is firstly that there co-exist here conflicting possibilities in the representation of Ireland in popular culture in Britain during the period of British rule in Ireland (and after), and, secondly, that the co-existence of these texts seems to suggest that, in one sense, Ireland can be 'taken in at a glance' – in 'Europe Delineated' Ireland *is* glanced at; it is understood, catalogued and shuffled off into the structures of what Edward Said calls the 'family of ideas', [5] offering itself as a homology of adult knowledge which is to be created during childhood play: 'Toys here reveal the list of all the things the adult does not find unusual'.[6] To read these children's games as texts which are partially contradictory is not to diminish their ideological significance, nor is it to suggest that

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[3] 'Europe Delineated', produced by John Betts c. 1830. This is a fifty-seven piece jigsaw cut from a hand coloured steel engraving mounted on wood; when assembled it was used as a 'race' game. John A Betts published various educational materials such as maps, globes and puzzles. After 1875, Betts' stock was sold by the importers, AN Myers & Co. George Phillip & Son took over the puzzle publication, to be listed as Betts Dissected Puzzles. I am grateful to Susan Smith of the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood for her generosity in supplying information on this item. 'Europe Delineated' is catalogued at Bethnal Green as MISC 6-1936.

[4] The text for 'England' reads: 'Harvest Home: This is a cheerful sight indeed! The last load is going home and the reapers are no doubt thinking of the hearty supper which the farmer gives them on this occasion. It is hoped that they will not abuse his kindness by taking more than will do them good'.

[5] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Penguin, 1991 [1978], p. 41. Said takes the phrase from Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 17.

[6] Roland Barthes, 'Toys' in *Mythologies* (Vintage, 1993), p. 53.

their establishment of patterns of cultural knowledge are annulled through their comparison – rather it is to stress alongside this potential existence as cultural evidence, their fleeting nature, their status as ephemera, their representational instabilities. This essay suggests that it is the generic and cultural status of popular texts which gives them a potential as a resource in cultural history and in cultural theory, and, most crucially, in the ability of Irish cultural criticism to trace the relationships and conflicts of colonial and post-colonial cultural production.

What follows then is a discussion of a series of popular cultural representations which involve Ireland in some way and an attempt to make some preliminary speculations on how the notions of hybridity and marginality, which in themselves have become something of a commonplace in post-colonial thinking on Ireland, can be made material and readable in these cultural ephemera – texts which have their own marginality to the standard discursive contexts in which Irish coloniality and post-coloniality has been understood.

The standard work on the representation of Ireland and Irishness in what is recognisably popular culture is of course L.P. Curtis's *Apes and Angels*[7], while the most significant expression of dissent from, Curtis, as much as it does dissent, is Roy Foster's essay "Paddy and Mr Punch".[8] Curtis's work has become influential largely because it offers a material culture history as 'evidence' to a cultural critique which is dependent on a neat and precise argument for Irishness as an 'other' Englishness[9]; as a result, Curtis's implicit and methodological insistence on *Punch* as the primary site in which popular culture in Britain constructed its 'Other' Ireland has gained a hegemonic status

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[7] L.P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971). See also Curtis's *Anglo-Saxons and Celts* (University of Bridgeport, 1968).

[8] R.F. Foster, 'Paddy and Mr Punch' in *Paddy and Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (Allen Lane, 1993), pp. 171-194.

[9] The idea which underpins Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Jonathan Cape, 1995), though of course Curtis is in no way the sole or even main source for this thesis in Kiberd.

which would be extraordinary in any other area of academic research[10]; when Foster 'challenges' Curtis the position of *Punch* as paradigmatic looking glass for Victorian visualizations of Ireland is simply reaffirmed. Foster's reply to Curtis relies on arguments about the veracity and accuracy of stereotypes (as if a stereotype was neutralised by being 'true'). This method disables Foster's ability to discuss the politics of representation in any theoretical way, while his attention to genre goes only so far as to imply that stereotypes are typical of *Punch* and that Ireland was not therefore singled out for special treatment. Beyond that, Foster argues for a recognition of the variety in *Punch's* representation of the Irish; this is useful and necessary, but it maintains the monopoly of *Punch* as the source (and type of source) to be used in examining British attitudes to Ireland. And of course this in itself negates any notion that popular cultural forms may be different from high cultural forms, or from 'official' political discourse. For these reasons I would argue that we need to begin to look again at popular culture as a source for the representation of Ireland in the colonial metropolis,[11] and that we need, in tandem with this material methodological change, to allow a theoretical shift away from the binaries of the 'Other', towards post-colonial theory's use of the marginal and hybrid as possible categories.

Placing 'popular' cultural texts in the theoretical framework of post-colonial criticism is a largely untested discursive intersection[12]. Hybridity as a conceptual framework for understanding colonial and post-colonial culture has the advantage of acknowledging culture, when

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[10] Vincent Cheng's *Joyce, Race and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), for example, repeats many of Curtis's assertions with little fundamental questioning of the method or remiss of Curtis's work.

[11] See, however, J.S. Donnelly and K. Miller, *Irish Popular Culture 1650 – 1850:* (Irish Academic Press, forthcoming at time of writing) which would appear to take the study of Ireland and popular culture into previously ignored periods.

[12] Though see Kevin Barry, 'Critical Notes on Post-Colonial Aesthetics' in *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (1996), pp. 2-11 for largely incidental usages of 'popular' visual culture, and David Lloyd's discussion of ballads, especially in 'Adulteration and the Nation' in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Movement* (Lilliput, 1993), pp. 88-124.

caught between centripetally-organised ideological entities, as an often unstable state of affairs, in which categories are maintained as ghosts of their original presences. Homi Bhabha usefully argues that colonial domination is reliant on a denial of 'its dislocatory presence in order to preserve the authority of its identity'.[13] Bhabha's initial illustration in his essay is a translated Bible, an 'authoritative' cultural text propelled into the domain of the 'low' and colonized, and this can enable the levering of a potential space in which the cultural and colonial statuses which seek to construct the text allow cross-hatched reading trajectories. The 'fall' from high to 'low' may be as much a process or series of stages as it is choice between two levels – and determining the relation of this process to the dynamics of colonial interaction thus becomes more fluid and potentially indefinite. Following Bhabha, it can certainly be argued that the 'colonial text's pressure to 'authorise' itself, to deny its own dislocation, is aided when that text is placed within what is already a discourse of authority (and in this sense Bhabha sees this struggle to deny dislocation as the centripetal force of colonial texts). Put simply for the case of Irish culture, it may be that it is now only partially possible to read hybridity in Joyce or Yeats since the discourses in which these texts exist (that of Joyce scholarship, for example, or of Irish literature) are already established within what Bhabha calls 'teleological narratives of historical and political evolutionism.[14] (for example, the history of literature, or modernism, or indeed cultural or literary nationalism).

To see textuality at play in marginality in the Irish case we might be able to turn to the sort of texts which are discussed below; texts which are themselves marginal, and whose cultural status is indeterminate. The remainder of this essay attempts to follow through some of the potentialities and difficulties of reading these marginalized, popular text as what John Fiske calls 'producerly' texts[15], those

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[13] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tress Outside Delhi, May 1817' in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), p. 111.

[14] Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders', p. 111

[15] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Routledge, 1989), pp. 103-104.

characterized by popular production, vulnerability, self-exposure and by having 'meanings [which] exceed [their] own power to discipline them'.[16] Brian Maidment's discussion of prints in the Victorian period makes these textual/theoretical possibilities more concrete. Maidment suggests that the 'unselfconscious and unambitious' nature of such texts allows them to contain a 'spontaneous response to an ephemeral social event or commercial opportunity',[17] an observation which importantly highlights the awkward negotiation involved in reading such texts over the differentials of the ideologically reflective against a generic and structural depth, both of which in turn can only have a degree of dependence on audience ('commercial opportunity').

With these contingencies in mind, I will be moving backwards chronologically in reading these texts – the reasons for doing so should become clearer as the essay progresses. It is worth stating at this point that I want to use these texts to look at the possibilities of complicating the understanding of the representation of Ireland in British popular culture which is currently available in Irish studies. This backwards look also allows me to end before *Punch* begins in an attempt to dislodge the dominance of the magazine from the status Curtis and others have given it.

The embodiment of Fiske's producerly notion of 'popular' textuality, and its possibilities in an Irish context, are at their most bizarrely 'indisciplined' in a text which was a 'gift' series of collectors' items given away with Kensitas cigarettes (presumably, and rather obviously, some time in the 1920s or 1930s[18]). The item is a small silk banner and comes from a series called 'Flags of the Empire' (which also included flags from both white and non-white parts of the Empire). Before beginning to struggle with what might be said about this item, it needs to be placed in its widest possible context. The other similar

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[16] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 104.

[17] B.E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints, 1790-1870* (Manchester University Press 1966), pp. 17, 18. I am grateful to Professor Maidment for allowing me to consult proof copies of his book and for generously sharing his expertise on nineteenth-century popular forms and especially his knowledge of the almanac form (discussed below).

[18] I have been unable to find an exact date for this series.

types of collector's items and series issued with tobacco products used at this time were often, as far as it is possible, ideologically innocuous, or at least less obviously political (from wildlife and flora to footballers and cricketers). This is not to downplay the cultural significance of 'collecting' football heroes; rather it should emphasise the 'ordinariness' of this type of cultural text, while comprehending the 'shapes', 'purposes' and 'meanings'[19] which this ordinariness draws into itself.

The Kensitas flag embodies one delicious irony, of course; the co-existence of the word 'Free' with the word 'Empire'. Its ordinariness sits blandly beside its politicality as if both speak with equal weight. As a text it is placed at that anomalous, paradoxical, pre-Constitutional period of Irish history. Certainly that paradox is made less evenly balanced by the fact that the typeface of 'THE BRITISH EMPIRE' is larger than that of 'THE IRISH FREE STATE'; however, the contradiction and ultimately the bizarre hybrid nature of this text is clinched by the flag itself – a glaring expression of independence and nationality which is, through the (proposed) act of collecting the entire set of 'Flags of the Empire', dragged unhappily and illogically into the awkward constitution of the empire. Faced with the 'Plates of the *Encyclopedia*', Roland Barthes notes appositely that we are lured into its structuring of knowledge in the following way: 'the fracture of the world is impossible; a glance suffices ...for the world to be eternally complete'.[20] What we are left with in reading the Kensitas flag is a blank ideological connotation; inherent in the compulsiveness of the collector is a blindness to the political reality which the collected item loudly proclaims. The world in the text (here in its individual and serial form) in this case stands at the edge of being an 'act' (collecting for its own sake) rather than a connotation (Ireland in the Empire) – such balances of genre, audience, consumption and ideology are crucial to reading of these texts since the insistences they bring introduce a

[19] Alluding to Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' collected in *Studying Culture*, ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (Edward Arnold, 1993).

[20] Roland Barthes, 'The Plates of the Encyclopedia' in *Selected Writings*(Fontana, 1982), p. 234.

different theoretical and contextual domain to that used to read standard Irish 'cultural' texts.

It would be a false methodological and theoretical construction to use the backwards historical movement in this essay as an attempt at a history of images of Ireland in British popular culture. The cumulative argument here is in fact tangential to and partly in conflict with the notion of a cultural history in the way that Curtis and Foster allow it. While the Kensitas flag shows an incongruity embodied in one text to the extent we are left resisting the text's tendency to closure if not contradiction, the covers of *'Now* what will Become of Poor Old Ireland (written and composed by Arthur West) and of 'The song That Broke My Heart. "O' Shea's My Sweet heart I'm Her Bear"' written by G.W. Hunter and John Stockes; composed by Julian Jordan and Michael Nolan, plus the texts of the songs can be used to open a similar textual space in a different genre and context. They show the covers of late Victorian song sheets, both concerning Charles Stewart Parnel and both produced at around the same time (after Parnel was cited as co-respondent in O'Shea's divorce case in 1890, an event which they both refer to). The songs and the texts they form (including the covers) were part of a long series produced by Francis Day and Hunter (again it is important to stress that the rest of the series is by no means solely about Ireland, nor even solely about politics). The first song, 'Now What will Become of Poor Old Ireland?: or, Charlie Parlie' is a satire on Parnell, attacking him for his adultery (note Parnell escaping from O'Shea down the fire-escape in the illustration), for his law-breaking and (almost) accusing him of money laundering and neglecting his mother. The song itself, playing on Parnell's difficulty, contains the marvellously devastating lines:

Won't the lawyers giggle and grin when they take up his pelf;

He wants Home Rule for Ireland, but he can't Home Rule himself.

There are no surprises here – this is satire of the *Punch*-type, with an added sense of ribaldry and sexual innuendo, reflections, no doubt, of its music hall context. But the second song, 'O'Shea's My Sweetheart I'm Her Beau', contains an entirely different version of Parnell in

which he is a romantic hero and a tragic lover. The song, for example, contains the lines:

Perhaps we'll marry, never to part,

Little Kitty O'Shea's

The girl that broke my heart

These are uttered entirely without irony, without satire and with immense affection.

How then can these conflicting views of Parnell be held simultaneously in one cultural form, at one brief historical moment, produced by one publisher? One obvious way to understand this would be to revert to the trope of what is here quite literally stage-Irishness; the sentimentality attached to Parnel could be envisaged as the light side of the Othering of Ireland, part of the marrying of the exotic and threatening which characterizes Orientalist discourses. If this is so, then the switch from one side to another, from exotic to dark, is shockingly immediate and above all arbitrary. This arbitrariness can only disturb, to some extent, the apparently definitive nature of the binaries of the Other and this may tell us something significant about popular culture – that in a very particular way it is fickle, its representational categories having peculiarly porous boundaries. This is certainly convincing, but there is another factor here. The audience that listens to these songs is, of course, largely working-class, Victorian and English – but a significant part of that audience could, under certain circumstances, be of Irish origin. How far this affects this cultural text is impossible to tell quantitatively without extensive research on the ethnic make up of Victorian music hall audiences[21]. But an important point is nevertheless enforceable – these cultural texts are moving in ways we are only partially able to grasp (being both methodological and conceptually

[21] The work of Professor David Mayer of Manchester University on early films in the United States is instructive here. Professor Mayer's archive material includes many films which depend on 'ethnic' jokes and the representation of ethnic types (including the Irish). Professor Mayer suggests that these jokes were often 'for' rather than aimed against the immigrant groups represented, who would often have *been* the audience.

'new'), and the glimpse that we see of their resonances implies that they exist in an order of discourse which at the very least cross-cuts that ~~which~~ we usually assume for 'Ireland' as it is figured for itself in 'British' culture (additionally questioning how Irish criticism's understanding of how 'British' culture is made).

To reach concrete conclusions on this topic would in a sense be self-defeating since the 'field' of study outlined here is essentially unpredictable and unmapped. It seems appropriate then to conclude with an image which is typically astonishing, in a genre about which too little is known, and the 'meanings' of which could be endlessly contended.

This item 'The Modern Phenomenon of a Murphy, or the Cullcatcher of 1838' is principally a satiric version of the almanac, a cultural form which gained in popularity over the early nineteenth-century especially. It is likely that this would have been passed around as a handbill or displayed in a workplace or pub, for example and thus collectively interpreted. This particular almanac was produced in 1838 by J.L. Marks – at its centre is a harlequin figure, who is obviously Irish, given the text above him[22] and his potato head; he is surrounded by gestures towards typical features of the almanac – the changing seasons, meteorological 'information', predictive powers. The figure circulating the dial on the bottom of the illustration are also typical of the form (and are excellent examples of their type). To this extent this almanac contains standard elements of a cultural form we know too little about yet, as I argue below, it is crucial to understand that this text actually constitutes an attack on the almanac form itself.

What is of further interest, of course, is the extent to which this is also a representation of Irishness, and additionally, the extent to which this Irishness is of its time or is anticipated or insisted upon by the

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[22] This reads: 'In returning my grateful acknowledgment for the liberal patronage which an *"enlightened Public!"* has bestowed on my *"Weather Almanac"* and the *increasing demand* for it proves my *theory is sound!!* And that I'm quite a Pat!!! I beg to state that I am preparing another for the year 1839 and intend to publish it on the *1st of April* next (all Fools day) with many improvements, and to save my Printer time and trouble I shall *commence* with the *59th Edition.*'.

genre. From our knowledge of later *Punch* images we can trace characteristics of Irishness which became (or already were) 'stock'; the Irish bull, for example, contained in the text at the top which suggests beginning at the 59th edition of the almanac to save the trouble of the printer; the meteorological symbolicm, which is transmuted into the 'blowing hot & cold' of the pipe smoke and which bespeaks the supposed intemperance of the Irish (this is of course transferred additionally in the references to alcohol[23]). In parallel to this, the almanac form arguably allows for both Catholicism and perceived stupidity to be woven into this text, so that while these work as essential structural principles of the satirized almanac (the religious ordering of the year and the belief in almanac as predictive) they are also able to function as tropes of the Irish stereotype alluded to.

One element which is central to the illustration and to any understanding of it is of course the central harlequing figure with the potato head (A. Murphy). From the perspective of representations of Ireland what is important here is that this establishes the image of the potato as a signifier of 'Ireland' both before the Famine and before *Punch's* infamous characterization of Daniel O'Connell in similar terms.[24] The fact that this precedes *Punch* (which was founded in 1841) puts the structures of knowledge we have on this area of culture further into question. What is clear about this image is that it represents some sort of ideological battle in which Irishness is implicated but is not necessarily central. The 'Gullcatcher' (Murphy) is predominantly 'catching' those who 'live by' the almanac. The anti-rationalism of almanac forms of knowledge is then arguably further 'discredited' by the conjunction of Irishness (stupidity, drunkenness, superstition) and the form. Yet interestingly this is a debate the satire of which tends to suggest an uncertainty about the dominance of the almanac itself. It is surely a useful and potentially extraordinary spectacle to see Irishness involved in this way in a cultural friction in which a 'low' cultural form

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[23] Father Matthew's abstinence movement was founded in 1838, the year of this almanac.

[24] 'The Real Potato Blight' in *Punch*, 9 (July-December 1845), p. 255.

may be undermined and mimicked from 'above', and which leaves the status of that 'low' form unresolved.

Finally, we might speculate on the detail of this almanac, always being thrown, I suspect, by its inability or unwillingness to prioritise and order what it contains. How, for example, are we to understand the figures on the right-hand side, labeled 'Northern lights'? The temptation is here surely to look at the geography of the landscape in the print, the exclusionism of the text ('we Green-landers are too Far North'), the play on the North itself, the border of ice between the 'Green-landers' and the other figures, and to see pre-echoes of Partition (thus separating off Protestantism from the 'Catholicism' of the main section of the illustration?). And yet could we ever substantiate such a reading?

The problem here is not simply retrospective projection of our own ideological obsessions. It seems to me that we are faced with this image as an 'object' in the sense in which Barthes understands the term, something which is 'at once a perfection and an absence of origin'.[25] In many ways this is the case for all of the images I have discussed here. These texts are on the verge of a new archaeology of knowledge about which we know little. As Foucault suggests under different circumstances, we are left with the 'never completed, never wholly achieved uncovering of the archive [which] forms the general horizon to which the description of discursive formation ... belongs'[26]; this is an archive which can only complicate and expand our notions of the meeting of cultural monoliths in Irish colonized history. How these popular cultural representations coincide with or have any knowledge of other forms of political and cultural discourse remains equally unknown. Summarising the conditions for the reception and the reading of prints, Brian Maidment says:

> In seeking to represent the immediate, the topical, and the ephemeral within their own cultures, these images instead

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[25] Roland Barthes, 'The New Citroën' in *Mythologies* (Vintage, 1993), p. 88

[26] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans, by A.M. Sheridan Smith (Tavistock, 1972), p. 131.

> describe for us the complex and not entirely conscious exchange of cultural values which is characteristic of discourse. Such discourses are dependent on representational codes which we can never decipher with absolute confidence.[27]

We are still, arguably, a long way from understanding the 'representational codes', patterns and structure of ideology expressed about Ireland in texts such as these – and as a result the version or post-colonialism we use in the Irish context is still skewed by readings of Ireland as a *literary* analogue to the Empire elsewhere, just as the version of 'culture' we assume for Britain and Ireland across history is hierarchised and static. Reading these texts suggests that the negotiation between particularity and typicality, discourse and genre, text and ideology needs to be carried over into a post-colonial critique of Ireland as generic, 'marginal' and unsettled, both in its cultural status and in *all* its cultural textuality.

[27] Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints*, p 19.

PART THREE

AFRICA
A Continent Within

11

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT IMPERATIVE

Women and the Colonial Struggle in Three West African Novels

Dele Layiwola

Let me say from the start that I consider Womanist or Feminist studies a literary model as much as it is a discipline. As such it is a deliberate ploy to discuss context as a means of clarifying forms or canons. This paper will therefore do two things: the first is to try and clarify the significance of what women's studies should not be about; the second is to discuss three novels from Nigeria and Senegal within the destabilizing context of colonialism. The three novels are Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood, (1979, 1981),* Mariama Ba's *So long a letter (1981)* and Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1970).

The rationale for the choice of the novels is as follows: Emecheta's novel represents a woman's outlook on life and culture in a colonial period. It therefore represents some early phase of feminine articulation of one's cultural and political milieu through situations which are continually changing and difficult to master. A humane rural woman encounters colonial urbanization with a simplicity that is lucid but naïve and wonders why she might suffer deprivation in spite of an optimism dictated by diligence and hard work. Ba's novel discusses puberty and married life from the perspective of an oppressed woman. Finally, Ousmane's novel, written by a man sympathetic towards feminist matriarchy, or womanism, presents the other side of what might be a 'liberated' patriarchy groping toward a balance or an equilibrium. It is not as if this scheme is complete in and of itself. At best, it serves as a seminal study towards a re-orientation of theory; from what is often described as feminism towards what is more

appropriately, womanism. I shall then conclude by citing a framework from the sociology of literature.

Indeed Chikwenye Ogunyemi had re-defined and categorised what amounts to a Womanist as opposed to a Feminist position in literary as well as cultural nomenclature. In her opinion:

> A black woman writer is likely to be a 'womanist'. That is, she will recognize that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy. (1985:64)

Ogunyemi further strengthens her argument by differentiating between womanism and feminism. Womanism, though similar to Western feminism, is a mere integrative ideal. Womanism, for instance, would often underscore the more positive aspects of Black life apart from being racially aware. Womanism, though similar to Western feminism, is a mere integrative ideal. Womanism, instead of denigrating (Black) manhood, rather recognizes its collaborative potential, believes in him and empowers him. Womanist writings would, therefore, almost always end in 'integrative images of male and female worlds' (Ogunyemi 1985; 69; La Pin 1984, 1991; 102). This position has always been borne out by womanism as an operative in traditional worldview and polity (see Awe, 1977; Layiwola, 1987).

