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## **Mainstream or Margin? Ethnic Minority Literature in Britain**

**Jana Gohrisch**

Black creativity in Britain has injected a modicum of excitement and meaningfulness into British society in much the same way as the Irish writers in their antagonisms with the British and the English language have done. Both appear to have emerged out of a history of conflict with Britain. Both have a distinct language with marked cultural differences to Britain. Both too are resisting Britain's cultural imperialism from within, in their use of the English language. (D'Aguiar 1988, 108)

This quotation comes from "Against Black British Literature," a 1988 article by Fred D'Aguiar, a poet and novelist born in London of Guyanese parents in 1960. It analyzes problems that arise from applying racial and ethnic categories to literary phenomena. D'Aguiar continues:

Creativity is not confined to experience alone. . . . If creativity is seen as born entirely of class, racial or sexual struggles and the responses to them, doesn't this view reduce the imagination to a passive entity without a will and dynamism of its own? . . . Blackness, at the level of the vexed and overrated question of identity, must be evaluated independently of assaults from racists. (110)

According to the same author, "there is only literature with its usual variants of class, race, time and place" (106). These

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contradictory remarks provide the background for the following discussion of ethnic minority literature, which is one of the most lively and diverse fields in contemporary culture in Britain. While D'Aguiar is certainly right in important ways, serious questions remain regarding the general applicability of his humanist approach.

As Nigerian-born writer Ben Okri complained in the *New Statesman*, "to be a writer and to be black in Britain is to be in a corner. If you are not published because of colour, you are read because of it" (Brennan 1990, 9).

The title of my essay is designed to reflect the tension and even antagonism that in my view derives from the social situation of ethnic minority people and the status of their writing in a predominantly white society. In order to position this literature I shall take into account the material conditions under which the majority of ethnic minority people live in Britain as well as the power relations in society in general.

Talking about minorities in this context means talking about visible minorities. Although visible ethnics are far from constituting a homogeneous group, they need a special status within multiethnicity as long as racism remains a reality (Lutz 1996, 56). Therefore, "race," in terms of visibility of individuals as "others" within larger dominant groups, remains a sociological category to be reckoned with (52). As racism is deeply ingrained in Western culture it does not seem very likely at the moment that literary texts are evaluated solely on aesthetic grounds. I would argue that there is no "objective" or "neutral" assessment of ethnic minority cultural production because D'Aguiar's "usual variants of class, sex, race, time and place" enjoy a variety of extraliterary connotations and evaluations derived from their role in the wider social conflict.

In this essay I shall prefer to the term *race* the culture-based term *ethnic*, as it is indeed cultural features, not racial belonging, that influence writing. I should like to reserve *black* to denote people of African descent and of the African diaspora (for example in the Caribbean), while I shall retain *Asian* for people from the Indian subcontinent.

I view ethnic minority literature in Britain as an integral part of both British literary culture and the worldwide phenomenon of “the new literatures in English,” “postcolonial literatures,” or “Commonwealth literature,” as it was called until a few years ago. Criticizing scholars and academics for their deliberate “invention” of Commonwealth literature, which he says “does not exist,” Salman Rushdie insists that theory and criticism should “investigate common features between writers from . . . poor countries, or deprived minorities in powerful countries” (1991, 61ff, 69). It is not so much a common thematic agenda and/or aesthetics that constitutes this kind of Commonwealth literature, according to Rushdie, but the fundamental or “post-colonial” experience of marginalization, material deprivation, and social and geographical displacement. Without attempting yet another definition of *postcolonial*, I argue that this experience finally gives postcolonial writing its characteristic thrust. I side with the Belgian critic Hena Maes-Jelinek, who singles out

that sense of the future and of new beginnings (as opposed to the West’s “sense of an ending”), a will to rethink the past and give the future a different direction which . . . generally differentiates Post-colonialism from Post-modernism and is a major feature in the work of British writers who came from the former colonies or descended from immigrant parents. (1997, 67)

In this essay I try to locate glimpses of “new beginnings” in prose and poetry by selected ethnic minority writers, especially of Afro-Caribbean origin. I shall give a brief overview of major themes and modes of writing by first- and second-generation writers, two of whom I single out for more detailed analysis. My discussion will move along D’Aguiar’s “history of conflict with Britain” and emphasize both the distinct language and culture of ethnic minority writers as they develop strategies of subversion and resistance on various levels. As Salman Rushdie pointed out with regard to Indo-British writers:

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps

because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (1991, 17)

Although voiced as early as 1982, this opinion retains its extraliterary relevance. Postcoloniality, I should add, is not merely “a regime of power/knowledge relations” foregrounding “the problems of representation,” but “basically an economic issue” (Teresa Ebert cited in Marquit 1994, 433). This seems even more important at a time when poststructurally informed postcolonial theory has come to dominate the international debate (cf. Marquit’s brief but precise analysis, 1994, 432ff).

In the wake of eminent critics like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, it is now widely accepted that the potential of the postcolonial project as an aesthetics of liberation lies with the double vision and hybrid culture of migrants and others on the margin. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin put it in their seminal study, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, marginality “became an unprecedented source of creative energy” (1989, 12). The cross-cultural cosmopolitan aesthetics of the marginalized will result in a new transnational world literature. Although this sounds both convincing and desirable, I doubt its potential for practical implementation because it seems relevant only for a relatively small group of intellectuals in the academy. They are migrants and members of ethnic minorities but do not share the deprived conditions of living in the economic and social margin of Western society. On the contrary, literary critics of ethnic minority origin who practice poststructurally informed postcolonial criticism have become part of the intellectual mainstream.

Nevertheless, ethnic marginality remains “a powerful space,” even if it is only “a space of weak power.”

The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from the major forms of cultural representation, unable to locate themselves except as decentred or subaltern, have

acquired through struggle, sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time. (Hall 1991a, 34)

In defining their multiple identities publicly, ethnic minorities reclaim the power to name what hitherto rested with the dominant groups in society only. Although Stuart Hall acknowledges the importance of class, race, and gender, he claims ethnicity as “the necessary place or space from which people speak” (1991a, 36) and from which they voyage into histories of their own. I share Hall’s opinion in that it is certainly easier to develop an affiliation to an ethnic group based on a deliberate selection of cultural phenomena to be taken on and appreciated than it is to develop a class or gender consciousness. I should like to point out, however, that class and gender are equally important sites of identity. Every form of ethnic identity is a gendered identity at the same time as it is shaped by belonging to a particular social class. To mobilize as a group, however, it proved viable for ethnic minorities in Britain in the 1970s to formulate both objectives and strategies for their struggle privileging ethnicity. The years since then have shown that this strategy cannot guarantee collective action any more than could the earlier monolithic notion of class as main locator of social position (Hall 1991b, 45–6, 57–8).

I follow Hall, who claims that ethnic minority people have successfully fought to define themselves as a political group in Britain, which produced an enormous political space (Hall 1991b, 53). Using the term *Black* to express their new group identity, they wrenched from it its exclusively negative connotations in white British culture. According to Hall, this marks “a change of consciousness, a change into visibility of a new subject. A subject that was always there, but emerging historically” (1991b, 54). Since the 1980s this collective identity has been increasingly challenged for its silences on gender, though not class, which currently seems to lead a life as a nonissue. Furthermore, the term *Black* has been criticized, especially by people of Asian descent, because it fails to account for the differences among the various ethnic groups in Britain. Black cultural politics, therefore, has been increasingly concerned with the

representation of the diversity of ethnic minority life in Britain. This move corresponds to the shift in the general political climate that does not seem to allow for immediate mobilization. Negotiating space within the new multicultural society has become the task of the day.

About 2.4 million Britons (4.5 percent of the population of approximately 56 million) belong to visible ethnic minorities. Of this 2.4 million, 40 percent were born in the United Kingdom (Diamond and Clarke 1989, 181). There are Chinese, Africans, Arabs, and various European nationals. The largest groups, however, are from the Indian subcontinent and of West Indian origin. Of these, 46 percent come from India, 20 percent from Pakistan, 5 percent from Bangladesh, and 29 percent from the West Indies and Guyana (Jackson 1987, 26). *Indian* or *Asian* comprises various ethnic groups with languages as different as Hindi or Gujarati, Telugu and Tamil, Punjabi and Bengali, Urdu, etc. *West Indian* refers to Afro-Caribbeans as well as Indo-Caribbeans, the latter being the descendants of the indentured laborers the British had brought to the region after the abolition of slavery. In Guyana as well as Trinidad and Tobago, for example, Indo-Caribbeans account for half of the entire population (Dabydeen 1990; Dabydeen and Brinsley 1987).

Although there had been small African, Chinese, etc. settlements (mainly of sailors) in English seaports (like Cardiff, Liverpool, and Bristol) since the eighteenth century, today's ethnic minority population dates from the middle of the twentieth century.

When the bulk of the West Indians arrived in Britain in the 1950s, followed by the Asians in the 1960s, they came with expectations of a better life in the "mother" country or (after having earned enough money) back home. Britain welcomed its postcolonial heritage since labor power was needed to rebuild the industries after the Second World War. Despite the limiting effects of the 1962 and 1971 Immigration Acts, these immigrants were later joined by their families and by political refugees from Kenya (in 1968), Uganda, South Africa, Iran, etc. The majority of these people settled in London (which houses 57 percent of West Indians in Britain) and in the southeast of the United Kingdom, as well as in the West Midlands (where live 14 percent of

all the West Indians in Britain; Diamond/Clarke 1989, 184). The inner cities of Liverpool and Manchester, Birmingham and Coventry accommodate both West Indians and Asians. Furthermore, Asians settled in Yorkshire, Humberside, and in the north-west of the country (*Demographic Review* 1987, 90).

Originally, Asians predominated in the textile industry while West Indians worked in shipbuilding and mining, the auto industry, and food production. If not hit by unemployment, members of both groups are today employed in the service industries such as catering, garbage disposal, and transport. Afro-Caribbean women often work as cleaners or as auxiliary nurses in the national health system, while Asian women are frequently home workers. Unemployment is severe, however. In 1985, 30 percent of ethnic minority people aged 18 to 24 were jobless, compared to 16 percent of whites (Diamond and Clarke 1989, 188). There has been little change since then.

As I have already pointed out, the class composition of ethnic minorities has changed considerably over the last four decades. While Afro-Caribbeans, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis are clearly underprivileged with regard to education and professional status, Chinese, Indians, and (male) African Asians do much better. South Asians are often self-employed and have created a niche for Asian businesses in retail trade, catering, and repair shops, which are usually small and render only small profits. More important in terms of class mobility is the presence of male African Asians, Indians, and Chinese among the top professional category of academics, managers, and employers. This group holds 27 percent of all white people, 30 percent of all Chinese, 27 percent of all African Asians, and 25 percent of all Indians (Baringhorst 1994, 145). In contrast, Afro-Caribbeans, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis mainly work in semiskilled manual jobs. Ethnic minorities in general (with the exception of African Asians) are more often employed as semiskilled manual laborers than are whites: 15 percent of all whites are semiskilled laborers compared with 23 percent of all Afro-Caribbeans, 24 percent of all Indians, 31 percent of all Pakistanis, 36 percent of all Chinese, and 65 percent of all Bangladeshis in Britain (Diamond and Clarke 1989, 146).

These few figures may suffice to prove the process of polarization within the total ethnic minority population in relation to white Britons and within the individual ethnic groups. Immigrants today occupy a greater variety of social positions in British society than the earlier generations. Very often, this brings them closer to corresponding strata of white Britons than to members of their own ethnic groups.

This diversity of social positions no longer enhances the collective political mobilization of ethnic minorities as a whole. At the same time, culture and literature become important fields for negotiating these differences. I follow Stuart Hall, who wrote in 1991:

A jejune protest or parochial literature, be it black, gay or feminist, is in the long run no more politically effective than works which are merely public relations. What we need now, in this position, at this time, is imaginative writing that gives us a sense of the shifts and the difficulties within our society as a whole.

If contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society, and if these are willing simply to accept themselves as marginal or enclave literatures, they will automatically designate themselves as permanently minor, as a sub-genre. They must not allow themselves now to be rendered invisible and marginalized in this way by stepping outside of the maelstrom of contemporary history. (1991b, 60–1)

Thus my initial question calls for a dialectical answer: Ethnic minority writing is both part of the margin and of the mainstream of British literary culture. This is mainly due to two extraliterary reasons: to the social position of ethnic minorities in Britain in relation to the white and dominant majority and to the increasing diversification of the ethnic minorities themselves. Hence ethnic minority writers publish with both major and central publishing houses as well as with minor and regional ones.

Except for the pioneering efforts of Longman and Heinemann in running for decades special Caribbean, African, and Asian

writers' series, the major publishing houses have neglected postcolonial literature. Black writers of the first immigrant generation, therefore, founded independent publishing houses that catered to the needs of the not-yet-established Black writers. Akira Press, Bogle L'Ouverture, Dangaroo Press, Hansib Publishing, Karia Press, Karnak House, New Beacon Press (which runs a specialized bookshop in London), Peepal Tree Publishers—to name some of the most important ones—have tended to follow the project-based and flexible approach of community publishers looking back to a longstanding tradition in Britain as promoters of working-class literature. Today a number of ethnic minority writers (especially well-known male novelists) publish with mainstream publishers, such as Faber and Faber, Chatto and Windus, Jonathan Cape, Viking, and André Deutsch, which “have cashed in on the demand for black creativity previously so underexposed” (D'Aguiar 1988, 111). Women ethnic novelists tend to prefer feminist publishers such as Virago, The Women's Press, or Sheba Feminist Publishers. Lesser known writers, playwrights, and especially poets quite often resort to regional publishers such as Cofa Press in Coventry or Bloodaxe Books in Newcastle, which promote new talents and regional art.

Except for the eighteenth-century slave narratives by Ukansaw Gronniosaw, Ottobah Cuguano, and Olaudah Equiano, and Mary Seacole's nineteenth-century book on her work during the Crimean War, there is very little black or ethnic minority literature in Britain before the middle of the twentieth century. This literature gains momentum in the 1950s when many writers came to Britain in search of better publishing opportunities and a wider audience. Reflecting the general pattern of immigration, the majority of these writers were male and came from the Caribbean; the ethnic minority literature of the 1950s and 1960s consequently was very much a West Indian phenomenon. The situation changed noticeably with the African and Asian writers who joined the Caribbeans in the 1970s.

There are a few women, however, for example, the Indian Kamala Markandaya (born in 1924), who married an Englishman and settled in Britain in 1948. Although she started her career as a writer in 1954 with *Nectar in a Sieve*, she neither

enjoyed the public recognition of her Indian colleagues R. K. Narayan (born 1907) and Raja Rao (born 1908), whose work had been published in Britain for a long time, nor could she claim the public attention the West Indians achieved for themselves. Markandaya has remained one of the contemporary authors in Britain to whom little attention is paid. She often sets her realistically written novels in India, as she did in her first novel, which deals with the fate of a young woman in a village community. In *Nowhere Man* (1972) she depicts the life of Indians in Britain, which she sees as characterized by an atmosphere of alienation and loss causing a nostalgic longing for the past (Ahmad 1992, 141ff). Very much like Anita Desai's (born 1937) *Bye-bye, Blackbird* (1971), this novel conveys a sense of exile from which there is no return. The protagonist tries to become part of the new culture but loses his identity in the process, finally ending up as the "nowhere man" of the title.

The publication date of *Nowhere Man* indicates that women like Markandaya or the Guyanese Beryl Gilroy (born 1924) started relatively late to write about the effects of immigration compared to the men of their generation like the Barbadians Edward Kamau Brathwaite (born 1930) and George Lamming (born 1927) and the Jamaican Andrew Salkey (1928–1995), all three of whom later returned to the Caribbean. Along with them should be mentioned the Trinidadians Samuel Selvon (1923–1994), who wrote plays as well as novels and left England for Canada in the early 1980s, and V. S. Naipaul (born 1932). Naipaul and the Guyanese author Wilson Harris (born 1921) still live in Britain. Along with Brathwaite, the historian and poet, poets like the Jamaicans James Berry (born 1924), John Figueroa (born 1920), and E. A. Markham from Montserrat (born 1939), who is well known as a playwright and stage director both in the West Indies and Britain, became popular. Berry, Figueroa, and Markham, as well as the Indian A. Sivanandan (director of the Institute of Race Relations and editor of *Race and Class*), paved the way for the writers of the second generation by establishing magazines, networks, and publishing houses that served the interests of the newly arrived authors.

The writers of this generation have often been referred to as writers of the diaspora because they not only describe the experience of migration but embody it at the same time. While Harris and Naipaul have dedicated themselves to the whole canvas of human experience, a large group of writers of the 1950s and 1960s dealt primarily with the now almost global phenomenon of migration. In response to both a historical and a psychological colonial problem, their concern was the large-scale migration to Britain and the belief in a shared heritage with the mother country and the Western world. Novel after novel, poem after poem explored the pleasures and perils of exile and their effects on the sensibilities of the West Indians (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 1988, 19).

George Lamming's novels *The Emigrants* (1954) and *Water with Berries* (1972), his essays and autobiographical observations in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), Samuel Selvon's short stories *Ways of Sunlight* (1957) and his novels *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983) as well as Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) and Brathwaite's volume of poetry, *Rights of Passage* (1967), reveal the enlarged consciousness of the (male) immigrant side by side with his peculiar disorientation in an alien world (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 1988, 19).

To illustrate these general remarks I shall now explore one of Selvon's novels in detail. Selvon's highly acclaimed *The Lonely Londoners* is remarkable in various ways. Instead of a linear plot Selvon employs a loose, episodic structure permeated by irony and humor. He combines elements of the European picaresque novel with the Trinidadian calypso tradition. Selvon is the first author to write a whole novel entirely in Creole, rejecting Standard English as the compulsory norm for the writer from the former Commonwealth. Condensing the different dialects of the islands, Selvon generates a mild version of Creole to suit the taste and ability of his British readership. On the level of plot, Creole serves to set "the boys," the group of Caribbean immigrants in London, apart from their white and hostile surroundings. Creole provides them with a sense of community and identity. It appears as a vital part of the emerging

Afro-Caribbean subculture in London and is—along with laughter—one of the strategies of survival in exile. Creole serves to underline the function of Moses, the central character from whose point of view Selvon narrates the story, as the Calypsonian who—like the *picaro*—adopts the perspective of the ordinary person to observe and evaluate the various aspects of life. Selvon bases his novel on one of the main characteristics of calypso. Beneath its veil of jollity and levity, suggested both by the music and the performance, calypso contains a great deal of incisive social observation and commentary (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 1988, 73).

The almost all-male cast consists of flat characters (in Forster's terms) that sometimes come close to stereotypes. They are an easygoing crowd with thoughts centered almost exclusively on having fun with white women except when they are looking for jobs or housing.

Moses is the only exception, and the novel subtly tells the story of his personal growth. He serves as a chronicler, a linking device, and the author's voice of general assessment. He displays a deeper insight than his fellows and perceives the distress, loneliness, and aimlessness beneath all the fun and laughter. Selvon picks the name of Moses as a means to contrast the biblical story with that of Moses's modern Caribbean namesake. The story of Moses as told in the Old Testament is one of oppression and subsequent liberation since it describes how Moses leads his fellow Jews out of Babylon into the Promised Land. Selvon's Moses has nothing like that to offer. Britain is not the expected "land of milk and honey" as colonial education would have it. Instead, the "Lonely Londoners" meet with racism and alienation. The quest of Galahad, another character, acquires a tragic note as seen against this background. Like Sir Galahad of the medieval romances, he is constantly searching for new adventures in the service of yet another "Lady." But unlike the knight, he does not win the permanent favor of a woman but finds himself forever wandering about. Four years have passed since Galahad came to Britain and nothing has really happened. Alluding to the emptiness of the passing time, Selvon conveys

the disappointment of these young men who had set all their hopes on a better life in the mother country.

Women feature only as objects of male desire and are subsequently referred to as “the number,” “this piece of skin,” and “the thing” (Selvon 1985, 90, 91, 105). Moses and his friends seem constantly occupied by chasing “bags of white pussy in London” (90). To win a white woman appears emblematic of immigrant success. Access to the white woman’s body is turned into a signifier of male control, power, and dominance.

Joan Riley’s novel *The Unbelonging* may be read as an antidote to Selvon. For Riley’s protagonist, the consequences of displacement take on a vastly different and to a varying degree traumatic quality because she falls victim to male sexual violence.

I should like to divide the ethnic minority writers into two groups. First there are the mainly male immigrant writers who came to Britain in the 1950s and immediately began to reflect upon their experiences in writing. Second is the numerically larger group of female and male writers who are either immigrants who began their literary careers rather late (like Buchi Emecheta and Kamala Markandaya) or who were born and/or raised in Britain.

Gender is one of the themes introduced by the women writers who moved onto the literary stage primarily in the 1980s. The early male writers mainly document male immigrants’ search for new identities despite the depressing experience of alienation, discrimination, and rejection. The authors protest against racism and, as I pointed out in Selvon, develop strategies of resistance and survival. Their novels and short stories are designed to provide orientation under new social conditions and to build up self-assurance. This group of first-wave immigrants established a community-based drama that very often served consciousness-raising purposes. Since the 1970s, several poetry anthologies have been published, the first of which included almost only male poets. Since the 1980s, women have also made their poetic voices heard. The anthologies indicate that first black men and secondly black and/or Asian women have developed a collective identity, that they are networking, and that the individual groups have reached a certain degree of cohesion.

To the themes brought up by the male immigrant writers, the authors of the second group have added not only gender and a specifically female perspective, but a new awareness of the different histories of the various ethnic and social groups.

What has surfaced now is something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it. . . . We now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few . . . of women and men. (Hutcheon 1991, 66)

Furthermore (cf. D'Aguiar 1988), these writers display a special interest in linguistic issues, in the fusion of languages, cultures, traditions. This concern, which ethnic minority writers in Britain share with a number of postcolonial writers elsewhere, has been termed "hybridity" or "syncretism." It is understood that we witness the emergence of an entirely new concept of writing that goes far beyond the traditional idea of adding some exotic flavor to an otherwise unchanging English literature. Ethnic minority writers are transforming British culture from within. They redefine the notion of Britishness, which D'Aguiar maintains "should conjure up a picture of a plural society" (1988, 108). Novels, poems, and plays by contemporary ethnic minority writers certainly are plural and diverse both in terms of themes and modes of writing. The authors combine realist approaches with magic realism and postmodernist narrative strategies. They employ Western-style poetry in the vein of Phillip Larkin as well as performance and dub poetry informed by Afro-Caribbean traditions and poetry influenced by Urdu, Hindi, or Bengali literary heritage. Furthermore, ethnic minority artists move successfully into television and cinema as the highly acclaimed films by Hanif Kureishi and screen plays by Caryl Phillips demonstrate.

The recent history of the Booker Prize, the most prestigious prize for fiction in Britain, reveals how much the literary and publishing establishment values these new histories. Being awarded the Booker Prize, of course, signals the writer's arrival in the literary mainstream. He—and so far it has been exclusively

ethnic minority men who have won the prize—has obviously managed to reflect “the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society” (Hall 1991b, 61). In 1981 the Booker Prize went to Salman Rushdie (born in India in 1947) for *Midnight’s Children*, in 1989 to Kazuo Ishiguro (born in Japan in 1954) for *The Remains of the Day*, in 1991 to Ben Okri (born in Nigeria in 1959) for *The Famished Road*. Abdulrazak Gurnah (born in Tanzania in 1948), Timothy Mo (born in Hong Kong in 1950), and Caryl Phillips (born in St. Kitts in 1958) have been shortlisted for the prize several times. Even internationally the attention for stories hitherto unheard (but not unwritten!) seems to be on the increase as the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the Caribbean Derek Walcott (in 1992) and the African American Toni Morrison (in 1993) shows.

Let me now briefly comment on some of these writers and their novels.

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* blends history, myth, politics, and fantasy in a novel at once serious and comic. As an allegory it chronicles the told and untold history of modern India throughout the lives of 1,001 children born within the country’s first hour of independence who display a range of magical gifts. As critic Clark Blaise remarked in the *New York Times Book Review*, “It is . . . a novel of India’s growing up; from its special, gifted infancy to its very ordinary, drained adulthood. It is a record of betrayal and corruption, the loss of ideals” (CA 1991, 133:381). The novel was praised for its ambitious and brilliant style, which continues to mark later books by Rushdie. His radical questioning not only of literary and stylistic traditions, but also of religious and political matters, eventually led the religious leaders of Iran to place him under sentence of death for his *Satanic Verses* (1988). This book is again a complex narrative with several stories within a story, reminiscent of the Arabic tales in *A Thousand and One Nights*. Much of the novel is preoccupied with the dreams of one of the characters, which take on the form of enigmatic parables. Each story, according to Blaise, including the controversial tale concerning Mahound (a derisive epithet for the Islamic prophet Mohammed), comments on “the theme of religion and its inexorable, unwelcome and dubious

demands” (CA 1991, 133:383). In addition, the novel abounds with allusions to literary works of various traditions and with theoretical debates that sometimes seem like a treatise on postmodern and postcolonial concerns.

Due to his extraordinary literary abilities, Rushdie is often described as the foremost innovator in the otherwise stagnant contemporary British novel, thus claiming him as a British author similar to the Irish modernist writers of the early twentieth century (whom D’Aguiar had in mind in the passage quoted as a headnote to this essay).

Another writer highly praised for his style is Ben Okri, who published his fourth novel in 1993. He uses nightmarish imagery and surrealist contortions of reality to portray the bizarre social and political conditions inside his native Nigeria. Critics have associated Okri’s techniques with those practiced by magic realists, a school of writers who incorporate supernatural elements into otherwise realistic settings (CA 1993, 138:336). However, Okri insists that the supernatural elements in such works as his short story collections *Incidents at the Shrine* (1986) and *Stars of the New Curfew* (1988) and in his novel *The Famished Road* (1991) are realistic representations of the Nigerian experience, demonstrating the link between the realistic and mystical realms of experience that exists for Nigerians. Okri remarked in an interview in 1991:

I mean that one may be writing about Nigeria, but that terrain may be the place in which one can best see very strong universal concerns. . . . I happen to think that human beings are largely composed of the world view they have inherited; in other words, we see the world through our belief system. . . . So what seems like surrealism or fantastic writing actually is not fantastic writing, it’s simply writing about the place in the spirit of the place. . . . I’m looking at the world in *The Famished Road* from the inside of the African world view. (CA 1993, 138:337)

Innovative, though on a different level, are the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro and Timothy Mo. Ishiguro’s prize-winning novel

*The Remains of the Day* (1989), which was later turned into a film, tells the story of an English butler who is totally devoted to his profession. He serves his master unquestioningly, without paying attention to the latter's fascist inclinations. His life is characterized by a complete repression of his own will, which he perceives as the decisive virtue of a butler. Ishiguro chooses a style that perfectly renders the atmosphere of an upper-class existence in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the protagonist's detached self-perception, which eventually makes him an accomplice of his master's vicious political dealings. Ishiguro's other novels (set in Britain and Japan) center on Japanese-British relationships and individuals who, as he once said, "believe their lives a failure" (CA 1987, 120:185).

Timothy Mo's novel *An Insular Possession* (1986) portrays the history of Hong Kong as a British colony. Mo uses the stylistic means of pastiche, i.e., the language of early nineteenth-century diaries and newspaper articles, to create a sense of authenticity that he juxtaposes to elegant modern prose. His earlier novel *Sour Sweet* (1982) is of a very different kind. It describes a Chinese immigrant family in London and chronicles the cultural clash between East and West. Mo shows a keen eye for comic incongruities and sympathetic respect for the courage and resilience people display coping with an unfamiliar social milieu (CA 1986, 117:301).

Caryl Phillips is another writer who deals both with historical events and recent immigrant experience in Britain. He, too, uses realistic modes, pastiche, and experimental structures. Born in St. Kitts, he was raised in Leeds and later—like the majority of his fellow immigrant writers—attended an English university (in his case it was Oxford). Before he published his first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985), he was already a well-known dramatist and screenplay writer and had produced several radio documentaries. The novel chronicles a young woman's experience as an immigrant in Britain as well as her subsequent return to the Caribbean—actually a rare phenomenon to be portrayed in this kind of fiction. After a further novel in the traditional realist mode, Phillips started to experiment with structure and point of view. *Higher Ground* (1990) presents three first-person narrators

on different levels of time without an explaining omniscient voice to bring the life stories together. The uniting element is the experience of displacement the three protagonists share on a geographical, cultural, and psychological level. Form and language of his next novel, *Cambridge* (1991), are in the style of a nineteenth-century diary, a genre in which much of the colonial discourse was presented. The two points of view in Phillips, however, subvert the notion of authenticity connected with diaries. The narrators, a white woman and a black slave, tell very different versions of the same story, requiring the reader to sort them out. Phillips's last novel, *Crossing the River* (1993), again uses different points of view and repositions black people into histories from which they are usually excluded. The novel spans two hundred and fifty years of the African diaspora and interracial relations. The life stories of two brothers and a sister are tracked through different epochs and continents, framed by the dialogue between their eighteenth-century father and the English captain to whom he sold his children as slaves (cf. Jaggi 1994, 25).

While all the male novelists I have mentioned so far seem to be interested in both history and formal experiments, the female writers tend to focus on realist representations of the everyday life of African, Asian, or Caribbean women in contemporary Britain. With few exceptions, like Ravinder Randhawa from India, they all tell straightforward stories from the perspective of immigrant women. The narratives are often autobiographically informed and invite the reader to identify with the fate of their female protagonists.

This approach characterizes all four novels by Joan Riley (born in Jamaica in 1958): *The Unbelonging* (1985), *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), *Romance* (1988), and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992). In writing them she "wanted to . . . create a permanent tribute to the everyday life of the working people" (Riley in Mordecai and Wilson 1989, 66).

In *The Unbelonging*, the author chooses the perspective of the black girl Hyacinth to describe the effects of sexism and racism on a human being unable to fight back. As in Selvon's novel, the woman's body appears as a dominant topos, yet in a vastly

different context; male fantasy gives way to female nightmare. Hyacinth experiences her body not as a site of pleasure but as a site of pain. Hyacinth is brought to Britain to join her father when she is eight years old. She has to leave behind her friends and the aunt who acted as her mother. Subsequently, she is deprived both of a mother figure to provide a model of female behavior and of a sense of cultural belonging. Hyacinth clings to dreams about a safe and happy childhood in Jamaica and sees her return as the only possible solution to her plight. Riley then introduces her central character's father as a man who attempts to rape his own daughter. As becomes obvious in the course of the story, the author is not primarily interested in denouncing the destructiveness and evil in the individual black man. Rather, she tries to hint at some of the wider social reasons that may account for the incestuous intentions of men like Hyacinth's father.

In presenting the father, Riley's point is not to present the male figure as odious. In fact, Lawrence is the first line of victimisation in his society, the first member of the family to face racism and discrimination. The reader can see what Hyacinth cannot, that Lawrence is a pathetic, broken man with little to do, no self-confidence, and no friends of his own. . . . Like many West Indians he had thought that his skills and experiences would have guaranteed him a better position in England. (Abruña 1992, 42)

Furthermore, Riley designs this setup to point out the consequences to women of repressing the experience of rape. In Hyacinth's case, this repression coincides with her reluctance and final inability to come to terms with her Caribbean heritage and British upbringing. She is neither able to accept love nor to love herself when she meets Mackay and Charles, two black men who take an interest in her. Having interiorized blackness as something inferior and detestable but unchangeable, Hyacinth believes her only way out is to climb the social ladder in order to enter the realm of the "civilized" middle class (Riley 1985, 84, 103). Thus she works very hard and eventually studies chemistry. At the university Hyacinth meets another Jamaican woman, Perlene. Unlike Hyacinth, Perlene assesses critically the political

developments in her home country as well as in Britain. As in her other novels, Riley projects her visions of how to overcome the debilitating status of victim onto her secondary characters, who display more easygoing attitudes to their gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Of a similar level of political awareness as Perlene is Charles, a Rhodesian refugee and activist. Both try to impress on Hyacinth the notion that she should face the truth instead of idealizing her childhood. But it is only subconsciously that this truth dawns on Hyacinth.

As unpleasure is reduced in her “real” life it surfaces in her dreams. It is as if the sheer need to have something to cling to for survival made her “will” pleasurable dreams at a time when these dreams were literally all she might have some control over. But as she starts to gain control over her “real” life, she seems to “lose the grip” over her “dream life.” . . . Her dreams turn into nightmares. (Griffin 1993, 23–4)

Riley ends the novel on a note of despair, as far as Hyacinth is concerned, because she makes clear that education and the subsequent return to Jamaica do not solve Hyacinth’s psychological problems. Once back in the slums of Kingston, faced with the appalling living conditions of her relatives and friends, Hyacinth longs to be back in Britain, slowly realizing what had driven her father to leave Jamaica.

Her mind screamed rejection. . . . She thought longingly of the taxi, the hotel, England all so far away and safe, God, how civilised England seems now. (Riley 1985, 137, 139)

When she experiences the hostility of the place and its people, Jamaica and England change places in Hyacinth’s mind.

“Yu noh belong ya soh . . . Go back whe you come fram. We noh like farigners ina J. A.” . . . How many times had she heard that since coming to Jamaica, or was it since she had gone to England? She felt rejected, unbelonging . . . rejected even among her own kind. . . . What justice said that to be black has to be inferior? . . . She had to run back

to where black people ruled, only to find that it all was a dream. They are still slaves, still poor, still trodden down. (Riley 1985, 141, 143)

Although Hyacinth does not solve her problems in the course of the book, the reader is enabled to imagine which way she will have to go in order to appreciate the various components of her identity. She will have to rethink the ideas of Perlene and Charles in order to develop a new gendered and racial self and to negotiate a position in society.

What the novel finally argues is that one cannot create a ranking of the problems faced by West Indian women in England. Hyacinth's story is so poignant because she is an example of the number of different humiliations that women might have endured. Yet, the story is also one of Maureen and Hyacinth's overcoming obstacles so that they are not purely victims. Hyacinth will be healed when she can bring together the various parts of her experience that make her a black woman from Jamaica living in England and dealing with a personal history of abuse. Hyacinth's story, the women's side of the story, is replete with images of resistance and survival. (Abruña 1992, 44)

Ethnicity is "the necessary place . . . from which people speak," in the words of Hall (1991a, 36), although Riley chooses to make this point rather indirectly. Ethnicity in *The Unbelonging* is a gap the child Hyacinth cannot yet bridge. The novel centers on gender, race, and class, leaving ethnicity a possible future issue.

In addition to being openly political and advocating the cause of (black) women, literature by ethnic minority women in Britain very often shows a strongly documentary character. Their innovative contribution to contemporary literature lies with themes and perspective, language and point of view. This can be discerned in the early novels of Buchi Emecheta (born in Nigeria in 1944), *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) as well as in her last novel *Kehinde* (1994). Her first two novels report on her experience as a single mother and African

immigrant in London. Kehinde unites Emecheta's commitment to black women in Britain with her concerns with Nigeria, demonstrated in many novels set at different times in Nigerian history. Kehinde tells the story of a middle-aged woman who moves from identification with husband and family towards conscious affiliation to her job and to female bonding. She learns to negotiate a space of her own in Western society and preserves parts of her Igbo cultural heritage at the same time. Emecheta also conveys the cross-cultural existence of her protagonist on an aesthetic level. She creates hybridized versions of the realist novel and of the Igbo concepts of *Taiwo* and *chi* but does not resort to the magical elements so common in Okri. This new mixture of ethnic, social, and gendered components reflected in the mode of writing underlines the black female individual's claim to define her own identities. Compared to Riley's protagonists, Emecheta's Kehinde manages both to rationally assess and select the various ethnic components of her identities and transform them into a new lifestyle within the scope of the story.

Where Emecheta uses an Africanized English, in Riley's novels Jamaican Creole forms an important part of the characters' emotional affiliation to a Caribbean ethnic identity. Working with different varieties of Caribbean-British English characterizes almost all the novels by women of Caribbean heritage writing and publishing in Britain: Merle Collins (born in Grenada), Beryl Gilroy, Vernella Fuller (born in Jamaica in 1956), Janice Shinebourne (born in Guyana of Chinese-Indian parentage in 1947). Shinebourne and, more recently, Gilroy resort to historical settings in the Caribbean in order to "gender" the historical discourse from a female point of view. Along with women writers who still live in the Caribbean, they rewrite the social and cultural history so that it appears as "woman-made" and therefore changeable. They position women as the agents of history and creatively express the women's determination and ability to organize their lives according to their own needs and wishes. The writers communicate to the readers the "strong self-images" (Ngcobo 1988, 16) of ethnic minority women representing, in my view, "that sense of the future and of new beginnings"

(Maes-Jelinek 1997, 67) so characteristic of postcolonial literatures worldwide.

The novels' plots and linguistic presentation carry the mobilizing thrust aimed at pushing readers into action. Furthermore, I find the idea of self-determined individual action encoded in the titles of recently published anthologies of ethnic minority women's writing. It no longer seems viable (in contrast to the 1970s) to mobilize people on the basis of ethnicity alone (cf. Hall 1991b). Gender and class combine with race and ethnicity to form a variety of as-yet-unstable affiliations that offer a host of new chances for future collective action. At the moment, however, women are still exploring the multiple facets of their lives. In 1987 Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins edited *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*, followed in 1988 by Shabnam Grewal's *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*. These titles symbolize the journey on which women have embarked in search of their places in society. They are still on their way, and always will be, as defining an identity is a never-ending process.

In 1992 Margaret Busby edited an anthology whose proud title signals a new stage in black women's self-awareness: *Daughters of Africa. An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the Present*. It outlines black women's creative history through both oral and written sources.

Asian women have compiled their own anthologies to ensure more scope for the presentation of their "common identities as Asian women and as black women" (Ahmad and Gupta 1994, viii). In 1988 Ravinder Randhawa edited *Right of Way: Prose and Poetry by the Asian Women Writers' Workshop*, followed by Rukshana Ahmad and Rahila Gupta, eds., *Flaming Spirit: Stories from the Asian Women Writers' Collective* (1994). For more than a decade, the London-based Asian Women Writers' Workshop has dedicated itself to setting off the alienating and isolating effects on writers' lives of a racist and patriarchal capitalist society by working as a group or collective.

Within our network women have collaborated formally and informally on various creative projects and we have

all benefited from a camaraderie and friendship which enriches our lives as well as our writing. (Ahmad and Gupta 1994, vii)

They clearly lead a very marginalized existence within the literary scene because their aims do not easily agree with the expected behavior in a competitive society. In my opinion, these community-based projects deserve our respect as possible models for the future. Furthermore, they deserve our continued interest as there is an endless stream of new authors arising from such community-based projects. These writers embody the interrelation between mainstream and fringe.

Looking briefly at poetry by ethnic minority writers in Britain, we see that the most prominent writers in this most lively field come from the Caribbean. The issues of gender and class in conjunction with race and ethnicity raised by the novelists are taken up in the collections of poetry by Grace Nichols (born 1950), John Agard and David Dabydeen (born 1955) from Guyana, Merle Collins from Grenada, Amryl Johnson from Trinidad, Jackie Kay and Maud Sulter (both born in Glasgow, in 1961 and 1968, as mixed-race children), and Linton Kwesi Johnson (born 1952) and Benjamin Zephaniah (born 1958), both of Jamaican heritage.

The public attention to Caribbean-heritage poets is, in my opinion, due to the lively oral tradition of the region, which was brought over to Britain. As one of the effects of forced migration, African myths and legends, riddles and rhythms, proverbs and fables, as well as the call-and-response pattern of story telling, form a stable element of Caribbean folk culture. Over the centuries, people have adapted them to their needs and have made them carry their specific Caribbean experience. Caribbean folk poetry is closely linked to music (reggae in Jamaica and calypso in Trinidad); enunciation; and the collectivity and mobilization residing in the notion of collective identity. To a certain degree, both the rural communities of the Caribbean and the urban communities of the Caribbean and Britain, at least in the 1970s and early 1980s, are based on a shared definition of ethnicity—that is, on a similar history, on shared experience, and

shared traditions, as well as on a collectively maintained culture of symbols, meanings, and value systems. Every one of these notions is closely linked to the language of the region: Creole. Many Afro-Caribbean poets draw on the collective cultural experience of their audience and style themselves as performance poets like Valerie Bloom (born 1956) from Jamaica and Merle Collins from Grenada. They do not write primarily for the printed page but perform their poetry, which allows for the immediate reaction of the listeners as well as the direct interaction of poet and audience. The fact that it is performed makes poetry far more a shared and hence inclusive experience than if it were being read in solitude.

The ability to speak to and engage with the greatest number of people, and to achieve the minimum separation between poetry and everyday life, between poetry and politics is an important shared aim for these writers. (Williams 1989, 122)

This is characteristic of the dub poetry and reggae lyrics that are extremely popular in Jamaica and Britain among whites and blacks alike. Since the 1970s Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah have been addressing the problems of the deprived in modern society, openly advocating protest and action, resistance and struggle. They build on rhythm and music as well as on a relatively obvious relationship between lyrics and messages geared to the needs of the audience they have in mind: young people, mainly men, trying to find their position in a society that seems to have almost nothing positive to offer.

Amryl Johnson, a poet and prose writer from Trinidad, uses the musical and rhythmic quality of the Caribbean heritage, building on calypso. Like the poets and singers just mentioned, she retains the link between poetry and politics, thought and action, but rejects their male-centered aggressiveness and belligerence. She employs varieties of Creole and Standard English in her latest collection, *Gorgons* (1992), which features seven fictional women characters. They are the daughters of Medusa, who is the only mortal among the ancient Greek monsters, and embody the fatal power of women. In the Greek myth Medusa is

later killed by a man, Perseus, because she turns everything she looks at into stone. Amryl Johnson (not unlike Samuel Selvon or Derek Walcott) resorts to both Western traditions and her Caribbean heritage. She fuses them to create a very powerful vision in female characters who represent humanity as a whole. They come from all over the world and separately embark on a journey because they are awakened by the cry of their mother Medusa. This journey signifies their search for their own selves, their own place and future. In the course of the poetic story chronicling that journey, we listen to a multiplicity of voices from Standard English to Creole, which eventually merge in the last poems. They embody both the rebellion of the speaker and the optimism and self-confidence the other women bring in. The collection as a whole conveys the author's poststructuralist conviction that identities are never stable and that there is no final and true answer to the manifold problems people encounter. According to Johnson, women will develop the mutual understanding and cooperation needed to mobilize the human potential of shaping their own lives. Each individual will have to take on responsibility for her or his actions to render the live-saving intervention of a Perseus unnecessary and impossible.