It is necessary to cite Ogunyemi's discomfort with an overbearing critical model not because feminism is to be denigrated but because even in the history of Western feminist criticism, the two streams of differentiation into feminism/womanism have always been apparent. In this respect it will be necessary to cite the works of two well known writers on the subject: Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1977) and John Stuart Mill's "The subjection of women" (Jagger and Struhl, 1978). The differentiation I seek to make between the two works will be brought out if we discuss both works at some length.

In *Sexual Politics,* Kate Millet is constantly preoccupied with redressing the age-old imbalance in the subjugation of women by men. She constantly cites the extremes in works of literature to back up the

claims that even the conduct of sexual relation across the board has always been intensely political in their inclinations from the dawn of time. In works by American writers, Millet succinctly depicts the paradigm of sexual subjugation. One of them is Henry Miller's novel, *Sexus* (1965) which narrates the adventures of a hero, Val, who seduces Ida Verlaine, the wife of his close friend, Bill. Much of the novel is made up of rather gross and unseemly scenes of brisk sexual encounters. The novel is, for what it is, a pornograph. The same with Norman Mailer's novel, *An American Dream* (1964). The preoccupation is largely the same with that of *Sexus*. The narrator, Stephen Rojak, is a ribald wit masterminding bawdy scenes of inverse masochistic tendencies toward the opposite sex. He kills his wife and rapes his servant. It is important to note that Kate Millet's book is already a classic in literary feminist criticism, as well as being a best-seller.

No critic can resist the incisiveness of Millet's scholarship but our actual concern here is this – what real preoccupation has a serious sociologist or literary critic with rendering perverse, pornographic literature as a true sample of female subjugation? In spite of the fact that *Sexual Politics* (1977) analyses pornography instead of authentic works of literature, in spite of the fact that its premise is unhealthy, it arrives at an acceptable conclusion. That is, even indecent sexual relations must be brought within the purview of political exchange. In attempting to transcend the banal, however, true genius, as in Millet's book, often mars its own objectivity which is itself a stage in the de-structive tendencies of an on-going structural process. Every positive criticism portends that a true redress must come in favour of feminism but such criticisms must analyse the terrain as a complete whole. Upholding obscene literatures as the ideal specimen for analytical feminism can only lead to a lopsided understanding of what scholarship should be (about) in this whole area. In other words, absolute statements cannot be made when processes between social or gender groups are analysed, otherwise this yields extreme interpretations which abridge the complimentarity inherent in the structural processes of the subject-object divide. When particulars are isolated for analysis,

they may neglect the benefit of an inclusive, ramified context. As a complementary alternative, it is in Stuart Mill's essay (1978) that we find a real example of Womanist criticism.

Mill impressively maps out the terrain: that the oppression of women is part of the minority problems in society, much like the oppression on the grounds of race. The artificiality of gender superiority has been legally written as if it were genuine. Mill's essay broaches one of the questions which we will tackle at the end of this paper. It is analogous to the question: how is it that the greater oppression of women are persons of the opposite sex? He puts it thus:

> And the case is that in which the desire of power is strongest: for everyone who desires power desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common, and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences. (1978:89).

Mill's essay infers that it is a perverse or inscrutable kind of fear which makes a man subject that which is dearest to him.

In the same light in which we saw Kate Millet's book, Mill's essay perceives that what we experience at our present historical stage is just a phase of transitional history when subjection is a structural default of equality. The optimism which this proffers is that the inequality against women will be redressed in good time. He writes:

> Through all the progressive period of human history, the condition of women has been approaching nearer to equality with men. This does not of itself prove that the assimilation must go on to complete equality: but it assuredly affords some presumptions that such is the case. (1978:93)

"The Subjection of Women" advocates the liberation of women by making its analogy through the invocation of ideals. This, certainly, is amenable in the light of our methodology.

In this section, one final point is worth the making to justify the theoretical framework adapted in the body of the work. Apart from the models quoted in the aforegoing paragraphs, I have applied also the

genetic-structuralist model of Lucien Goldmann. This is by no means an accident. At the back of my mind is the fact that the works of literature discussed here are, generally, concerned with articulating stages of 'transition' in phenomena as well as in society. In other words, the link between Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1970) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) is not so much in their both being West African or Senegalese novels, but in representing transitional stages of human development in societies constantly evolving. After all, no two communities are exactly alike in West Africa from the Gambia to the Cameroons. But there is a sense in which theoretical models such as that of the French theorist, Lucien Goldmann, unifies, in a genuinely characteristic manner, developments in evolving cultures anywhere around the world. Essentially, also, it is fortuitous that Senegal should have been a French colony as opposed to Anglo-Nigeria where Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* 1988, is set. It is hoped that this explains the preferences for the models adopted. Western feminism, like its counterpart, African womanism, are best conceived as stages of articulations in sociological as well as humanistic developments.

II

What is left in the three remaining sections of this paper will be to illustrate in what way women are either foregrounded in literature as interactive subjects or how false consciousness relegates them as inert objects of history. The West African situation presents a two-fold problem. The first is that traditional wisdom classifies womanism as a disadvantaged rival of patriarchy because patriarchy is legitimized into law in most West African societies. The second problem is that colonialism complicates an inherent handicap. Even further, many societies on the west coast of Africa have suffered doubly in the colonial encounter because they had yet to recover from Arabic colonialism before European colonialism overtook them. Women in those West African societies are easily the most oppressed. It is

therefore no accident that two of the novels I have selected for discussion are from Senegal where women have had to see through two veils of colonialist encounter. Arabic and French. This aspect of the impact of colonialism on Nigerian women is only just articulating literatures in the form of the novel. The Senegalese examples are strikingly similar and very well understood in this respect. In her study of three West African women under colonialism, La Ray Denzer succinctly remarks:

> The constraints of European patriarchal policy reinforced the patriarchal structure of traditional and muslim, African societies, with the result that the wide variety of women's indigenous political institutions were rapidly stripped of their former authority and status. During the phase of decolonisation, African male political leaders adopted policies which accelerated this decline.
>
> (1992:217)

Buchi Emecheta's sociological novel, *The Joys of Motherhood,* presented a gradual decline in the status of women's indigenous institutions. The form of urbanization that colonialism presented tended to put emphasis on men's wage labour, and women and wives were appendages to these labourers in the service of colonial masters. Whilst a lot of men work as factory hands or domestic stewards in the homes of expatriate families, very little provision was made for women whose responsibility it was to support and sustain family life. Thus the economic and social security guaranteed to women in traditional societies was lacking in the urban slums that were rapidly expanding under colonialism. The social rules changed so suddenly and erstwhile rural women had the carpet pulled from under their feet. This is why the heroine of Emecheta's novel ruminated aloud:

> She might not have any money to supplement her husband's income, but were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Ibuza, women made a contribution, but in urban Lagos, men had to be the sole providers; this new setting robbed the woman of her useful role. Nnu Ego told herself that the life she had

indulged in with the baby Ngozi had been very risky: she had been trying to be traditional in a modern urban setting. It was because she wanted to be a woman of Ibuza in a town like Lagos that she lost her child. This time she was going to play it according to the new rules.

She would sometimes ask herself how long she must do it. In Ibuza after the child was weaned, one could leave him with an elderly member of the family and go in search of trade. But in Lagos there was no elderly grandparents

(pp. 102-3)

Through the vision of the housewives in *The Joys of Motherhood,* and particularly through the perspicacity of Nnu Ego, attention is consistently drawn towards the anonymity that the individual attains once he or she is forced to leave his cultural roots behind in his or her home village. Nnu Ego had to remind her husband, Nnaife, that his stewardship to an alien master, Dr Meers, had robbed him of the traditional notion of dignity. The search for money will make him wash the undergarments of Mrs Meers; what he wouldn't have done for any woman in his own culture. The same search for survival will make him compete for a military career – a profession where men are supposed to kill for a living! This is how Nnu Ego represents the morality of a tested traditional archetype:

Have you forgotten that it is a curse in Ibuza for a respectable woman to sleep with a soldier? Have you forgotten the customs of our people completely, Nnaife? First you washed a woman's clothes; now you want to join people who kill, rape and disgrace women and children,

all in the name of the white man's money. No, Nnaife, I don't want that kind of money. (p. 12)

Strident as she sounds here, the destabilizing deprivation of colonialism put the lie to her words. Her husband is forcibly conscripted into the colonial army and she benefits from his pay as a soldier with the Allies in Burma during the second world war.

The subtle point gradually drags the story to its climax because the social situation that prevails in the slums of Lagos drives Nnaife to grievously harm a prospective suitor to his daughter. Partly owing to Nnaife's deprivation and partly deriving from increasing monetisation of social relations, Nnaife and Nnu Ego found themselves alienated from the realities of their culture. This is the reason she symbolically retraced her steps back to Ibuza where she could monitor the development of their children who are destined to live in the city of their birth. Whatever material investments the likes of Nnu Ego have put in the colonial era, their only consolation lies in the satisfaction and joys of motherhood.

So Long a Letter narrates, in a personal correspondence to another friend, the woes of a woman embattled by patriarchy and colonialism. The form of couching a whole novel as a letter is unusual and is not free of implications. The very obvious connotation is that a priviledged audience is allowed to witness the private thoughts of the representative heroine, Ramatoulaye, to her friend Aissatou. The fact that she has just been widowed shows that she can now unburden her mind about a husband hitherto turned master. Both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou became estranged from their husbands after those husbands turned polygynous. Here is an extract from Ramatoulaye's petition:

> Every night when he went out he would unfold and try on several of his suits before settling on one. The others, impatiently rejected, would slip to the floor. I would have to fold them again and put them back in their places; and this extra work, I discovered, I was doing only to help him in his effort to be elegant in his seduction of another woman... I told myself what every betrayed woman says: if Moudu was milk, it was I who had had all the cream. The rest, well, nothing but water with a vague smell of milk. (pp. 38, 39).

Unfortunately, the link between the two periods in history referred to by Ramatoulaye is, in actual fact, more of a dilemma than a link. Another contemporary of hers in the novel, Jacqueline, becomes the victim of this ostensible link. She is an Ivorian of Protestant stock and has emigrated with her husband, Samba Diack, a physician, to Senegal.

In Ivory coast, her husband practised monogamy, but in Senegal where other traditions and religions allowed for polygyny, she lost her husband to other women. This is how the narrator explains it:

> Coming to Senegal ... she refused to adopt the Muslim religion and went instead to the Protestant Church every Sunday.
>
> A black African she should have been able to fit without difficulty into a black African Society. *Senegal and the Ivory Coast both having experienced the same colonial power. But Africa is diverse, divided. The same country can change its character and outlook several times over, from north to south or from east to west.*
>
> (my emphasis, pp. 41-2)

On account of not being able to come to terms with this post-colonial medley, Jacqueline's mind drifts unchecked. She is, however, spared the worst.

There abound several subtle ways in which the colonial burden impinges on the imagination of different characters in Mariama Ba's novel, but the contradictions are expressed as a flawed aspect of self-consciousness. For instance, Mawdo, Aissatou's husband, finds religious as well as existential justification for his moral lapses: 'You can't resist the imperious laws that demand food and clothing for man. These same laws compel the ''male'' in other respects ...' Mawdo's mother, Seynabou, tries to find justification for polygynous tendencies by resorting to things no less psychological than they are tangible. For instance, she believes that Aissatou, her daughter in law, is from a less notable genealogy than herself. In spite of Aissatou's education and industry, Seynabou, herself a princess, would prefer another royal to a goldsmith's daughter. A further striking aspect of the novel is that all its wayward male characters are highly educated by European standards. They are often Western styled physicians. This confirms that in thought, in religion, and in lifestyle these are the finest that colonial values had bred to sustain their society in the post-colonial era. Aissatou weighs the values of religion and matrimonial etiquette and

concludes that all the rationalizations will fail, and that the colonial question is fundamental:

> ...the formulation of the choice I had made, a choice that my reason rejected but that accorded with the immense tenderness I felt towards Moudu Fall? I cried every day. From then on, my life changed. I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life. I was left with empty hands. (pp. 45-46)

The greatest asset of *So Long a Letter* lies in its being able to diverge from the unifocal medium of a single narrator to the multiple layers of public instinct. Its form does not involve the active participants of multiple characterization or mass engagement as Sembene Ousmane does; rather, the individual narrator engages an historical problem through her plight and the plight of others like her. It is in making the female persons both the subject as well as object of debate that the fusion of the subject-object imperatives is achieved.

Sembene Ousmane, in *God's Bits of Wood* (1970), using the multi-focal medium of the participant-actor mode, analyses and explains society more through the action than the narrators of the subject. Quite like Mariama Ba, he allows the objects of history – women – the benefit of direct engagement as subjects in the historical events of their time. In the first place, the locus of action takes off from the Dakar-Niger railway workers strike of 1947 – 48. The strike involved much of French West Africa – Senegal, Sudan, Niger – and lasted from 10th October, 1947 to 19th March, 1948. Because of its protracted nature and because all the male employees were denied their salaries, women mobilized to save the families from starvation and ruin. The terrain is quite similar except that unlike the introverted world of *So Long a Letter,* the day-to-day living here is quite realistic and visceral. The same colonial setting, but fifteen odd years earlier:

The days passed, and the nights. In this country, the men often had several wives, and it was perhaps because of this that, at the beginning,

> they were scarcely conscious of the help the women gave them. But soon they began to understand that, here, too, the age to come would have a different countenance. When a man came back from meeting, with bowed head and empty pockets, the first thing he saw were always the unfired stove, the useless cooking vessels, the bowls and gourds ranged in a corner, empty. Then he would seek the arms of his wife, without thinking or caring, whether she was the first or the third. And seeing the burdened shoulders, the listless walk, the women became conscious that a change was coming for them as well.
>
> One morning a woman rose and wrapped her cloth firmly around her waist and said, 'Today I will bring back something to eat!'
>
> And the men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women.
>
> (Ousmane, 1970:33, 34)

The emergency of a strike at the height of colonial subjugation shook society and sharpened the focus of the subject-object imperative of women in an embattled society.

The structure of family and filial relations changed and patriarchy realised as well that it had to change. Even though a huge percentage of the citizenry still paid attention to what the earlier Arabic colonialism entailed, the more recent imposition of the French awakened their consciousness to both contracts. It thus becomes valid within the genetic-structuralist model (Goldmann: 1973), that a new stage has been reached in the de-structive tendencies of progressive history. A subject-object complementarity of the human condition will thus appear as non-static. One seemingly anomic stage in Ousmane's novel thereby becomes an orientation towards a new structure; a new stage transcending an old structure. This is what Lucien Goldmann has described as an orientation towards an optimum equilibrium:

> Optimum in terms of adjustment to the natural world, of the survival of the human being, and of the whole of a given set of circumstances; but very often, before this optimum equilibrium has been attained, two kinds of phenomena create a new situation and hence a new rationality. These phenomena are first, exogenous – transformations of the environment which came about through the actions of the members of the group itself who are connected with a given structural process.
>
> (1973:118)

The exogenous agency that sets off the chain effect here is colonialism, or as Goldmann puts it, 'intrusion from the outside'. Thus a new logic and a new rationality began what we just quoted from *Gods Bits of Wood.*

Ousmane balances narrative techniques and content analysis with craft. At the polar ends of the continuum are the figures of two 'women', so to say. The first is the precocious figure of a girl called Ad'jibid'ji who would always ask her elders questions from ancient mythologies such as when she asked her grandmother what it is that washes water if water washes every other thing. She would seem to be the ideal sublimation of the men-women dialectic in the on-going struggle. She attends all the rallies of the male-dominated labour unions, and is closer in temperament to elders when at home. In some way. Being just eight or nine years old, she couldn't physically follow the women's march from Thies to Dakar. The author creates another character, Penda, to lead the momentous march.

While Ad'jibid'ji conceptualizes the soul of the strike, Penda stands as its physical force. The author cleverly introduces atavisms of history as evidenced in superstition and fraud, but these are neatly contained and controlled within the revolutionary ethos. There are also such midway characters representing the intelligentsia and the 'faceless' masses: N'Deye Touti; Alioune; Yacine; Awa; El-Haji Mabigue, the renegade and exhibitionist; Maimouna, the blind; Fa Keita, Miakoro and Ramatoulaye are the different stages of maturation and age; and Bakayoko is the astute union leader.

The human condition is the focus of Ousmane's preoccupation and the successful prosecution of the strike becomes a kind of Odyssey. Though lives were lost – those of Penda, Samba N'Doulougou, Niakoro, Doudou and a few others – their sacrifice ploughed back to invigorate the nation. That is why Lahbib recounts in his letter:

> The women got a big welcome when they came back, of course, but now the men are having all sorts of trouble with them. At first they even pounced on men like tigresses – they wanted to start running everything! But things are a little calmer now – the children have not come back yet and the women go out to the lake everyday. In future, though, we will have to reckon with them in whatever we do.
>
> (pp. 225-6)

The steep enthusiasm of the women is generated by the pursuit of a new rationality. Revolutionary initiative is altogether positive but it must have its own excesses generated within the new impetus of cultural change.

Now Ad'jibid'ji, the idealist quirk that motivates material reality, finds the solution to her unrelenting preoccupation: "Grandfather," she says, "I know what it is that washes the water. It is the spirit. The water is clear and pure, but the spirit is purer still." (p. 237).

III

To return to the nagging question that we temporarily mooted at the beginning of this paper: How is it that man, the product of women's 'labour', has become woman's bitterest rival across the gender divide? Why is it that in the dialectics of gender, man has always ranged himself against women? As Mariama Ba observes, it is 'a thrilling adventure... to turn a baby into a healthy man.' (1981:47), but in that very act women are responsible for a continuous race of patriarchs. The faulty adjustment could be found in the structure of society itself. The earliest of feudalist societies were based on the premium of physical or muscular superiority (Mill 1978:87). But the scientific interpretation of

human relations reveal that the sexes have often grown up estranged from one another in the scheme of labour relations and division. One is irresistibly drawn toward Marx's theory of alienation as a requisite explanation for this phenomenon of estrangement.

If society supposes that the sole place for the woman is the hearth or the home and that it is her sole duty to bear or breed children, then this amounts to an unnatural stimulation of ability. Marrying thereby amounts to buying oneself a master. This kind of unequal relationship necessarily views the weaker sex as a worker in the sense of a labourer: a master-servant relationship. In falsely proposing women as mere breeders of men, men

> do not see them as (wo)men but only as instruments of production which have to yield as much as possible with as little cost as possible (Marx, 1977:35)

Whilst suppressing women to be eternal workers, men become ranged against them as fair rivals and are therefore prompted by unreal fears to persecute them. Thus, in spite of the fact that 'the interest of the worker (in this case women), ...never stands opposed to the interest of society, society (here men) always and necessarily stands opposed to the interest of the worker' (Marx, 1977:27). This has tremendous implications for the health and well-being of the nuclear family and of the larger society. We reach a stage where people see themselves as things and not as collaborators, and the grave danger is that a woman may always see her own children as the property of another person. She becomes a medium of production which helps the man to manufacture the baby. Deirdre Lapin observes that this wife-mother image is at the core of the feminine literary persona (1984, 1991:102).

The foregoing is the psychological base of most lopsided agnatic or patriarchal systems of law whereby the man automatically assumes that the right and ownership of the child necesasarily belongs to him. This, of course, is fallacious; but if the law holds it as valid it conditions the man to confront the woman who rears him as an opponent. In subconsciously conditioning such beliefs, untruths become entrenched as tradition; and introverted violence against

women, such as we often read, recurs inexorably. One final illustration with a sociological model will illuminate this phenomenon.

IV

The sociology of literature stipulates that no phenomenon in art or in social life can truly be researched unless it is contextualised in its own history and its own environment. Research on the theory of culture and literature reveals much underlying expressiveness as to the validity or otherwise of literature as a humanistic endeavour that uncovers thought in individual or collective consciousness. This implies that the individual or collective psyche, if studied scientifically, reveals a credible degree of imaginative connectedness. In other words, this is where archival memory and purposive adventure meet. This more than begs a temptation to adopt the genetic structuralist approach of Lucien Goldmann.

Genetic structuralism informs that there exist three fundamental characteristics of human behaviour which underlie the study of culture and society (inclusive of the study of art and literature):

1. The first characteristic of human action and thoughts is that it has a tendency to adapt to environment either in ways which would reinforce the present order or in ways which might challenge and seek to change it.
2. The second is a tendency, either in individual or in groups, to conform to a general order or degree of consistency in attempts at creating new structural forms.
3. The third tendency is an impetuous one which modifies the order of which it constitutes a part, and thereby transcends it (Goldmann, 1973:115-19). This third tendency is, ultimately, the most practical in our schema because it takes cognizance of the fact that the old structures are not broken down at once: that there are erstwhile stages of the old process in its march towards the formation of new processes. The understanding of

this thus gives a fuller scope to the subject of study. We might just adapt Goldmann's words:

> The study and understanding of collections of human facts always presupposes that one studies them from two complementary angles, both as structural processes oriented towards a new structure, and as de-structive processes within old structures which have already been achieved, or towards which the same social group was moving a little while earlier (pp. 117-18).

To thoroughly study a disadvantaged social group in art within a social situation compounded by the prejudice of colonial domination, it is necessary to examine the complementarities of the context.

It is also interesting to note that the world of imaginative creation adopts its own categories for ordering the world or idea it re-creates. As such, it helps a more insightful understanding of the objective reality which is abstracted and placed before us. It is a subtler work of literature which, whenever it recreates the external world, penetrates its mechanics and transcends the bias or prejudices of the external world. This is to say that the solution to the problem is multiple and can be outlined as such:

1. A novel seeks to present a natural, social or psychological scenario as the case may be.
2. In so doing, it re-creates the external world emphasizing some things and de-emphasizing others.
3. The final creation may compound the outlines with its own bias or false consciousness – intentional or fortuitous – as the case may be.
4. The product may imaginatively transcend the boundaries of subjectivity or false consciousness and enrich us with a new experience.