Summarizing my arguments, I should like to come back to the authors quoted at the beginning of this essay. Out of the "history of conflict with Britain" (D'Aguiar 1988, 108) emerges "that sense of the future and of new beginnings . . . a will to rethink the past and give the future a different direction" (Maes-Jelinek 1997, 67) that I perceive as the unifying feature of an otherwise most diverse literature. As D'Aguiar points out, authors of ethnic minority origin resist "Britain's cultural imperialism from within, in their use of the English language" (D'Aguiar 1988, 108). My analysis of some of the major male novelists has tried to point out that men often challenge the aesthetic norms of writing novels in English. Women tend to take a more concrete and practical approach in novels dealing with the ordinary everyday lives of black and/or Asian women in Britain. As they position women as historical agents on both the realist and (as in Johnson) mythic level, they convey the notion of society as basically woman-made and changeable.

Ethnic minority writing “gives us a sense of the shifts and the difficulties within our society as a whole” (Hall 1991b, 61) from a minority perspective. Margin and minority stand for a specific experience based on a specific position in society. Redefining Britishness out of a minority perspective means challenging the notion of Britain as a homogeneous middle-class society. In this process the term “minority” sheds the negative connotations of inferiority and acquires new significance as a site from which hitherto accepted norms and notions can be successfully destabilized. As Joan Riley aptly put it:

To allow my readers to retreat back to their comfortable world and not accept their collective part in solving the issues that did not go away with the final full stop would be to have failed in achieving the purpose of the work. . . . As a writer I do not claim to be able to change society. . . . Granted there are questions, uncomfortable questions. But questions which create debate, however hostile, keep a normally hidden reality uncovered and raise the possibility of change. (1994, 552)

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# **History, Memory, Myth? Reconstructing the History (or Histories) of Black Women in the African Diaspora**

**Barbara Bush**

## ***Introduction***

The most striking feature of the Caribbean woman, observed by researchers, and, indeed, visible to outsiders, is how fraught with contradictions is her existence. The crux of these contradictions has been identified as the lag between behaviour and self-image, perceptions and consciousness. (Senior 1992, 3–4)

Of all groups of women, including other colonized groups, black Diaspora women have been subjected to the most continuous and damaging misrepresentation in mainstream history and have come under the most pressure to embrace new identities reflecting civilizing “European” behavior (Brodbber 1982, cited in Senior 1992, 41). These problems are illustrated not only by the historical invisibility of the “real” slave women revealed in pioneering studies by White (1985), Bush (1990), Beckles (1991), and Gaspar and Hine (1996), but also by what Maya Angelou has termed “a fabulous fiction of multiple personalities” of black women, stemming from the period of slavery and before, that have rendered black women “concrete in their labor but surreal in their humanness” (Angelou 1989, 8).

White representations of black women have frequently been at odds with the realities of their lived experiences. Disentangling fact from fiction is complicated by the fact that, during the

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colonization process, white patriarchal and racist culture reconstructed the black woman as the “ultimate other.” While black men became the “vehicles of change,” drawn into Western progress through education and the embracing of Western culture, black women remained beyond or upon the dangerous margins delineated by sexual relations between the powerful and powerless (McClintock 1995, 212).

The position of black women in Diaspora societies was, and still is, contradictory and ambiguous, defined by a dangerous sexuality or passive subjection and masculinization. Damaging links exist between historic and contemporary images of the black woman in the contrasts between “mammy” and “whore,” between the worker and breeder and the sensuous, animalistic woman of male fantasy. Powerful white myths became institutionalized in Western culture, penetrating the black Diaspora psyche. The negotiation of such white-defined identities arguably generated strong resistance, but it also involved the collusion of some black women (and black men) in reinforcing and perpetuating the generalizing myths that continue to block black women’s advancement in the contemporary West (Marshall 1996).

In this essay I address the problems of writing the history of subjects that have been “beyond history” in the context of conventional historical methodology. Central to my discussion are the vital links between recorded history, “long memory,” and present, lived experience; for the collective memory of the black “holocaust” and ensuing long-term trauma remains alive and burning in black diasporic consciousness. Questions of history, myth, and memory as they relate to contemporary black women’s identity demand not only a critical evaluation of the shaping of black women’s identities in the slave era (Bush, forthcoming) but also an examination of the cultural processes at work during the colonial and postcolonial period. The era of “freedom” was as problematic for black women’s identities as the slave era. Contradictions and identity ambiguities sharpened as women were encouraged by the white “civilizing” project to reject negative “African” traits and “whiten up,” resulting in a damaging and confusing “double consciousness” that was complicated by changing gender relations.

My research to date has centered primarily on Caribbean slave women and, more recently, on Caribbean women's experiences of colonial rule and migration to Britain. My aim here is to explore these within a diasporic perspective building on the insights provided by pathfinding studies by African-American scholars. In contrast to the United States, Caribbean black women's experiences had certain unique features resulting from the nature of slavery and colonial rule. Significant differences between the dominant white cultures also existed that impacted on black identity formation. Serious intellectual and methodological problems arise from over-generalizing the black diasporic experience. Informing my analysis, however, are important cross-connections between black women's experience in the United States, the Caribbean, and Britain. Furthermore, changes in the twentieth century, particularly migration to Britain, have arguably resulted in increased convergence of African-American and British black women's experiences as racially excluded minorities.

Three key factors are common to black women throughout the Diaspora: a triple burden of racism, sexism, and classism going back to slavery (hooks 1982; Jarrett-Macauley 1996a; Senior 1992); common memories of exploitation and violation that inform individual and collective histories; and the ways in which their identities have been detrimentally intertwined throughout history with those of white women (Bush 1981; Beckles 1993). How do such contemporary issues relating to black female identity relate to historically constructed white myths?

As black female academics in the Caribbean and the United States have pointed out, the two myths that have been most damaging to black women are that of black "matriarch," linked to the concept of the strong, long-suffering, asexual "work-horse," and that of the sexualized Jezebel who became a target of sexual violence and exploitation by both black and white men (Senior 1992; Hine 1995). These representations of black women defined their complex relationship to white women through white patriarchal ideals of female morality, female beauty, and femininity. In the challenging search to reclaim their own history and identity, black women have confronted and reevaluated white images

of black womanhood (cf. Onwurah 1993). But this process of self-discovery also has important implications for white women's identity and has foregrounded enduring antagonisms and sexual rivalries between black and white women over white *and* black men.

White women's "body identified" identity has been shaped through comparison with black women and this has had material and psychological effects on black women (Senior 1992, 43; Trepagnier 1994). Whiteness and beauty have become intimately intertwined in Western culture, with the exception of the odd "exotic" beauty like Eartha Kitt or Naomi Campbell, whose "otherness" becomes a marketable commodity. Yet even black supermodels like Campbell are not featured as frequently on the cover of *Vogue* as are their white counterparts because of possible impact on sales. As Bethan Hardison, who runs a New York agency, stated, "They're not going to put the black girl on the front and the blonde girl inside" (Katz 1996).

Black feminists have argued that white women thus are privileged and have actively acquiesced in perpetuating racism. Patricia Hill Collins affirms:

African-American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to externally defined standards of beauty—standards applied to us by white men, white women, Black men, and, most painfully, one another. (1990, 80)

White feminism has avoided these issues and developed an equally stereotypical image of the black woman as "superwoman," a model of "strength and integrity" (Wallace 1990). This more positive reworking of the matriarch stereotype still generalizes black Diaspora (and Third World) women's experiences and relegates them to a world outside the experience of white women.

Negative images of black women have endured despite the postwar development of black consciousness and black and white feminism. The Black Power movement of the sixties and seventies celebrated "black is beautiful" through promoting African-derived dress and hair styles, but some black women

have since reverted to hair-straightening. Hair as a defining feature of black women's identity is currently a strongly debated area, with arguments against straightening forcefully articulated by black feminists like bell hooks (Woman's Hour Special on Black Women, Radio 4, 29.5.95). What processes are at work here? Does hair-straightening and coloring relate to ongoing problems of identity or to a more confident and secure assertion of black femininity that has transcended earlier consciousness-raising body statements?

To flesh out my arguments, it is necessary to deconstruct the persistent white myths that have, weaving from Africa through the slave period to the present, defined black women's identity in white racist cultures. This facilitates analysis of the oppositional identities that developed through black women's self-definition and were articulated through resistance to economic exploitation, cultural oppression, and black and white male patriarchy. Such *real* identities were produced in conflict with the "fabulous fiction" of black womanhood and negotiated within the African-derived cultural frame of reference common to all black Diaspora women. In the first section, I trace the development of black women's identities from slavery to the present day, highlighting continuities and changes. Analysis of these contrasting and shifting constructions of black female identity is fundamental to the creation of more positive and enabling histories of black Diaspora women, the focus of the second section. The linking theme is the need for an imaginative fusion of black women's art, fiction, and memory with ethnography and conventional historical evidence in the reconstruction of black Diaspora women's past.

***Searching for the "Princess in Darkness":<sup>1</sup>  
History and myth in slavery and freedom***

The origins of myths about black women are rooted in slavery, when whites reworked existing stereotypes of African women as "debased drudges" or "hot-constitution'd and lascivious" sexual women. To emphasize racial contrasts with white women and rationalize female slave labor, black women were also adversely described as "muscular and masculine" and nearer

the animal than male Africans (Bush 1990, chap. 2). Women were forcibly stripped of their African identities through renaming (often with ludicrous classical names), branding, and attempts to suppress or transform their female culture, particularly in the area of reproduction (Bush 1996b). The reality of their experience was hard labor as the backbone of the labor force. Contrary to the myth of the “emasculatation” of men, male slaves in both the Caribbean and the United States held privileged positions as elite workers, benefited from slave women’s domestic labor in the slave quarters, and had positions of authority as drivers and elders (Bush 1990, 32–8, 91–3; White 1986, 78).

While common myths connect Diaspora women’s experiences of slavery, contemporary white representations of Caribbean (as opposed to American) slave women place far more powerful emphasis on the “rebel” or “troublesome” woman. This is not to say that American slave women did not resist—evidence clearly indicates that they did (White 1985; Genovese 1979). But the forms that resistance took were mediated by the minority status of U.S. slaves and the feudal paternalism of a resident plantocracy. Most Caribbean slave-owners lacked even a superficial interest in “culturally civilizing” slaves, and the particularly harsh regime on Caribbean plantations is arguably reflected in the low fertility of slave women there in contrast to their U.S. counterparts (Bush 1996b). These conditions led to the forging of a unique and dynamic African-Caribbean culture sustained by women as religious leaders, healers, mothers, market traders, and higglers. Caribbean slave women were reputed to be rebellious, verbally aggressive, difficult to handle without recourse to the whip; they were often punished more frequently than men (Bush 1990; Costa 1997; Beckles 1991). Cultural resistance and defiance of white oppression thus enabled African and Creole slave women to develop strong counteridentities against the psychic annihilation of slavery.

Caribbean slavery thus failed to undermine African women’s identities. However, the more subtle ideological influences of antislavery increasingly eroded the solidity of an African-oriented world view. Abolitionists, male and female,

mythologized women as passive, brutalized victims and “fallen women” exploited by evil and sexually debased white men (Bush, forthcoming; Midgley 1992). Cruder stereotypes of black women crystallized simultaneously as proslavery advocates sharpened their racist justifications. These stereotypes were reflected in contemporary English cartoons and literature lampooning attempts of black women to “Europeanize” (Bush, forthcoming). In Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848), for instance, the “coloured” West Indian heiress, Miss Schultz, is depicted as “woolly-haired” and “stupid.”

Abolitionists, however, were committed to the Enlightenment vision of an individual’s capabilities to progress through Christianity and education in “civilized” values. The impact of this abolitionist vision is evident in the only female slave narrative from the Caribbean. Ghost-authored by white abolitionist women, this narrative charts the redemption of Mary Prince from bad “African” ways through her adoption of white Christian values of womanly “respectability” (Ferguson 1987). For the first time black and white women became entwined (albeit on a massively unequal basis) through a political cause (Midgley 1992), beginning an ambiguous and complex relationship extending up to current debates between black and white feminists (hooks 1982, 142).

Developments emerging in the transition to freedom were accelerated under colonial rule and this period arguably rendered black women’s identities ever more invisible. The “civilizing mission” intensified ambiguities and psychic tensions related to problems of “double identity” and of mediating black and white definitions of black female identity (Olwig 1992). It also arguably led to a deterioration of relations between black men and women, characterized by misogyny and an assertion of black patriarchy, with enduring implications for Caribbean women (Senior 1992, 25). Further complications were produced by the class/color configurations of colonial society that continued to affect black women’s perceptions of themselves in relation to “colored” and white women in the postcolonial period (Jarrett-Macauley 1996a, 47). Despite a differing political and cultural context, similar developments can be charted during the

Reconstruction period in the United States, when their minority status arguably increased pressure on blacks to conform to white standards to achieve advancement (hooks 1982, 28).

In the Caribbean, the taming of rebellious black women, as the primary bearers and transmitters of African-derived culture, was the crucial key to this moralizing campaign. Abolitionist missionaries sought to “domesticate” black women and thus ensure that an orderly, productive and “civilized” society would emerge, premised on Christianity, patriarchy, and Victorian morality and industriousness (Hall 1993, 110). Here there are clear parallels with the experiences of women from other preliterate cultures oppressed by white racism and colonialism. Research indicates that whites have consistently seen the “moralization” of colonized women as fundamental to their “civilizing” projects. Colonized men were co-opted through Christian conversion and the offer of privileged positions in white male colonial cultures and institutions. Such co-opted men were then used to police female “bad ways”—a productive (for the colonizers) tapping of deep-seated misogyny in the culture, with negative consequences for colonized women’s lives (Anderson 1991, 179; Bell 1983, 96–8; Vaughan 1991, 22–3, 69, 70). Martha Beckwith, an American anthropologist, reveals this process at work in Jamaica in the 1920s, when she applauds “much had been done” to produce “a sense of order” through the “imposition” of British law, which promoted legal marriage and ensured that the father was “emphatically the head authority” in households (1969, 102).

In the African Diaspora, as Paul Gilroy has argued, it was black male leaders who were most influenced by the “double consciousness” of being both within and outside of Western culture, and who most forcefully articulated Victorian white male constructs of “a woman’s place” (1994, 85–6). Through them, black women were recreated as supportive, subservient wives and mothers, central to the stabilization of the black family and thus the renaissance of the free black community through self-help and retrieved dignity. Similar attitudes persisted among later Black Power leaders such as Malcolm X (hooks 1982, 96) and, in the Caribbean, nationalist leaders and politicians (Senior

1992, 156–65). In freedom, black men's perceptions of the "mother versus the other" (sexual partners) thus sharpened, and women were rendered increasingly subservient to men who now "reclaimed" the manhood denied them under slavery (hooks 1982, 4).

After 1860, white cultural power in the West Indies and United States, combined with the emergence of social Darwinism and scientific racism, led to the cultivation of the belief among Diaspora blacks that they were superior and more civilized than Africans. This had enormous implications for some women as they increasingly distanced themselves from their "African" identity and strove to maintain "civilized" standards (hooks 1982, 55; Senior 1992, 46–51). But there is evidence that in the Caribbean, strong undercurrents of resistance arose against this "civilizing" project. Reforming missionaries and philanthropists were soon disillusioned by the failure of their efforts in the Caribbean to eradicate such "bad African practices" as obeah (magic and healing) and African-oriented sexual mores (Hall 1993, 126–7).

The "moralizing" project was also undermined by tensions between planters' ongoing needs for female labor, abolitionist visions of women's place in the home, and women's desire for more autonomy. Immediately after emancipation, these tensions led to women's protests and their depiction as "females of abandoned character." Swithin Wilmot finds this powerful evidence that women were major historical agents in shaping their world after emancipation (1996, 280–2). White observers, however, continued to stress the "otherness" of such black women, depicting them as "so very masculine in their voice, manners and appearance that it is at times doubtful to say to which sex they belong" (cited in Brereton 1996, 88–9). Ultimately, economic pressures on free black women ensured that only a privileged minority could aspire to white respectability. Most black women remained, in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, "de mule ah de world" (Jarrett-Macaulay 1996a, 43). As two white observers noted of Jamaica:

Women are the workers among the blacks in the neighbourhood of Kingston. They carry the coal, carry

stone and unload vessels and other building materials for house builders, wash, bake, dig in the fields. (Cited in Senior 1992, 107)

These were Alice Walker's "suspended women," with "pressure on them so great that they can't move anywhere" (Washington 1982, 212–3). Such black women were visually represented through the white camera lens in a head-tie, short-sleeved, bare-footed and frequently bearing a head-load (e.g., Lorne 1867, i). Their lived experience of labor was reflected in the visual imagery of skirts hitched up to the knee: bare-legged and bare-footed, the black peasant woman was thus excluded from the femininity and respectability that came through shoes, silk stockings, and covered legs (Robertson 1995, 119–21). Such images of black women became the prime visual emblem of tropical backwardness and "otherness" in English travelogues.

The West India Royal Commission confirmed these images in a major study of black poverty in the Caribbean, the Moyne Report, issued in 1938. Echoing the paternalist concern for the victimized black woman first articulated a century ago by the abolitionists, the Moyne Report reinforced white representations of black women as passive, downtrodden workhorses concentrated primarily in the same occupations they were allocated under slavery (Senior 1992, 123). Yet evidence also exists that the colonial authorities continued to see women as prime trouble causers in emergent anticolonial protests and as more troublesome workers than men (Senior 1992, 150). This suggests that counteridentities persisted, reaffirming the link back to the "rebel women" of the slave period.

Martha Beckwith, although writing from a Eurocentric and derogatory perspective, provides insight into women's key role in the maintenance of African-oriented cultural practices, particularly religion and obeah. Such insights underline the discrepancy between the ideal black woman of white construction and the real woman that "mirrors the gulf between official white culture and real black Caribbean culture" (Senior 1992, 43). As "mammies" in revivalist cults, for instance, women claimed the gift of prophecy and healing and attained prominent reputations in their communities. Beckwith naturally dismisses this as

evidence of “emotional instability” and religious mania (1969, 102). This actual Caribbean woman, who was pivotal in keeping alive a vernacular African-centered culture, was more positively affirmed by the pioneering anthropological studies carried out by Frances and Melville Herskovits in the 1930s and 1940s.

The interwar years also produced pioneering writings by black women that addressed the subjective position of Diaspora women. Una Marson, the Jamaican playwright, confirmed Jamaican women's rejection of Christianity and prominence in black religions like Pocomania. Like the U.S. writer, Zora Neale Hurston, who also visited Jamaica in the 1930s, she commented on poor black women's lives of toil but also on how they drew their strength from their African-centered women's culture and networks (Jarrett-Macauley 1996a, 47, 51). African-American women such as Hurston and the choreographer Katherine Dunham were drawn to the Caribbean because of the strength of its African-centered culture, and utilized their experiences in exploring their own African-American identities (Clark 1994, 188). Dunham's ethnological studies and choreography, in tandem with the interpretations of the Trinidadian dancer Pearl Primus, foregrounded the importance of dance as a “site of memory” in African Diaspora histories. Primus, who worked mainly in the United States, made a further significant contribution to the recovery and revitalization of Diaspora history through her visits to Africa in the 1940s, which enabled her to make even more powerful connections between dance, culture, and history (Harris 1994).

Caribbean women's key agency in transmitting and sustaining a vibrant oppositional African-Caribbean culture is symbolized by the survival of the head-tie, a powerful cultural identifier for black women since slavery. The significance of this to black female identity is clear in Una Marson's poem, “Black is Fancy,” written in 1937:

There is a picture in my room  
It is a picture  
Of a beautiful white lady  
I used to think her sweet  
But now I think

She lacks something  
I was so ugly  
Because I am black  
There is something about me  
That has a dash in it  
Especially when I put on  
My bandanna

(cited in Jarrett-Macauley 1996b, xi)

The ways in which black women defined their identity through the visual signifiers of dress codes is commented on in contemporary travelogues (Gordon 1942, 63–4). As the Caribbean became a popular destination for English writers and artists, the “African-ness” in black women that attracted attention—exemplified in “A Woman of Domenica” by Abram Poole (reproduced in Gordon 1942, 81) and Augustus John’s “Two Jamaican Girls” (1934).

Most noticeably absent in twentieth-century white commentaries is any reference to the “rebel woman.” During slavery, older black women were associated with the dangerous power of obeah and the ability to inspire resistance. They are now reduced to the docile, asexual, and devoted “nanny” or “Aunt Jemima” stereotype, common in the United States since slavery. In Elliot Bliss’s *Luminous Isle* (1934), such tropes figure prominently in the servicing of colonial society. The novel centers on garrison life in Jamaica, and blacks are merely a silent footnote to the story of white expatriate society, a part of the “other world” of the “negroes.” In tracing shifting identities in white women’s narratives, Bridget Brereton also notes how the “wild and unruly” black female domestic, who could taint white children, had by the late nineteenth century been replaced by “friendly, gentle and supportive presences,” affectionate and “utterly loyal” (1995, 71).

By the 1920s, the Caribbean was a neglected and forgotten outpost in the British imperial psyche, moving ever closer into the U.S. orbit through migration and tourism. Changes in white representations of Caribbean blacks arguably reflect these developments. After the “moral panics” that followed the 1865

Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, it was assumed that Caribbean blacks had accepted the wisdom of British rule and were loyal and devoted subjects, well advanced on their way up from slavery (Egerton 1922, 240–3). An elite of black men figured prominently in this image of advancement, but the mass of women were reduced to silent ciphers. This is reflected in the durability of the stereotype of the asexual workhorse, highlighted in contrasts made by white observers between sexualized younger women, now represented by the slim, “nice-looking” African girls, the “fancy dressers,” and the older “nanny” type of more “ample proportions, and habitually carrying a basket on her head” (Gordon 1942, 19, 20). The mass of Caribbean women in contemporary travelogues are thus reduced to beasts of burden, “dark, erect, worrying figures . . . bearing huge burdens upon their heads under the heavy sun” (Waugh 1928, 34). There are also frequent references to the black woman as a “prodigious breeder,” associated with “loose morals” and a lack of commitment to legal marriage. Female observers also commented on how Caribbean men reputedly saw their black womenfolk as a “bad nation,” loud and “African mouthed” (Gordon 1942, 56–7).