There is absolutely no doubt that the pursuit of truth or realistic representation purports a measure of rationality which, in spite of this, may be unwittingly flawed. One solid ground, however, in the métier of a creative imagination is to try as best it can to find outlines of

compatibility or consistency in the world and verify them as subjects or objects in their relative circumstances without infusing them with a bias of its own. This implies that the rightness of a particular perception will be found in the same traditional milieu; even if it is the exact opposite of that which it portrays. It is in this sense that genetic structuralism leads us to the same conclusion that sociology, history and literature are inseparable parts of the same inimitable whole. In this respect, Lucien Goldmann writes:

> If a creative worker can create a significant, coherent and unified world in his work, it is because his starting-point is this collective working out of rough categories and of the connections between. What he does is to take them much further than the other members of the group have, but only within the world he has created ...I must add also that this tendency to transcendence – which is part and parcel of human action, and which has been the subject of classical philosophy ...implies that any coherent universe must be located by reference to values which transcend the individual, even if only by their *absence* - which is the outstanding mark of the principal form of modern literature, the novel, and of that great part of contemporary literature which is commonly called avant-garde...
>
> (1973):119-123)

How then does the issue of logical transcendence relate to the subject of gender and society? We are able to establish that a conglomeration of human facts are momentary processes which are either moving towards other consummate processes or are themselves stages of accomplishment within the status quo. In other words, absolute statements cannot be made when processes between social or gender groups are analysed. This is because issues are unduly polarized such that conflict can be probed and judgements given on the nature of reality. We must emphasise that this allows for extreme interpretations which destroy complementarity inherent within the structural processes of the subject-object divide. When events become isolated in order that

their analyses may be conducted, they often neglect the total, ramified context within which they are desirous of interpretation.

To conclude by way of abstracting the foregoing, we reinforce our pet model once again. In what ways do the subject-object imperative generate a methodology for the balance of perception in womanist literary criticism and the sociology of literature? When relations in human society and character have been examined in their potentials either as perceiver (or subject) or as perceived (or object) in critical analyses, then there must occur a real or virtual balance in the relations of the two modes. In other words, unless a theme or character has been examined both as subject (active or passive) or as object (passive or active) and has been found to adhere to similar conclusions of judgement, a bias or prejudice has inhibited the performance of the context. It is only in thus examining characters in literature and art that we are able to ensure that the horrible bias, erstwhile encountered in such disciplines, can be restudied for their truth value.

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12

THE PRISON-HOUSE OF LANGUAGE: THE AUDIBLE SILENCE IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Dele Layiwola

> This privileging of the 'margins' in post-colonial writing produces a particularly practical orientation to questions of theory. Language is a material practice and as such is determined by a complex weave of social conditions and experience. So, for example, because the traversal of the text by these conditions becomes so clear and so crucial in post-colonial literature, the idea of art existing for its own sake or of literature appealing to some transcendent human experience are both rejected.
>
> [Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin,1989:41]

The use of language has become central to most recent discourses on post-coloniality. Whether language is thought of as a philosophical vehicle, as the motor of rhetoric or as a controlling factor in literature and the printed word, there is no gainsaying its centrality. Even more pertinent is the fact that conceptualisations in the English language have tended to fore-ground English studies as the basis of hegemonic discourses: always with an undercurrent of an empire relating to its periphery. However, before we can cite definitions from recent discourses, it is helpful to point out that perceptions on this phenomenon vary given the parallax effects that the 'monetisation' of language as a commodity of exchange presents to scholars and commentators of widely differing temperaments. For instance, Robert Cummings, in his presidential address to the African Studies

> colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial culture. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial.
>
> [1989:2]

By way of definition as well, these literatures do present certain basic nuances: there would appear to be three main distinctions here – language, nationality, theme or subject matter. As the margins and periphery write back to the centre as challenge or as revision, the tension itself creates its own subtle patterns of expression. At the same time the argument is raging whether or not the expression of indigenous literatures in colonial tongues – English, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish etc. – appropriates those literatures to the dominant cultures. For instance, what makes a literature African or Irish? Will this distinction be based on nationality, linguistic relevance or thematic preoccupation? This controversy has always been a feature. [See, for instance, Obi Wali, 1963; Ngugi, 1972; Cummings, 1985; Layiwola,1992 among others.] For instance will W.B. Yeats and Joseph Conrad be considered to be writing from the auto-centre or from the margins? Could we say because these authors have instituted thought patterns in the English language, their registers [as opposed to diction] have been incorporated by the centre? The first point is an instinctive addition to the thesis of Edward Said and others [Said, 1984; Ashcroft et al., 1989] that when elements from the periphery lay claim to the competent use of language and literature as the elements from the centre do, they are rapidly incorporated. Or can we boastfully claim that literatures written by an Anglo-Irish or a Polish emigrant are neither emigrant or immigrant English, post-colonial, Irish or African literatures irrespective of their thematic preoccupations? The curiosity is even sharper in the case of Joseph Conrad if we take his personal saga into consideration. This is how Frederick Karl [1979] and Paul O'Prey record it:

> The first two lives of Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski [he later changed his name to Joseph Conrad because he couldn't bear its continual mispronunciation by the English]

Association in 1985, adopts a rather conservative approach to the debate. He says, among other things:

> Most significantly, Europe affected Africa both through the alphabet and through the various European languages adopted by the African leaders at the time of political independence. As a result of the African decision to keep European languages, Africans are now tied to the language communities of Europe. Indeed Africa is the only geographical area whose people have decided to conduct official national and international business in adopted languages. Of course, there have been numerous debates over the relevance and appropriateness of adopting a foreign language. Regardless of one's position on the matter, the current state of research seems to arrive at several conclusions.
>
> [1985:9]

Cummings would seem to infer that there were ample choices left for Africans in the matter and that it probably remains in their own best interest, given the worst alternatives. A more radical approach would be found in the seminal observations of Ngugi wa Thiongo, "On the Abolition of the English Department" [1972] where he noted that the nomenclatural use of English Studies for the literatures and culture of Africa in the context of African universities is an instrument of hegemony. More recently, the issue has been tackled in the canonical attempts on the theorisation of culture. Ashcroft *et al*, for instance, categorise their attempts to define post-coloniality thus:

> We use the term 'post-colonial'... to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new

cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted.

[Ashcroft *et al*, 1989:2]

I find this definition interesting and handy because it sensitively conflates the tripartite ideas of space, time and dominance as identifiable indices of a certain kind of culture – the post-colonial. Other derivative discourses by scholars in the area have since emerged. Gayatri Spivak [1992,1995], for instance, weaves her ideas of post-coloniality around situations of real or virtual oppositions which she refers to as freedom vs unfreedom; or events conceived from the viewpoint of a 'subaltern'. Kwame Anthony Appiah [1992] also conceptually predicates his ideas on post-coloniality as the jostling for space or territory among contending ideologies and 'nationalities'. I shall argue further in this paper that the goal of post-colonial literatures, in definition and design, should be to constitute a model which makes ideas and their production subservient to particular or situational needs and seeks to make knowledge accountable in its own context. That context may be geographical when it consists of the cultural study of land mass and spaces; or statistical when the context deals with personages, oppression, gender or age dominance and the like. I shall thereby illustrate this principle with a discussion of Joseph Conrad's racialist novella, *Heart of Darkness* [1902, 1984]

Issues in language and literature or even psycho-analysis and statistics tend to interpret the world in a certain way or another thus instituting tension, or torque. This, in itself, is derivative of the fact that a domineering factor is always involved. In a general sense, the bulk of ideas reach us as some form of language or linguistic phenomena pulling at a certain centre, or tugging at a particular margin. This is why literatures of post-coloniality have taken on, willy-nilly, the inherent tension in society within their own expressions, often applying torque on the models of the imperial centre. This point is reinforced by Ashcroft et al.:

What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of

> were as Pole and as seafarer. Born in 1857 at Berdyczów in the modern Ukraine, he knew as a child an intense spirit of repressed nationalism, in a Poland so dominated by Russia [and to a lesser extent, by Austria and Prussia] that it had virtually ceased to exist as a nation except in the hearts and minds of people.
>
> [*Heart of Darkness* Intro:10]

As is evident by birth and by his instinctive adoption of language, Conrad spelt with a capital C is a doubly colonial, perhaps post-colonial character and writer. He emigrated from his homeland because he preferred [like most of us] to be colonised by Britain rather than by Russia. Thereafter he adopted the English language and wrote in it. It is clear that both spatial and conceptual movements are involved as in my earlier distinction. Now we shall return presently to Conrad's perception as regards another post-colonial landmass, the Congo, and by implication, Africa and Africans.

There is a problem of the late acquisitor of a language trying her/his very best to outdo the native speakers of the language; what Said[1984] refers to as 'affiliation under the guise of filiation' because that tendency has its own peculiarities. But where writings overly lead to tendencies pernicious to literature and liberal humanism, there is always a need to get to the roots of linguistic and moral affiliations. Language, I believe, is a key to cultural re-discovery when we need to learn about ways in which a writer or translator handles his or her materials.

The other two parameters would be nationality and thematic preoccupations. We recalled above that Joseph Conrad had consciously, or otherwise, renounced his nationality for another. This may, or may not be, a tendency but it is interesting for certain points of articulation in this paper. It might be relevant to ask the question: In writing *Heart of Darkness* [1902, 1984], was Conrad writing African literature or was he writing English literature? He had emigrated from Poland and had changed his name, perhaps his identity; but should we be privileged with classifications, would we rather call him an English, an Anglo-Polish or an Anglo-African writer? Even if he adopted a

nationality, did that help his portraiture of the landscapes and peoples of Africa as he had chosen to see them at second remove? One of his putative concerns is to condemn economic exploitation, greed and political subjugation. But can his inability to represent female characters [be they voiceless or empowered] be a political statement from his own background?

Even if we dwell solely on Conrad's thematic preoccupation in *Heart of Darkness*, the questions raised by this contextualisations will not agree to straightforward solutions. But it is patent that the advocacy to re-orient the now cosmopolitan subject of English Studies offers a refreshing insight. Again, the ground-breaking assertions of Ngugi wa Thiong'o [1972,1986], Chinweizu et al. [1983], and, more recently, Ashcroft *et al.* [1989] that the enthronement of English language Studies provides the grounds for undermining other regional language literatures are hardly contestable. There exists a fresh dimension to the tendentious use of language in literature which defies classification under the normative sub-genres that have so far been listed. This is noticeable in Joseph Conrad and it is worthwhile to explore this in greater detail here.

Joseph Conrad was writing *Heart of Darkness* about the turn of the last century because the novel was first published as a complete whole in 1902, having been serialised in a news magazine in the late 1890s. Effectively, most colonies were still under the direct influence of the colonising powers. The practitioners of post-colonial criticisms have always affirmed that post-colonial literature started from the instance of colonialism. This point is not in dispute but Conrad portrays scenes which even date back to the days of slavery. Apart from forced, conscripted labour of "black and naked" people who "moved about like ants", there are mostly rusty and disused machinery about [p.42]. Conrad's narrator, Marlow, further observes:

> A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. *Black rags were wound* round their loins, and *the short* ends

behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib,;the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. [Emphasis mine, pp. 42-43]

It may well be that Conrad's aim in the novel truly portrays the despoliation by colonial adventurers; but his narrator, like the novelist himself, a sea farer, systematically in his diction, pours contempt on the subjects of his portrait. Whilst his emasculated black men in the novel are cannibals who, though hungry, would not eat him, the women are listless and unteachable. This is his description of a scenario:

> When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear... I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, "*I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.*" *Thus this man had verily accomplished something.* And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order. [Emphasis mine pp.45, 46]

The narrator mentions or describes women on three other occasions: the first pair of women who knit black wool and would not talk; the African sorceress who moves gracefully but would not talk; and Kurtz's intended who doted over the memories of a dead man.

Having described his men and women in his own language, we need to examine his third subject: the representation of land and the environment. One feels, through Conrad's racy and tightly knit prose, the hazy human movements in the novel and a certain intangibility and

oblivion. This imposes a certain atmosphere of gloom and soullessness. Apart from the displacement of renowned trading places which "seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth" [p.40], he describes the landscapes thus:

> Next day I left that station at last, with a caravan of sixty men for a two hundred mile tramp.
>
> No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over *the empty land*, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; *and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons* suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts *would get* empty *very soon....* Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris, very hospitable - not to say drunk - was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. *Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet -hole in the fore-head*, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, *may be considered as a permanent improvement.* [emphasis mine, pp.47 -48]

A most striking feature of the passage quoted above is its alarming internal contradictions and the superficial nature of the adventurism. He gives an initial impression that the landscape is desolate in the sight of a privileged narrator with sixty servants, bodyguards and carriers. Unfortunately, there is not much to discover. All of a sudden, he believes that numerous mysterious, armed niggers traverse the land to carry load for travellers! Were it possible to situate the area in the desert planes, it might make some sense; but the setting is equatorial Congo where the same passage describes long grass, burnt grass and thickets. If it is true that the landscape is desolate, and

populations have moved, how come "every farm and cottage thereabouts" are still inhabited and there are drumbeats and music to be heard "as the sound of bells in a Christian country"? Mr Conrad's narrator has a strange sense of logic! In the latter part of the quotation, he describes a murdered Negro as an a act of "permanent improvement". There are other instances of racialist assertions in the text where the tragic murder of Marlow's negro helmsman is treated with levity because his blood has stained his master's shoes [p.87]. There have been earlier, trenchant studies on racism and ethnocentrism in *Heart of Darkness* by Chinua Achebe [1989] and Niyi Osundare[1992].

II

It is about time we got down to linking imprecise management of language to Conrad's debt of vision itself. Whilst his own tribesmen and colleagues are described as "pilgrims", in no place in the text is any indigenous African described as a human being. His Africans are "pairs of bare feet" [p.48]; "Black figures" [p.55]; "A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers" [p.61]; "paddling savages" [p.64]; "Fine fellows - cannibals - in their place" [p.67]; "naked breasts, arms, legs and glaring eyes" [p.80]; "vague forms" [p.81]. The list is endless. It is consistent that since these natives are not conceived, even for the purposes of fiction, as human beings, Conrad cannot offer them a voice, nor might they have visions or aspirations which are legitimately human. Not unexpectedly, there abound unnatural, unrealistic silences in the novel wherever the subjects of reflection are to speak or act.

On two occasions in the novel, the narrator toys with the old styled eugenicists, Francis Galton and Herbert Spencer, whose views were prevalent in Conrad's days [see CCHR, 1995]. Though his setting for the beginning of his expedition into the heart of the so-called dark continent was on the River Thames in London, he uses a French doctor to measure the circumference of Marlow's cranium whilst insinuating:

> I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. [p. 38]

A little while on in the narrative, about the end of the first chapter, the colonial heir, Marlow, interviews a colonial officer who is described as the brickmaker of the Central station about the supposed genius, Mr Kurtz, who was sent to the interior to intimidate the native population and appropriate all the available ivory; they describe his mission thus:

> He is a prodigy. He is an emissary of pity and science and progress and devil knows what else. We went for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose. [p.55]

About the end of the second chapter, Kurtz's report informs Conrad's narrator, Marlow:

> All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz... the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it too... It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung I think...But this must have been before his nerves went wrong and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites.... But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might of a deity...." [p.86]

It would appear that the mission of Kurtz is the mission of Conrad, whose alter-ego is his hero and narrator, Marlow.

From a technical viewpoint, novels based on the authoritarian view of the first person narrator [who speaks as the first person singular "I"] tend to affect an immediacy of observation and a clarity of vision. Such novels almost always coerce the reader to believe them without raising a finger. Most of the speeches in *Heart of Darkness* are direct rather than reported speeches. Whilst a narrator does not necessarily speak for her/his author, in a part-historical, part-autobiographical novel like the present one, a bit of the authorial self is projected into the vision of her/her narrator. Details from the author's own past vindicates this point:

> It was in 1868 when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space [the Stanley Falls region] then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now: 'When I grow up I shall go there.' [O'Prey, Intro:11]

Paul O'Prey writes after Norman Sherry [1971] and Frederick Karl [1979] that Conrad gives his own dream to Marlow because at the time of his return to London from the East, Henry Morton Stanley, who had become famous from exploring in Africa, was being presently celebrated. In 1871, Stanley had traced and found the missing missionary, Dr Livingstone, and a few years later, he had found and probed the jungles of Central Africa where he traced the course of the River Congo. His revelation of the commercial prospects there aroused the interest of King Leopold II of Belgium who created what he called the Congo Free State. Imperial Britain stayed off but later regretted it. Stanley led the first commercial expedition of Belgian explorers and traders. Conrad himself followed the trail in 1890 but arrived too late to find an easy prospect. Instead, he found a great stampede of fortune seekers and the Congo had become the property of Leopold II. He returned with a great sense of disillusionment and failure and thereafter chose to become a writer. Marlow's aunt which the narrator mentions in this novel is actually Conrad's aunt, Marguerite Podarowska, who had helped him to secure a job with the Société Anonyme Belge pour le

Commerce du Haute-Congo [SAB] as skipper of the steamboat which was managed by Alexandre Delcommune whose brother is the SAB manager in Kinshasha [described as the Central Station] in Conrad's novel. It is thereby clear that the two 'conspiring' brothers he eavesdropped in the novel were characters he knew in real life. The only fictional character, Kurtz, is based on a fabricated newspaper report of a company agent and explorer called Hodister. He died in 1892 in a rebellion by Africans and Arabs on his way to establish new factories. Though a rival of Delcommune's, he was a true patriot who condemned slavery and barbaric customs and was not materialistic in the sense in which the fictional Kurtz is. Conrad's interest clashed with that of Delcommune and his career in the Congo ended in frustration, withdrawal and disillusionment, irked constantly by fever and dysentery. Not surprisingly, he internalised his profound frustration and this affected the temper of his writing and his narrator. It is evident that Marlow, his alter-ego comes through as a cynical narrator, constantly introspective and withdrawn and regarding life with scorn.

Frederick Karl [1971:301] writes that the Congo episode tamed Conrad and granted him enlightenment and maturity owing to disillusion and defeat and that it brought him to the brink of his own existence rather than that of civilisation. Although Karl believed that Conrad thereby gained a deeper understanding of men from their darker side, I doubt that this is overly so. He tended to have internalised the frustration which, in turn, led him to scepticism and angst. This explains the *ennui* with which he regards persons and environment and the squeamishness with which he handles the use of his adoptive language, English. O'Prey bears me out thus:

> Although his own experiences are the raw material for the story, Conrad, in an attempt to express in fiction his development from idealism to disillusion and greater understanding, distorted actual experience in several ways. [p.14]

O'Prey goes ahead to name four instances of distortion. First, he integrates the character of Marlow with the scepticism which his own boyhood dreams did not entail. Second, that Marlow is overplayed in

his role such that Conrad makes him the captain of the boat. He, therefore, is responsible for the rescue of Kurtz and for the lives of everyone on board. This, certainly, makes his first person narrative more direct and more immediate. Third, he exaggerates the primitiveness of the Congo by pre-dating the historical setting, and makes the large settlements and trading posts disappear; whereas the Congo he knew in the 1890s was a busy river and well settled. Finally, he gives a simple journey the semblance of a grand mythical tale making an individual experience correlate with Marlow's spiritual and emotional development.[Intro. *Hear of Darkness:* 14 - 16]

While the story has been seen by critics as a spiritual journey through the night into the earth's centre or as a replay of the archetypal myth of Jonah, the tale does not have enough structures to aspire to such dimensions of art. There is a deceptively false logic about it; a mock epic and mock heroic. It is, at best, racist literature. This has a disastrous implication for the imprecise use of style and language. There is no doubting the fact that the story is tight and compact in layout and form. The tripartite evocation of places as "Company Station", "Central Station", and "Inner Station" artistically replaces verifiable geographical places as Matadi, Kinshasha and Stanley Falls. Even this style, in itself, subverts its purpose because their being unnamed as a nameable phenomenon – their not being given form or evocation as a tangible entity – makes them disappear from Conrad's landscape altogether. The purpose of language as a template for naming is thus applied *in vacuo*. This manner of referential miscoding has a way of making reality unfamiliar, and doubly so, in the conversion of a historical fact into art. In disempowering the code as nameless things, the narrator effaces them from a knowing memory, and lowers their category of identification. This, in itself, has a serious theoretical as well as practical implication for the matching of language and meaning in Conrad's art. The final part of this paper examines this aspect in the novel.

III

Language & Meaning: The Parallactic

It is altogether true that we gain a certain level of suspense as we move from the empire in London, Paris or Brussels to the "heart of darkness" , the representative of the margins on the African Continent. But Marlow's language precision diminishes, proportionately, as we follow his movement into the hinterland of the Congo. We fail to get the focus of the quest such that when we have encountered Mr Kurtz, his subject of quest, Mr Kurtz says nothing. He is too ill and too delirious to make any comprehensible statement. Even the manuscripts he entrusts to Marlow turn out to be of little significance. Yet he had been described as the genius and the prodigy who focuses the mission of Europe in the interior. Even his exact role has been overwhelmed and compromised by the consuming rite and sheer enthusiasm of the natives. A certain impersonal character, Russian by birth, is supposed to be an informant and guide to the questers. Unfortunately, he is so incoherent and too impoverished to be of much use. All we know is that he is a vagrant who knows that the indigenes love Kurtz and have adopted him, for which reason they don't want him to leave the area. Both vision and language are at a tangent here and time and sequence become blurred. Since the murder of Marlow's helmsman whom he referred to as "an improved specimen" because "he could fire up a vertical boiler" [p.70], whatever that means, and however that makes him an improved specimen! The imprecision in the description is also compounded by the confusion in the categories of personal identities. The death of the helmsman is linked with the loss of Kurtz's voice and the imposition of a loud, audible silence on the mission of Marlow:

> The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood up pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words - the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. [p. 83]

At the point when we need the greatest illumination, we lost it. It would seem to me that with this breakdown of communication, the whole sense of the journey into the heart of darkness aborts and breaks down. It is as if it confirms the reported claim of E.M. Forster on Conrad's art that "the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel". Language sustains objectivity in narratives which are self-redemptive; that is, narratives which convert from history to myth and from the realistic to the sublime. Where this fails, as in mock heroics, imprecision and speculation take over accuracy and detail. The vision so well formulated over the Thames has foundered over the Nile and on the Congo. As the style and the linguistic imprecision cannot sustain the burden of the epic, Marlow resorts to personal interpolations rather than allow the story to evolve organically from the vision and task laid before the hero. This point has been very well noted by F.R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*:

> The same vocabulary, the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery, is applied to the evocation of human profundity and spiritual horrors; to magnifying thrilled sense of the unspeakable potentialities of the human soul. The actual effect is not to magnify but rather to muffle. [O'Prey:19]

The final scenes in which Marlow meets Kurtz's 'intended', long relegated to the back burner in the scheme of events, the portrayal of this 'lady of mourning', is hardly convincing. The anti-climax of trying to create a mood adequate for expressions recalling the deeds of the dead Kurtz continually break down into farce, and it recurs once again that Conrad could not handle the subtlety of feminine portraiture. Even the cynicism of Marlow comes to the fore again, unable to master the sympathies necessary for the penetrating apprehension of artistic moments. Above all, Conrad's distrust for, and misuse of the paradigmatic potentials of the English language leads, occasionally, to frivolity where genuine profundity is warranted. In the final analysis, it is difficult to say whether his distortion of reality accounts for his racialist effusions or whether he basically has a racist attitude of mind. His narrow nationalism prevents his accomplishment of a humanist

ideal. Darkness, like a pall, in the novel becomes unfathomable knowledge and an otherwise mystic odyssey becomes a purposeless peregrination across desertlands and the perimeter of the earth.