These images of black women accompanied them to England after World War II. In the “postcolonial” era, Caribbean women had to negotiate new identities as migrants and members of an oppressed minority group. Because of the marginalization of the Caribbean to British life and the social processes at work during colonialism, it has arguably taken them longer to find a voice than African-American women (Jarrett-Macauley 1996a, 52–3). In Britain, however, their experiences in racially mapped white cities have increasingly echoed those of African-American women.

Migration further undermined and distorted gender relations, as some black men rejected “slave labor” and learned to “hustle” through pimping and gambling to survive. Strode, a young “hustler” interviewed by Ken Pryce in Bristol in the 1970s, viewed “colored” women as “stupid” and “ignorant” mothers who passed on such traits to their children. He preferred white women because “a Jamaican woman wants as much as she can get out of you. She’ll con you” (Pryce 1976, 86–7). Such

misogynist attitudes evoke another American-derived stereotype, “Sapphire,” a domineering black woman who is “avaricious and calculating” (Senior 1992, 168). As in the United States, poorer Caribbean women were thus devalued as “bitches and whores” and exploited as casual sexual partners. Black misogyny has been reflected in male-dominated Diaspora music from early calypso and blues through reggae and, more recently, ragga and gangsta rap; all contain lyrics that promote male elevation through female degradation (Senior 1992, 168–71).

In Britain black men’s negative images of black “African” women were also sharpened by the novel availability of white women upon whom the less respectable hustlers also depended financially, sometimes as pimps (MacInnes 1957). This contrasted with the Caribbean, where a clearer color bar existed and “no coloured man would invite a white woman to dance,” despite the increasing popularity among tourists for “black dances” and opportunities like Carnival for black and white to socialize (Gordon 1942, 19, 20). From the interwar period, relations between poorer (and some middle-class) white women and black male settlers had become more common, despite moral opprobrium (Bush 1996a). Male preference for light-skinned women in the Caribbean thus became further entrenched. This affirms the contention by bell hooks that in contemporary Diaspora society black women alone, not white women, are seen as the enemy and as a threat to black men’s masculinity, thus intensifying the competition, anger, and envy between black and white women that has existed since slavery (1981, 79).

Black female identities in Britain were also complicated by the potential that has always existed for some black women to advance socially through sexual relationships with white men. Though made as a liberal film dealing with the new race problems emerging from a postwar black presence, *Sapphire* (Basil Dearden 1959) engages obliquely with this stereotype. The black murder victim, Sapphire, is emblematic of what Alice Walker terms the “assimilated woman” of the 1950s—a victim of psychic violence that alienates individuals from their roots and denies them ethnicity (Washington 1982, 216). She has been passing for

white as a student, but her duplicitous double life provokes her white boyfriend into murdering her after he discovers she is “reverting to type” by going to black clubs to dance to African music with a “very dark” black man. She thus ruins her boyfriend’s life. Her seduction by the “primitive” is also contrasted with the respectability of her more obviously “colored” brother, a doctor who gains the respect of the white liberal detective. A cluster of complicated images of black womanhood thus emerge from the film relating to white perceptions of black female sexuality that echo the plantocratic “scheming” Jezebels demonized for tempting white men and enhancing societal degeneracy.

Yet the reality of black women’s situation in Britain was far from the relatively privileged life of the “lily skinned” student, Sapphire. It was also at odds with the “Sapphire” construct of black male vernacular culture. Most Caribbean women worked at harsh, “slave-labor” jobs in the garment trade, food, and other light industries, or as poorly paid ancillaries in the new National Health Service. They had to endure racist attitudes that reiterated popular white conceptions of black womanhood. When Sheila Patterson interviewed employers and supervisors for her study of the Brixton migrant community, West Indian women were described as slow workers prone to absenteeism and a “colossal” pregnancy rate. They were seen as on a par only with Irish girls in terms of lack of skills. There were also offensive comments about their body odor and “toilet habits,” emphasizing animality.<sup>2</sup> Young, attractive, and light-skinned women were preferred, since “unkempt, too dark or Negroid-looking” women could give offense to white staff. “Coal black mammy types” were rejected outright as ugly, slow, and dim-witted (Patterson 1962, 96–125). Informants also described black women as “aggressive” and “quick-tempered,” although, as with earlier accounts of “troublesome” women, such comments can be interpreted as evidence of refusal to accept racism docilely.

Black British women are still twice as likely as white women to be unemployed; they work longer hours for less pay and tend to be in the lowest status jobs (E.O.C. data cited by Forna 1995). They also continue to suffer from abuse by black men. The alienation of black men and women—a product of racism and the

negative white constructs of black women going back to slavery—remains one of the most serious contemporary issues addressed by African Diaspora Women. Even black-consciousness movements like Rastafarianism that have sought to revive Africanisms and remoralize the black community through strict codes of behavior have arguably not benefited women. They remain subordinated to their “kingmen,” subjected to strict, male-defined codes of dress and behavior, and generally excluded from participation in male religious activities and music (Lake 1994, 87–9). Are these the reasons, Forna asks, why “the hard-working superwoman,” increasingly out-succeeding men in contemporary American and British society, is finally losing patience with the “no hope, no good black man” and opting to stay single or marry a white man? Ironically, as hooks noted over a decade ago, these trends may be viewed as a new threat on the part of black women to white social stability (hooks, 1982, 64).

In the long-term perspective, this purportedly newfound assertiveness and success of black women can be related to two overarching features of black women’s history: their pivotal role in of black communities as the main sustainers of the African-Caribbean heritage and their high rate of economic activity compared to women from other ethnic backgrounds. Forna suggests that as a result of their triple struggle to survive racism, classism, and sexism, black women may also have developed since slavery shrewder and more sophisticated tactics to counter racism than have black men, who tend to contest it more openly or reject “slave labor” outright—perhaps explaining why black men are now viewed in a more negative light by employers. It is at this point that a more positive reappraisal of black women’s history, from their own, not a white perspective, becomes central to the analysis.

### ***History and memory: Reconstructing black women’s history***

How can the distorted history of black women be rewritten when the history that does exist arguably contains much fiction? Black women in the United States have been addressing this question for over a decade now. As one black feminist notes:

Political education for black women . . . begins with the memory of 400 years of enslavement, Diaspora, forced labor, beatings, rape. (Russell 1982a, 196)

This is where the “long memory” of black women becomes valid as an alternative source of history. This has been revived through black women’s prose literature (Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Elean Thomas, Joan Riley), poetry (Grace Nichols, Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Merle Collins), and film (Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*, USA 1991). Such fictional representations draw on oral histories passed on between women through the generations and highlight the importance of women’s networks and women’s culture in sustaining oppositional and thus resistant identities. As Maya Angelou explains about black women’s experiences:

Lives lived in such cauldrons are either obliterated or forged into impenetrable alloys . . . early and consciously, black women as a reality became possibilities only to themselves. (1989, 289)

The validity of memory and oral transmission in writing the history of the oppressed is becoming increasingly recognized (Davies 1994; Fabre and O’Meally 1994). Diaspora women share memories of their collective violation but also African-derived cultural forms—music, poetry, religion and oral history—that were vital in “stimulating and sustaining memory” and enabling them to transcend that violation (Lewis 1991, 90). Insights from cultural memories can help to affirm the black experience, achieve positive identities, and prioritize history in contemporary black identities (Jordan and Weedon 1995, 231).

Innovative historians have questioned the conventional divide between fact and fiction in the validation of historical truth (Lukacs 1994, 98–128). The postcolonial challenge to the “fiction” of white histories of the black past has further contributed to debates still fiercely raging over the meaning of history (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 1994). Such developments have added weight to the validity of the “collective rememberings” of black women writers. As a historian, however, I am concerned that the “trendiness” of black women’s writing in Western cultural studies has resulted in a tendency toward overgeneralization

and lack of chronological specificity. My argument here is that the slim written historical evidence in existence remains a valid source if it is reevaluated in conjunction with the invaluable insights provided by the “long memory” of black women. This facilitates analysis of the shifting identities of both black and white women through different epochs in time and highlights the extent to which black and white histories and identities are interwoven. From this position we can address several key questions relating to the most common (mis)representations of black women addressed in this article.

First, how “strong” are black women? Despite the enduring myth of the black matriarch, modern Caribbean women still tend to defer to male authority, and girls are socialized into subservience (Senior 1992, 35–9); bell hooks has made similar arguments for the United States (1982, 73). The strong, capable mother figures in Caribbean literature arguably derive from the fact that, at least for poorer women, status has come through being a good “mumma” and prolific childbearing (Senior 1992, 33). There is always a kernel of truth in any stereotype and the “black matriarch” tag may derive from West Africa where women were expected to be economically independent, motherhood was the main rite of passage, and male influence over mother-child bonds was diffused through polygyny. Evidence suggests that these cultural roles were reworked and sustained during slavery (Bush 1990, 91; White 1986, 108–10). But the high number of “mother-headed families” in both the Caribbean and U.S. context is also closely related to poverty and the impact of male migrant labor. For white sociologists this confirms the “pathology” of the black family as deviant from the white norm (Clarke 1952; Moynihan 1965). Such perceptions of black women as mothers and “breeders,” not wives, has persisted in United States and British welfare policy and British immigration policy. Such women remain “frozen in time” and unable to achieve “white standards of womanliness” (Chaney 1996, 58).

This view of black women has contributed to the problems they have with black men, for whom they are either powerful mothers and scheming Jezebels, who pose a threat to black masculinity, or sexual objects and “baby mothers,” through whom

men can demonstrate a hypermasculinity as successful “lover-men” but also express misogynist violence and cruelty (Senior 1992, 171–6). Such gendered stresses on black women’s lives have been vividly evoked in black women’s literature. In *The Color Purple* (1983) Alice Walker uses Celie’s husband to express the “triple bondage” of black women. “You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman . . . you nothing at all” (176) is his scathing response to her “breaking her chains of enslavement” by leaving him.

Caribbean women writers have also begun to explore the ways in which migration and social change mediate and transform their role as mothers. In Elean Thomas’s *The Last Room* (1992), the life of Icey’s independent African-oriented great-grandmother, living in rural isolation in the Jamaican mountains, is contrasted with that of her mother, a migrant to England, who tries to “assimilate,” suffers a breakdown as a result of racism and identity confusion and retreats to the “last room” in Birmingham. When Icey and her mother are finally reunited in Birmingham, they engage in the painful process of addressing the mother-daughter relationship and hence wider issues relating to contemporary black women’s identities. The three generations of women, born in different times and having differing experiences, do not fit neatly into any stereotypical pattern.

The matriarchy myth is closely linked to the second key stereotype of women that requires deconstructing, that of the passive, physically strong workhorse—Alice Walker’s “suspended woman.” Poorer women have suffered exploitation and violence from both white and black men, but they, rather than the more assimilating middle-class women, have surfaced throughout history as “rebel” women (Senior 1992, 151). Such women have also been the transmitters and protectors of African-derived culture in resistance to white cultural power. In so doing, they have strengthened communal consciousness, sustained positive identities, and ensured black women’s psychic survival. It is African-oriented culture, particularly religion, that has empowered Caribbean women. In the words of Olive Senior:

Afro-Caribbean religions . . . have been a powerful agency for securing women access to power and authority

in their communities. Religions such as Shango or the Shouters of Trinidad and the revivalist and Kumina cults of Jamaica . . . offer women key leadership positions and a significant role in rituals and ceremonies. (1992, 167)

In contemporary Britain, women of Caribbean origin take leading roles in independent black churches (Alexander 1996). Women's participation in African and Afro-Christian religions is high throughout the Diaspora, and religion has provided psychic support for women in hostile, racist environments from slavery to the present (Alexander 1996, 93–4). African religion is the cultural root that coheres an African-oriented life-view, represented by the “folk-wisdom” at the heart of healing and magic practices, oral histories and story-telling, song and dance (Collins 1995). Black women have been prominent in all these cultural practices, keeping their histories alive.

In slavery and freedom, black women's contribution to singing and music has been indispensable in sustaining communal morale and memory (Bush, forthcoming; Lewis 1991, 98–101). In the United States, women have contributed to the durability of old Creole songs and spirituals. Celebrated blues singers like Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday have addressed the reality of “love and sorrow” in black women's lives, but have also powerfully evoked the history of oppression, alive in black memory but distorted and belittled in white histories (Russell 1982b, 129–33, 299). This is epitomized in Holiday's deeply moving “Strange Fruit,” dedicated to the victims of lynching. Building on the gospel tradition, the Tamla Motown “girl” groups and female soloists like Aretha Franklin became a powerful motif for Afro-America in the 1960s despite being heavily exploited by the white pop industry. More recently, the opening of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta was dominated by the voices of black women, including Gladys Knight singing “Georgia,” evoking the city's black history and culture. Groups like Eternal, also with a strong base in the black church (their mother is a pastor), are now continuing this tradition in Britain (Sullivan 1995).

Religion, music, and oral memory have been vital in the articulation of a black identity emancipated from white cultural assumptions about the nonhistory and “weak” culture of

Diaspora blacks. Oral memory, arguably a major strategy for survival, has been sustained through black women's creative writings. Black women's fiction and poetry not only reflect individual autobiography, but speak with the collective voice of women past and present thus constituting "a polyphony of female voices . . . with ancestral reverberations" (McClintock 1996, 315–7). This clearly distinguishes them from black male Diaspora autobiographies and other writings. From pioneers like Una Marson and Zora Neale Hurston, black women writers have been the "guardians of discredited knowledge" and "cultural conservators" reassessing and reworking the African folk past and women's contribution to it (Jarrett-Macauley 1996a, 48–50).

Black women are now pressing for greater recognition of primary source materials such as letters, autobiographies, photographs, paintings, and oral testimony in reclaiming their suppressed histories (Jarrett-Macauley 1996a, 53). In the Caribbean and England, black women academics are catching up with their U.S. counterparts. They are increasingly adopting the "Afro-feminist theory," developed by African-American scholars, which highlights the similarities and differences in Diaspora women's experiences and the importance of African culture in a "common women's culture" focused on self-reliance, and female networks that have ensured survival since slavery (Terborg-Penn 1995). Furthermore, there is growing academic recognition of the importance of the relationship between "gender memory" and culture in understanding the processes of historical change (Chamberlain 1995, 109). The auguries for the future are promising. Greater recognition for black women's history will enrich the reassessment of white, as well as black, gendered histories and revive debates about racism, colonialism, and slavery in historical research, reclaiming them from cultural and literary studies while retaining the valuable insights those disciplines have pioneered.

### ***Conclusion***

"Just as in some African myths of creation, the black woman has been called upon to create herself without model or precedent" (Caroll 1982, 126). In my analysis of myth and memory,

fact and fiction in black women's past, I have charted the fragmented and conflicting identities necessitating, but also the cultural bases enabling, this "creation." In deconstructing the stereotypes of white histories, I have emphasized the diversity and also the commonalities of Diaspora women's experiences as well as the important changes that have occurred over chronological time spans in response to changing economic and cultural contexts.

A minority of black women, in the United States and (more recently) in Britain have made spectacular personal achievements that have gained them widespread recognition (Busby 1994). In Britain, changing labor-market conditions now favor black women over black men, and positive action programs have resulted in a wider black middle-class constituency. However, the majority of black women still draw the shortest straws, trying to hold families together, working in the worst and often most precarious jobs, and trapped by the historic burden of "workhorse" and "matriarch." Conversely, young and attractive women still have to contend with assumptions about their hypersexuality and exotic "otherness," a situation not helped by the increase in white male sex-tourism in the "Third World," where "exotic" black and Asian women are the chief attraction.

The path has been rough, but black women have accelerated their journey" to reclaim their own histories, despite lack of access to research facilities and academic respectability. The catalyst in this progress has been black Diaspora women's imaginative "remembering" of their collective histories through fiction. This has enabled them to use their own African-derived language and imagery, to assert self-identity, and thus to "move from being an object to a subject" (Parma 1989, 49). Black women's writings reveal the complexity, depth, and diversity of black women's lives, and challenge the generalized stereotypes perpetuated by white culture and (in a different, but equally significant way) by black male culture. Alice Walker's "emergent woman" is now beginning to prevail over "suspended" or "assimilated" woman. She is a woman

conscious of political and psychological oppression, aware of her African cultural heritage, searching for her roots

and traditions and seeking reconciliation with black men.  
(Washington 1982, 218)<sup>3</sup>

Will the development of a more consistent and established black women's history consolidate this trend and finally make more concrete and coherent the shifting and fragmented "fabulous fiction" of identities that for too long has rendered black women the "ultimate outcasts" in the societies in which they have lived?

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#### NOTES

1. From the poem by Audre Lorde, "For Each of You" (cited in Evans and Henderson 1985, 290).

2. bell hooks notes similar attitudes on the part of white women employed by the federal government who worked with black women (1982, 113).

3. There is indication that Diaspora men have also now understood the importance of this reconciliation. The Seventh Pan African Congress held in Kampala in April 1994 endorsed a resolution stating that the fight for European and American reparations for the African Holocaust raised the need to "transform gender relations in Africa and the Diaspora" (Declaration of the 7th Pan African Congress, *ASACACHB [Association for the Study of African, Caribbean and Asian Culture and History in Britain] Newsletter*, 12 April 1995).

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# In Defense of the Marxist Theory of Knowledge

Neil Charlton

The orthodox presentation of the Reformation as essentially an antireligious movement is of course misleading, and can serve as a false starting point in the evaluation of post-Reformation thought. Far from being intended as a critique of ecclesiasticism per se, the fundamental themes of Reformation thought, from Luther to Knox, were primarily directed against the untrammelled exercise of papal authority in European politics. They did not necessarily signal the imminent secularization of political life; moreover, post-Reformation political thought generally still held the notions of “natural law” and “natural right,” indicating it to be fundamentally as theocratic as its immediate predecessors.

Indeed, this was a feature of both scientific as well as political spheres of thought. “Rationalist” criticisms of late medieval natural philosophy were themselves far from motivated by any irreligious purpose. Previously, medieval traditions of scientific thought had been reliant generally on the framework provided by the Thomistic synthesis of Christian doctrine and Aristotelian philosophy (Quinton 1980, chap. 2). Yet the inception of “modern” philosophy, most notably with Descartes, was not provoked by contempt for the religious dimension of the speculative learning of scholasticism, but rather at the perceived archaic nature of Aristotelian (syllogistic) logic: “If we read all the argument of Plato and Aristotle, but can form no sound judgement on the matter in question, we shall have learned, not the sciences,

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but history” (cited in Williams 1978). For Descartes, the truth of the natural world lay underneath sensible appearances, and was only discerned by systematic scientific inquiry through the use of the rational intellect. Far from being in fundamental contradiction with religion per se, the Cartesian view held that God himself had implanted the “natural light” of reason, which allows the natural order of the world to be ascertained. Thus here we have only a transition from “natural right” to “natural light,” although one with profound consequences—the “Method of Doubt” was to be welcomed as a means of removing the obstacles placed by previous scholastic formulations in the way of simple truths.

Yet, as Marx and Engels make clear in *The Holy Family*, the historically progressive aspects of seventeenth-century metaphysics (Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz) subsequently represented a contradiction in the development of scientific methodology in that, although it “had *materialism* as its *antagonist*,” it “still contained a positive, secular element” (Marx and Engels 1976, 126)—represented by Cartesian physics—in which “matter is the sole substance, the sole basis of being and of knowledge” (125). This latter element was to provide one of the foundations to eighteenth-century French materialism. It first required that the positive sciences should break away from the metaphysical shell, to mark out their own specific territories independent of the remnants of speculative thought.

With the emergence of English and French materialism in the eighteenth century, as Marx and Engels put it, “Metaphysics had become insipid” (126), as the scientific kernel did indeed become separated from the accompanying baggage. As far back as Bacon, who had criticized speculative learning for overthrowing “the different enquiry of physical causes, and made men to stay upon these specious and shadowy causes, without actively pressing the enquiry of those which are really and truly physical” (cited in Robertson 1905, 471), the onslaught had begun. Hobbes, as Bacon’s continuator, systematized his materialism in opposition to Cartesian metaphysics, although without “furnishing a proof for Bacon’s fundamental principle, the origin of all human knowledge and ideas from the world of sensation” (Marx and Engels 1976, 129).

### *Common sense*

As Marx and Engels point out, it was Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) that supplied this proof and founded the philosophy of *bons sens*, of common sense, at the expense of exploding the concept of innate ideas held by the "Rationalists." "There is a great deal of difference between an innate law, and a law of nature, between something imprinted on our minds in their very original and something that we being ignorant of, may attain to the knowledge of by the use and due application of our natural faculties" (Locke, cited in Berry 1982, 10). Locke's *Essay* formalized the general (subsequent) theme of Enlightenment philosophy in establishing that human beings were passive recipients of sensory information, of *a posteriori* knowledge. Similarly, the specifically French strand of eighteenth-century empiricism had itself been precursored by the earlier skepticism of Bayle, who Marx and Engels claim refuted chiefly Spinoza and Leibniz (1976, 127). Locke's immediate pupil Condillac also propounded the assumption of the mind as a *tabula rasa* in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Understanding*, concluding that not only the art of creating ideas, but also the art of sensuous perception, are matters of experience and habit (Marx and Engels 1976, 129).