IV

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, *Heart of Darkness* represents a literature and an activity that subjectively apprehends and projects 'the other' through its own jaundiced lenses. It betrays a certain imbalance of geopolitical awareness and is what Edward Said has articulated in a concept he terms *Orientalism* [1978, 1991]. The etymology of the word would seem to infer a division into East and West, but this is more than a simplistic and neat division. It reflects a convenient way of expressing a new awareness and a new temper; as he himself relates:

> It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts;
>
> it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction [the world is made up, Orient and Occident] but also of a whole series of 'interests' which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different [or alternative and novel] world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political [as with a colonial or imperial establishment], power intellectual [as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the

modern policy sciences], power cultural [as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values], power moral [as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do].

This lengthy illustration from Said fully illustrates a certain tendency which has helped the theorization of one category of those literatures described as distinctly post-colonial.

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13

HISTORY AND POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY IN GEORGE LAMMING'S *SEASON OF ADVENTURE*

Wumi Raji

Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffith *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice of Post-Colonial Literatures* celebrates the cross-cultural approach to post-colonial literatures. According to them, what the literatures have in common inheres in their having been inspired by colonial experiences. Both the literature and theoretical perspective, as they argue, actualize the tension between the colonized and the colonizer and, in addition, emphasise the "difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre". To demonstrate this difference the theory foregrounds the concepts of displacement and dislocation, which terms themselves articulate the tension generated when the experience of place differs from the language available to describe it.

Ashcroft *et al* identify three types of displacements. In the first category, the colonial finds himself trying to capture an alien environment, an alien culture and a new experience in his original language, a situation which obtains in settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The second category describes a situation as in Africa and India where the colonial remains in his original environment and retains his original inheritance but can only express himself in an alien tongue. The third situation is that of total dislocation. The colonial, either because of an earlier experience of slavery or forced removal for indentured labour finds himself in an alien environment, grappling with both a new language and a new experience. This, specifically, is what obtains in the Caribbean Islands. In all of the three cases, however, the common factor, as Ashcroft *et al* argue, is an attempt to force experience through a language which bears a different culture. The result, inevitably, is hybridity or syncretism or, to borrow

their own term "double vision" which is peculiar only to the colonized and which constitutes the difference from the colonizer.

In "Culture and Identity: Politics and Writing in some Recent Post-Colonial Texts", a paper which in many ways represents a follow-up to the arguments of *The Empire Writes Back*, Gareth Griffiths contends that "the same fundamental discursive conditions exist across all post-colonial societies." In fact, as he continues, recent post-colonial texts are hardly concerned with such essentialist issues as "national or regional identity." Rather, as he argues they are more concerned with the process of "cross culturation", which legitimate concern, at least in Griffiths' view, makes them "re-work classic texts from the European canon, or seek to express in a cross cultural form the intricate and tangled relationships which can spring, and have sprung, between post-colonial societies in the neo-colonial period" (437). Rounding off on his argument, Griffiths asserts that the contemporary reality of post-colonial society is unquestionably pluralist, a situation which renders essentialism anachronistic, since it would mean "a re-inscription of tradition as fixed and dead." (438).

This essay attempts a supplementary variant of the above assumptions of Gareth Griffiths. It argues that it is possible to negotiate the past not as fixed, holistic entities but as part of contemporary movements for politico-cultural transformations. The approach is to conduct a detailed study of George Lamming's *Season of Adventure*[1], a work described by Kenneth Ramchard as a novel invoking Africa. The view is to point out how one of the foremost West Indian novelists sends his heroine on a journey back to the past as the latter struggles desperately to re-possess the future. Clearly, Lamming, like Chinua Achebe, his African counterpart[2], has always emphasized the need for

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1. George Lamming: *Season of Adventure* (London: Allison and Busby 1980). All references will be to this edition and will be indicated by page number immediately after quotation in the body of the essay.
2. Writes Chinua Achebe in "The Novelist as Teacher", one of his most frequently cited essays: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past–with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's

the young generation to possess a "firm sense of historical continuity" in order to avoid a second stage of isolation. So concerned is he with contextual specificities that he has gone so far as to emphasize in his book of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*, the difference between the African and the West Indian experiences[3].

Directly, the symbolic framework of *Season of Adventure* is based on a voodoo cult that has its origin on the slave-coast of West-Africa. The ceremony of souls first reached the Caribbean Islands in the sixteenth century when the slaves started arriving in the New World. Even though it must have undergone a lot of changes after almost four hundred years, the ceremony still retains its essential features as an engagement with the past. Lamming himself gives a detailed explanation of the ceremony in "The West Indian People":

> In the republic of Haiti there is a ceremony of souls at which all celebrants are relatives of the dead who return for this occasion to give some report on their previous relations with the living. The dead are supposed to be in a purgatorial state of water, and it is necessary for them to have this dialogue with the living, before they can be released into their final eternity. The living, on the other hand, need to meet the dead again in order to discover if there is any need for forgiveness. This dialogue takes place through the medium of the Priest or *Hougan.* It is not important to believe in the actual details of the ceremony. What is important is its symbolic drama, the drama of redemption, the

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behalf delivered them." See *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975) p. 23.

3. Lamming's argument is that while it is true that as a colonial, the West Indian is a Caliban sharing a common predicament with the African, the word colonial itself does not have the same meaning for the two of them: "the African, in spite of his modernity, as he says, has never been wholly severed from the cradle of a continuous culture." (*Pleasures of Exile*, 34). For further discussions on this point see Wumi Raji, "Transformative Imagination: Post-Colonial Discourse and Black Revolutionary Drama", Unpublished Ph.D thesis submitted to the University of Ibadan, March, 1995, pp. 78-80.

drama of returning, the drama of a cleansing for a commitment towards the future (64-5).

The action of the novel properly commences with the heroine's visit to the tonelle. Indeed, Fola, at first, could not understand while Charlot, her white teacher in History should have taken her to watch the ceremony. But the patronizing Charlot is sure that despite her obvious atmosphere of social refinement, Fola has within her a hidden parallel of feeling with the peasant women dancing at the tonelle. She, on the other hand, considers this a terrible misjudgement on the part of her teacher and nurses a quiet anger against it:

> She glanced at the child and thought with bitterness: 'so that's how he sees me. The college where he teaches, the way I live: all this means nothing compared with what he *thinks I am*. He thinks I should be like those women. (author's emphasis) (28).

Her arrogance soon begins to dissolve however. She begins to feel uneasy as the women dance in frenzy. The power of spirit possession filters through her as the supplicants raise their voices in prayer. And, by the time the *Hougan* has taken her round the secret chambers to see the sacraments, her process of transformation has been completed. Badly shaken, she sees herself as another dead soul in need of urgent reconciliation with the past.

It is important to indicate a difference between Fola's quest and Charlot's American friends' "passion for discovery". The Americans visit Europe in search of monuments, cathedrals, important graves, elements of architecture and so on. As Sandra Pouchet points out in *The Novels of George Lamming*, their disposition to favour a past they do not fully understand "measures a continuity with that past". (75) And this is quite the opposite of the shame, fear and embarrassment characterizing the young lady's visit to the tonelle. Since the original European migration to America was a conscious, deliberate act which has been carefully documented in history, the latter-day adventurers from America have a sense of expectation as they set out on their journey back to Europe.

The contrary is the case with Fola. As we have said elsewhere, [4] her own people were uprooted from Africa and bundled into the slave-ship on a forced voyage to the new world. They were not allowed to bring anything along with them. Neither could they even act out the contents of their memories. There is thus no concrete evidence for Fola to rely on in her search. Her's is a personal journey; one that is beyond "the essential history of all Charlot's World." (*Season of Adventure, 49*).

It may seem ironical for it to be Charlot who introduces Fola to the tonelle; but it is also very important to note that it is Chiki, the painter, who alerts Charlot to the significance of the ceremony as an example of "the backward glance meant only for the dead, (and) the living who are free" (49). It is this that makes Chiki the appropriate man to contact for help as Fola embarks on her journey. Having ultimately secured his collaboration the lady then becomes the instrument through which the author forges a link between the peasants and members of the emergent bourgeoisie.

Fola's journey back to her peasant origins is made very gruelling. She receives a battering from Piggott who feels scandalized that she could descend so low as to seek a relationship with any of the Forest Boys. On the other hand is the initial rebuff she gets from Chiki as she tries to enlist his help in her quest.

But by far the most deadly threat to her comes from Powell who actually is set on finishing his job off her but for Chiki's timely intervention. Indeed, Powell represents a serious threat to the efforts at bringing the peasantry and the middle class together. He tells Fola as he makes to slit her throat that he would have nothing to do with any member of her class:

> What I do I do alone no help from you and your lot 'cause I learn how any playing 'but with your lot bound to end. You

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4. See Wumi Raji, "A Circumference of Two Worlds: Politics and Alienation in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*". *Centrepoint: Ilorin Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. V. No. 2, 1995, pp. 23-36.

know the rules you have for murdering me. So is me go murder first. Otherwise is you that will murder me or make me murder myself. (328)

In the "Author's Note" where Lamming explains the cause of Powell's dislocation, the author brings back the predicament of the boy-hero in *In the Castle of My skin.* "G" in Lamming's first novel feels a sense of displacement as he waves goodbye to his playmates on his way to the high school. In this daring violation of the principle of novel writing, the fictive narrator heaps on himself the blame for Powell's criminal defeat. The two (Powell and the fictive narrator) are half brothers by the same father. They are together in the primary school. The division only comes when they attain the age of ten:

I got a public scholarship which started my migration into another world, a world whose roots were the same, but whose style of living was entirely different from what my childhood knew. It had earned me a privilege which now shut Powell and the whole tonnelle right out of my future. I had lived as near to Powell as my Skin to the hand it darkens. And yet! Yet I forgot a war, and attached myself to this new world which was so recent and so slight beside the weight of what had gone before (332).

Again, this "narrator" contrasts with "G" who is determined before setting out not to be cut off from the boys. "G" is actually closer to Chiki while the narrator in the above quotation reminds us of the haughtiness with which the members of the ruling class in the novel under consideration carry themselves. We remember the wedge they have constructed between themselves and the people. Chiki confronts Piggott with this fact as the police following the gruesome assassination of Raymond, the Vice-president.

Look round this yard, an ' what you see? What you see, Piggott? Nothing here is foreign to you. Whorin', hunger, the whole lot. You start from scratch like any o' these men here. Now you got power, an' you feel you can put out your memory like a fire... (268).

The fictional author then is symbolic of the middle class. The "Note" is Lamming's way of driving home the point: that the privileged class is to be held responsible for the spiritual and moral decay suffered by members of the peasant community in San Cristobal. "I will not have this explained away by talk about environment; nor can I allow my own moral infirmity to be transferred to a foreign conscience labeled imperialist. I shall go beyond my grave in the knowledge that I am responsible for what happened to my brother." (332).

But of all the Forest Boys, Gort symbolizes the people's will. His illiteracy draws him closer to the peasants who, predominantly, are illiterates. The drum articulates the people's creative will to freedom and independence. Gort shares a strong bond with it. He is never able to accept the fact when the police destroy it. He weeps because, to him, the destruction of the drum is a murder more terrible than Raymond's assassination. It is an attempt to destroy the people's collective identity. Together with Gort, all the people share a spontaneous understanding of the language of the drum. Any attempt therefore, on the drum represents a wilful attempt at denying them of their only means of self-location. Gort weeps because of this destabilisation. And as he does, he discovers an answer in the mystery of the sugar. If Flo, Unice and Mathilda, in spite of their enmity, could agree on a common price for sugar, there is no reason why the drum boys in San Cristobal should not unite to keep the drums alive. He communicates his failure to understand this lack of harmony to Chiki but it is Fola who actually discovers the possibility in the words. The former eventually paints them on cards which are distributed round the republic. The people are inspired by the message and a revolt led by Gort leads to the overthrow of the government.

What the above analysis goes on to show is that it is possible to conduct communitarian search, not for the purpose of idealization or preservation but as part of contemporary anti-hegemonic struggle. Inter-textual engagements have a lot of merit and a lot of post-colonial writers adopt the method; but not to prove, as Gareth Griffiths suggests, that the same conditions exist across all societies – post-colonial and otherwise. This is merely to destabilize age-old prejudices and

underline actual *differences* in circumstances obtaining in different places. Thus it happens that Chinua Achebe's literary archive has as its main focus the dismantling of assumptions that under-write Europe's disruptive adventure in Africa. The ultimate aim, in his own words, is "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (*Hope and Impediments,* 30).

Finally, as Ella Shoat indicates in "Notes on the Post-Colonial", the term post-colonialism, like such others as post-structuralism and post-modernism, assumes an intellectual advancement over the discursive perspectives of the nationalist theories of the colonial period. However, beyond fresh jargons which have now been introduced and also beyond the intellectual airs exuded by its practitioners, it does not seem as if the theory has offered much by way of fresh insights. In fact, in some ways, and as we hold, a number of the theses proposed by some of the nationalist predecessors are far ahead of certain aspects of post-colonialist postulations. At least, some members of the former group appreciate the inestimable potentialities of the indigenous traditions in the process of socio-political transformations. Indeed, both Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral agree that certain members of the emergent bourgeoisie, owing to an acute experience of discomfort and crisis occasioned by their marginality in terms of number and spatial location, are, now and again, caught in a process of self-assessment and re-examination. The inevitable result of this is a negation of alienation; retracing of steps and a re-location among the masses of people. This is the process characterized by Cabral as a "return to the source". Its limit is a repudiation of the tradition of the dominating power and a re-immersion in the indigenous heritage. Writes Cabral in *Unity and Struggle:*

> The differences in cultural levels explain the differing behaviour towards the liberation movement of individuals within the same socio-economic category. It is at this point that culture reaches its full significance for each individual: understanding and integration in his environment, identification with the fundamental problems and aspirations

of society, acceptance of the possibility of change in the direction of progress (144).

The above words precisely articulate the purpose of Fola's quest in *Season of Adventure*. It is in an attempt to create an alternative tradition for her society that she, a middle-class intellectual, collaborates with Chiki and Gort, both of whom represent the peasantry.

Let us conclude by suggesting that post-colonial theorists will derive a lot of advantages from re-visiting the political thinkers of the colonial period. At the worst, Fanon and Cabral should be able to indicate that casting a backward glance does not automatically imply anachronism. The process may, on the contrary, be a conscious and constructive step by a particular individual to treat himself or herself for the psychic injury sustained as a result of colonial and/or neo-colonial violence.

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14

SPLIT IDENTITY AND THE ATTENDANT PERSPECTIVE TANGLE IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN ART FORMS

Cornelius O. Adepegba

Despite the changes that African ways of life and traditional values have gone through since colonialism, Africanity has been a major expectancy in post-colonial African arts. The concern for it was a strong factor in the colonial formation of the arts. Not has it continuously created a foggy perception of the art forms, it has also appeared as a dilemma in the creative efforts of emergent African artists. To the audience, the artists and their works are neither individuals nor groups. The identity problem it has created in both the understanding and creation of the art forms is what is here being specially considered alongside the popularly advocated approach to traditional African art to evolve a suitable approach to the new art forms. The approach as used for traditional African art is certainly not without its shortcomings; it is even a barrier to the understanding of the new African art which is not as culturally functional as the traditional one.[1] But as the only approach popularly advocated for the study of African art, which to many is only the traditional art, its examination together with the new art forms is a relevant starting point in the search for an appropriate methodology for understanding the new art.

To begin with, however, there is need for clarification on Africa as it is taken to mean in reference to African arts and post-colonialism. The adjective "African" in cultural studies commonly refers to a section of the continent occupied by a particular race and not the entire geographical entity from which the adjective derives. Culturally, the adjective applies only to the countries directly south of the Sahara inhabited by black populations together with Sudan and Ethiopia east

of them. Whether this application is appropriate is not the issue. Mention is only made of it to show the spatial coverage of both the art forms and the artists referred to by the qualifier, African. With the exception of Ethiopia, the countries to which the artists and their art forms belong were under one European power or the other for most part of the first half of the twentieth century. Their post-colonialism, very recent, only started with the independence of Sudan in 1956 and the time most of them became independent coincided with the period of upsurge in their artistic outputs. However, post-colonial African art did not just begin with their attainment of political freedom. In art, as in most aspects of African life, there is no clean break from colonialism to post-colonialism. Post-colonial African art actually has its root in colonialism and as colonialism mostly started in different parts of the region in the early decades of the twentieth century, post-colonial African art is simply twentieth century African art.

The Colonial End of Traditional African Art

The political control which colonialism meant was the umbrella for all other controls of the countries and their peoples in the colonial era. The political control very much strengthened Christianity and commercial enterprises which had been introduced into the region before it and the trio -- foreign rule, Christianity and commerce – combined to bring an end to the concept of traditional African art, especially the sculptures which were produced mainly to serve traditional religious purposes. Industrial materials from Europe also replaced traditional hand-made utilities and through churches and European style education which were prompted by the need for mutual understanding and administrative conveniences, Africans began to see their traditional ways of life, often branded "primitive" by their colonial masters, as inferior.

The colonial period also coincided with the time that traditional African art became recognized as art in Europe. The rush to collect the art objects that followed the recognition, coupled with the absence of traditional preservation of the art, impoverished the countries of their existing traditional art objects and their traditional artists also started to

give up production owing to paid employments brought about by monetary economy. African traditional artists preferred newly introduced jobs and trade to their traditional crafts which used to be practiced as pastime mainly for the interest of the group and for little or no reward. Thus before the end of colonialism, traditional African art appeared close to its end. In the new ways of life ushered in by colonialism, art, though desirable, was no longer functional and essential but became sensual and luxurious.

The Colonial Origin of Post-Colonial African Art

Western formal education introduced in the colonies general, elementary education based mainly on the needs of the time could not provide professional training in a subject such as art that does not lead to the production of obvious essential end-products. Thus, in most of the countries, the first set of new artists had to go to Europe for training. Notable early Nigerian artists (Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwonwu) were trained in Britain. So also did the foremost Sudanese painters, Ahmed Mohammed Shibrain and Ibrahim El Salahi study at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. Other foremost African artists who trained abroad include the Ethiopian artists Afewerk Tekle, who also studied at the Slade; Gebre Kristo Desta who studied at the Academy of Art in Cologne, Germany and Skunder Boghossian who studied in both the Ecole des Beaux – Arts and the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in France.

Although these early artists are of different generations and cultural backgrounds, Western training made them to value originality, a common artistic value and major expectancy in Western art, above anything else. Their works were the beginning of personal and individualistic self-expressions in contrast to tribal and stereotypical attributes of traditional African sculpture. As the eventual vanguards in art and art teaching in their respective countries, these artists also passed on the same European value to their students. Thus their European artistic orientation became a permanent mark of modernity in African art.

Not long after this early set of artists were being trained abroad, the art schools fashioned after European models were also being set up in Africa. They were different from those of Europe only in their locations. In the materials introduced as well as in the method and focus of the training in them, they were the same with Western art schools. In them, as in European art schools, emphasis was on skill and originality and all their instructors were Europeans until the Africans trained in the same tradition started to join and take over from them.

Established in 1936, Achimota College near Accra, Ghana, was the first of the formal art schools to be established in Black Africa. It was followed by the School of Fine Arts at Makerere University College which was established in Kampala, Uganda in 1939. There, Margaret Trowell practiced the conventional European teaching procedure to produce easel painters. In Kinshasa in 1943, a Catholic priest, Reverend Brother Marc-Stanislas established the Ecole St Luc, named after the art school where he trained in Belgium. There also, European classical art was taught.[2] Worth mentioning also are the present College of Fine and Applied Arts in Khartoum which was established as the Department of Arts and Crafts in 1946 and the Academie des Beaux Arts et des Metier d' Art which was run by a Belgian artist, Laurent Moonens, and was established in 1951 in Lumumbashi in Zaire. Then in Nigeria, the Fine Arts Department of the Yaba Technical Institute (now Yaba College of Technology) was established in 1953. The Fine Arts Department of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was originally established in Ibadan but was transferred to Zaria in 1955. These were the formal art institutions established in Black Africa in the colonial era. Many more have been established since then; at present in Nigeria, formal art schools are not fewer than ten and they have continued with the Western conventional method with little or no modifications. This is to show that the post-colonial art institutions in Africa are not particularly different from those established in the colonial era before them.

The formal art schools were not the only places for art instruction in Africa. Very important in the foundation of modern African art are also the workshops and occasional centre which, run by some

European individuals, taught Africans art in unconventional Western methods. These workshops were two types: those in which European and other media were employed and those which were set up to revive the dying African traditions.

Those in which European media were employed were similar in their focuses; they were to encourage individual creativity as in the formal schools but through a different approach. In most cases, the workshop instructors simply provided their students with materials without interfering with their creations and even their processes of executing their arts in some cases. This method, according to most of the organizers of such workshops, was to ensure that the resulting art forms would be free of any imposition and can be taken as the authentic individual African expressions, a claim which Marshal Mount finds difficult to accept on the ground that even when formal instruction was not given, the artists could still be influenced just by mere admiration, approval or disapproval of their works by their instructors.[3]

Only in French-speaking African countries, namely, Zaire and the People's Republic of Congo, were two of such schools established before post-colonialism. The earlier of the two and the earliest of such workshops was established by Pierre Romain-Desfosses in 1944 at Lumumbashi (formerly Elisabethville) in Zaire. It was first called "Le Hangar" but was later changed to "L' Academie de l'art populaire Congolais". The workshop began from the astonishment of its founder by an accidental painting made by his chauffeur who was later given materials to work with together with his friends. According to the founder, the intention was to make the students produce works that were wholly African: hence he would not suggest themes, provide models or give advice on methods of representation to his students. He only gave them the place to work and provided them with necessary materials such as paper, canvas and paints.[4] The school was run that way until after his death in 1954 when the school was merged with the Academie des Beaux-Arts et des Metiers d'Art, a formal art school which, as indicated earlier, was established in the same town by Laurent Moonens. According to Marshal Mount, Moonens's approach,

which is conventionally European, resulted in a greater technical proficiency.[5]

Established also in the colonial era, the second of such workshops was the Centre d'Art Africaine, popularly referred to as "Poto Poto" school. The name derived from the quarter of Brazzaville in the People's Republic of Congo in which it was established in 1951 and the workshop was established by a French mathematics teacher and an amateur artist, Pierre Lod. The origin of the school was as accidental as that of the one established by Desfosses. The paintings that Osali, Pierre Lod's houseboy, did with the paints he secretly took from his master, intrigued and made his master start supplying him and his friends paints and other materials to work with. His method was not different from that of Desfosses and Lod: the organizer claimed to have only surrounded the boys with traditional African objects, organized parties, furnished the materials such as paper, paints and brushes and left them to work freely up to allowing them to discover the technique themselves.[6]

Other such experimental workshops were run in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Nigeria in the 1960s. Although the earlier workshops cannot be said to have directly influenced the later ones, such workshops continued to play a major role in the production of African art and artists up to the post-colonial period. Those of Nigeria even began after Nigeria's independence.

The one in Mozambique appears to have been a two-man affair, just an effort made by a Portuguese architect, Pancho Miranda Guepes to develop the creative potentials of Valente Malangatana, an African ball boy and club attendant he found painting in the tennis club in 1959 Lorenco Marques (now Maputo). Unlike the earlier of such workshops in Zaire and the People's Republic of Congo and even the ones in Zimbabwe and Nigeria established shortly after it, the Maputo experiment was not open but was similarly prompted by the founder's interest in developing local talents. Malangatana had been painting and drawing from his early school years: Guepes only provided him the needed facilities to improve and mature in his art. Malangatana claimed that Guepes discovered him painting in 1959 and very early in 1961,

the architect had arranged for him to leave his work at the club by offering him a studio and monthly allowance to enable him paint full time. Malangatana soon matured into an outstanding African passion painter.

Equally successful was the workshop run at the National Gallery in Salisbury (now Harare) by Frank McEwen, then the administrator of the gallery. When McEwen became the administrator of the gallery, the activities of the gallery focused mainly on the interest of the European colonists. The political situation in Zimbabwe at the time did not favour African participation in the activities of the gallery and the situation did not please McEwen who was very much interested in developing local talents. Young local artists, including the gallery attendant, Thomas Mukarobgwa, were encouraged to paint and sculpt; but sculpture, particularly in stone, was dominant in the creative outputs of the gallery artists. Stone sculptures were found in the ruins of ancient Zimbabwe, and McEwen linked their productions to the past; but their forms, though personal and individualistic, are sophisticated, most likely because of the criticisms which McEwen claimed to have offered the artists.

Though individualistic in their forms, the works of the workshop experiments of the Mbari Mbayo center in Osogbo, Nigeria is conversely naïve. The workshop, which was begun in 1962, started as an offshoot of the Mbari Centre which was originally set up in Ibadan by some intellectuals of Ibadan University in 1961 as a forum for artists of all kinds to meet, discuss and display or perform their arts. In the Ibadan center, writers, musicians, actors and, occasionally, visual artists were involved. A print-making workshop was run there in 1962. But it was the performing aspect of its activities that attracted and led the Late Duro Ladipo, then a local dramatist, to request Ulli Beier, a leading organizer of the Ibadan centre, to set up a similar centre in his native town, Osogbo. It was from the performing art beginning of the Osogbo Mbari Centre that the visual art workshop grew. In fact, most of the early Oshogbo artists were former actors/actresses of Duro Ladipo's theatre group. Ulli Beier himself was not an artist, hence the visual art

activities of the workshop were primarily in the hands of guest artists and Ulli Beier's painter wife, Georgina.

The requirement for the visual art participants at the workshop which was decidedly of minimal Western education was in reaction to what Ulli Beier saw as Western imposition or slavish imitation of European art forms in the Nigerian formal art schools with higher educational entry requirements. Of such workshop centers in Africa, hardly has any as much lasting influence on the arts of its country of origin as the Oshogbo workshop. The setting up of a similar centre, the Ori Olokun of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) at Ile Ife was influenced by the Osogbo experiment and many talented Nigerians with neither ability nor means to further their education still take to art through the workshop apprenticeship method.

Before independence in Nigeria, a number of efforts were made to revive the obviously disappearing traditional art. In a number of places, workshops for such artistic revival were attempted or successfully organized. In 1897, the traditional ruler of Benin was removed by the British. But in 1914, the appointment of a new traditional ruler was necessitated by the role he would play in the indirect rule the British were going to introduce and the grumblings of the natives against the high-handedness of Obaseki, a Benin appointee that replaced the ruler deposed and exiled in 1897. Traditional brass casting and wood carving which were mainly to serve the royalty and had been driven underground with the banning of the king were revived.

Although without success, attempts were also made to introduce traditional wood carving into the curricula of secondary institutions in both Lagos and Omu-Aran.

However, none of the efforts to keep alive traditions, especially in wood-carving, was as successful as the notable workshop experiment run by two Catholic priests, Fathers Carroll and Mahoney, in the Yoruba town of Oye Ekiti. The objectives of the Oye Ekiti experiment was to employ traditional artistry for the artistic needs of the Catholic church. Hence, various craftsmen including traditional wood carvers were assembled at the workshop to produce images and other artistic

needs of the church in the local, traditional ways. The only occasions for interference was when the sculptors were representing sacred figures such as that of Jesus. Set up in 1948, the workshop has long been discontinued. But its wood carving activities have led to the expansion of the repertoire as well as the continuity and popularization of Yoruba sculptural forms which are now seen employed for mundane and non-traditional uses.

Yoruba sculpture is generally humanistic. But its ethnographic pieces, whether in cast metal or wood, are abstracted in contrast to the naturalistic sculpture of ancient Ife, the cradle of Yoruba civilization. The naturalism of Ife art, rather than the abstractions of the later Yoruba sculptures, remotely motivated Abayomi Barber, a native of Ife who, in 1972, established and still runs a workshop named after him in the Centre for Cultural Studies of the University of Lagos. At the centre, Abayomi Barber, more of a self-trained than an art-school trained artist, imparts technical competence and care for minute details, sometimes described as surrealism, into his students most of who are Yoruba like him. The method of the centre is, however, hardly different from that of the formal art schools. Their art forms require technical competence and extreme patience in the use of materials and representational devices such as foreshortening, proportion and modelling.

In Nigeria where there have been the highest numbers of both formal art schools and workshop centers, emphasis in the discussions of contemporary arts is sometimes placed on the dichotomy between the modes of training in the formal art schools and the workshops.[7] But the goals of the training in both the formal art schools and the workshops were in most cases not strikingly different. The same can be said of the personnel involved in the organisation and the running of the workshops. The teachers in the art schools and most of the instructors in the workshops were trained in Western art schools and the emphasis in the training in the workshops, like in the formal schools, has been on originality of both the artists and their works. Regardless of their training backgrounds, what is foremost to the outstanding ones among the artists is being themselves. This, however,

is not to say that the works of the two groups of artists do not reflect their individual modes of training. Forms in the works of the school-trained artists are generally characterized by greater rationalization and logic than those of the workshop-trained artists.

The Diversity of Forms
and
The Problems of Handling and Approach

In the catalogue of the exhibition of contemporary African art held in London in 1969, Jaqueline Delange and Philip Fry imagined how justice could be done to the many artists exhibited without infringing on the originality of individual works of art.[8] If the artists could be as many as to give such a concern in 1969, now almost three decades after, how many more artists need to be studied and how diverse will their works also be, especially, as avenues for training have kept on increasing? The variety or diversity of the art works is, however, not totally confusing. The need for handy classifications for teaching purposes has prompted me into coming up with four tendencies that cut across contemporary African art forms.[9] The tendencies are: (1) Discernible Images of Experiences and Ideas, (2) Naïve Visions Encouraged and Sometimes Fossilized (3) Abstractions beyond Common Understanding and (4) Adaptations from Traditional Art Forms.

Images of Experiences

The first tendency consists of figural works in different degrees of abstraction representing the artists' experiences and world views. They may be portraits, reports of events, representations of traditional and contemporary ideas, world and religious views, landscapes or even still lives, all rendered in the individual ways that are explainable or can be understood by the art audience. The tendency was the earliest: Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan and Ben Enwonwu of Nigeria as well as Afewerk Tekle of Ethiopia demonstrated the tendency and the tendency still constitutes the largest percentage of the works of contemporary African art.

Naïve Visions

Naïve visions of individual artists were only encouraged by the approach of the workshop schools in which the student was simply given materials to produce "masterpieces" without any technical instruction or much interference. Even in individual visions of life and experiences, forms are characterized by naïve abstractions which resulted more from lack of representational skill than the artists' intentions. Their forms have no regard for volume, depth, proportion and logical interrelationships of motifs and their folkloric themes are sometimes cover-ups for representational inadequacies. Only the products of some workshops such as of the Abayomi Barber School, the National Gallery Workshop of Zimbabwe and the Catholic Experiment of Oye Ekiti, the approaches of which differ, are exceptions. As already indicated, the forms in the works of the artists of the National Gallery workshop of Zimbabwe were somehow corrected through criticism; those of the traditional craft experiement at Oye Ekiti in Nigeria were outcomes of prior knowledge of Yoruba traditions while those of Abayomi Barber school in Lagos (also in Nigeria) are not different from those of any of the conventional art schools. Generally, the non-teaching and non-interference approach of the other workshops did not encourage much stylistic changes in the works of individual artists. (No stylistic change is obvious in the works of Twin Seven Seven of the Osogbo workshop while the artists of the "Poto Poto" school even seemed to have copied one another to the extent that their original style has degenerated into the commonest tourist art forms in West Africa).

Abstractions

Complete abstracts are the art forms that are completely without or hardly suggestive of nature. Not many artists produce such works and neither has their production anything to do with whether they, the artists, were trained in the formal art schools or workshops. Both Gebre Kristos and Skunder Boghosian of Ethiopia from formal art schools are

outstanding in their complete abstract paintings. Both of them won the Haile Selassie I Prizes in art and the former was even specifically awarded his for introducing non-figurative art into Ethiopia.[10] Notable of such works are Kristos's *Tin Cans, Green Abstract* and *Red Abstract* as well as Boghosian's early paintings of embryonic forms such as *Cosmological Explosion.* A good number of the untitled abstract painting or prints of Louis Maquebella of South Africa, also a product of a formal art school, have been published while the early works of Muraina Oyelami of the Osogbo workshop, especially his architectonic series, are among the earliest traces of complete abstract art in Nigeria.

Adaptations from Traditional Forms

Although they are increasing in number, contemporary African artists who have revisited traditional art forms in their works are not many and the sources of the traditional art forms adapted into their works vary according to their cultural backgrounds. While most of the artists from Sudan have drawn inspiration from Arabic and Islamic scripts because of their Islamic background and those of Ethiopia were influenced by their Christian icon and magical images, those of West Africa have drawn their creative ideas from traditional sculptural forms. Most contemporary African artists are also not consistent in their sources of inspiration or outputs. However, some notable ones among them have consistently adapted traditional art forms in their works. Among them are Ahmed Mohammed Shibrain and Ibrahim Salahi of Sudan whose works have been influenced by Arabic script and alphabets and Nigerian artists such as Ayo Ajayi and Chucks Anyanwu whose works have shown influences from traditional wooden masks and figures. From Nigeria also is Sokari Douglas-Camp whose themes and forms of sculptures are the various performing arts of her people, the Kalabari. Her works straddle over discernible images of experiences and ideas and adaptations from traditional art forms.

The variety of approaches, styles and forms among present day African artists demonstrates the artists' openness as observed by Jean Kennedy[11]. As the art forms range from extreme naturalism to complete abstracts which tends towards internationalism, they could

normally be expected to have an international appeal. But the acceptance and patronage of the arts sometimes seem to have depended on racial prejudices which have blurred the perceptive placement and identity of the artists and their works. The artists by their up-bringing see themselves as still Africans but their works as individual. But to outsiders, particularly their Western audience, their individualism should always show their African backgrounds. To such an audience, the artists are more or less copiers of Western art especially when their works are not satisfactorily "absurd".

Unfortunately, the thrust of the purchase of their arts has been preponderantly Western. The first generation of contemporary artists such as Aina Onabolu and Akinola Lasekan, both of Nigeria, and Afewerk Tekle of Ethiopia were contented with local patronage in their respective countries, most likely because they were unnoticed or hardly recognized in the Western world. They were forced to understand their local tastes as the colonial arrogance of the outside audience of their times would hardly allow anything good to be seen in their works. A story told by Evelyn Brown about the comment made on contemporary African art by a leading museum director when requested to present Ben Enwonwu in an exhibition in England in 1950 is a good enough illustration of the then Western attitudes towards the works of the early set of contemporary African artists: "Yes, I know Enwonwu's work and his reputation in England. But no good art is being done in Africa today; none will be done in the next fifty years – and I know what I am talking about."[12]

Aina Onabolu's portraits of the Lagos elite of his time and Tekle's works which celebrated the Ethiopian church and royalty which conferred on him the honour of a court painter[13] are proofs of the inward looking of the pioneer modern African artists. But local patronage of the arts has not been consistent. Even up to the post-colonial period, the artists still look forward to foreign buyers not only for higher prices but also because it was dignifying to have European recognition. Ulli Beier, commenting on the Nigerian artists trained in art schools in the late 1960s, observes that the chief concern of the artists was to establish new identities by building broken bits of

traditions self-consciously into a collage often proclaimed as African renaissance and the identities were more often established in the art galleries of Europe than in the villages of Nigeria.[14] The fact of the disposition is that most Africans, and not only the artists, have placed a high premium on musicians than visual artists. Among many Africans and even to date, to behave or dress European has become a mark of modernity. With the French colonial policy of *assimilation*, Africans in the French African colonies could even aspire to become "French"!

The criticisms of the artists were not unconnected with the attitudes of the European audience towards the new African arts. The European orientation in bringing about the new art such as the emphasis on individual creativity is often forgotten. The artists are criticized both for leaving traditions behind or for embracing traditional elements.[15] More common of the criticisms, however, is the question of Africanity which is often directed more to the artists trained in formal schools than the workshop-trained artists. The intellectual contents of the arts of this group of artists which could be mistaken for those of European arts appear detested. Africans who study abroad and avoid African subject matter or employ styles that are not "recognizably" African are sometimes considered betrayers of their inheritance.[16] Skunder Boghosian's early paintings were well received but not bought in the exhibition he held at the Galerie Lambert in 1964[17], most likely because of their abstract forms that are not patently African. But no issues are raised on the Western art materials that are commonly used by the new African artists. No voice is also raised when the images are absurd. Hence scholars are more comfortable regarding the paintings of the semi-literate street artists displayed on vehicles and barbers' shops as African than the works of African artists trained in art schools.

The replacement of traditional African values with the European since the colonial era and the frequency of such a criticism in the valuation of the post-colonial African art forms seem to have continually affected the artists in their outputs. The artists and their works are still neither here nor there and the identity of the artists rather than show naturally is sometimes consciously sought. The resultant split of identity has not helped to encourage interest in the collection

and study of the artists' works. Neither also has there been a consensual and appropriate methodology for understanding their diverse forms. Much interest has not been shown by collectors and scholars in expanding African art beyond the traditional art forms. While museums and private collections of traditional African arts abound, institutions especially devoted to the collection of modern African arts are rare. The only contemporary materials that most schools which offer African art as a teaching subject include in their syllabuses are the extant traditional craft materials such as textiles, jewellery, pottery and basketry.

Although Henry Drewal has made a case for the inclusion of modern African art in the teaching of African art in schools[17], modern sculptures or paintings are still not commonly included and, as I have indicated elsewhere [18], general publications on contemporary African art are still very few. Only catalogues of exhibitions, most commonly self-promoting and sponsored by the artists themselves, can be found and they too are few. Serious criticism of contemporary African art is yet to begin and, in fact, scholastic attitudes towards modern African art are just improving. Twentieth century African art is sometimes erroneously considered as part of European development. Fagg, in the early 1960s, was of the view that contemporary African art, because it was not tribal, was like skyscrapers, an extension of Europe in Africa[19], a comment that one would now hesitate to pass even about modern African architecture which has been considerably indigenised. One even wonders to what extent the issues of European influence on the art can be stressed if the later Western naturalistic traditions that derived from classical Greece and Rome are seen as belonging to their different periods and countries of origin and not just as extensions of the classical tradition.

The diversity in the art forms, rather than attract scholars tends to scare them and the absence of an expected, single distinguishing attribute for the art forms has left most scholars who have shown interest in the art groping in different directions. No common approach to the understanding of the art has evolved. The special methodology used for traditional African art by scholars is not adequate even for the

traditional art forms for which it is constantly advocated, how much less for the modern art forms. Since the 1930s when the field investigations of Griaule among the Dogon in Mali indicated that traditional African sculptures meant more than "art for art's sake" within their cultures of origin, the constantly advocated approach for the traditional art forms emphasizes the cultural rather than the aesthetic significance of the art objects. By this, attention is paid to functions even at the expense of forms and emphasis is not on the objects as art but on their totality as objects. Both anthropology and art history, the major disciplines involved in the study of the traditional African art, have upheld the approach regardless of the differences in their traditional interests in art. While the interest of art history in art is form, that of anthropology is the study of art to understand culture. Yet both claim to be studying African traditional art objects as arts. Neither of the disciplines also seems to understand the methodology of the other. Art historians can only claim to know the peripheral and descriptive method used by anthropologists in the study of African and other non-Western arts and not the mainstream approach of anthropology. Anthropologists too often ignore the fact that even in the Western sense, traditional art historical approach does not forbid the use of cultural backgrounds to understand and explain art. As I have indicated on many occasions, mention cannot but be made of the political and religious life of 17th century Holland in the understanding of its easel paintings and similar things can be said of other periods of European art and their cultural backgrounds. If the study of Western art appears silent about the cultural background of the art, it is simply because Western culture, mostly written, is already well known to the Western readers for whom the art historians of Western art write.

The Relevance of the Advocated African Art Approach

The major questions to now ask are: If the mythology of cultural significance has been advocated and commonly upheld for African art because of the functions of the art objects within their cultures of origin, how appropriate is the methodology for contemporary African art forms that are not functional but are purely aesthetic? Does it then

mean that the background cultures of the contemporary artists are not necessary for understanding their works?

Out of the four tendencies into which contemporary African art has been earlier classified, only the third which is constituted by complete abstracts may not be identifiable with culture. The forms in it may not be produced for cultural interpretation. But the first, which is constituted by images that are discernible as specific life experiences and ideas, embraces both the traditional and contemporary aspects of life. And so is the second which is made up of naïve forms. The fourth that consists of adaptations from traditional arts that could also be seen for the sake of their forms that are abstracted could only be understood in the light of their traditional sources. Thus, there is still much need for the understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the artists in understanding their arts.

However, both the artists and their fellow Africans are no longer their ancestors for whom the traditional art forms were made. While only the traditional cultural aspects or ethnographic data are needed for understanding traditional African art, both the traditional and the modern ways of life are needed for understanding the contemporary arts. Thus scholars who are interested in the study of the contemporary arts require a wider coverage of African culture. Religious ideas and practices, both traditional and present, as well as current events are all aspects of African cultures that are required for interpreting contemporary African arts. For this reason, the approach, rather than oppose the approach to traditional African art, simply extends its scope. The expanded scope is even adequate for understanding both traditional and contemporary African arts. However, its effectiveness for understanding both traditional and contemporary arts of the continent still requires the appreciation and understanding of forms. This is not because some of the contemporary works, especially those in the third tendency, are made up of pure forms that appear unidentifiable with any culture. The objects being studied in both cases are supposed to be studied as art. Even in cases where art, especially the modern ones, emphasizes processes rather than tangible forms, what distinguishes art from ordinary artifacts is still their extra-ordinary forms. The neglect of

forms in the study of traditional African art, regrettably, has no justification.

Conclusion

The suitability of the approach being suggested is not exclusive to contemporary African visual art forms. It is equally valid for other art forms of post-colonial Africa, be they music, drama or literature. As rightly pointed out by Jean Kennedy, modern African poetry, like modern African visual art, has many forms: it reveals patterns reminiscent of indigenous poetry as well as suggests influences from Western poetry.[20]

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15

NEGOTIATING PRESENCES OR SQUATTING ON THE VERANDAHS OF POST–ISMS

Sam Kasule

The colonial enterprise in Uganda involved not the settlement of white farmers but the introduction of cash crops (e.g. coffee and cotton) grown by indigenous farmers. Labour resources were thus stretched and farmers in Buganda were forced to take on labourers from either West Nile or Rwanda and Burundi (as it was known then). Some of these were refugees running away from the inter-ethnic violence in their countries. The labourers were usually allowed to clear a 'space' to build huts. But, in as much as they lived with the families, they remained marginalized outsiders, 'immigrants', 'foreigners' or 'banyolo'. Whether sharing a meal or consulting with the 'surrogate/adopted family' they always squatted on the verandah. In the new post-liberation era, the squatters have either integrated with local communities taking over positions of power or have returned home to Rwanda and Burundi where they are still considered exotic outsiders.

It is not a generalization to say that 'world literatures', the focus of this paper, are increasingly becoming part of the academic menu of literature in Britain. Soyinka, Ngugi, Achebe, Emecheta, etc., authors who have physically or academically migrated to the North, are studied in these courses. 'Elsewhere [read African/Caribbean] theories' are not served as part of the theoretical menus, however.

A while ago, in one of the departments proud to be teaching 'world literatures' alongside the established European canons, there started an argument centering on the teaching of Critical Theory. While the department marketed itself as one that privileges the teaching of world literatures, there was strong resistance to the teaching of African literary theories as part of the critical theory package.

'No, no, no. We have a Course Reader which we must follow.'

Course readers for Critical theory are composed of works/analyses of Anglocentred literary discourse and the jettisoning of non-European theories to verandas of European theories. Soyinka, like other non-European writers, squats on the verandahs of European theories and canons.

From my experience on the verandah, I have discovered that European [read white] readers and the 'other' [read non-white] read differently and position themselves differently in relationship to text and theory? While the 'other' may read Wole Soyinka's *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1995), *Death and the King's Horseman*, or Emecheta's *Kehinde* as an experience of 'boundary crossings', 'a space filling exercise', the European as a decentred subject regards the texts as 'exotic', an addition, a wind-blown figure on the verandah pleading to be let in, to be saved from nature's cruelties.

The interrogation of the "post" of modernism produces its own problematics: 'post'- what? Africa, without a clearly developed capitalist nation, modern or even postmodern is problematic (difficult) to categorize in the new world order. And, given the experiences of Africa in the past three decades, the period of decolonisation, the appearance and disappearance of the likes of Idi Amin, Bokassa and Banda, the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi, and the dismantling of apartheid, the only 'post'- going on in Africa may be post- liberation (wars).