The character of French materialism further develops with the work of the Encyclopedists, such as Diderot, Helvetius, and Holbach, leading to the logical conclusion of the mechanical materialism of La Mettrie in *Man a Machine* (Berlin 1956). Of course the specifically bourgeois strand of Enlightenment philosophy is hardly difficult to see. The Encyclopedists were themselves to play the decisive part in the ideological preparation for the eighteenth-century bourgeois revolution in France;<sup>1</sup> Locke similarly was, as Engels put it, "a child of the class compromise of 1688," both in politics and religion (Deism) (Marx and Engels 1979). While Locke rejected the view of innate principles of mind, he did, however, affirm that there are "natural tendencies imprinted on the minds of men," including the desire for pleasure and the rejection of pain (Berry 1982, 10). One of the products of the explosion of the theory of innate ideas was then a stimulus to the need to anchor social science in a

sufficiently determinate and robust soil, with utilitarianism staking prior claim. By this view, an attempt was made to operate a noncontextualist view of a fixed human nature, in which human action was based on the pursuit of “the external utility, unalterable and independent of the customs and varieties of governments, applying to the very nature of man and consequently always invariable” (Marx and Engels 1979, 17). As Marx and Engels also make clear, another product of empiricism was the counterreaction it set in motion, most notably in the speculative German philosophy of the nineteenth century (125). This trend was to proclaim the value of intuition and imagination, the uniqueness of individualism, of language, customs and race, beginning with Hamann, through the subjective idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and beyond (Berlin 1956, 32). Both avenues of thought were of course to have important repercussions in the twentieth century.

Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1962) is not only the best available compendium of systematic refutations of subjective idealism, skepticism, and agnosticism (whether Humean or Kantian varieties), but it is also additionally useful as a critique of vulgar materialism.<sup>2</sup> Far from the issues raised having a partly esoteric and historical interest only, the current bastardized forms of skepticism/subjective idealism, spawned subsequent to its publication, are themselves permeated by the same fallacious and spurious arguments dismissed by Lenin. The extensive prevalence of positivism and methodological individualism, on virtually permanent display among all areas of Western social science, are perhaps indicative of the problems of being trapped in a continuing intellectual *cul-de-sac*. Less polemically, perhaps, even the most cursory glance at important areas of contention in political economy (value theory, for example) would illustrate that the various perspectives adopted by, in part, commitment to alternative epistemological viewpoints, can still generate often diametrically opposed conclusions from even limited “material.”

### ***Subject-object relation***

The basic philosophical question, around which many other subsidiary issues gravitate, is that concerning the relation of

consciousness to being, thought to existence—in my usage, subject to object. As we have indicated, the decisive refutation of the theory of innate ideas by the sensationist empiricism of the Enlightenment heralded the dominance of the view of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, in which all knowledge is derived from the senses. As a corollary, this raised the question of whether our senses can be trusted to be an accurate reflection of what is assumed (for some) to be an external object. Given that such assumptions are not, as most subjective idealist and syndicalist philosophies would contend, actually warranted, one is left with the subject, or consciousness, as the sole determinant of thought. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of a subjective idealist viewpoint was that of Bishop Berkeley in his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), in which he proposes that “the object and the sensation are the same, and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other” (cited in Lenin 1962, 25). This theme, a refusal to recognize things outside the mind, independent of (our) consciousness, is repeated ad nauseum in successive philosophical works. Yet “the different methods of expression used by Berkeley in 1710, by Fichte in 1801, and by Avenarius in 1891–94 do not in the least change the essence of the matter, viz., the fundamental philosophical line of subjective idealism. The world is my sensation, the non-*self* is ‘postulated’ (is created, produced) by the *self*.” As Lenin concludes, “this is all one and the same proposition, the same old trash with a slightly refurbished, or repainted, signboard” (69).

### ***Pillars of positivism***

Similarly those modern Pyrrhonians, the Humean skeptics and agnostics (one of the “pillars” of modern positivism), share the doctrine that the objective world cannot be regarded as existing independently of human means of cognition (Hindess 1977, 115). For Hume, as for Berkeley, “the belief that anything exists outside our mind, when not actually perceived, is a ‘fiction’” (Smith 1966, 81–2). Influenced by introspective psychology and Newtonian mechanics, Hume visualized the mind as a pinhole camera, the inner space, within which circulated atomistic “ideas”: he gives the example of a table, which, when moved

away from our eyes, seems to diminish in size. Yet, argues Hume, the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration, proving that it was, therefore, nothing but its image which was present to the mind. For the skeptics, however, the origins of sensible phenomena are absolutely unknown and can only be generalized inductively, through custom, as facts. Instead of a consistent subjective idealism (Berkeley, Fichte) that the external world is my sensation, the skepticism of Humean agnosticism can exclude altogether the question of whether or not there is anything beyond my sensations.

Such agnostic eclecticism (of Mach and Avenarius in particular) was condemned by Lenin, for its overt sophism. The example of the Humean table is often reproduced today in that old philosophical chestnut about the falling tree—if a tree falls in Canada, but no one is aware of it, how does one know it has happened? In both areas, idealist premises are mixed with individual materialist deductions (or vice versa). If one assumes that everything exists in sensation, and only in sensation, one cannot simultaneously hold that the physical, external objective world exists independently of your mind. A “pauper’s broth of eclecticism” (Lenin 1962, 63). For both schools of thought, however, two major problems arise. Both reject the notion of objects existing independently of our consciousness. “We always mentally project ourselves as the intelligence endeavouring to apprehend the object” (77). Yet the question of nature existing prior to humans is a thought experiment particularly annoying for such an approach: “Every subjective idealism is menaced with the necessity of conceiving the world as it was contemplated by the ichthyosauruses and archaeopteryxes,” remarked Plekhanov acidly (cited in Lenin 1972, 82; see Plekhanov 1961, 1:519). This simple point alone is perhaps a decisive refutation of subjective idealism, if one were really needed.

Yet the rejection of an objective “dimension” underlying sense phenomena on its own “logic” leads forms of subjective idealism down the path of solipsism: indeed it is a direct corollary of exclusive reliance on exclusively subjective sensationism. For such a methodology, the distinction between individual and

collective perception, even as a starting point for discussion, cannot effectively be made. A consistent subjectivism must surely lead to the *cul-de-sac* of purely individuated subjective idealism or solipsism. Yet as Sextus Empiricus, one of the leading proponents of ancient skepticism, admitted, “the Sceptic does not frame his life as a man according to the doctrine which he professes as a philosopher” (Warner 1958). Hardly surprising, given a consistent solipsist would deny the act of his own birth! As Lenin indicates, “The principal feature of Kant’s philosophy was the attempt to reconcile materialism with idealism,” which produced a “combination within one system of heterogeneous and contrary philosophical trends” (1962, 198). In relation to the first element, Kant actually dedicated his greatest work, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), to Bacon, the father of English materialism. Yet the “Copernican revolution” in philosophy by Kant was perhaps more associated with the second dimension of idealism through his doctrine of apriorism. Although Kant was aroused from his celebrated “dogmatic slumber” by the views of Humean skepticism, his “revolution” was of course brimming with internal contradictions.

His dualism was very much located at a point short of the “halfway-house” between idealism and objective sensation. On the one hand, Kant’s assumption of something outside us, a “thing-in-itself,” was very much a concession to materialism. Indeed the creation of neo-Kantianism in the nineteenth century was stimulated very much by their interpretation of this concession to be potentially dangerous to the prevailing bourgeois social order if used in the “wrong” way (i.e., radical materialism). Nevertheless, that Kant himself always declared that this “thing-in-itself” unknowable (*unfassbaren*) earned him the contempt of the materialists also. Feuerbach attacked Kant over this point for promoting the “thing-in-itself” as an “abstraction without reality,” whereas for the former, it was (or should be) “an abstraction with reality,” a world existing outside us, although completely knowable and not fundamentally different from appearance (Lenin 1962, 118). The incomprehensibility of the Kantian “noumenal” world thus prevented any substantial identification of his work with embryonic materialism.

*Doctrine of apriorism*

Yet it is Kant's doctrine of apriorism that has perhaps earned him a (somewhat dubious) fame in respect of ostensible innovation in philosophical methodologies. Arguing that in addition to empirical or a posteriori knowledge (the fundamental basis of Enlightenment philosophy), there were also "synthetic a priori judgements," absolutely independent of experience, originating exclusively in the pure intellect, Kant is of course directing his philosophy toward idealism, if not to the metaphysics of Cartesian Rationalism. For Kant, the solution to "Hume's problem" (i.e., the assumption of no experiential basis for the attribution of necessity to the relationship between a cause and its effect) was resolved by his argument that the ordering principles, the "synthetic a priori judgements," are automatically built into the human understanding, that the mind is preprogrammed to construe experience and sense-phenomenon into an ordered cosmos. Thus for Kant, his doctrine of apriorism reversed the relation between thought and things (Lenin 1962, 194–205; see also Cupitt 1984, section on Kant): it is we human beings who dictate laws to nature and not nature that dictates laws to us.

This was of course to earn him the further contempt, not only of the agnostics, but additionally of the early materialists too. Returning to his thought experiment of nature (the earth) prior to humans (during the age of the dinosaurs, for example), Plekhanov wickedly remarked: "And whose intelligence at that time dictated its laws to nature? The intelligence of the archaeopteryx?" (cited in Lenin 1962, 82). For the agnostics, their doctrine of apriorism was reproached, not because they refused to deduce causality and necessity in nature from objective reality, but because they admit any causality and necessity at all (Lenin 1962, 199). Each aspect of the Kantian dualism therefore contained an inherent contradiction between materialism and idealism, an inconsistency for which he experienced the vehement criticism of both subjective idealism/skepticism and alternatively materialism. For the former, his acknowledgement of the "thing-in-itself," the "real per se" (Berry 1982, 45), was a dangerous concession to materialism. Similarly his acceptance of causality and necessity through the doctrine of apriorism earned

him the contempt of the Humean agnostics and skeptics. Conversely the materialist objected to his assertion of the incomprehensibility of the “thing-in-itself,” which he held could not be known although it could be thought, and for deducing laws of causality from an anthropocentric fetishism with axiomatic introspection. Though he did recognize an experiential basis to knowledge, through sensationism, Kant’s recognition of the putative a priority of space, time, causality, etc., seemed clearly directed toward idealism.

At the time of compiling his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* around 1908, Lenin had not as yet managed to review Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, which included an indecisive critique of Humean and Kantian agnosticism, as of other forms of subjective idealism, albeit written (paradoxically) from an objective idealist viewpoint. By 1914, however, Lenin himself had carefully reviewed Hegel’s contribution in his “Conspectus of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*” (see Lenin 1961, especially 109–14), which Lenin was to hold in high esteem divorced from its mystical shell. This is not to say that without undertaking such an activity Lenin’s earlier views in this area were somehow incomplete. Far from it. His earlier work itself demonstrated a masterly perception of the subtleties separating scientific from pseudoscientific epistemologies, and followed on from Engels’s own extensive contributions on the subject. Lenin’s “Conspectus” essentially demonstrated that he was provided with all requisite knowledge to supply an exhaustive genealogy of even the philosophical icing on the cake.

### ***Hegel’s legacy***

It is no secret that Engels as well as Marx held Hegel in high esteem long after his removal from fashion (Engels 1990). Indeed Hegel’s masterly demolition of Kantianism was of central importance for the advance of a dialectical (materialist) theory of knowledge. In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel castigates the legacy of Kantianism for positing logic as somehow the sterile “science of thinking” in general, in which it is presumed that the material of knowing is present, ready made, apart from thought, and that thinking comes purely as an external form to the said material

(1969, 43–4). Thus logic, which seemingly abstracts from all content, is seen as mutually exclusive to truth, which lies outside logic; as a mere external form, logic is seen therefore to be incapable of holding the truth, which is in itself infinite. Hence,

the way in which the critical philosophy [namely Kantianism] understands the relationship of these three terms [human beings, thought, and nature] is that we place our thoughts as a medium between ourselves and the objects, and that this medium instead of connecting us with the objects rather cuts us off from them. But this view can be countered by the simple observation that the very things which are supposed to stand beyond us and, at the other extreme, beyond the thoughts referring to them, are themselves figments of subjective thought, and as wholly indeterminate they are only a single thought—thing—the so-called thing-in-itself of empty abstraction. (Hegel 1969, 36)

### *Cognition process*

For Hegel, truth was therefore not ascertainable independent of cognition, in the form of finished dogmatic statements of formal logic, but lay inseparably within the process of cognition itself. The hypostasis of truth as a thing-in-itself standing above and necessarily outside the comprehensibility of thought was clearly wrong. For Kant, cognition divides nature from people, whereas actually it unites them: the Kantian unknowability of the “thing-in-itself” regards sensation as being not the connection between consciousness and the external world, but “a fence, a wall, separating consciousness from the external world” (Lenin 1962, 51). In Kant, then, the incomprehensibility of the noumenal world, of the “thing-in-itself,” is nothing but an empty abstraction, a static and lifeless invention reified in formal logic. For Hegel, as befitting a dialectician of no small import, nothing is fixed or final. Rather “truth,” like life, is an uninterrupted (although uneven) process of becoming and passing away, of endless ascendancy from lower to higher. Any simplistic separation between subject and object must nevertheless remember

their dialectical interaction, without dissolving the distinct characteristics of each. In life, as Lenin puts it, each thing and everything is usually both “in itself” and “for others,” being continually transformed from one state into the other. Truth as a process indistinguishable from cognition. Of course Hegel’s objective idealism of the “Absolute Idea” prevented him from concentrating on the materialist kernel of his dialectic. Yet the important message lay, as Marx pointed out to Engels rather ironically, straight in front of Hegel’s face, hidden beneath the subliminal “double entendres” of his beloved German language. “But what would old Hegel say, were he to learn in the hereafter that the *general* [*das Allgemeine*] in German and Nordic means only the communal land, and that the *particular*, the *special* [*das Sondere, Besondere*] means only private property divided off from the communal land? Here are the logical categories coming damn well out of ‘our intercourse’ after all” (1987, 558).

The point was naturally not lost on Marxists, however. As Engels put it: “Matter is not a product of the mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter” (1990, 369). Our consciousness, however suprasensuous it may seem, is itself the product of a material bodily organ, the brain. Thus the formation of abstract concepts, the simplest generalizations and distinctions, the formation of basic notions (judgments, syllogisms) were, as described by Hegel, indicative of ever-deeper human cognition of the objective connection of the world (seconded by Lenin 1961, 178–9). “Instinctive man, the savage, does not distinguish himself from nature. Conscious man does distinguish, categories are stages of distinguishing, i.e., of cognising the world” (93). Thus “the laws of logic are the reflections of the objective in the subjective consciousness of man” (183). Lenin added: “Logic is the science of cognition” and moreover, “the theory of knowledge. Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws, etc. [which] . . . embrace conditionally, approximately, the universal law-governed character of eternally moving and developing nature” (182).

***Process of movement***

While in ordinary formal logic, however, thought is formalistically divorced from objectivity, a dialectical understanding promotes an assessment of subjectivity and objectivity not as a static, fixed antithesis, but dialectically related and in motion. Cognition is an eternal, endless, approximation of thought to the object, as a process of movement, not in spite of contradiction but arising from contradiction in the eternal process of motion (195). Finally, and this is a point of particular relevance for those academics weaned on mechanical reliance on vulgar empiricism (who see “science” as only synonymous with the concretely empirical), the movement of thought from the concrete to the abstract is not a movement away from truth, but comes closer to it.

Dismissal of theory on the grounds that it is too abstract is indicative of a gross misunderstanding of the scientific process.

The abstraction of *matter*, of a *law* of nature, the abstraction of *value*, etc., in short *all* scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and *completely*. From living perception to abstract thought, *and from this to practice*—such is the dialectical path of the cognition of *truth*, of the cognition of objective reality. (171)<sup>3</sup>

***Feuerbach reproached***

Although statements derivative of the monistic crudity of vulgar materialism in no way match the absurdity of their subjectivist counterparts, nevertheless it is important to distinguish the materialism of Plekhanov, and to a lesser extent Feuerbach, from that of the classical Marxists. The former is himself reproached by Lenin for failing to appreciate the full importance of the necessarily dialectical interaction between subject and object (179), among other errors (1962, 151–3). Similarly Feuerbach was of course taken to task by Marx himself in (especially) the first of his “Theses on Feuerbach” in regard to this area. As Marx put it:

The chief defect of all previous materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the *active side*, in contradistinction to materialism, was set forth by idealism—but only abstractly, since of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. (Marx 1976, 6)

Thus while many bourgeois critics consistently attempt to misrepresent classical Marxism's epistemological approach to knowledge through the fisheye lens of a monistic materialist outlook, anyone caring to look at even the intellectual precursors of classical Marxian methodology—most notably Hegel perhaps—would find this view quite untenable: its extension to Marx, Engels, and Lenin (among others) is simply ludicrous.<sup>4</sup> Of course a good deal of the output of pre-Marxist materialism did exhibit a formal mechanicism—La Mettrie, for example—which also permeated the thought of the Second International (Plekhanov, Kautsky, etc.). Yet this does not fully explain the subsequent misreading of Marxism in various areas by its critics. The distortion of, for example, Marxian value theory is a pertinent example of what can only be described as deliberate misrepresentation (more than misunderstanding).

As indicated by Marx in *The Holy Family*, the base camp for practically all modern theories of knowledge was formally provided by the sensationism of Enlightenment philosophy, premised especially on the work of the mature Locke. “Both the solipsist, that is, the subjective idealist, and the materialist may regard sensations as the source of our knowledge. Both Berkeley and Diderot started from Locke. The first premise of the theory of knowledge undoubtedly is that the sole source of our knowledge is sensation,” remarked Lenin, adding: “Starting from sensations, one may follow the line of subjectivism, which leads to solipsism . . . or the line of objectivism, which leads to materialism” (1962, 126–7). From the source point of the mind

as a *tabula rasa*, then, both idealist and materialist tributaries flow. Lenin himself goes on to draw three main conclusions *vis-à-vis* the tenets of a materialist theory of knowledge. First, the existence of an external object (the world) independent of our consciousness; secondly, the fundamental comprehensibility of this object through our sensations in scientific practice; thirdly, the dialectical conceptualization of the origins of objective truth, etc.

### *Independence of the object*

The first point would hardly need explanation, one would think; as Feuerbach put it simply, “my sensation is subjective, but its foundation or cause is objective,” or as Lenin remarked: “Our sensation, our consciousness is only *an image* of the external world, and it is obvious that an image cannot exist without the thing imagined, and that the latter exists independently of that which images it” (69). And later: “Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, whilst existing independently of them” (130).<sup>5</sup>

The sleight-of-hand practiced by idealism is that the physical is taken as the starting point; from it external nature is deduced, and only then is the ordinary consciousness deduced from nature.

Consciousness, idea, sensation, etc., is taken as the *immediate* and the physical is deduced from it, substituted for it. The world is the *non-ego* created by *the ego*, said Fichte. The world is the Absolute Idea, said Hegel. The world is will, said Schopenhauer. The world is concept and idea, says the immanentist Rehmke. Being is consciousness, says the immanentist Schuppe. The physical is a substitution for the physical, said Bogdanov. One must be blind not to perceive the identical idealist essence under the various verbal cloaks. (228)

On the second point, the question of the correspondence of our sensations to this objective “thing-in-itself,” Lenin argues: “There is definitely no difference in principle between the phenomena and the ‘thing-in-itself,’ and there cannot be any such

difference. The only difference is between what is known and what is not yet known” (108). Whereas for the subjectivists and agnostics, sensation is seen as a “fence, a wall” to understanding of the external world, for materialists, it is a bridge, the direct connection between subject and object, through “the transformation of the energy of external excitation into the fact of consciousness” [Lenin citing Bogdanov before the latter was led astray by Ostwald] (51).

### *Nature’s laws*

Any philosophical invention attempting to fence off the “thing-in-itself” as unknowable (Kant) per se is simply nonsense. The latter-day corollary of Humean skepticism, logical positivism, is equally ridiculous. To eschew any objective measure or model existing independently of humanity to which our (relative) knowledge approximates would fall into relativism: presumably all bodies of knowledge, science, ideology, religion would have equal status simply because everyone believed them to be true. That the earth existed prior to human beings makes nonsense of such claims that there can be no objective truth, a world independent of human perception: that matter (stars, for example) exists beyond our currently available perceptions does not preclude the fact of its existence in-itself. It is not “man who gives laws to nature” à la Kant: rather, as Engels demonstrated, reason is itself a product of nature, of the brain as the highest form of matter. Of course it is not difficult to ascertain an objective material base for the continuing prevalence of forms of subjectivism and skepticism within, for example, Western social science in particular. As Lafargue polemicizes,

the workingman who eats sausage and receives a hundred sous a day knows very well that he is robbed by the employer and is nourished by pork meat, that the employer is a robber and that the sausage is pleasant to the taste and nourishing to the body. Not at all, say the bourgeois sophists, whether they are called Pyrrho, Hume or Kant. His opinion is personal, an entirely subjective opinion; he might with equal reason maintain that the

employer is his benefactor and that the sausage consists of chopped leather, for he can not know *things-in-themselves*. (cited in Lenin 1962, 204)

The Marxist paradigm contained within it relative truths correctly reflecting the objective truth of social processes, a feature which consigned the future generation of bourgeois sophists to the clear absurdity of reliance on entirely subjective theories of value (and profit also). Even the “Absolute” (objective albeit) idealism of Hegel recognized that “various forms of idealism, Leibnizian, Kantian, Fichtean, and others,” which had “not advanced beyond being as determination, have not advanced beyond this immediacy, any more than scepticism did” (Hegel 1969, 396). Behind the Hegelese, the point is apparent.

Thus Lenin’s third epistemological conclusion springs automatically from a dialectical conceptualization of the scientific process. In our materialist theory of knowledge, we must not regard knowledge as ready-made and unalterable, but determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact. The provisionality and conditionality of scientific truths at any given conjuncture cannot be used by forms of fideism and skepticism as indicative of the fundamental incomprehensibility of the objective world. “It is impossible to be a materialist,” remarked Lenin, without accepting the existence of things outside our mind, the source of our sensations. “But one can be a materialist and still differ on what constitutes the criterion of the correctness of the images presented by our senses” (1962, 113).

### ***Historically conditioned***

Thus the limits of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is unconditional, as is the fact that we approach closer to it “asymptotically” as Engels described it, in his *Anti-Dühring* (and other works). That the contours of the picture created by scientific method and practice are historically conditional does not, as positivists contend, invalidate the proposition that the picture depicts (with ever more clarity) an objectively

existing model. While dialectics hence contains an element of relativism, of negation, of skepticism, it is not reducible as such to relativism.<sup>6</sup> It recognizes the relativity of all our knowledge, not in the sense of denying that objective truth exists, but that the limits of approximation of our knowledge to this truth are historically conditional. Thus dialectical materialism, while recognizing the relativity of phenomena, recognizes that relativity is itself relative;

that absolute truth results from the sum total of relative truths in the course of their development; that relative truths represent relatively faithful reflections of an object independent of mankind; that these reflections become more and more faithful; that every scientific truth, notwithstanding its relative nature, contains an element of absolute truth. (Lenin 1962, 309)

For present day sophism, not only in social science (see Hirst and Hindess 1977, for example), the mutability of scientific conceptions is often concerned as grounds for a retreat into irrationalism via relativism. Yet the increasing recognition of the probabilistic nature of even major areas of “hard science” (Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in atomic physics, for example) is entirely compatible with, indeed derivative of, a dialectical understanding of the scientific process, which would acknowledge, says Lenin, citing Engels, that truth and error themselves, like all thought concepts which move in polar opposites, have absolute validity only in an extremely limited field (Lenin 1962, 134–5). It was Einstein’s own fideism, ironically, that led him to reject the statistical character (“God does not throw dice”) of the (then) new quantum theory associated with Planck (Heisenberg 1971).

Human conceptions of space and time are relative, but these relative conceptions go to compound absolute truth. These relative conceptions in their development, move towards absolute truth and approach nearer and near to it. The mutability of human conceptions of space and time no more refutes the objective reality of space and time than

the mutability of scientific knowledge of the structure and forms of matter in motion refutes the objective reality of the external world.” (Lenin 1962, 175)

The retreat into irrationalism and fideism, attempts by skepticism to use the provisionality of knowledge as proof of the non-existence of objective truth, all can only be confronted by materialism in its practical activity. “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking,” as Marx noted, “is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or nonreality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question (Marx 1976, 6).

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#### NOTES

1. As Plekhanov put it, they were merely the ideological expression of the revolutionary bourgeoisie’s struggle against the clergy, the nobility, and the absolute monarchy (1976, 2:45).

2. Marcuse absurdly accused Lenin as having “replaced [in this work] the dialectical notion of truth by a primitive naturalistic realism, which has become canonical in Soviet Marxism” (cited in Slater 1977, 39).

3. Very much the doctrine of praxis. As John Hoffman puts it: “Theory is not abstract because it is general; on the contrary, it is a thousand times more concrete because it encompasses in its scope a far greater slice of reality than more limiting particularising concepts” (1975, 67).

4. Even more astounding was Gramsci’s comment that “Marx never called his conception ‘materialist’ and how, when speaking of French materialism, he criticised it” (1987, 117)—although this misreading of Marx (*Holy Family*) may validate the point that Gramsci did not receive Marx direct, but “through the eyes of Labriola, Croce, Gentile and Mondolfo” (Nemeth 1980, 7).

5. How Korsch would conclude that Lenin “seems to be unaware that such a ‘materialist inversion’ of Hegel’s idealist philosophy involves at the most a merely terminological change whereby the Absolute instead of being called ‘Spirit’ is called ‘Matter,’” is quite beyond belief. See Slater 1977, 38. Equally facile is Bernstein’s remark that “Pure or absolute materialism is just as

spiritualistic as is pure or absolute idealism. The two simply assume, although from different viewpoints, that thinking and being are identical; they differ ultimately only in their mode of expression" (cited in Plekhanov 1976, 2:326).

6. Weber, for example (purely subjective view of economic rationality, etc.). See Brubaker 1984, 57.

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### **Socialism—the Historical Alternative to Capitalism**

#### **German Communist Party**

*A draft statement on its conception of a socialist Germany prepared by the German Communist Party (Deutsche Kommunistische Partei—hereafter DKP) for discussion, revision, and subsequent submission to the Party Congress in May 1998 was published in the Party's newspaper, Unsere Zeit, on 3 January 1997. We present here a translation of the German text as revised through 21 September 1997. The current version of the text can be found on the DKP Web page <http://www.dkp.de/sozi-eng.htm>*

In our century the scientific-technological revolution has created almost immeasurable opportunities to improve human life. Never have people had so many chances to develop their productivity and creativity and at the same time to reduce their physical burdens. It would be possible today to overcome hunger and misery worldwide, to make possible a dignified human life without poverty, and simultaneously to pass the earth on to future generations as a viable ecosystem.

Yet the reality appears otherwise. The vast growth of productive forces and the increase in social wealth have occurred under the predominance of capitalist relations of production. These

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furthered, first of all, scientific and technological progress and, in the industrialized countries, social progress as well, as a consequence of the organized struggle of the working class. The development of the forces of production, however, serves capitalism only as a means for the utilization of capital. Thus they actually become a hazard to the foundations of existence of human life. The annihilation of humanity and all highly developed forms of nature is possible today through a nuclear, chemical, or biological war, or by the manipulation of human genes. As the destruction of the living environment proceeds, it becomes irreversible. Under the compulsion of capital accumulation—the principle of this social system—there are no effective means to eliminate this risk. Under capitalist conditions, degeneration and destruction accompany all scientific-technological progress.

The basis of contemporary society is production by division of labor. Almost everything is now produced not for the immediate consumption of the particular producer but for social exchange in the society. Production is not socially, however, but privately organized, and its results are privately appropriated by the few.

The means of production, raw material, and labor must first be changed into commodities and then into capital, before production can begin. For the owner of capital, production has a single aim, the utilization of capital, to squeeze surplus value out of labor, and to realize this through the sale of manufactured commodities, in order to begin the whole process on a new stage on a larger scale than previously.

In this manner capitalism has increased the productive forces of labor immensely. But every rationalization here means not only the production of new products with less work, but at the same time also production of more unemployment on the one hand and greater exploitation on the other.

At the same time as the means of production set in motion by one worker become ever more gigantic, social wealth must continually become concentrated in fewer hands, in order to be able to come out a winner in the process of worldwide capitalist competition.

Capitalism is production not for the sake of people, but for the sake of profit. Human beings do not govern production, but

production rules society and presents itself as the force of circumstance, the force of circumstance of capitalist competition, of maximization of profit.

All relationships in the society, the life relationships of individuals, independently of the individual, appear inverted, stood on their head. Under capitalist conditions, human beings become not the subject but the object of history; and production relations are transformed from the object of human creative planning to the subject of history.

***For a revolutionary break with capitalism!***

The goal of Communists is to abolish these causes of exploitation and alienation, of war and hunger, of poverty and homelessness, of the scramble for jobs and of unemployment, of destruction of the environment, and of discrimination, racism, nationalism, and oppression.

This is not possible if we remain in the sphere of the force of circumstance of capital.

Therefore a revolutionary break with capitalism is necessary: abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, social labor free from exploitation, socialization of the means of production, production for the needs of humanity according to a plan developed collectively, and the social appropriation of society's wealth.

Today all material prerequisites are present to provide employment for everyone; conditions already exist to guarantee everyone a life in dignity with each one performing only a fraction of labor that is now demanded.

For this, however, another social order is required. The perspective of such a society is no pious wish. It grows out of the contradictions of present capitalist society itself. It is these developments that continually give rise anew to the necessity and possibility of socialism. Its own contradictions force capitalism to bump against its borders, where it must take stock of the elements for overcoming crises—these already foreshadowing the perspective of another society, the materialization of which, however, requires the militant intervention of the people.

Capitalism polarizes society into two great opposing classes: into a class that has control over the modern means of production, and thus over social wealth, and into a class of people who are cut off from this control and have nothing to sell but their physical and mental capacities, their labor power. On this basis we call this second class the working class, fully conscious that this class today is structured into multiple layers.

The working class must be, corresponding to its historical responsibility, the decisive force in saving human civilization and in the achievement by struggle of the transition from capitalism to socialism. In order to accomplish this task, it will seek an alliance with all classes and strata whose interests or partial interests coincide with those of the working class. The new society will only come into being if it is based on the agreement of a great majority, desiring an alternative to capitalism and therefore supporting it.

But this new society must look different from the first attempts in this century. The historical conditions for this society are different. We shall have to draw lessons from the serious errors made in these first attempts and create structures that will allow us to avoid such errors. But we shall not be reinventing socialism. This new beginning for socialism that we consider necessary will spring from different sources.

This new beginning grows out of the realization that capitalism must be overcome; it grows out of the hopes, the wrath, and the longings of the overwhelming majority of people. They desire a life without constant worry, without hunger and need, without exploitation and war, and above all, without concern for their daily bread.

It is based on the social and historical interconnections whose foundations were laid out by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It must be renewed and taken up by the working class in order to be fruitful for the future.

It is based on analysis of the experiences from 1917 to 1989. The reasons for the collapse of socialism and the reasons for its enduring over seventy years in a world of imperialist enemies and predators both need scrutiny.

### ***Achievements and distorted developments of “real socialism”***

After the brief course of the Paris Commune, the construction of a socialist social system was begun for the first time in 1917 in Russia. The October Revolution gave humanity the signal for the start of a new world historical epoch. Under the most unfavorable conditions, great achievements were accomplished in the Soviet Union and later in the other socialist states:

★The socialist societies proved over decades that the development of the productive forces and the undertaking of production according to a social plan are possible beyond the profit principle.

★They tore asunder the fetters of imperialist aggression. The long chain of peace policies of socialism ranged from the first decree of Soviet power in 1917, which ended World War I for Russia, through the victory over Hitler’s fascism, up to the disarmament initiatives of the Warsaw pact.

★Socialism developed economically by itself, without taking part in the exploitation of the developing countries. To its historical achievements belong solidarity in support of the people of these lands in their battle for their national independence, against colonialism and neocolonialism.

★Socialism put through social achievements that have not been reached in the rich imperialist centers: elimination of homelessness and unemployment, equal educational opportunities for all, access of women to skilled employment, free health insurance, and a highly developed mass culture.

★The existence of socialism and its achievements improved the conditions for the struggle for social and democratic reforms in the developed capitalist countries. The bourgeoisie and its regimes were forced to make significant concessions.

In spite of these achievements, socialism in the USSR and the European socialist states suffered a defeat. Internal and external, economic and political, objective and subjective causes for this defeat include:

★The socialist states had to endure extremely difficult initial conditions. The revolution was victorious, first of all, in Russia, an economically backward, weakly developed country without

bourgeois-democratic traditions, with a predominantly peasant population, the majority of whom were illiterate. This backwardness as well as the extreme threat from the imperialist powers made it necessary, in the shortest possible time, to centralize all resources in order to bring forth a modern industry and initiate a cultural revolution. Under these conditions, the Communist Party had to take on the task of comprehensively representing the leading role of the working class.

This was still maintained, however, even after the conditions had changed as a result of industrialization and the cultural revolution. The Party and state merged more and more into an administrative-bureaucratic apparatus. Not only did socialist democracy remain underdeveloped, but it was seriously undermined by the disregard of socialist legality. The extreme external threat to the Soviet Union led to internal repression and terror. Sweeping nationalization was substituted for real socialization. The consequence was an increasing alienation from socialist ownership of property.

★This “model of socialism” was transferred after World War II to the countries that embarked upon the path of socialist development, including even developed countries like the German Democratic Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Although important economic successes could be initially achieved with the administrative-centralized type of socialism, it later proved to lack the flexibility necessary to master the requirements of the scientific-technological revolution. The consequence was that the socialist countries increasingly fell behind the developed capitalist countries in labor productivity and the material standard of living. This had destabilizing consequences.

★The socialist countries failed to develop new types of productive forces adequate for socialism.

★In the long run, the socialist value systems could not draw wide support.

★We see as the chief internal causes for the defeat of socialism the increasing ossification of social relations, the failure of socialism to deal on its own terms with the necessity for ever-new revolutionary developmental measures in correspondence with the existing level of development.

★Also contributing to its demise was the dogmatic ossification of its social theory, which increasingly sapped its strength and prevented the elaboration of a real analysis of concrete conditions and scientifically grounded prognoses that would guide the development of a socialist society. This was the essential basis for the erroneous economic and political decisions.

★The defeat of socialism is at the same time the result of external and internal counterrevolution. From the intervention of fourteen imperialist states against the new Soviet power, and the economic blockades in the nineteen twenties, through the anti-Comintern pact to encircle the Soviet Union, and the aggression of Nazi Germany, up through the embargo policies and the strength-sapping arms race after World War II, the imperialist powers left no stone unturned in their effort to destabilize and destroy socialism.

★In the presence of these internal and external factors, opportunistic tendencies won the upper hand, which increasingly led to the decay of the revolutionary character of Soviet society and the theory of scientific socialism, which favored the penetration of bourgeois ideology, and which finally brought about the collapse of the Soviet system and with it the other socialist states.

### ***Essential characteristics of a future socialism***

Any presentation of socialism can only be provisional, based on the knowledge of the historical course of a steadily changing background of technological, economic, political, and cultural conditions. Nevertheless, one can indicate some necessary prerequisites and incontestable aspects of a future socialist society.

Contributing to the construction of socialism will be forces of different origins—whose interpretations of socialism will be accordingly different—that will work together to pursue the goal of a society freed from the drawbacks of capitalism. The unquestionable basis of the worldview of us Communists is Marxism, the scientific analysis and the perspectives resulting from it. Other approaches can grow out of Christian or general humanist, feminist, pacifist, antiracist, and ecological convictions. The future socialism consequently will be formed through the cooperation of different social forces.

Also to be taken into account is that the Communists in the world, and above all in Europe, are organized into national parties. The focus of our activity is above all shaped by the conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany. Nevertheless we are certain that the future socialist course does not have a chance for a lasting success within only a national framework, but must develop regionally on an all-European scale. For this reason we desire to bring our experiences and efforts to a strengthened theoretical and practical cooperation of Communists that strengthens the Left and at the same time gives impetus to cooperation of all progressive forces in Europe and beyond it in the rest of the world.

Finally, socialism will only be proven successful historically when, in forming a world society, it becomes a worldwide society characterized by a manifold culture, solidarity, cooperation, and equal rights.

***What will come in place of today's society?***

The aim and yardstick for the development of socialism is socialist humanism. It concerns the overcoming of "all relations in which people are degraded, enslaved, forsaken, despised beings"; it concerns their freedom from exploitation and "the free development of each [as] the condition for the free development of all," a self-determining and self-shaping worthy life for all people.

Socialism means emancipation and the increasing benefits of freedom for all. It demands:

**Social justice.** Socialism brings about social human rights, the rights to work, social security, and housing.

**Equal opportunity.** Socialism secures equal opportunity to education and development and makes possible equal access to the goods of culture for all.

**Freedom and self-determination.** Socialism guarantees for the first time in history the unity of social and political human rights as the essential basis for free self-development, that is, at the same time the competent and consciously responsible activity of

the individual in society as “a condition for the free development of all.”

**Equal rights.** Socialism lays the basis for the real equality of the sexes. Socialism ensures equal rights for all people regardless of nationality, religious belief, or worldview.

**Solidarity.** The relations between people will be marked by a community of spirit, many-sided aid, and support.

**Internationalism.** The world will come ever closer together in economics, communications, and migration. The socialists of the entire world will work together with the aim of forming a community of struggle against imperialism and for maintaining peace; of implementing active solidarity with oppressed and exploited peoples and of supporting their freedom and development; of promoting friendship and mutual concern among all peoples; of building the necessary cooperation among the parties and states embarking on the path to socialism.

**Responsibility for the future.** Solidarity and internationalism require responsible treatment of our environment and its resources in the interest of a life befitting all human beings in all parts of the earth and for the future of coming generations.

Socialism is the most exciting societal project for the future of humanity. It constitutes an enormous step ahead on the way to “liberty, equality, fraternity,” which the bourgeoisie once inscribed on its banners in its fight against feudalism, but which was a goal doomed to failure under the capitalist profit system.

The future society will be fundamentally different from the present capitalist system:

★through an economy that will no longer be oriented toward private profit as the basis of the way and means with which we reproduce our daily life;

★through a democracy in which the people are the real masters for the first time in history.

The dominance of social ownership of the means of production and the political power (based on this) of the working class in alliance with the other working people are indispensably

necessary conditions for the construction of a socialist society. This requires likewise a planned reorganization of social development.

### *The economy*

Socialism leads to a fundamental break with the capitalist mode of economy, which is directed toward the extraction of maximum profits through the exploitation of human labor power and the wasteful manipulation of natural resources. The task of socialism is the satisfaction of the material and cultural needs of the people through higher productivity of social labor and the application of the natural riches to reliable economic measures on the basis of social planning and management.

The basis of socialist production relations is the socialization of the more decisive means of production. In this way a meaningful socialization will occur instead of a sweeping nationalization embracing the entire society—Marx and Engels saw nationalization only as a first step in the appropriation of the means of production. The producers must be transformed from formal to actual owners of socialist property, alienation from property and the means of production must be overcome.

The principal content of the first steps to socialism that our generations will undergo is the construction of socialist self-determination. What is this concretely? The old title of ownership of the large corporations, banks, and insurance companies by individuals will be eliminated. The right and obligation to control the production of goods and services will be given over to the producers. Therefore centralized, democratically determined planning and monitoring agencies are indispensable to carry out the essential tasks in regard to the socialized property—financial institutions and large corporations (including manufacturing and distribution organizations).

Nevertheless, socialism will have a variety of property forms, for example, state, municipal, cooperative, and private production by small enterprises.

The concrete form of the labor and production processes themselves, however, will not be subject to central planning. The

swift advance of communications technology, with its network of interlinkages growing daily, makes it possible to do what was not possible between 1917 and 1989—the direct involvement of the producers themselves, prior to production, in the decisions regarding the work they are to perform.

Little by little—but first under the assumption that private ownership of the principal means of production has been done away with—it will be possible to remove from the market increasing segments of the economy. Increasing amounts of goods and services that satisfy the needs of people will cease to be commodities. Labor power will cease being a commodity. In this way, the exploitation of people will be overcome.

Further essential areas will lose their character as commodities, being taken out of the valuation process and made accessible to all:

- ★education
- ★healthcare
- ★sports
- ★recreation
- ★protection of nature

Little by little, broader and broader areas will be characterized by communal activity instead of the laws of the private economic market. From the very beginning, the right to a job, housing, food, and clothing will be guaranteed.

In this way, socialism can develop into a social formation in which the people, on an ever-higher scale, will be able to shape and change their living conditions consciously in accordance with their needs. It is even necessary in the overcoming of the economic causes of exploitation of people by other people to overcome the economic factors that lead to social relations separated from and in opposition to the people.

Socialism will have to find a way during its development to organize the complex division of labor in production and exchange of goods so that exchange value will no longer take the place of use value. This goal must be kept in sight from the very beginning.

**Democracy**

Socialism means the rule of the people. Underlying this can only be the following assumptions: In order to establish another path of development in place of the clenched-fisted power of capital, a comprehensive mass struggle is necessary. The beginning of the socialist path is not the result of a putsch, but only the result of the activity of millions of people—thus, the expression of a deep democracy.

Every bourgeois democracy—however large the formal room for political freedoms may be—is based on the economic power of the capitalist class. It is in every case a form of the political rule of capital, the rule of a small minority over the majority. And even these limited rights and freedoms are constantly being threatened under capitalism. Only in socialism, with the political power of the working people and the most important means of production transformed into social property, will the democratic rights and freedoms won in struggle by the working class under capitalism have a secure foundation. The working class, at the same time, creates qualitatively new freedoms under socialism.

Socialism guarantees the right to work, equal opportunity in education, effective and lasting social security. It establishes the social basis for the equal rights of women. Already in its initial phase, the conditions to put socialist democracy on a lasting basis in the new society must be created.

Key questions here are the election, accountability and right of recall of all important political functionaries, oversight by the people of the political organs of power, the development of forms for democratic decision making, the elevation of responsibility, and the unfolding of direct democracy through voting and other direct possibilities for activity and decisions.

An important place in a socialist democracy is occupied by the trade unions, including their representative trade union and enterprise bodies, as the most encompassing class organizations of the wage and salaried workers. They are not only involved with the determination of wages and social security benefits in the enterprises, and with other working and living conditions, but they will participate directly in the planning and management of

the economy and society. On all levels they will directly and continually put forward the interests and the influence of the working class.