Since I do not come to this discussion from a 'post-list' standpoint, I would wish to map out the terrain from which I will discuss the 'post-ism' of Soyinka. If postmodernism is to be interpreted (in the Euro-American sense) as (among other things) a registering of an 'event' or a revisioning/remapping of the world, making colonial centres heterogenous spaces', convergences of multiple histories of the world which dismantle [deconstruct] our received images of the West, then Wole Soyinka's writing may be doing vice versa: decentring the colonial presence and demilitarizing the received images of the colonial and the native 'other' in colonized Africa. But, just as post-modernism may be taken to mean the critique, deconstruction and GIVING VOICE

TO THE 'OTHER', it may controversially be an avenue denoting the NOT LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF OTHERS AS THEY TRY TO EXPLAIN THEMSELVES.

While I find Lyotard and Jameson essential reading – specifically Jameson's postmodernism which identifies degrees of postmodernism through the segregation of the types of capitalism – I propose that to react adequately to the post- or non-post- 'ism' of Soyinka and Emecheta's work one has not only to take into account Soyinka's critical essays, e.g. "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies" or "Between Self and System: The Artist in Search of Liberation" (Soyinka, 95-123; 40-61) but, to incorporate "elsewhere" readings of post-modernism. Appiah's theorization of what is postmodernism (Appiah, 337-357), Carole Boyce Davies' reading of "post-coloniality" as "post-European (-colonial)ity" enables us to recognize and address various colonialities and resistances to them throughout history (Davies, 86). Further, Davies' model, "Going a Piece of the Way with them", from which she constructs the "visitor theory", (Davies, 46) centred on the forms of relationships we form with "strangers" is for me the best way of countering the "Anglo-centredness" (Davies, 27) of post-modernists and the horror stories associated with this experience. For, in the African experience, the "visitor theory" pre-positions all theories as visitors because, as Davies says, many of these theoretical positions are forms of enslavements, domination and contradictions. Adopting them means becoming the exotic other.

Davies argues that the "visitor theory", so much similar to "multiple articulations", 'becomes a kind of *critical relationality* - a process of "negotiating, articulating and interrogating simultaneously a variety of resistant discourses relationally and depending on context, historical and political circumstances". By adopting this theoretical position, therefore, we are enabled to interrogate various theoretical positions in as far as they apply to our specific experiences and 'textual ities' (Davies, 46).

In the context of Soyinka's *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1995), *Death and the Kings Horseman,* and Emecheta's *Kehinde,* I would go

to argue that for those of us who squat on the verandas of modernism (and Europe), postmodernism may read as 'post-European (modern) ism''.

Soyinka engages issues in world politics as well as post-modernist "new world order" of "flexible production" in several of his works and essays. For the critic and reader of Soyinka's texts, multiple crossing of boundaries, remapping, and reimaging the world and its inhabitants occurs; European literary stylistics must be, if not abandoned, ameliorated with other performance aesthetics. Thus "boundaries of orality and writing, of geography and space, engender fundamental crossings and re-crossings. For the readers as well, a variety of languages, Creoles, cultural nuances, history have to be learned before the texts can have meaning" (Davies, 20). The cartography (deliberately) links migrations to culture, language, voicing and reception. Soyinka's *Ibadan: The Penkelemess Years* (1995) so persistently and mysteriously rouses mental and physical dislocations in us.

One may argue that in *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), and *Ibadan* which traverses post-colonial centres, Soyinka invades the colonial centres (and spaces) and decentres not only their perceived superiority but the capitalist instruments of power and their 'selfs', filling in the 'absences' and delineating the Africans' 'other' boundaries. These texts act as a point of intersection between African and Euro-American critical practices. In these texts, the marginalized 'other' decentres the white colonizer, questioning issues of historicisation, culture, power and individual/national security previously taken for granted and assumed stable. It is not assuming too much if we state that where, when and how a reading is read and critiqued determines the manner in which it is 'evaluated and historicized'.

In Soyinka, this demythologization is enabled by the accretion of a double-barrelled African/Euro-American theatrical aesthetic and artistic perception of a writer nurtured on the critical diet of both sides of the divide (North and South). His 'postcolonial postmodernist' drama and theatrical production (a popular genre in Africa),

autobiography, essays, journalistic articles, television interviews, music compositions, the re-engagement of popular traditional performances in open spaces, and the divestment of the English language (the doyen of literary criticism) with new words and meaning do not only revisit the colonial posts but are divested with the ammunition, albeit (un) lethal, that enables us to resist oppressive literary discourses and perceived attitudes of the 'other'. We do note, however, that in as much as we would like to peg Soyinka to a periodic critical movement, he has previously dismissed the Western notion of critical theories as mechanistic, 'a steam-engine which shunts itself between rather closely-spaced suburban stations ....' (Soyinka, *Myth*, 37).

Soyinka's writings referred to in this discussion avoid the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized and instead engages a' "dialogic" relationship with other social discourses that circulate' in his immediate society, Africa and the diaspora. What we have to ask ourselves, is, is it the 'postmodern imperative' of Soyinka's postmodernist approach to his work which makes it inaccessible to the West or, as Esiaba questions, is it the postmodernist imperative of his work which makes the West reject it?

Soyinka, it has been stated, closes out the 'non-initiate', especially the Western European, but, is his writing more of a closure than the closures we experience in postmodernism? Do I find Soyinka problematic? Maybe in so far as rituals and myths in his writings are concerned. But these are adaptable, more adaptable than the highflying euphemisms and phrases in which postmodernist discourses are couched. Soyinka's engagement of African metaphysics, blended with classical mythologies/texts and Euro-American literary forms, may be interpreted as an act of dis-closure, a creation of a symbiotic model for a postmodern theatre/fiction. He is a good example of the "postcolonial, postmodernist" writer that John Hawley talks of in "Ben Okri's Spirit-Child: Abiku Migration and Postmodernity" (Hawley, 30-39).

A Play of Giants and *Ibadan* are a re-action to the 'cost of capitalism' and Marxism which have brought Africa to its knees and driven the West to reject the immigrant and his culture. *A Play of*

Giants demonstrates how megalomaniacs nurtured by imperialism and its bastard offsprings (capitalism, violence, consumerism and materialism) have turned it on its back, holding it to ransom. The historical and contemporary experience of Africa is transported to the West's doorstep in *A Play of Giants*; and what better symbol than the toilet could we have had. Kamini reverses the roles of power in the play and implicitly decentres the masters from the global symbol of unity.

Brenda Marshall says that 'intertexuality is not simply a reference to earlier texts, but is a manipulation of those texts' (Marshall, 130). And by extension, I would say, it is manipulation of oral texts in the case of African and African American scholars. Soyinka's writings are a 'site' where transliteration, translation and intertexualities take place. These all have their origins in both African music, ritual, myth, dance and dramatic performance as well as the European dramatic traditions. Intertexuality is a major aspect of Soyinka's writing and it is alive in his political texts. Through intertexuality and a disciplined application of mind to art, he recreates his world in every place. *Ibadan*, to me perhaps his finest prose work after *The Man Died*, remaps his relationship to a 'new world order'. Soyinka violates these spaces of the world powers in these works.

'*Penkelemes*' (peculiar mess) is a postmodern sign. '*Penkelemes*' violates borders and exists in the South and the North, in Ibadan, Cairo, London and Paris. Fusing a blend of global experiences Soyinka demythologizes the colonial centres and the glorified outposts in the empire; challenges France's assimilationist attitude exposing racism and unemployment at the centre, revising our cartographic images. Soyinka is the historiographical metafictionist' (Marshall, 171) whose narrator-author invokes "objectivity, the accuracy of facts, and the permanence of the past". He is at the same time the centre of the events in the text. Marem's story (which is Soyinka's) is a 'metacritique' (Marshall, 173): of empire, postcolonial Africa and postmodern Europe.

As an 'historiographic metafictionist' (Marshall, 150-1) he refuses the possibility of looking to and writing about the past "as it really was". Rather s/he takes on an active role, and 'does' the past,

participates, questions, and interrogates. If we take his comment in the introduction to *Isara, A Voyage Anound Essay* (Methuen, London, 1990), of which *Ibadan* is a sequel, he says: "I have not only taken liberties with chronology; I have deliberately ruptured it."' (Soyinka, *Isara*)

In *Death and the King's Horseman* the linguistic map of the non-initiate (read white) is shattered. Commenting on the reception of the play in the United States, Soyinka observed that the 'geography of their (non-initiate – white) perception' is ruptured and a new 'geography of sounds, of metaphor, of narrative' is recreated. The play clearly challenges the received (meta-theatre) perception of the postcolonial theatre especially when Pilkings is used to provide comic relief in an African tragedy.

If postmodernist discourses imply – to the non-initiate – the entering of other cultures by (with) all means necessary "other than the shock of domination and conquest", then, the study of Soyinka is one of those means.

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16

WOMEN'S VOICES AND GENDER PEDAGOGY IN POST-COLONIAL KENYA

Ciarunji Chesaina

"A woman's witchcraft is her tongue." –
Swahili

"A woman's words are believed after they have spent a night." –
Kikuyu

One of the major problems facing women in post-colonial Africa in general, and Kenya in particular, is the chauvinistic traditional attitude towards women's views as unimportant and inconsequential. Indeed, in traditional and colonial Africa, women's words were regarded as mere noise. Unfortunately, the roots of tradition, including the negative aspects, go deep into the psyche of a people. Hence negative traditional attitudes towards women still thrive in contemporary African cultures. Women's views are still regarded as unimportant, as the insignificant representation of women in the parliaments of most African countries attests. In Kenya, for instance, even after the inception of democratization in 1992, women form a mere 2.5% of the total number of the country's parliamentarians.

In spite of the disregard for women's contributions in the public sphere, Kenyan women have broken barriers to protest against the status quo as can be seen from pressure groups such as *the Anti-rape, Mothers in Action* and other Women's support groups that offer assistance to battered wives.

What has all this to do with a conference on literature? A great deal. Literature has an intricate relationship with society and society's experiences at any given time in history. The creative woman's role, therefore, has to be seen within the context of historical progression and experiences of her people. Notice, for example, what Penina

Muhando, the leading female Tanzanian creative writer, feels about her role as a writer:

> I see myself as having a duty to help the society either in showing where the problems are or trying to make people aware that the sources of this and that problem are in this or that thing. (Nichols, 1981, p. 140).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss leading female creative writers' contribution to gender pedagogy in literature in post-colonial Kenya. The two writers are Grace Ogot and Micere Mugo. Apart from being seasoned creative writers whose works show overt concern with gender relations, the two women offer critics an opportunity to examine all the three major genres of literature in this area. Grace Ogot writes prose fiction while Micere Mugo writes drama and poetry. The two writers also offer a chance for critics to examine women creative writers' sensibility to different historical and cultural milieux of Kenyan society. Ogot bases her works on the traditional and transitional cultural parameters, while Mugo operates mainly within the neo-colonial milieu.

The Traditional and Transitional Voice: Grace Ogot

Grace Ogot is the Kenyan woman with the longest history in creative writing. Her first works, *Land Without Thunder* (Ogot, 1966), and *The Promised Land* (Ogot, 1968) were published only three years and five years, respectively, after Kenya attained her political independence. Ogot has since written other creative works, but this paper limits its discussion to selected stories from *Land without Thunder*.

In these early works, Grace Ogot can be viewed as a writer who plays the role played by women oral artists in traditional Kenya. In traditional Kenya, women oral artists used oral narratives to inculcate moral values in the youth. In this case, women acted as custodians of culture. Ogot, however, is a custodian of culture with a difference. Whereas the traditional oral artist encouraged the upholding of traditional cultural values and mores unquestioningly and without

attempting to change the status quo, Ogot tells her stories in a way that facilitates a critical approach to tradition. In this connection, she is particularly concerned about the role, position and image of women in society. Although the writer has tremendous admiration for traditional values, she is greatly critical of those traditional attitudes and practices which are detrimental to the welfare of women.

It is interesting to note that many of Ogot's early stories are recreations of traditional folktales both in form and content. 'The Rain Came' (Ogot, 1966, pp. 159-171) is based on a popular folktale, not only among the Luo (Ogot's people), but also among other Kenyan ethnic groups. In its authentic version, the story narrates how a community resolves the problem of a long drought by sacrificing a young virgin girl to the gods. The original versions do not question the tragic situation of the sacrificial victim or the feelings of those close to her. Ogot not only questions this situation but also takes sides.

Ogot's sacrificial victim is chosen when she is just ripe for marriage. When the plans for her impending tragedy are being discussed, therefore, Oganda innocently speculates that the community leaders are discussing her marriage. The author evokes the reader's sympathies for the young girl by juxtaposing the medicine-man's calculating attitude with Oganda's innocence. In addition, Ogot empathises with the girl's mother who is completely marginalised from the planning sessions about her only daughters' impending death. Notice, in the following quotation, how the author captures the bond between mother and child by asking probing rhetorical questions about the mother's silence when the villagers gather to send off Oganda:

> But was it maternal love that prevented Minya from rejoicing with the other women? Was it the memory of the agony of childbirth that made her feel so sorrowful? Or was it deep warmth and understanding that passes between a suckling babe and her mother that made Oganda part of her life, her flesh? Of course it was an honour, a great honour for her daughter to be chosen to die for the country. *But what could she gain once her only daughter was blown away by the wind?* (Ogot, 1966, p. 165, italics mine)

Ogot captures this bond between mother and child in another story entitled 'The Bamboo Hut' (Ogot, 1966, pp. 27-37). This story revolves around the traditional attitude towards female children as unimportant and as inferior to male children. It may be mentioned here that this is an attitude which is still prevalent in contemporary Kenyan society. It is reflected in the half-hearted congratulations a woman gets when she delivers a girl, particularly if she has no male child.

In Ogot's story, a chief feels greatly frustrated because none of his wives has given him a son. Owing to the fact that this is a patrilineal community, the absence of a son means that the chief has no heir since girls cannot inherit the chiefdom. In addition, Once girls get married and leave their parents to live among their in-laws, they cannot serve as investments to cater for their parents in old age. Ogot's criticism of the status quo in which girls are regarded as second-rate children is illustrated by her narration of the chief's attitude towards his children. We are told:

> And although he loved all his sixteen daughters, they were like the birds of the air who, at the appropriate season, migrate to other lands. Who would comfort and succour him in old age? (Ogot, 1966, p. 28).

It will be noticed from Ogot's presentation of the chief that she does not present readers with stereotype male characters. Here, she actually analyses the chief's expectations from children in order to make us understand why his love for his daughters cannot neutralize his predicament of not having a male child.

But Ogot's deepest sensibility can be viewed from her empathy with women who are caught up in the precarious situation of the traditional requirement to have male children. This sensibility is seen from the short story writer's presentation of the psychological agony experienced by one of the chief's wives. Achieng gives birth to a set of twins, a girl and a boy. Yes, she fulfils her duty by bearing the chief an heir, but it is as if she dilutes this long-awaited event by bearing yet another daughter at the same time. Ogot enters Achieng's mind and

sees a woman in whom, "Love, hatred, anger and happiness crossed and intermingled." (Ogot, 1966, p. 29)

In order not to prejudice the chances of the birth of the chief's first son and heir, Achieng decides to throw her daughter away where she can be picked up by a foster parent. She actually stays long enough to see the daughter taken by an old woman, yet the knowledge that her child is safe does not prevent her from perpetual psychological torture thereafter. The act of abandoning the girl leaves a deep psychological scar on her. We read:

> Years slipped by, but Achieng's distraught mind showed no signs of improvement. It was a life of visions and depression in the daytime and of nightmares at night. Neither her privileged position among the chief's wives nor the future prospects for her son were adequate to fill the acute emptiness she felt in her heart. (Ogot, 1966, p.31)

The effects of the impact of the cultural transition from the colonial to the neo-colonial period on women is an area in which Ogot shows some interest. In a short story entitled, "Elizabeth" (Ogot, 1966, pp. 189-204), the writer examines the predicament of women professionals *vis-à-vis* their male bosses who cannot see them as officials, their femininity notwithstanding.

Elizabeth, the heroine of the story, has had to move from employer to employer in search of a boss who respects her as a professional and who does not threaten her with sexual exploitation. Eventually, she assumes that in Mr. Jimbo, who is old enough to be her father and who appears like a man of integrity, she has found such a boss. The latter ends up raping her, leaving her pregnant and in utter disillusionment. Ogot wins the reader's sympathies for her heroine through juxtaposing Elizabeth's innocence and honesty with Jimbo's hypocrisy and crudeness. Though Elizabeth's suicide towards the end of the short story is somewhat melodramatic, the reader can nevertheless appreciate the writer's message. Elizabeth hangs herself in Mr. Jimbo's house and leaves her notebook behind to tell her story. The writer hopes that Elizabeth's story will lead to the eradication of the

treatment of women as mere sex objects and their subsequent denial of opportunities to play their roles as professionals in their own right.

From our analysis of Grace Ogot's concern with women's issues in her short stories, we can assert that Maryse Conde grossly misunderstood the writer's short stories when she observed that:

> Grace Ogot ... may believe that she is an emancipated woman 'who reads books' but what she offers her fellow-countrywomen is a dangerous picture of alienation and enslavement. One feels tempted to advise her to join some Women's Lib. Movement to see how European females question the code of values and behaviour imposed upon them, and to replace her Bible by Germaine Greer's book. (Quoted in Stratton, 1994, p. 61).

As Grace Ogot's country-woman, I feel greatly indebted to her for sensitizing me to the plight of women in Kenya. Her sensibility inspires me much more than Germaine Greer's books, if that comparison would be of any relevance or consequence.

An African Woman's Feminist Voice:

Micere Mugo

Feminism is perhaps the ideology that has generated the most heated debates in post-colonial Kenya and post-colonial Africa in general. Although the essence of feminism really addresses itself to the creation of equal opportunities for women, the ideology has been viewed with suspicion and as though it is potentially dangerous to healthy relations between men and women in the African context.

In literary circles, critics have attempted to see, for example, its applicability and relevance to the analysis of African creative writing. Davies and Graves look at feminist criticism positively when they state:

> African feminist criticism is definitely engaged criticism in much the same way as progressive African criticism grapples with the politics of the male literary dominance. (Davies and Graves, 1986, p. 12)

This paper sees feminism as an important analytical tool for the understanding of African creative writing, particularly the works of women creative writers. It is indeed a relevant tool for understanding the works of Micere Mugo who is very explicit about her position concerning gender relations.

Micere Mugo is very militant both as a writer and political thinker. Her zeal in unmasking the negative side of women's position in Kenya is reflected in her essays, interviews, poetry and drama. In an interview recorded as early as 1982, she is quoted as saying:

> Most of our traditional societies were patriarchal where the man was the unquestionable boss and owner of property. This position was accentuated by colonialism and the worst thing that has ever happened is the acceptance by women of the stereotypes that men have imposed on them. (*The Daily Nation*, 1982, p. 15).

A reading of Mugo's drama and poetry reveals the work of a woman who is feminist-inclined. A significant theme in her drama is that of a search for freedom and justice for women. Her heroines, young and old alike, are engaged in struggles for freedom and justice.

In her first play, *The long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti* (Mugo, 1976), she introduces us to a teenager named Pesa who is struggling against the attempts by her family to bring her up as a submissive woman who has no freedom to question things. In spite of her age, Pesa is very conscious of the antagonism between the culture the home wants women immersed into and the new values she is taught at school. The scope of the play does not allow for the development of Pesa's character, but the glimpse we have of her indicates that she is far from growing into the docile woman the way her family would like to mould her. She is against the way in which traditions such as respect for one's elders are used to deny a girl independence of thought and sense of justice. She says:

> That is the trouble with this home. When one person does wrong, everyone else gets included ... At school we are taught to question everything we don't understand. But if one says

anything in this home, one is told not to argue with one's elders. (Mugo, 1976, pp. 26-27)

The search for freedom is a theme that is prevalent in drama by feminist-inclined African women writers. Pesa's search for freedom reminds the audience of Anowa in Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *Anowa* (Aidoo, 1970).

Mugo explores this theme with greater intensity in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which she co-authored with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a leading male Kenyan writer (Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo, 1976; 1984). A comparison between the portrayal of women in this play and a similar play by Ngugi on his own (Ngugi, Undated; 1982), reflects a significant difference between the outlook of women creative writers and their male counterparts.

There is an attempt to project a positive image of women through the character of Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.* This can be noticed even from the way in which this character is introduced in the stage directions. She is described as:

> Goodlooking. ...Though apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously worldly-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert. Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one. (Ngugi and Mugo, 1976; 1984, p. 8)

Unlike the stereotyped female characters in the plays by male writers, for example in a similar play entitled *Dedan Kimathi* (Watene, 1974), Woman is deeply aware of the manifestations of injustice inherent in the neo-colonial forces against which the workers are fighting. Where the women in Watene's play use their good looks to lure the male freedom fighters into sexual exploits which detract from their commitment in the struggle, Woman of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* uses her good looks and charm to distract the enemy and to adapt to changing circumstances in the struggle.

On a symbolic level, Woman plays the role of revolutionary mother to Boy and Girl. She initiates them into the struggle and teaches them the appropriate tactics and attitudes to assume in the fight. In this play, it is Woman rather than a male character who articulates the ideology behind the struggle through the words she uses to initiate Boy as a freedom fighter. In view of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as revolutionary drama, the repetition of Woman's words in boy's mind is aimed, not only at illustrating her influence on the younger generation, but also at mobilizing the audience to move to the side of the fighters. Woman's words are a powerful creed of the struggle; she tells Boy:

> The day you will understand why your father died: the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you ask yourself: 'What can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances?', that day, my son, you will become a man. (Ngugi and Mugo 1976: 1984, p. 19-41).

It is important to note here how Woman is made to play a role that was exclusively for men; that is, the role of a male initiator. In traditional Africa, women had no place in the important aspects of any male initiation ceremonies. In the above quotation as well as in her influence on Boy in the whole drama, woman is actually the character who initiates the young man into manhood and subsequently as a warrior.

A significant difference can be discerned between the portrayal of Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and the Woman in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Mother Sing for me* (Ngugi, Undated,?1982). Although both characters are used as symbols to represent the playwrights' views on women's roles in revolutionary struggles, the Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* leaves a more striking impression. This is because, unlike the Woman in *Mother Sing for Me* who operates only on the metaphysical level, the Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* operates on both the metaphysical and the physical levels. The audience can actually see her mingling with the fighters and carrying out her duties as a guerrilla while at the same time she plays her symbolic role. This difference can be explained by the fact that where *Mother Sing for me* is the work of Ngugi on his own , *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is co-

authored by a woman. Being a woman, Mugo was able to put herself in the position of Woman of the latter play and project both the latter's essence and existence in a way that was difficult for Ngugi on his own in *Mother Sing for Me.*

This difference is also noticeable in the portrayal of Girl and that of Nyathira in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Mother Sing for Me*, respectively. Girl is the younger version of Woman as a future fighter and revolutionary mother. She is portrayed as fearless and full of remarkable determination. After her initiation into the struggle, she becomes a fighter in her own right and not an inferior complement to Boy. From a relationship of antagonism and hatred between her and Boy, Girl becomes the younger version of revolutionary mother to him, challenging him and urging him not to give up when his courage and perseverance seem to wane. Between Boy and Girl, the latter is by far the stronger and the more courageous of the two. This is a deliberate attempt by the playwrights to demolish the myth of female inferiority and cowardice.

Girl is a much stronger character than Nyathira of *Mother Sing form Me.* She is independent where Nyathira is dependent on Kariuki, Boy's counterpart in *Mother Sing for Me.* Girl has a great deal of confidence where Nyathira lacks any and emerges as an inferior complement to Kariuki.

Apart from her role in the revolutionary struggle, Girl is used to criticize men's oppression of women. It is her history of victimization by men which leads her into becoming militant and eventually joining the revolutionary struggle. She talks about this oppression when she says:

> All my life I have been running ... Men molesting me ... I ran away from school because the head-master wanted to do wicked things with me ... So I left school. I wanted to stay home and teach myself how to sew or do something with my life. But my father would have nothing of it ... In the city it was the boys. Always harassing me ... And yet I did not want to starve! I lost my virginity while trying to run away from losing it. (Ngugi and Mugo 1976; 1984, p. 41).

Mugo's feminist inclination and her militancy are manifested in her poetry. Each of her two collections of poems, *Daughter of my People, Sing* (Mugo, 1976; 1991) and *My Mother's Poem and Other Songs* (Mugo, 1994) contains a number of poems addressed to the position of the African woman in society.

In 'Wife of the Husband' (Mugo, 1976; 1991, p. 34) written in 1970, for instance, the poet attacks the patriarchal attitude towards marriage which reduces a woman to a slave of her husband. In this poem, she uses poignant sarcasm to hit at the distortion of marital relations which makes the institution facilitate the exploitation of the woman instead of facilitating her enjoyment. Notice the bitter sarcasm below:

His snores
protect the sleeping hut
but the day's
load
and the morrow's
burden
weigh heavily over
the stooping mother as she

sweeps the hut
bolts the pen
tidies the hearth
buries the red charcoals
and finally seeks
her restless bed

His snores
Welcome her to bed
four hours to sunrise
His snores rouse her from bed
six sharp
Arise
O, wife of the husband! (Mugo, 1976; 1991, p. 34)

The last line which also forms the title of the poem points at the distortion of the terms "wife" and "husband" which the poet sees characterizing unequal distribution of labour that leaves the woman to shoulder all the responsibilities while the man snores. Angela Davis takes a similar stance in her comments about women's role in housework in a bourgeois situation. She sees the woman as being reduced to "her husband's lifelong servant" (Davis, 1981; 1994, p. 215). Mugo does not give the criticism a bourgeois tag, and, in fact, the situation presented seems to fit a traditional African setting. An interesting point to note about the style of this poem is the use of indirect attack and sarcasm as used especially in women's traditional protest songs. (See, for example, "The Song as an Expression of Gender Solidarity", Chesaina-Swinimer, 1994b, pp. 29-44).

Underlying the criticism of the exploitation of women is the poet's anger against the way in which women's efforts are taken for granted. The need to give due recognition to women's efforts is one of the major themes of 'Mother Africa's Matriots' (Mugo 1994, pp. 29-35). In this poem Mugo devotes herself to the task of toppling patriarchal attitudes behind the obliteration of women's contributing to important landmarks of black people's history. The most striking stylistic aspect of this poem is the feminization of words which society has always taken for granted. These words are introduced right from the title of the poem where the poet feminizes the word 'patriot' to read "matriot". The word "history" which we normally take for granted is feminized to read, "herstory". Each of these new concepts is woven into the semantic and aesthetic fabric of the poem in such a way as to make it appear quite natural and therefore develop the poet's arguments. The poem is written in the style of a mixture of traditional African epic and war song. However, instead of male heroes, the poet deliberately sings the praises of heroines in black people's history (herstory). Mugo's point is that, until women's contributions to black people's history are accorded their rightful place, this history remains incomplete. Hence the challenge is for black people to do thorough stock-taking and complete this history by including in it "herstory".

As mentioned above, Mugo shows a clear inclination towards feminism. She states her stand within the feminist framework in a poem entitled "To be a Feminist" (Mugo, 1994, pp. 36-42). She actually offers the reader a guide when she states her intention as:

> ... an effort to liberate the concept of feminism from abduction by Western bourgeois appropriators and in the spirit of naming the essence, rather than simply peeling off the label (Mugo, 1994, p. 36).

The poet underscores that for her, feminism is to be proud of womanhood rather than to be ashamed of it. She seeks to assert that womanhood is an identity that is endowed with dignity and hence it is nothing to be ashamed of. The poem starts and ends with this assertion. She praises not only womanhood, but also motherhood.

It should be observed here in passing that the importance of motherhood is an issue which Mugo shares with other East African women writers. Penina Muhando stresses the importance of women's responsibility as mothers in her Swahili play, *Talaka si Mke Wangu* (*I divorce you;* Muhando, 1976). In this play, Muhando criticizes women who let themselves be derailed from their responsibilities of childrearing by superficial views of progress in post-colonial Tanzania. She sees such irresponsibility as a significant contributor to delinquency and crime in children.

Mugo's song about the beauty of womanhood is not an empty idealization of the African woman. It is a rejection of the Western bourgeois feminism which advocates *sameness* rather than *equality* between women and men. It is a refusal to assume what the poet sees as self-hatred by certain radical feminists, expressed, for instance through their rejection of roles such as those played by mothers. Mugo feels that women's search for recognition and for equal opportunities with men should be, first and foremost, a conscious recognition of the aesthetics inherent in the essence of womanhood. Notice this from the insistent tone in the verse that begins the poem:

For me
to be a feminist is
to embrace my womanness
the womanness of
all my mothers
all my sisters
it is
to hug the female principle
and the metaphors of life
that decorate my being

(Mugo, 1994, p. 36)

Finally, it is important to consider Mugo's view of the relationship between men and women in her concept of feminism. It was observed above that this writer is very militant and portrays women as fighters against injustice. She sees true feminism as readiness to struggle against neo-colonial oppression manifested through systems such as patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism. In no way does she see feminism as a fight between women and men. In fact, she advocates for unity and combined efforts between the two genders in fighting neo-colonial enemies of freedom. She says:

For me
to be a feminist is
to have dialogue
with my father
and my brother
to invite their partnership
as fellow guerrillas
it is
to march with them
to the war-torn zone
of Afrikana survival
it is
to jointly raise with them
the victory salute.
(Mugo, 1994, p. 39)

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the contribution of two leading women creative writers to gender pedagogy in literature in post-colonial Kenya. It was observed that Grace Ogot's writing of the early post-independence days shows the author's concern for the way in which African traditional cultures impact on women's welfare. Her short stories reveal the author's sensitivity towards women in situations where tradition victimizes them because of the tendency to disregard their human worth and human feelings. It was further observed that this writer's sensibility is also focused on the plight of women in the neo-colonial era. She laments that during the transitional culture between tradition and western-oriented modernity, society fails to accept women as independent individuals and professionals in their own right. Hence she criticizes men's sexual exploitation of women which emanates from their refusal to see women as equal partners socially and professionally.

The paper observed that Micere Mugo, writing in the early post-independence days and in contemporary times, reveals an inclination towards militancy and feminism. Her drama portrays militant female characters with the aim of correcting the popular myth that African women are passive and weak. In her poetry, Mugo shows her inclination towards feminism in her overt criticism of the exploitation and marginalization of women. However, the poet categorically denounces the brands of feminism which refuse to accept the subtle dignity of womanhood.

A significant question to consider in relation to the discussion in this paper is that of the relevance of gender pedagogy in post-colonial African culture. Literature is a creative mirror of our social reality. Our social reality is a dynamic phenomenon which changes as circumstances change and progresses as historical and cultural dynamics dictate. Literature acts as a creative commentator on and guide to historical and cultural dynamics. It is in this light that this paper sees creative literature by Kenyan and other African women as an avenue for the critical re-evaluation of women's role in society. This

also paves way for better and more harmonious gender relations in post-independence African culture.

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PART FOUR

INFORMATICS

AND

THE BATTLE FOR SPACES

17

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Femi Folorunso

Always implicit in the writings of information society theories and even that of many of its critics is the notion that *Information Technology* is organically new and therefore has no links with previous technological discoveries. But, as Krishan Kumar rightly points out, information technology is a revolution that gestated for more than a century and whose 'earlier expressions were the electric telegraph, the telephone, the gramophone, film, radio and television.[1] What makes IT seem unrelated to its predecessors is that it is more diffused and utilitarian in scope.[2] These characteristics are not furtuitous; they come directly from the very engine of the technology itself, *the computer.*

The computer as it is known today was a product of the military-industrial-scientific complex which Western nations funded to bizarre heights from the end of the second world war until the collapse of communism at the close of the 1980s. It is therefore not a surprise that the IT revolution has expanded immeasurably since the beginning of this decade and with even more touching effects on social behaviour.

Yet, what has made that expansion even more astounding is the synergy the computer has created between technological developments, not just in the field of telecommunication, but the overall industrial and related processes. In other words, the computer has produced a totally new, and sometimes unexpected symbiosis between organic technology, telecommunication and the human environment. It is often

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[1] Krishan Kuma, *FromIndustrial to Post-Modern Society* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 8

[2] See Melvin Kranznberg, 'The Information Age' in Tom Forester (ed.) *Computers in the Human Context* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 19-32

not very easy to realise the extent of what has been achieved. For example, in a recent essay remarking what he sees as the irreversible marriage between talent and technology in the wake of the new revolution, George Steiner observes that:

> The commissioning of a book is now often done with a view to its reproduction in other media. The calculation of the print run is almost unimportant compared to the hope of its acquisition for television or film rights which, in turn, presses on the structure of the written text. There are masters of this form who write knowing that if the television or cinema production is a great success, people will return to the book. It is a creative boomerang of the most interesting kind. There are even cases where the book has been commissioned *after* the film or the television version. The book is no longer the pre-text, it is the post-text of its distribution. None of us can measure the quantum of intelligence, of imagining going into the media. It is prodigious – even the quantum of intelligence that can go into a great advertising campaign. The difference between poetry and jingles is difficult to distinguish. There are advertising people who can write one-liners of which Restoration comedy would have been proud. You can compare the skill, the caricature skill of a human situation exploding into an unforgettable *bon mot* or repartee.[3]

Steiner's observation, informed no less by the seductive appeal the new age holds for him as by his awareness of the unprecedented changes digital electronics might bring to the sphere of high culture from now on, is arguably the most friendly and powerful yet of the intervention by any culture critic or humanist scholar on the IT-culture debate in recent times.

There are two dimensions to Steiner's claims. The first is that media technology's intervention in the creative process in many areas

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[3] George Steiner, 'Talent and Technology', in *PROSPECT*, IssueEight, May 1996, pp 30-3

of what we generally call *art or culture* is now as crucial a factor as raw talent itself. This would mean, on the one hand, that the concept and definition of talent has to change if it is not already doing so, and, on the other hand, that the meaning of art in all its manifestations too has to change. This is like emancipating and then extrapolating the very best in Walter Benjamin's famously distilled optimism about the transformational capacity of technology on art.[4]

The second dimension, rather implied than described, in his own beliefs, perhaps following the 'information society' theorists, that given revolutionary, transformational power of *IT,* the brave new world will be much less dreary, even worth celebrating, unlike that the great writers of twentieth century dystopia had warned us to expect. For a humanist scholar with reputation for controversies, Steiner's belief in modern technology reads obsessive in part.[5] There is, for example, his declaration that since the immediate cultural sphere to suffer from the unavoidable interplay of talent and technology will be the 'high art' of literature, the arrogance and immortality of *fin-de-siecle* are about to be conquered and banished for good.[6]

The IT-culture phenomenon has equally been examined in a different but by no means underestimating manner by Umberto Eco and Elaine Showalter, two other critics who, like Steiner, share a passion for the written word or, more appropriately, literature.[7] But while Steiner seems more interested in the ramifications of the computer-enhanced media of communication on the cultural process, the two critics raise the rather more straight-forward question about the future of the book. They ask whether 'the book' both as an aesthetic object and a treasure house of knowledge, the phenomenon of literacy, could

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[4] Cf 'The Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'

[5] Steiner also takes up this theme in 'A Festival Overture', the lecture he delivered at the University of Edinburgh last August, as part of the events marking the 50th anniversary of Edinburgh International Festival.

[6] Steiner, op cit. p. 32

[7] cf. Umberto Eco, 'The texts to boot', *The Observer,* Sunday, 18 June 1995. Originally printed by the *Wall Street Journal* in the same year and Elaine Showalter, 'Apocalypse Not', in *The Guardian,* Friday, 27 October 1995

survive? The answer seems simple and straightforward. The book will survive. While Umberto Eco has no doubts about this, Showalter will rather be modern and anticipate whatever technology might produce. However, her optimism that the future integrity of literature will remain as it is today is unshakeable. She uses the unfulfilled past predictions about the imminent death of the book, the most insistent of which was in 1895, to justify her verdict.

There is no doubt that both Eco and Showalter are of the incurably optimistic breed. The truth, however, is that it is still far from being certain how many of the traditional subjects whose lives are currently based on book culture will want to utilize electronic technology and unsuspectingly get transformed by it. We probably would have to wait for that to be known before we could speak with any conviction. However, it is fairly certain that if the present trend continues, the very culture and psychology that have nourished and ensured the permanency of the book over the centuries will be altered in a manner yet indeterminable but fundamental. Literacy will acquire new meanings. Colin McCabe, the head of education at the British Film Institute in London, captures this where he warns that

> The traditional oppositions between old and new media are inadequate for understanding the world which a young child now encounters. The computer has re-established a central place for the written word on the screen, which used to be entirely devoted to the image. *There is even anecdotal evidence that children are mastering reading and writing in order to get on the Internet. There is no reason why the new and old media cannot be integrated in schools to provide the skills to become economically productive and politically enfranchised.* (My emphasis)[8]

Ironically, while the debate on the possible effects and gains of the electronic revolution goes as far back as the 1940s, it was not until the last few years that humanist scholars and critics began to look at it seriously and less, as suggested earlier, as the product of permanent

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[8] Colin MacCabe, 'Reading the Screen', in *PROSPECT*, op cit. pp. 14-5

dystopia.[9] The immediate cause of this surprising change in disposition to the subject owes must to the alteration in the last five years or thereabouts to the intellectual debate around the idea of *information society*. That alteration was more or less decreed by the increased and widespread use of computer at virtually every level of human interaction. *Information Society* began to acquire the legitimacy of an ideology from the 1940s following a series of break-throughs in research into computer development. Though primarily for military purposes, the initial rise of a market for 'commercial spinoffs' was inevitable in view of the costs of maintaining research.[10] But it was not until the 1970s that the confidence of the information society theorists actually matured such that they could speak prophetically about the transforming capability of the computer. Even then, there was still cautious optimism in their manner of speaking until suddenly, the refinement of transistors into microchips transmogrified both the inquiry and the invention around the computer. From then on, as Kumar pointed out, the theorists, as the writings of Marshall McLuhan, Alvin Toffler, Daniel Bell, John Naisbitt – the better-known among them – show, did not merely predict that IT would change the world, but become holistic and near mystical about the possibilities they foresaw:

> The information technology revolution compresses space and time into a new 'world oikoumene' orientated towards the future. Past societies, says Bell, were primarily space-bound or time-bound. They were held together by territorially-based political and bureaucratic authorities and/or by history and tradition. Industrialism confirmed space in the nation state while replacing the rhythms and tempo of nature with the pacing of the machine.

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[9] For a very good summary of the debate, see chapter two of Kumar, op cit.

[10] See William D. Marbach et al. 'The Race to Build a Supercomputer', in Tom Forester (ed.) *The Information Technology Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 60-70

> The clock and the railway timetable are symbols of the industrial age. They express time in hours, minutes, seconds. The computer, the symbol of the Information age, thinks in nanoseconds, in thousandths of microseconds. Its conjunction with the new communications technology thus brings in a radically new space-time framework for modern society.[11]

If the IT-human interaction or the more specific IT-Culture transformation debate has been taken over from developmental economists and techno-experts by humanists, critics and scholars, the debate at the wider public level is still marked mostly by paranoia and sometimes moral panic. Hence, it is not surprising when one occasionally comes across critics who regard IT as a continuation of the process which Adorno describes as a uniform system of capitalist corruption of culture.[12] The pessimistic trend, in particular, has become pronounced since the popularity of the *Internet,* arguably still the most amazing, yet visibly functional of all that has come of the IT revolution to-date, became an irresistible social force.

The disappointing quality of the popular debate on IT in the West and the still evolving character of recent trends in its development have made any assessment, even on a temporary basis, of how IT might affect the cultural space in the post-colonial world, particularly Africa, more difficult. Already, there is the ever-recurring image of Africa as a continent in a terrible state of health, with its economy in shambles, her debt burden a crushing weight and her infrastructure totally decrepit. The consequence is that one might end up entangled in the reified, and sometimes, purely intellectual aspect of the IT-cultural process debate. This will of course miss the point. As anybody who has lived through the past five years in the affluent North will testify, the transformation which the IT revolution is bringing into the factual social realities of everyday life is both massive and astounding. Though a continuation of a process that goes back at least one century, there can be no doubt that

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[11] Ibid., pp. 10-11

[12] Cf Adorno's seminal essay, 'How to look at television'

when every allowance must have been made for the circumstances of its appearance, including the present rush by the market to dominate it, the IT revolution will become the greatest revolution since the invention of the book.[13] One only needs to look at the rapidity of innovation in computer technology to see the basis for this statement. For instance, on August 16, the *International Herald Tribune* published on its Business/Finance page a report which validates how influential the computer has become in the way it forces changes on even technologically sophisticated manufacturing processes. The report is worth quoting at some length:

> ESCHBORN, Germany-In Johannes Gutenberg's hometown of Mainz, the local museum of vintage printing presses devotes a major exhibition to Ottmar Mergenthaler, another German, who invented the Linotype machine 110 years ago. In 1886, the Linotype represented the greatest advance in typesetting in the 400 years since Gutenberg invented the Western version of the process. The first newspaper to use Linotype typesetting, beginning in the June of that year, was the New York Tribune, a predecessor of the International Herald Tribune. The Linotype system of molded lead, known as hot type, remained in wide use of printing books, magazines and newspapers well into the 1970s.
>
> Until only five years ago, the German company that bears the Linotype name continued to dominate each advance in publishing technology. Today, Linotype-Hell AG spills red ink by the barrel. A vanguard of every revolution in printing for the past century, Linotype-Hell was blindsided by the digital age. The fact that many of the company's innovations are installed in museums symbolizes how each overhaul of publishing technology rapidly becomes obsolete. In the age of pixels and bytes, new

[13] This, by the way, is a view widely shared by all the academic-humanists commentators on the IT revolution. See for example, the three mentioned here earlier: Steiner, Eco and Showalter.

> generations of tools such as graphics scanners and software often are overtaken only six months after their arrival....

According to some of the company's critics, Linotype-Hell's fate shows how classic German management philosophy – mobilizing armies of engineers to design the best machinery money can buy without heeding the market's shifting needs – is the wrong strategy in an age of lasers.

The above illustrates how what by itself was technological wonder is being revolutionarily re-tuned by the force of the computer. To appreciate the full import of this re-tuning and its possible grand impact on the cultural sphere, one has to place it side by side with the invention of the CD-ROM, with its awesome storage capacity and the yet unmatched ability to combine seamlessly the visual and verbal fluency of television with the permanency of the book. Given all this, it will seem foolish, as Steiner suggests, to place a bet that *book* will last another 50 years under that name!

This is where the centrality of the IT revolution to the cultural process lies. And it is within the context of such centrality that the possible extent of IT's ramifications on other cultural processes outside the West, but in particular Africa, ought to be measured. Hence, the issue of the 'economic and political framework' within which IT might be applied in Africa and any of the less developed economies needs to be weighed critically and assessed in its own terms.

The present situation of the Less Development Enclaves in relation to the entire IT revolution is no more complex than that already in existence in all spheres of the relationship between the North and South, except only that IT revolution will further intensify the gap between them in the material reproduction and transaction of knowledge within their different space.[14] Conscious of such

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[14] The troika of Bill Aschroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their most recent book, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) devoted a chapter each to education, production and consumption, as representative features of what they describe as 'the material conditions of cultural production and consumption in post-colonial societies.' Whatever might be the inadequacies of the

intensification, Juan Rada, one of the ealiest commentators on the possible impact of IT on the LDEs, warns that while IT might look attractive as the long-awaited opportunity for the emergence of a new concept of technology that could offer the LDEs the possibility of some sort of leapfrogging (from their disadvantaged economic and technological position), rather than to evolve through the traditional lines, we must not fail to acknowledge 'not only the [existing] unequal distribution of resources and knowledge, but also the fact that "informatization" is the *consequence* of development and not its cause, although the technology can be used for development purposes (emphasis as in the original)''[15]

If we took the argument from here, the obvious conclusion will be that IT will not make much difference to Africa's present position, whatever the circumstances of its incursion. A more pessimistic view indeed would be that it will only exacerbate the passive clients' relationship between the continent and multinational corporations.[16] In so far as one is looking at development in comparative evolutionary technological terms, all these may be true. Given, however, that the very nature of the developmental crisis faced by Africa has continued to be misrepresented on both sides of the ideological divide, it is possible to offer a less pessimistic and/or paranoid, even if ideologically contentious, optimistic perspective on what IT might be able to accomplish in Africa.

As is well known, culture is not merely the factual social realities of the past and the present, but includes also the processes and agents acting on and helping to define those social realities. Unfortunately, in most Western discussions about Africa, there is always an unspoken attitude of exonerating the cultural space from the overall tension that

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essays in those chapters, the editors' recognition of the need for the two chapters is by itself a departure from the fmiliar habit of subsuming the issues covered therein under general theoretical or ideological statements on the post-colonial condition.

[15] Juan Rada, 'Information Technology and the Third World', in Tom Forester, *op.cit.*, pp 571-589

[16] This is indeed the view taken by Kumar (op.cit) and other commentators in the popular press.

usually exists between local perception of modernity and the force of tradition. At other times, the discontinuities and incongruities that often result when the modern is suddenly grafted to the traditional, particularly in situations where the mental attitude and worldviews of the latter still remain dominant, are ignored as vital considerations in the discussion of both the cultural praxis and cultural productions in the African societies.[17] This habit of branching off culture from a close reading of the forces mediating it is at the root of the suggestion, ridiculous as it is, that is often made by developmental economists and conservative sociologists that for a social change to occur, the cultural landscape must first be sanitized.[18] While such a suggestion flies in the face of the genuine aspirations of ordinary people in third world societies to live in a better social and economic environment, it also trivialises the conflicts enacted, from the ordinary people's point, to promote those aspirations.