The role and influence of nongovernmental organizations and citizen initiatives by working people, women, youth, and pensioners will also grow. The process of dismantling the state in favor of self-organization and self-management should already begin under socialism and not be put off into a distant communist future.

The history of the struggle for socialism has brought forward different forms for the organs of socialist power: communes, soviets or councils, socialist parliaments. The people involved may possibly develop new forms appropriate to their historical conditions. Socialist parliaments must become real organs of people's sovereignty and representation.

The DKP also supports the right of an active opposition to exist within the framework of a socialist constitution. The constitution and the fundamental democratic rights embodied in it; individual political and social human rights; freedom of culture, worldview, and religious convictions; and also the rights and the responsibility of the media are to be strictly respected. Constitutional law must be guaranteed. An effective separation between parliament, the executive, and the judiciary is indispensable. This must be democratically legitimized, however, by the people's control over all organs through elections and the possibility of recall at any time.

What place does a Communist Party have in the future in the political system of a socialist society? Its task should be to succeed in winning the confidence of the working people and to influence their thinking by putting forth the best political ideas and initiatives in competition with other political forces. Above all, the Communist Party will seek to elaborate strategic orientations for the further organization of socialism and to win over the majority, to develop a socialist consciousness in the masses, and to mobilize them for independent activity rich with initiatives for building socialism and defending it against all attempts to reestablish capitalism.

Socialism can only be the result of the will and activity of the

working class, of the masses of people. It requires the agreement of the majority of the people. But it can prevail only with determined class warfare against the embittered resistance of monopoly capital. Confrontations will continue under socialism; it will be necessary to struggle for the dominance of socialist values and attitudes.

The DKP will work to bring the understanding of the necessity of socialism and struggle to bring it into being to ever larger sections of the working people, the marginalized unemployed, as well as those still in school.

### *The path to socialism*

The principal concern in the Federal Republic today is the defense of the social and democratic achievements threatened by the cabinet and capital, and the resistance to German imperialism's great-power policy of exploiting and oppressing the people at home and endangering peace abroad. In these struggles against the antihuman ideology and social conceptions of imperialism, forces must be gathered together to force through progressive reforms, turning from the dismantling of social and democratic achievements toward creation of more democratic social and ecologically oriented policies. Crucial meaning comes thereby to the enterprise and trade-union struggles and extraparliamentary movements. In unfolding these struggles, the DKP sees at the same time a most important need for the modification of the parliamentary balances of power. The proposals for this line of struggle are contained in the DKP program for action.

The main obstacle to social progress is the economic and political power of monopoly capital. The curtailment and ultimate overcoming of the rule of this most powerful section of the bourgeoisie is therefore the crucial prerequisite for opening the path to socialism. The DKP therefore strives to build alliances and movements that will bring together for struggle and change the widest possible social forces whose interests stand in contradiction to the policy of the dominant monopoly bourgeoisie and their political agencies. Forces brought into comprehensive alliances formed around concrete goals can undertake joint actions directed toward fundamental social change. The DKP considers it possible that

such an antimonopoly struggle can lead to fundamental democratic transformations and open the path to socialism.

How this path will be shaped concretely is an open question. It depends on the strength of the working class, the stability of its alliance with other democratic forces, the influence of the Communists, but also on the forms of resistance by reaction. The experiences of class warfare teach us that whenever monopoly capital has seen its power and privileges threatened, it has always attempted to use all means at its disposal to prevent social progress, including the establishment of fascist dictatorships and the unleashing of civil wars.

In the ensuing struggle, this inevitable resistance must be overcome. The forces striving for socialism must achieve a strength that will enable them to prevent reaction from amassing a bloody counterrevolutionary force and thereby establish the most favorable conditions for the working people to move on to socialism.

In view of the power of international finance capital and the transnational corporations, the growing globalization of capitalist production, and the processes of integration of the monopolies in Europe, heightened emphasis must be placed on internationalist cooperation of the working class and its organizations, the development of a coordinated strategy of the Communist parties and other left forces for the defense of the direct interests of the working people, and still more to the struggle for overcoming monopoly power and opening the way to socialism.

The DKP is committed to make its contribution to this struggle. The slogan “Proletarians and oppressed peoples of all countries unite” is as relevant today as ever.

**Drafted by the Executive Committee of the DKP**

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International Conference on the Occasion of the  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*

**The Spirit of the *Manifesto*  
on the Eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Sponsored by *Nature, Society, and Thought*  
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**August 7–9, 1998, New York Marxist School  
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The revolutionary movements that emerged from the call of the *Communist Manifesto* have long sought to build broad left alliances to advance the interests of all oppressed sections of the population while retaining their identity as class-based forces committed to the socialist transformation of society.

In the wake of the collapse of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, revolutionary Marxism faces a new schism comparable to that which led Marx to write his famous *Critique of the Gotha Program*. A new wave of reformism seeks the total replacement of ideologically grounded revolutionary movements based on the working class with broad multiclass pluralistic coalitions.

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## **BOOKS AND IDEAS**

*by Herbert Aptheker*

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### **Blues for America**

Doug Dowd, head of the economics department at Cornell in the 1960s, and a significant figure of the Left in the struggles against the militarist conquest of the presidency in the postwar era, has produced an important account and critique of those decades in *Blues for America: A Critique, a Lament and Some Memories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997; cloth \$38, paper \$18). The mixture of the personal and political is done deftly; the book is exciting as well as illuminating.

Some failings may be noted before we turn to the positive features of the book. Overall, the author demonstrates his anti-Communist Party bias via omissions that detract from the book's value. Glaring, too, is the absence of any mention of the student uprising pioneered at Berkeley in the 1960s. Certainly that effort was consequential in sparking such later uprisings as that at Cornell, which Dowd describes at length.

Noteworthy also, in the account of his visit to North Vietnam in 1970, is his failure to mention the journey in 1965–1966 to North Vietnam by this writer, accompanied by Tom Hayden and Staughton Lynd. That created a sensation and allowed the three of us—separately—to bring the antiwar demand to tens of millions throughout the United States. Dowd fails to mention Lynd at all—really a glaring omission considering Lynd's consequential role in the entire Left of the sixties. Dowd does briefly refer to Hayden twice in other connections, but he does so with hostility so extreme as to be startling.

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I found it quite extraordinary that even in a frankly fragmentary account of the postwar years no mention is made of W. E. B. Du Bois, nor of the monstrous effort by Washington to send that aged historic figure to prison, and the successful global campaign to prevent that scandal. It is also astonishing to see a total omission of the Rosenberg case. Again, in commenting quite favorably upon the appearance late in the 1960s of the Peace and Freedom Party in California, Dowd omits mentioning that some years earlier the congressional campaign undertaken by this writer in New York was called the Peace and Freedom Party.

In general, I think these omissions reflect Dowd's determination to write of the postwar epoch without mentioning the Communist Party, of considerable influence in that period. (He does say that "accusations" of his membership were false.)

In describing his visit to North Vietnam and his conversation with Prime Minister Pham Van Dang, Dowd observes the latter's keen awareness of the antiwar movement in the United States. The prime minister believed that the strength of that movement prevented Washington from using atomic weaponry. Pham added, writes Dowd, that "only those weapons could defeat them."

In my discussions with Pham, as I published at the time, this matter of the use of atomic weapons by Washington came up. The prime minister remarked that certainly his government did not have such weapons, but added that the nations supporting North Vietnam did have them. This, he argued persuasively to me, was decisive in preventing the Washington criminals from using the monstrous weaponry.

In writing quite perceptively of the Roosevelt administrations, especially the first one, Dowd notes the president's basically conservative outlook. He attributes the change in that attitude, beginning in 1935 (what he calls "a second New Deal," seeking to improve "the rights and standards of ordinary people") to "his advisers (including Eleanor)." There certainly was such a change and Mrs. Roosevelt favored it, but neither she nor his advisers could have induced that change without the immense pressure resulting from the mass uprising, especially in the newly surging

labor movement and the African-American liberation efforts. That needs emphasis, not omission, as in this volume.

On the whole, however, the book is an important source for those seeking a thoughtful examination of the postwar years and the present.

Especially welcome are the pages devoted to showing how atrocious was the employment of the atomic weapon (twice!) by Washington, which then knew that Tokyo was on its knees and seeking surrender. Dowd tellingly brings forth evidence to support this important reality from the writings of Stewart Udall (in both the Kennedy and Johnson cabinets), as well as Churchill. The latter wrote that Japan's "defeat was certain before the first bomb fell." Admiral William Leahy, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Naval Forces, stated that "the use of this barbarous weapon was of no material assistance in the war against Japan." And Eisenhower opposed its use, as he declared:

on two grounds: First the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first to use such a weapon.

Overall, Dowd proves persuasively that "the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not so much the last engagement of World War II as they were the first shot of the Cold War."

Very valuable is Dowd's treatment of the Korean War—"perhaps," he writes, "the most ferocious war in history." This is worth fuller quotation:

Up to the last days of the war, the U.S. Navy shelled the northern coastal city of Wonsun twenty-four hours a day unremittingly for 861 days. (During most of the period, peace negotiations were going on.) Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, was reduced to something less than rubble. . . . [I]n the last year of the war, the main hydroelectric dams providing most of the North's electric power were blasted to uselessness. . . . [N]apalm . . . was being dropped ceaselessly on villages throughout the North for three years leaving nothing of life behind.

Dowd's pages on Korea illuminate much of the news from that area reaching us today. It is worth adding that Dowd writes that *prior* to 25 June 1950, when the North attacked in force, "it was after serious attacks within the preceding forty-eight hours from the South." I cannot resist adding that this writer affirmed that reality in the August 1950 issue of *Masses & Mainstream* and was excoriated for doing so at the time. (Dowd makes no mention of this and probably was unaware of it.)

The book is adorned by several especially telling paragraphs. For example, Dowd writes of the Vietnam War:

We did our best to destroy those people and their beautiful country. . . . Most of our people do not yet and will not ever understand the nature or the scope of the war crimes we committed. . . . we did just about everything that could be done to destroy their beloved country, and came all too close to succeeding, and, in adopting those ends and those means, we destroyed a very important part of our own country, and made it harder to love.

The volume is superb in coverage of Cambodia and the intense censorship concerning it. It exposes Washington's responsibility for the numerous atrocities in Latin America. Summing up, Dowd writes bluntly and truly:

One wonders how many hundreds, thousands of bloody lies our government has fed us over the years about so many other disgraceful and dangerous actions; and what it has done to us that may never be undone.

One expects, given Dowd's expertise in economics, that his pages on the realities of the economic situation in the United States and worldwide are deeply informative. The postwar era has seen a "redistribution of income unprecedented in either its rapidity or its dimension." On a global scale,

this has meant that in the generation ending in the 1990's the share of world's income for the richest 20 percent rose from 70 to 85 percent; that is the other 80 percent—a quarter of whom try to survive on a daily income of one dollar suffered a decline in their share.

Dowd concludes by arguing persuasively for the need of a basic change in the politics of this country. The need is urgent: "To do nothing is to be a spectator in the continuing disappearance of America." To participate actively in efforts for basic change in the politics of our country is "to put our minds and energies and hearts into staving off the dark and letting in some light," thus "offering our society and ourselves the chance and the right to live up to our uncommon possibilities."

Dowd's book significantly adds "some light" to our present condition. If widely read, the volume will help bring the deep changes so desperately needed by the people of our nation.

### **Social dynamite**

The disparity between rich and poor is growing in the United States. One result is the appointment of an investigating commission by President Clinton to ascertain the facts and suggest remedies. Such action by a president faced with potential social dynamite has been customary since Hoover appointed the Wickersham Committee in 1932. Normally the act serves to defuse rather than warn, and perhaps that is what motivates Clinton now. This time, however, there is some reason to hope that the contrary will result. This is due to the fact that Clinton appointed John Hope Franklin to chair the committee. Franklin's eminence made the appointment obligatory, but if camouflage is what Clinton desired, his choice of a chairman reflects ignorance. John Hope Franklin is not only preeminent; he is also courageous and honest. If he retains his position, one may be sure the committee's recommendations will be not dubious and deceitful but penetrating and forthright,

The president's action reflects ruling-class worry about the extraordinary polarization of wealth in this nation and the evidence of growing discontent among those at the bottom of the ladder—especially the millions of African Americans among them. The polarization is unprecedented: Graef S. Crystal's *In Search of Excess: The Overcompensation of American Executives* (New York: Norton, 1992; cloth \$19.95) has shown that the average pay of a typical U.S. worker as compared with that of a typical corporate chief executive officer is 1:120; in Japan it is

1:16; in Germany, 1:21; in the United Kingdom, 1:23. I repeat: a CEO in the United States is paid 120 times as much as the average worker.

As usual in U.S. history, the disparity is most acute in terms of Black contrasted with white. Thus the official data show: 22 percent of all children in the United States (over 15 million) live in poverty; for Black children, the poverty rate is over 50 percent!

This reality has provoked not only the president's appointment of an investigating committee; it has led to columns even in the *New York Times* (20 June 1997), where the NAACP is quoted: "Racism is still endemic. My God, you have to be willfully blind not to see it." Naturally the scribes of the ruling class are "willfully blind." Thus, the editor-in-chief of *U.S. News and World Report* (7 July 1997) devotes a page to denouncing affirmative action and minimizing racism's existence. He calls for univalent education—such as that, no doubt, which produced the disparities now troubling even the president.

The data and comments presented above suggest the timeliness of the recently published book by Carl T. Rowan, *The Coming Race War in America: A Wake-Up Call* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996, cloth \$22.95). The author is presently a syndicated columnist; in the 1960s he was U.S. ambassador to Finland and a member of the National Security Council. Rowan denounces the "perverse set of government and private sector priorities that allocate billions to the Pentagon to fight a two-front war while spending just pennies to combat the war on children in America."

It is past time not for a "race war in America," but a deeply radical overhauling of this country's politics so that human needs rather than the limitless greed of the handful of the super-rich will determine our nation's path. If this is still further delayed we will see not only a "race war," but a war of the deprived and neglected of all colors and of no color against the few whose limitless greed is shaming and imperiling this nation.

### **Need for revolutionary change**

If ever an ongoing social order needed revolutionary change, the present United States is such an order. Foolproof evidence exists that every president since the close of World War II has

consciously deceived the U.S. population, and this deception has served to make the minuscule class of the superrich more and more wealthy. Exposure of this reality in two fine books was discussed in my last column: Frank Kofsky's *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948: A Successful Campaign to Deceive the Nation* and Paul Brodeur's *Secrets: A Writer in the Cold War*.

A recent fully persuasive exposure of corruption at the highest levels of government is *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Controversy and Cover-Up* (New York: Norton, 1997; \$29.95) by Lawrence E. Walsh, chief counsel investigating such activity. The demonstration of criminality involving the deaths of thousands and the maintenance in power of Washington satraps responsible for these murders is fully persuasive. Not least appalling in this careful chronicle of high-level illegality is the absence, as Walsh deplores, of punishment of these criminals, from presidents to avaricious subordinates.

An important supplement to these exposures, demonstrating the key role of a thoroughly corrupt media-information industry serving to sustain the criminals, is the work of Norman Solomon and Jeff Cohen, authors of *Wizards of Media Oz: Behind the Curtain of Mainstream News*, issued by the maverick Common Courage Press (Monroe, Maine, 1997; paper \$15.95). This book proves the corruption of such influential purveyors of "news" as George Will (once a speechwriter for Jesse Helms of North Carolina) and David Brinkley. It demonstrates the reactionary realities behind campaigns against affirmative action and the practice of covering up or distorting the nature of murderous regimes like those tormenting Colombia and Indonesia. Studs Terkel, in his introduction to this compelling book, states that it presents "all the news that the Respectables find unfit to print." Perhaps not all the news—that would require more than the three hundred pages in *Wizards*—but the volume provides important ammunition for those who want a thorough cleansing of the filth dominating the "mainstream" news.

### **Murder most foul**

After decades of torment inflicted upon the peoples of Central and South America, with the full support of Washington, certain

governments there have returned to something approaching civilized behavior. U.S. involvement in creating and bulwarking torture-regimes was a central target of the Left in the McCarthy and post-McCarthy eras. The influence of that Left in those years, however, was minuscule.

With the successes of popular movements in parts of Latin America and in South Africa, some of the details of Washington's criminal complicity have begun to reach even mainstream publications. Last spring a Central Intelligence Agency training manual distributed to agents and operatives in 1954 was released. This manual, entitled "A Study of Assassination," concerned the overthrow that year of the democratically elected president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz-Guzman. "Murder is not justifiable," the manual begins, but makes an exception of "assassination," which can be employed "with a clear conscience." The caution is added, "Persons who are morally squeamish should not attempt it."

The "clear conscience" covered the violent overthrow of Guatemala's government. Of course, omitted was the reason for this overthrow: the Arbenz regime had been elected on the basis of its promise to restore Guatemala's resources to the people and to take them out of the hands of such as the United Fruit Company. Various methods of successful assassination are described; an easily available source for this instruction in murder is the August 1997 *Harper's*. The viciousness of this officially created guide to murder is equaled only by Nazi instructions on the use of gas for the annihilation of enemies of the regime.

In July 1997 a government commission in Guatemala began hearings on human rights abuses. The *New York Times* noted editorially (August 5) that this commission's work "will be constrained by penury and political realities." Among those realities was the fact that "cooperation from the military will be scant." The *Times* continued that Washington, "which backed the military for long periods," has agreed to provide one million dollars to support Guatemala's investigating commission. But, adds the *Times*, Washington let Guatemala know that "something more important" than that scant sum is the fact that the U.S. government "has declined to open its own files on Guatemala crimes."

This secrecy is understandable, although the *Times* failed to note this, since Washington's funds and instructions were behind the atrocities.

Perhaps someday renewed Nuremburg Trials will become possible, and the involvement of Washington's murderers will be fully exposed.

Additional evidence has just been released of U.S. government involvement in efforts to murder Fidel Castro. Again, much of this had been exposed in the past, but the latest scandal comes with the partial opening of C.I.A. papers. Here is confirmed the fact that the C.I.A. director (then Sheffield Edwards) noted that between August 1960 and May 1961 several murder attempts were organized, both directly by the agency's personnel and by hired gangsters. We learn that after the Bay of Pigs invasion failed, John and Robert Kennedy approved efforts to murder Castro.

Judith Campbell Exner, who maintained sexual relationships with leading gangsters as well as President Kennedy, says she carried messages from the President and a gangster named Giancana (himself later murdered) concerning plots to kill Castro (*Vanity Fair*, January 1997). The Associated Press, in a dispatch dated July 3, 1997, stated that a volume to be published later in 1997 by the State Department entitled "Cuba, 1961-62" contains information of this nature. It is added that the volume has a total of 450 hitherto secret documents. It has yet to appear.

Several of the founders of this Republic were slave-owners. But no evidence has been forthcoming that they were murderers. Clearly several of their successors have chosen even more foul criminality.

### **Children and violence**

An official study of murders by children, released early in 1997 by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, found that the highest rates of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearms-related deaths occurred in the United States, as contrasted to twenty-six of the other developed countries. The suicide rate for children age fourteen and younger was twice that of the rest of the industrialized nations.

This unique childhood violence, according to Dr. Etienne Vrug, who headed the study, might be associated with “the low level of funding for social programs in the United States.” Another associate of this study, Stephen Teret of Johns Hopkins University, added the unique prevalence of such violence here might be due to “racism, poverty and unequal opportunity.” Might, indeed!

William Julius Wilson (formerly of the University of Chicago and now of Harvard) in his *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Random House, 1997; paper \$13). details the reality faced by millions of U.S. children who “are leading utterly miserable lives.” He urges a new Works Progress Administration (the W.P.A. of New Deal years) in which people were employed in restoring the nation’s infrastructure, building schools, beautifying parks, erecting bridges, etc. Wilson estimates that about \$12 billions of tax money would create a million jobs. The political reality at present, however, requires that Washington be prepared to wage two Gulf-style wars at once. Hence Washington continues providing 40 percent of the government’s income to the so-called Defense Department!

Emphasizing the madness of an intensely cruel social order, two studies released in April 1997 by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington and United For a Fair Economy in Boston demonstrate that “chief executives [of corporations] who lay off thousands of workers tend to get much bigger pay increases than average CEOs.” Increases in compensation for such CEOs averaged 67 percent in 1996; the average worker’s income increased 3 percent—not quite the rate of increase in the cost of living!

Fundamentally changing a social order characterized by such facts is a basic necessity. How to accomplish this is the main question and duty before anyone who values the nation for which Lincoln and Du Bois fought and died.

## Book Reviews

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*German Unification: The Destruction of an Economy.* Edited by Hanna Behrend. London and East Haven, Conn.: Pluto Press, 1995. 246 pages, cloth \$54.95; paper \$17.95.

One of the uglier linguistic creations of recent German is the word *abwickeln*, the process of gradually abolishing an institution, a function, even a person that played a role in the former German Democratic Republic. This important book describes the procedure in merciless detail. Its editor and seven further contributors are all people who were *abgewickelt*, and it is to their credit and heightens their credibility that they unfold their tale with relative objectivity and without bitterness. All of them are academics who had teaching functions in the GDR but—if we believe them—became disgruntled with the oppressive gerontocracy, were happy with the velvet revolution that swept it away in October 1989, and hoped for the continued existence of a political unit that would be truly democratic and socialist and preserve some of the ideas and institutions that had been perverted by the Ulbricht and Honecker regimes. Anyone who has visited eastern Germany recently or follows German affairs knows that these hopes were cruelly dashed.