Adebayo Adedeji, a former executive secretary for the UN-sponsored Economic Commission for Africa, was recently reported as saying that "What we confront in Africa is primarily a political crisis, albeit with devastating economic consequences".[19] Adedeji's matter-of-fact remark comes against the background of recent radical shifts in perspectives among African and Africanist scholars and commentators on the continent's condition. Having identified the same drawbacks as

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[17] In an essay, "Folktale meets video-camera: Improvisations and Transformations of Yoruba Popular Theatre Traditions" (MS), an African scholar, Wole Ogundele, using the example of the Yoruba popular theatre, presents a very good case of how hollow economic transformations leading to artificial and a non-lasting sense of prosperity and modernity could destroy the aesthetic base of cultural productions and, when this has gone ahead for about a couple of years, distort the very essence of the tradition in which that production occurs. (I am grateful to Dr. Ogundele for allowing me to read and comment on this paper at some stage in its writing).

[18] I will admit to a measure of exaggeration in my confining this attitude to Africa, as I have discovered, through the works of the radical sociologist, Frank Furedi, that it is a peculiar feature of most conservative historians, sociologists and politicians. See Furedi's *Mythical Past, Elusive Future* (London & Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1992)

[19] see *The Economist*, "Survey: Sub-Saharan Africa", September 7th, 1996

those pointed out by Aijaz Ahamad in post-colonial discourse, home-based African and Africanist scholars have sought by way of oppositional engagement, to re-position concrete facts of experience on the continent at the centre of theoretical formulations.[20] The specific accusation, likely to be put acerbically once in a while by these scholars, is that post-colonial discourse has the sweeping habit of grafting theoretical paradigms to inadequate knowledge and misbegotten evidence to explain the African condition.[21] A resentment against post-colonial mantras no doubt, but this combative mood is also a reaction to the disastrous and traumatic 1980s when the combination of IMF-conditioned structural adjustment programme and massive governmental corruption brought a virtual collapse to the economies of nearly all the countries on the continent with the resultant impoverishment of the people. One of the ironies created by this shrinking of the economic space lies in the fact that for the first time, there was less argument, at the intellectual level, about the desirability or otherwise of capitalism in Africa, but rather on the absence of productive capitalism. With informed justifications, liberals point at the emergence of the countries along the Pacific Rim as medium economic power, in spite of having suffered in equal if not worse measures in certain specific instances the same anti-democratic rule and practices

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[20] cf Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory, Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London & New York: Verso, 1994). See Chapters 1 and 5 especially.

[21] The position I am stressing here regarding the way African scholars feel towards post-colonial discourse is not, unfortunately, one that is documented or can be gleaned all that easily in any written form. However, having taught in an African university myself at the height of the popularity and novelty of post-colonial discourse, I was a direct witness at seminars and siscussions, and sometimes participant to the critique of many of the assumptions of post-colonial theories. See, however, Niyi Osundare, *African Literature and the Crisis of Post-Structuralist Theorising*, Monograph series: Dialogue in African Philosophy, No. 2. (Ibadan: Options Book and Information Service, 1993); Karin Barber, 'Literacy, Improvisation and the Public in Yoruba Popular Theatre' in Stewart Brown (ed), *The Pressures of the Text* (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Brimingham, 1995) pp. 6-27; Wole Ogundele, 'Playing at Modernity: or the Language Game in Postcolonial Africa', forthcoming, (Bayreut: Iwalewa Haus Publications, 1996)

suffered by many parts of Africa.[22] It is not unusual for comparisons to be made between the progressive economic decline of say Nigeria from the 1960s and the steady rise in prosperity and technological sophistication of Malaysia. Both countries are known to have compared ideas at many informal levels of agricultural developments in the 1960s. It was against this kind of comparative reasoning that a new historical consciousness emerged. It was not unusual for this new historical consciousness to seek to move beyond the paranoia always inherent in the analysis of the hegemonic reign of the metropolitan centre over the (African) peripheries. Therefore, while acknowledging the existence of the centre-periphery relationship, the internal power relations which is often a micro model of the macro centre-periphery relationship, was then also put under scrutiny and evaluated in terms of its own failures to facilitate local 'development'. Whatever the failure of this reasoning, its overall logic must first be placed in the specific context of a country-by-country analysis of Africa's economy and its mediating roles in the other spheres of national life. We need not go into specific details, except of course to draw attention to the situation of Zaire and Nigeria, the richest and arguably the most ethnically pluralistic nations on the continent, since 1960.

The end of the cold war, and with it, the elimination of the feigned ignorance of the incompetence and ruthlessness with which many African countries were ruled but hitherto tolerated by the super powers and their allies to maintain ideological balance has meant that the new historical consciousness would now develop unfettered.[23] The more many of the *old ideologically correct* taboos within the African

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[22] See also J.K. Galbraith. *The World Economy Since the Wars* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994). Especially Chapters 17 and 25.

[23] The most spectacular examples are Somalia and Ethiopia. No sooner was the cold war over than Somalia, which under the late Said Barre moved as it suited him between the two superpowers, was eventually thrown into chaos. In the previous years while it was seething, the bogey of capitalist expansion or communist insurgency was used by Barre to consolidate his very cruel and inhuman regime. The case of Ethiopia was no less different, except of course that Eritrea, which used to be a part of the country, bore the brunt of years of repression under the country's ruthless military regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

environment are opened up, the more the details with which the power relationship between the centre and the African periphery seem inadequate to explain the existing state of affairs in Africa.

The basis for going this far on Africa is to indicate how inadequate generalized opinions on the possible effect of *cyberspace* or *informatics* or any specific aspect of IT on the continent's cultural space is if the very complex processes and dynamics of culture are ignored. Paradoxically, the very reasons outlined above also foreshadows how Africa is already reaping one of the hidden benefits of IT and how this might further help its process of transformation. Apart from the fact that the information gap between the people and the state, remains huge and alarming, even at the most ordinary level, the available infrastructure of knowledge represented by institutions for formal education continues us to come under severe strain. This unhappy combination is what makes the information gap in many parts of the continent deeply structural. Yet, when viewed in relation to the ordering of national priorities and allocation of resources, it is difficult not to surmise the situation as being so designed by the African ruling elite to close the borders against the mass of their own people by distancing them from events in other parts of the world. By so doing, the ruling elite are able to package their own vision of society as the best that could be obtained anywhere. This is far from being a cynical comment. No other elite groups anywhere are as conscious of the penetrating effects of technology and information as those in despotic and anti-democratic nations.[24]

IT exponents and information society theorists attach a lot of weight to its knowledge transaction and dissemination potential. The merit of their case now seems beyond any doubts. The popular and the sometimes anarchic use of cyberspace have confirmed that there are indeed revolutionary possibilities in IT as a medium for transacting and disseminating knowledge, at all levels and for all kinds of purposes. In

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[24] The proof of this can be seen in how much attention African and Middle Eastern ministers often pay to the 'culture' issue in the matter of world information order debate.

this regard, the view of those critics who believe that IT has created a situation where "information abounds, but there is little concern with embodying it in a framework of knowledge, let alone cultivating wisdom in its use'' is overstated if not particularistic.[25] It is an argument that refers more to the existing situation in Western societies where the liberal gains made in earlier times through social movements and mass actions have been systematically eroded in the last fifteen years of the ascendancy of the New Right. The thoroughness with which the New Right has pursued its agenda and the level of success achieved have not only weakened communal self-respect, but somehow marginalized thinking on how best to reclaim liberal humanistic ethos in forms that are consistent with the demands of today's society, including the use of new frontiers of knowledge provided by technology. For all its dallying with the market, or its symbolism as the proof of global domination by the forces of capital, information technology remains an achievement that ought to be celebrated. However antagonistic the word 'globalism' might taste to the ideological palate of many of us today, its manifestation has become a crucial factor in how reality is mediated in all human societies, North and South.[26]

Since one of the major attributes of cyberspace is that it removes traditional limitations on the distribution of information across national boundaries, it is all too clear that it would shrink people's consciousness of the world a way as being distant and unconnected to their own environment. It is, therefore, not difficult to accept Giddens's observation on technologies of communication and all aspects of globalisation. According to him 'since the first introduction of mechanical printing into Europe' on the one hand, these connections have persistently 'formed an essential element of the flexivity of modernity and of the discontinuities which have torn the modern away

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[25] Kumar, *op cit., p. 32.*

[26] CF Anthony Giddens, "The Consequences of Modernity', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp 181-9

from the traditional.'[27] Apart from relieving governments and corporations of their information-sovereignty as it has done, cyberspace has also proved itself to be beyond the *absolute* control of any single body or government, however powerful. In the case of the industrialized countries, it is now fairly obvious that the cost of circumventing cyberspace will be far too heavy on the economy as to make the idea itself unattractive, if not ultimately dangerous. Sites and service providers could be threatened, but it will be difficult to banish them permanently as they will simply levitate from one site to another and under different names as soon as cornered. But more importantly, its knowledge and information value is limitless.

The question of the form in which education at all levels will be delivered in Africa from now on, in view of the changes IT is causing in the educational sphere in the West, should be an important one in our consideration. However, its importance must not be made to overshadow the more demanding project of how to reclaim the social and economic space, only after which it will be possible to liberate creativity, the kind of which is needed to make education useful. Education is certainly the unique shaft on which wheel of modern culture rotates as a result of which any transformation taking place within it inevitably affects the whole process of culture, it is also necessary to distinguish between formal and creative education as opposed to education for its own sake. When Ernest Gellner insisted that "The minimal requirement for full citizenship, for effective moral membership of a modern community, is literacy."[28], there was no doubt that he meant the former.

Some of the recent theorists of both globalism and nationalism have pointed out that 'computerized technology and telecommunications' are now part of the factors encouraging 'the

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[27] Giddens, *op.cit*, p. 182

[28] Ernest Gellner, 'Nationalism and Modernization' in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 54

proliferation of ethnic nationalism.'[29] This observation can be expanded beyond its immediate meaning. The confounding rise in ethnic nationalism coupled with the, sometimes, brutal violence that accompanies it would seem a paradox of an age when globalism is supposed to have made nonsense of national sovereignty. Yet, if anything, what these conflicts remind us is the janus-like multifaced influences on modern consciousness of the very globalism that should have eliminated such conflicts. Apart from comprehending the unstoppable transorder mobility of financial capital as a factor weakening the viability of nationalism everywhere, the theoretical assumption underlying the faith placed in the eventual decline of the nation-state is founded on the belief that all the existing nation-states have achieved permanence, even if not maturation as such. Where this assumption is confined to Europe, it will be very difficult to challenge. However, it is an assumption that extends beyond and, in so doing, takes for granted the unequal and sometimes forced process that brought many of the nation-states we now see on the map together. What we are currently witnessing in such places where the nation-state has this dubious ancestry is the ensuing act of bringing out those contradictions which have been buried deep into the forced nation-state structure. In Michael Mann's words, such nation states are now faced simultaneously by two problems, the postmodern institutional problem with the global setting and the modern problem within the local setting:

> They are subverted by the global reach of capitalism and the global culture of instant consumer gratification. But their basic political problem is that formally modern political institutions cannot compensate for the weakness of the other modernizing prerequisite: an evenly diffused civil society. They confront a crisis of modernity, not of postmodernity. This is their own crisis, and their diverse solutions will not reproduce the histories of Western Europe, North America,

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[29] Hutchinson and Smith, *Ibid.* See the introductory essay to Section VII, pp 287-8

> or Japan. But like these histories, they will centre on the struggle to create civil societies and nation-states.[30]

Mann's observation describes the peculiarity of the differences in current nationalist quarrels and agitation in Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia etc. The common denominator being that the individual nation-state within which they are currently taking place either failed or is believed to have failed to harness its resources and power to create the accoutrements of nation-state formations. It is in the light of that failure that the inhabitants of such nation-state often believe, with justifications, that they are being by-passed by the advantages of modernity. What determines how they choose to redress this is usually dependent on the level of the sophistication of the diverse units in the nation on one hand and the balance of forces among its elite on the other. But as has been seen and as is likely to continue, the ensuing bitterness is often too deep and consuming.

This then is the abiding paradox of globalism, and either for good or ill, it is a paradox which Information Technology will exacerbate rather than stifle. As the situation now stands, it is this paradox of globalism that is compelling the anarchic exploitation of the technology to either accelerate the fragmentation of those nations facing problems of modernity as outlined by Mann or frogleap them into transformation. This is not as automatic as it might seem here, but it is a compelling process which cannot be ignored or obfuscated by any of the prejudices surrounding the discussion of nationalism or of the global impact of information technology.

It is in the context of this paradox that one retains faith that IT will be essential to the new consciousness that will free up imagination and creativity in Africa and other overtly regimented corners of the third world. If we take cognizance of the volume of intellectual capital belonging to such societies, including a number of African countries, but which, owing primarily to political reasons, are scattered all over

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[30] Michael Mann, 'Nation States in Europe and Other Continents: Diversifying, Developing, Not Dying', in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London & New York: Verso, 1996) pp 295-316

the world, it becomes relatively easy to rearrange some of the hard-core issues relating to the belief in the use of IT as a means of advancing national emancipation.

Needless to say, the foregoing represents only one side of the argument. There is still the question of wider access of the computer. It might sound ordinary if not simplistic to suggest that this is the easier part of the problem. In their attempt to impress modernity on themselves, third world governments are usually the first to embrace fashionable new tools and technologies.[31] This pattern, which is favourable to international capitalism, is also one that carries its own insuperable disadvantages to its third world clientele. Unlike military weapons, for example, computer and telecommunication facilities cannot be confined to armouries. A single computer and a single telephone line will make a revolutionary difference in sustaining information transaction. If there is any analogy to be drawn, it is in how television has become the double-edged sword in Western politics. Most politicians go before it these days, not to seek immortality, but to claim kinship with the ordinary people. That was different from the days when they could be heard only on radios.

The following two pieces, downloaded from an Internet site called *Edupage*, are being provided as appendices to this paper for reasons which are all too clear in the pieces.[32]

INTERNET SUPPRESSION IN BURMA
Edupage 6-10-96

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[31] This is pronounced especially in the sales of arms, where countries shop around for the best in each category of weaponry for every section of their armed forces. It is in relation to this that Anthony Giddens, *op. cit.*, says that there is only one world when it comes to the possession of arms. As the catastrophic example of the Middle Eastern countries have shown, capability to use such arms effectively is, of course, another matter.

[32] I am indebted to Ms Gemma Tipton for drawing my attention to these materials.

In an attack on the country's political dissidents, the military regime in Burma has outlawed the unauthorized possession of a computer with networking capability, and prison terms of 7 to 15 years in prison may be imposed on those who evade the law or who are found guilty of using a computer to send or receive information on such topics as state security, the economy and national culture. (*Financial Times*, 5 Oct., 96).

IRAN WARY OF WORLD WIDE WEB

Edupage, 8-10-96

With access to the Internet increasing in Iran, the government there is trying to centralize all access through the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in order to ban sites of the Mujahedeen Khalq and other opposition groups, as well as sites of the B'ahai religion, pornography, or "Western propaganda". A senior Iranian official says: "There is stuff on the Internet that people have access to that is as offensive as "The Satanic Verses and it is updated every day. We believe a certain level of decency must be provided." (New York Times, 8 Oct 96, A4).

18

THE POLITICS OF LOCATION IN CYBERSPACE: NOTES OF A MEDIA PRACTITIONER

Gemma Tipton

In discussing the Colonial and Postcolonial, addressing the natures of the oppressed, repressed and dispossessed, we continually refer to a world whose borders have been drawn and redrawn for thousands of years. In Europe, nations have been created and recreated by Romans, Celts, Picts...it becomes a question of *how far do you want to go back?* And sometimes the arguments encircling Postcolonial discourse begin to take on tinges of manifestos for racial purity.

Imagine a perfect world. Free and democratic, no borders or boundaries to battle over, no exclusive or exclusionist structures, no tyrannies, petty or powerful. Imagine somewhere that ideas and images could be received without the mediation of self interested institutions. And imagine such a world created from new in the 20th century with our accumulated knowledge of the mistakes of history to support us.

Imagine if you could go right back. Or imagine if we discovered a brand new country, to which everyone had access (notwithstanding some technological entry criteria and strata) where everybody could meet and exchange thoughts. What would be the first thing we would do? Erect borders and boundaries? Start selling each other things?

Welcome to the Internet.

We know all this.

But how could it be different?

And why isn't it?

Everyone knows how the Internet began: there is no mystery of creation, but a communications system developed for exchange of

information between specialized groups—, scientists, the universities, the military. But what has it become?

Increasingly irrelevant virtual countries are being replicated in the Utopia of Cyberspace, complete with their own virtual cultural hegemonies. The freedoms of the Internet are being allowed to be bought up by corporate concerns. Government sponsored sites, such as those run by Arts and Cultural Councils, or large publicly funded cultural institutions are coming to slug it out, or make devils' pacts, with the likes of Microsoft and the multinationals, to hold sway over the mass of information in Cyberspace, while ease of access remains with the technologically rich.

If we hold the Internet up as a mirror to our own natures, we can see the pecking order of nations being reproduced, leaving developing nations underdeveloped. Multinationals and institutions exemplify the twin forces: cash and cultural hegemony that are dictating power. The impulse to colonise, to dictate terms by means of cultural information and exhibition continues apace. Here, EU initiatives are programming monies to encourage what they term *European Digital Cultural Content.* The enemy in this battle for space in the infinite is perceived to be America. There is no nod to the needs of fellow citizens, or those excluded by censorship. Amid the hype of freedom, blanket Internet censorship being implemented by countries such as Burma and Iran is passing unremarked. While the world is being globalised, cultural diversity is being run over by dominant forms. And as was predicted in the sixties, in a general bombardment of information, the contents are leveled and differences lost. Like Cable TV, one hundred channels and nothing on, more is definitely less.

In the face of this huge development in communication potential, the cry has been two voiced. How can I ensure my message dominatesmy sector in Cyberspace (i.e. the biggest site, the most 'hits', the best, or the only, information?) And how can I make money from it?

What do we have then? A giant advertising hoarding? The toilet wall of the digital world? A new focus for the power struggle over the control of information? Or a new opportunity?

Intellectual and financial imperialism are taking over. Cyberspace is reproducing the real world, warts and all. Subculture remains definitely 'sub'. It's far from a perfect world.

On the other hand are discussion and interest groups — the bars of Cyberspace. But their power to effect change or development is diluted by our panglossian desire to maintain the status quo. To insist that everything is all right, They talk out questions leaving the edifices unmolested. Notions of change through subversion deny the opportunity for equality.

So what about art? Where does creative culture fit in? Surely creativity has always come from below, from outside, to confront or subvert oppressive or exclusive structures.

Theoretically, the Internet should offer a new development for artists, a new way to exhibit work – and by this I mean not merely a virtual gallery wall, but a way to show work out of the contextualising space of the exhibitions system. The politics of location is about where you see things, where you believe the things have come from, and where you have come from yourself. In whose skies are the helicopters you see? The South of England? Northern Ireland or the European Rivers? In a gallery this can be controlled, dictated. On the Internet, it can be escaped. But this is not happening in any meaningful way.

Sites on the Internet for art are developed by major institutions, like MOMA in New York, the Louvre in Paris, or the Tate in London, to support their own programmes, advertise their collections and sell goods from the gift shops. Florence's Ufizzi gallery site allows you to walk around a 'virtual gallery' that creates a digital replica of the space itself.

Government funded spaces exhibit work as curated, editorialized, mediated, politicized and censured as any 'real' space. Artists are urged to 'sign up', to show on official spaces, which are mediated on the Internet in specific, often tendentious, ways. If that is how we want things to be – fine. But in a world where the major technological developments are announced in terms of tools to remove access to certain information either for purpose of censorship or payment, or

tools to ensure only prescribed routes can be followed through sites one has to ask why we need it? We've got all that already and in spades.

Art exhibiting in Cyberspace is being carved up in exactly the same ways as in the 'real' world. But the reasons are more complex than artists and creative practitioners simply playing follow-my-leader with Coca-Cola and CNN, and they point to a lack of confidence in both the arts public and arts practitioners. Going back, in Europe, art criticism and patronage altered dramatically after the impressionists. The art world never quite recovered from the mistake it made in initially rejecting them. Subsequently, it has been argued that the current 'anything goes' climate of acceptance stems directly from this point in time. However, while this only holds true in the official art world, it has been supported and manipulated by the gallery and collecting system for power and profit, or as famously in the case of the CIA and Jackson Pollock, to map out a new cultural agenda for an American centered art world, shifting the bias from post war Europe.

Any art work exhibited carries a provenance which allows the viewer to know whether to take it seriously, whether to treat it as art. Where has it been shown? Where did the artist train? Who has collected their works? All of these inform the value and the price. Creations outside this system do not necessarily qualify as art. To enter the system you have to subscribe to its values. More sophisticated than "we know its art if its in the Uffizzi", but we as viewers demand a context.

So translating this to Cyberspace, any 'surfer' or visitor happening on an image, perhaps by accident will check the address, the home page, all the available contexts, before making an evaluation of the work. Intellectual and judgmental insecurity act to maintain the power of the system to locate and contextualise art works. In the art world this is supported by the complex system of collections, exhibitions and patronage that makes up the Artist's CV. It also serves to exclude that which the system does not wish to recognize as Art or Culture. Meanwhile, from the point of view of the artist, a similar insecurity contends with pragmatism to support the definition of art

works in these contexts. Within a choice where would you put your work?

There's an enormous diversity of information on the Net. Because there's much there, you have to catalogue it in some way – and the cataloguing is the mapping that exerts the power. The problem and the challenge here is how to deal with such an enormous amount of unsorted information. Things on the Internet don't get looked at (other than by accident) unless they go underneath an umbrella of some sort. So an element of patronage becomes inevitable. But while the promised democracy and power of the Internet theoretically should reside entirely in the hands of the providers and users to make of it what they want, we are relinquishing our power for a sense of confidence. It is our intellectual insecurity that is colonizing the Internet.

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11. **David Lapsley**, scholar and cleric, has been in the forefront of the peace initiative in Northern Ireland.

12. **Dele Layiwola** teaches at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

13. **Wumi Raji** teaches African and West Indian Literature at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

14. **Andrew Thacker** teaches English at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Northern Ireland.

15. **Gemma Tipton** is the managing editor of *Circa*, the influential art magazine published in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

16. **John Toland** teaches Physics at the Queen's University of Belfast.

17. **Maria Rosaria Turano** teaches at the Dipartimento Di Scienza Dei Sistemi Sociali E Della Communicazione, Universita D'egli Studi Di Lecce, Italy.

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