In her introductory essay, Hanna Behrend recalls the heady days of 1989, the all-too-speedy reunification of 1990 with all its promises and expectations, and the sobering four years that followed. Instead of encouraging wide-ranging discussion in both parts of Germany, instead of recognizing some of the accomplishments of the GDR, the West German government followed a rigid policy of adjusting Eastern to Western ways. The controversial activities of the *Treuhand-anstalt* that privatized the

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state-owned businesses of the GDR, are analyzed in this essay in critical detail.

In another chapter, Manfred Behrend reviews the political movements and parties in East Germany before and after the fall of the GDR. A bewildering number of parties and interest groups sprang up in and after 1989, and their very number and range of goals led to their ineffectiveness. Here, too, the imported parties from the West came out on top. In recent years the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) has assumed an important role as a voice of the remaining Left. The painful transition from a planned to a market economy is discussed by Harry Nick. The GDR was a developed industrial nation, although its assets were outdated, its productivity was much lower than that of West Germany, and most of its products went east. The discussion over whether a speedy shock treatment or a gradual transformation would be better was soon decided in favor of the former and led to large-scale unemployment, early retirements for a large segment of the population, a squandering of economic assets with attendant corruption, and a further concentration of industrial production and redistribution of wealth toward the western part of Germany.

One of the more successful areas of the GDR was its agriculture. Although the land reform of the early 1960s was carried out forcibly and against the wishes of most farmers (many of whom packed up and fled west), the resulting cooperatives, with an average of three thousand hectares of agricultural land, were much more effective and in keeping with contemporary patterns of industrial farming, and benefited employees by giving them regular working hours, paid vacations, an income comparable to that of industrial workers, better schools, and a richer cultural life. Christel Panzig does not mention the severe soil pollution problems nor the fact that the agricultural population was still disproportionately high.

Women have been the real losers in the unification process, as documented by Braun, Jasper, and Schröter. At the end of 1989, 91 per cent of women in East Germany were gainfully employed or undergoing training; millions of them lost their jobs or had to give up working because of cutbacks and rising costs in child care, so that today two-thirds of all those unemployed are women,

especially older women. Although the equality of genders, much touted by the SED (Socialist Unity Party), was never a complete reality, East German women have nevertheless lost many of their privileges, including the choice of an abortion. Their prospects in the immediate future are bleak.

East Germany had constructed a huge scientific and scholarly apparatus as well as a very respectable medical establishment that dispensed free care and was accessible to all. The academies and research institutes were often bloated and some did questionable, ideology-dominated work. But the wholesale destruction at the hands of West German inspectors, not to say inquisitors, was unjustified and benefited mostly West German job applicants. When one compares the number of Nazi professors who kept their jobs after 1945 and the number of scholars “close to the system” who lost theirs after 1989, the difference is obvious. Horst van der Meer rightly calls it “the end of a European tradition.”

The final chapter on right-wing extremism before and after the *Wende*, while valuable in itself, seems tacked on and simply shows that both sides suffer from the same virus.

English and American readers have reason to be grateful for this account in our own language. Unless all authors wrote in English, the translation is excellent. Even though the book is easily legible for expert and lay person alike, I wonder whether a few dabs of color in the form of personal experiences or case studies might not have enlivened and dramatized a volume that is heavy on facts and documentation.

But what I miss most of all is the positive side of German unification, which indubitably exists. What happened to the billions of marks which the Federal Republic, at great expense to its taxpayers, has pumped into the recovery of the East? Where is the modernization that is visibly taking place? Has progress been made in the “growing together” of the two parts of Germany? Perhaps this account has to be written later, perhaps by a different group of scholars.

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*Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism.* By Jon Thompson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 200 pages, cloth \$32.50; paper \$14.95.

This intriguing study of crime fiction from the dark tales of Poe to the murky spy novels of Le Carré is firmly grounded in Marxist aesthetics and the theories of reflection, alienation, and praxis. Jon Thompson demonstrates in fascinating detail the myriad reflections of the social, economic, and political forces of British industrial capitalism and imperialism in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad. Crime fiction, like all modern literature (Thompson eschews distinctions between high art and popular culture), arises from and depicts the material reality of the disruptions of the modern age: the mass removal of populations from the pastoral countryside to urban slums, the alienation of labor in the new factories, the loss of community, tradition, and order.

Enter the detective: an exceptional human being capable of seeing the light through the smog, of finding the truth among the tangle of contradictory accounts, of restoring order to urban chaos. The detective occupies an enlightened space above the confused crowd. Thompson points out that detective fiction necessarily follows the Enlightenment and the historical shift from “a judicial process centered on confession and torture to one centered on trial by evidence” (2). The detective novel reflects the social and judicial evolution of institutions to gather and evaluate evidence. Unfortunately, Thompson leaves the entranced reader with the uncorrected assumption that confession obtained through torture was never again employed by enlightened Western powers, although torture was the dominant method used by forces of French imperialism to prosecute members of the FLN in Algeria two centuries after the Enlightenment.

French imperialism is beyond the scope of this study, which therefore does not include an analysis of Chief Inspector Maigret, created by the champion French crime fiction writer Georges Simenon. Nevertheless, Thompson shows us very clearly how Sherlock Holmes reflects the world order imposed by nineteenth-century British imperialism. Doyle created an immensely popular

hero of a new type, Thompson argues, a sublimely reasonable eccentric who promoted an ideology of imperialism in an age of expansion of both industrial and cultural production. Sherlock Holmes embodies the empiricist approach to understanding experiences and solving problems. Thompson explains:

By empiricism I mean not only the detached, quasi-objective method of interpreting phenomena, but also, more important, a way of thinking about the world, an ideology, which by definition, excludes qualitative, ethical, even aesthetic considerations in favor of abstract quantification, domination, and use of resources, human or natural, in the name of progress or profit. (66)

Thompson convincingly establishes the connection between empiricism and imperialism, showing how Holmes's "acute empirical powers enable him to dominate the vast landscape of London" without exploring the underlying material causes of social unrest. Holmes solves his cases through the narrow logic of empiricism, and finds and then delivers the guilty one to British justice. These detective stories offer a compelling refutation of social and collective guilt. Thompson contrasts the critical realism of Dickens, whose novels expose systemic crime and injustice, with Doyle's stories valorizing the imperialist, capitalist state. Doyle himself served with imperial forces in South Africa. *The Sign of Four* offers the most extensive representation of colonial relations, although East Indians appear often as the inferior, indecipherable Other. Citing Edward Said's analysis of orientalism, Thompson sees *The Sign of Four* as representing an India that is "exotic, cruel, sensual, opulent, and barbaric" (69), and in need of the stabilizing, rational, civilizing influence of Western domination.

Thompson points out that the vivid, seemingly realistic depiction of Victorian London is as mythical as the detective who looks out over the gas-lit streets. The London of Sherlock Holmes is a fictional construct that excludes or domesticates class struggle, racial divisions, and women. Women, like all Others, remain a dark continent (73).

The last section of Thompson's analysis of Doyle's fiction asserts that these bestsellers not only reflected the values of the

dominant institutions, but actually, by propagating and imaging these values, produced consent to the socioeconomic order. Drawing on Gramsci's theories of cultural hegemony, Thompson argues that the popularity of Sherlock Holmes enabled British capital to rule with the consent of the subordinate classes and peoples. Outlining a Foucauldian correlation between knowledge and power, Thompson asserts that Sherlock Holmes embodied and valorized this connection. Knowledge makes might makes right, we might paraphrase, but we cannot accept Thompson's failure to discuss the material might of the police forces of industrial capitalism and the vast armies of imperialism that brutally smashed labor strikes at home and indigenous uprisings abroad. As if British imperialists needed only to distribute two-penny editions of Sherlock Holmes to keep order!

Dame Agatha Christie's crime novels appear to offer a sharp contrast to those of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but as these authors' conferred titles indicate, both served the interests of the British empire. According to her biographer Gillian Gill (*Agatha Christie: The Woman and her Mysteries*, 1990), Christie has sold more copies and earned more royalties than any other writer. (The claim of most copies sold is inaccurate; that honor goes to Lenin, and for crime fiction, to Georges Simenon. But both those authors, especially Lenin, rank far below Christie in royalties.)

The expansion of literary production and distribution continued apace in the half-century that elapsed between the creation of Sherlock Holmes and the appearance of Hercule Poirot. Although these two popular sleuths have few physical traits in common (Holmes is very tall, while Poirot is very short; Holmes lives in disorderly bachelor quarters, while Poirot is obsessively neat; Holmes is quintessentially British, while Poirot is a Belgian refugee), both men solve mysteries by using their superior rational abilities. It should be noted that Holmes relies more on physical clues (empirical data) than does Poirot (who extols the power of his "little gray cells.") The English village provides the setting of Christie's novels (with a few exotic exceptions), and Thompson notes the idealization of the pastoral scene, the evident nostalgia for a preindustrial way of life, the same reactionary longing Thompson observes in the works of Poe. In the case of Poe, a

writer from the U.S. South, Thompson also detects a reprehensible fondness for the slavocracy.

Holmes, well adapted to post-industrial revolution London, helps his clients (and his readers) find their way in the urban jungle. Poirot, an outsider, arrives in an apparently ideal, ordered rural world and uncovers the diseased agent of crime. Yet Doyle and Christie created remarkably similar crime fiction, no matter how opposed their detectives and settings may be, for in all their works it is a question of extirpating the one criminal individual, thereby restoring order and stability to the community. Nowhere does either author question the political, economic, or social status quo. The detectives of both authors observe manners, customs, and laws, while kowtowing to royalty, nobility, and class hierarchies. The worlds of their crime fiction are notable for their “remarkable exclusion of social conflict” (129), notes Thompson, remarking on how happy all Christie’s domestic workers are to work for a lady of the house who is never bored nor beaten.

Gill does note some unusual aspects of Christie’s detectives, and here we must mention her other great creation: Miss Jane Marple. Neither Marple nor Poirot are romantic heroes likely to evoke passionate responses from devoted readers; in fact, both are old and odd-looking. Poirot, a foreigner in exile, is obviously a social anomaly, but in a larger sense, so too is Miss Jane Marple, who, though she has lived most of her life in St. Mary Mead, is also different: she has never married, has been educated abroad (in Florence), and has many friends, both old and young, male and female. True identity is often a puzzle in Christie’s novels, where stereotypes based on age and gender are strongly refuted.

Unlike almost all her English mystery-writing contemporaries, male and female, Agatha Christie does not assume that murder is essentially a masculine business or that women murderers exude the naked female sexuality loved and feared by the American “hard-boiled school.” (145)

Thompson agrees that questions of identity lie at the heart of Christie’s fictions, and thus, even though her pastoral settings

would place her works in the conservative modernist tradition, her plots, with their focus on masks and unmasking, display “a congenital similarity to one of the cardinal tenets of radical modernism, namely, the rejection of the bourgeois claim to a stable ego, consistent with its perception of itself” (130). In sharp contrast to Doyle, Christie questions the adequacy of empiricism to solve human dilemmas; her works even leave the reader with an uneasy feeling that all is not well. Thompson sees an analogy with the critique of bourgeois existence proposed by Walter Benjamin, “a soulless luxuriance” ripe for violence (133).

The “hard-boiled school” of U.S. detective novels depicts a soulless urban squalor permeated by violence. Thompson sees this fiction as rooted in human responses to the modern urban world of the early twentieth century, comparing the setting of Hammett’s novels to that of Brecht’s theater. But it must be noted that while Brecht celebrates solidarity and collective action against evil and injustice, the hard-boiled detective is an isolated individual imbued with skepticism, relativism, and alienation. But like Brecht—and Marx (Thompson begins his chapter on Hammett with a wonderful quotation from *The German Ideology*)—the “violence of things” is due to class conflict and the corruption of all bourgeois institutions. In *The Glass Key*, for instance, official politics is indistinguishable from the actions of gangsters. Unlike the hegemonic works of Arthur Conan Doyle, Hammett’s fictions produce critical rather than consoling images of society, and there is no way the detective can restore calm and order by the end of the story. In fact, there is no solution, because crime is intrinsic to the system (146).

Thompson amply proves, through detailed references to all his major works, that Dashiell Hammett’s fiction is “radically antibourgeois,” but he asserts that Hammett’s sexual politics undercut this radicalism. (In a recent forum on the works of Raymond Chandler, that other master of the “hard-boiled school” was also castigated for his portrayal of women [*New York Times*, 13 April 1996, 13].) Yet for all his sexist, objectifying descriptions of the women who walk in and out of his detectives’ lives, Hammett does at least reject the virgin/whore polarity and, in

several key episodes noted by Thompson, the detective refuses to pass any moral judgment on a woman who has betrayed him (143–4). On the whole, despite the stunning exception of Nora Charles, Thompson finds Hammett's women characters very disappointing and traditional. This contradictory aspect of Hammett's art—a radical critique of capitalism but a reactionary portrayal of women—is the inverse of the contradiction Thompson finds in many English novels of detection where smart, capable, radically modern women detect, yet the novel supports and sustains bourgeois society.

Thompson's study does not encompass contemporary U.S. detective novels, although he does mention the works of Sara Paretsky as an example of the continuing influence of Hammett's incorporation of a critique of bourgeois institutions in the detective novel. A sampling of contemporary U.S. women mystery writers shows that many follow the model of the English novel of detection—radical sexual politics and conservative political views.

Nevada Barr, for instance, is writing a series of mysteries situated in U.S. national parks featuring Park Ranger Anna Pigeon, who challenges sexual stereotypes and has many good friends who are gay. While protecting the flora and fauna within the park system, she nevertheless accepts the anti-“eco-freak” rhetoric of the timber industry and has fallen in love with an FBI agent involved in some of her investigations. Still, there are more than a few women mystery writers who follow Paretsky's lead of challenging both sexual stereotypes and bourgeois institutions in the course of a crime investigation. Marcia Muller's female sleuths often undertake investigations that lead them to research past labor, antiwar, or civil rights struggles to understand the roots of a problem leading to murder. Barbara Neely, an African-American author, has created a detective who is an African American woman domestic worker with feminist views and a healthy distrust for the ruling class. Recently, a number of mysteries have appeared featuring lesbian detectives. While these novels radically challenge traditional sexual and social institutions, they rarely question the economic and political institutions and class structure of late twentieth-century state monopoly capitalism.

In addition to analyzing detective fiction, Thompson has studied espionage novels from Kipling to Conrad to Le Carré. While Kipling's *Kim* blows the horn for the British Empire, particularly its grand design for the Indian subcontinent, Conrad's *Secret Agent* blows the whistle on both imperialism and capitalism. In stark contrast to the London of Sherlock Holmes, where there are a knowable community and an underlying order, Conrad's London is "fragmented, arbitrary, and alienating," the very vision of modernity, according to Thompson (103). Even more interesting, Conrad reveals anarchism to be the basic principle of bourgeois society, recalling Marx's phrase, "the anarchy of capitalist production." Lest we be left with the mistaken impression that Conrad was a Marxist, Thompson points out fatal flaws in his work, notably the separation of the individual from his environment and the negation of history. (Readers interested in a further critique of Conrad's works should consult *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said [1993].) *The Secret Agent* does present a frightening vision of modern industrial society; the only character with integrity is a fanatical bomber, a former professor. According to recent news reports, Theodore Kaczynski, the confessed Unabomber, had read Conrad's novel dozens of times (story by Serge F. Kovaleski of the *Washington Post* reprinted in the *Star Tribune* 11 July 1996, A12).

Thompson's study of Le Carré's spy novels, focusing on *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, is presented in a final chapter entitled "Agents and Human Agency in the Postmodern World." Thompson presents Baudrillard's theories on postmodernity, including the death of history and the death of the subject, while neglecting Lyotard's analogous premise of the death of the great liberating narratives. Thompson points out that the publication of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* coincided with the development of the defining works of postmodernism and posits that Le Carré's novel similarly questions the existence of objective truth and external reality. The agent has difficulty distinguishing rhetoric from reality, real events from simulations. Yet there are important differences between postmodern theory and Le Carré's espionage fiction, for in the spy novel history is still a narrative of

determinacy, history is the outcome of human action, and the real events of history exist outside the public spectacle (159).

In his conclusion, Thompson discusses the works of Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Nguigi wa Thiong'o. These writers are not usually associated with the genre of crime fiction, but each has published at least one work that focuses on the investigation of a death. Exploring Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* in greatest detail, Thompson concludes that although the real exists, it is difficult to understand and interpret. Furthermore, the connection between knowledge and power has broken down, so that even if the protagonist solves the mystery, he or she is powerless to bring the guilty to justice or restore order. Thompson deals all too briefly with the other three authors—Reed, Garcia Marquez, and Thiong'o, but does point out that they use the detective genre to expose the criminal foundations of Western civilization and the debilitating legacies of colonialism.

*Fiction, Crime, and Empire* is a fascinating study of British and U.S. detective and espionage fiction that demonstrates the vitality and validity of Marxist literary theory as applied to popular culture. Thompson's meticulous notes and extensive bibliography provide not only a great list of beach reading, but a fine guide to Marxist criticism and postmodern theory. We can only hope that Thompson will explore more recent works by U.S. women writers, particularly by African-Americans and Latinas, and by writers from Africa and the Caribbean. Such a study would reinforce his tentative findings that postmodern theories are indeed fictions, and he might notice how convenient it is for the neocolonial powers that theories proclaiming the death of history, the death of the subject, and the death of the great narratives of liberation are being trumpeted at a time when many new voices are writing historical narratives of courageous actions by men and women who refuse to be suppressed by Western theory and practice.

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## ABSTRACTS

**Jana Gohrisch, "Mainstream or Margin? Ethnic Minority Literature in Britain"**—The essay argues that the material conditions of visible ethnic minorities as well as their various positions within society account for the diversity of ethnic minority writers. Therefore, they belong both to the mainstream and to the margin of contemporary literary culture. The central thesis is that ethnic marginality is an important source of creative energy, although not always a cause for celebration as many recent post-colonial critics would have it. Although they are immigrants themselves, they do not share the deprived conditions of living in the economic and social margin of Western society. The essay analyzes major trends in prose and poetry since the 1950s and pays special attention to writers of Afro-Caribbean origin. From their different perspectives, they redefine Britishness and destabilize hitherto accepted linguistic and cultural norms in order to raise the possibility of change.

**Barbara Bush, "History, Memory, Myth? Reconstructing the History (or Histories) of Black Women in the African Diaspora"**—This article addresses the problems of writing the history of subjects that have been "beyond history" in the context of conventional historical methodology. Central to the discussion are the vital links between recorded history, "long memory," and present, lived experience, for the collective memory of the black holocaust and the ensuing long-term trauma remains alive and burning in black diasporic consciousness. Questions of history, myth, and memory as they relate to contemporary black women's identity demand not only a critical evaluation of the shaping of black women's identities in the slave era, but also an examination of the cultural processes at work during the colonial and postcolonial period. The author argues that the era of "freedom" was equally problematic for black women's identities. Black women were encouraged by the white "civilizing" project to reject negative "African" traits and "whiten up," resulting in a

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damaging and confusing “double consciousness” that was complicated by changing gender relations.

**Neil Charlton, “In Defense of the Marxist Theory of Knowledge”**—In response to renewed assaults on the materialist content of the Marxist worldview, a restatement of the basic tenets of the materialist basis of the Marxist theory of knowledge is timely. In his polemic against attempts to wed science with philosophical idealism, especially subjective idealism, Lenin not only defended but further elaborated the Marxist theory of knowledge. The author surveys the most important features of this effort.

**German Communist Party (DKP), “Socialism—the Historical Alternative to Capitalism”**—Draft statement on presenting the idea of socialism in Germany today.

### ABREGES

**Jana Gohrlich, «Une Culture dominante ou aux marges? la littérature ethnique minoritaire en Grande Bretagne »**—Cet essai soutient que les conditions matérielles des minorités ethniques visibles aussi bien que leurs positions variées dans la société expliquent la diversité des écrivains ethniques minoritaires. Pour cette raison ils appartiennent à la fois à la culture littéraire contemporaine dominante et marginale. La thèse principale est que la marginalité ethnique est une source importante de l'énergie créatrice mais pas toujours une cause de louange comme le prétendraient la plupart des critiques postcoloniaux récents. Bien qu'ils soient des immigrés eux-mêmes, ils ne partagent pas les conditions précaires d'une vie marginale socialement et économiquement dans la société occidentale. Cet essai analyse les courants majeurs en prose et poésie depuis les années 50 et examine en particulier les écrivains d'origine Afro-Caraïbe. De leurs perspectives différentes ils redéfinissent le fait d'être Britannique et déstabilisent les normes culturelles et linguistiques jusque là acceptées, afin de soulever la possibilité de changer.

**Barbara Bush, «L’histoire, la mémoire, le mythe? Reconstruire l’histoire (ou les histoires) des femmes noires dans la diaspora africaine»**—Cet article aborde les problèmes d’écriture de l’histoire pour des sujets «au-delà de l’histoire» dans un contexte de la méthodologie historique conventionnelle. La discussion se concentre sur les liens vitaux entre l’histoire enregistrée, «la mémoire de longue durée» et l’expérience présente vécue ; la mémoire collective de l’«holocauste» noir et le trauma à long terme qui s’ensuit restent vivants et brûlants dans la conscience diasporique noire. Les questions de l’histoire, du mythe et de la mémoire, comme elles se rattachent à l’identité des femmes noires contemporaines, demandent non pas seulement une évaluation critique de la formation des identités des femmes noires à l’époque de l’esclavage, mais aussi un examen des processus en cours pendant la période coloniale et post-coloniale. L’auteur constate que l’ère de la «liberté» était également problématique en ce qui concerne l’identité des femmes noires. Les femmes noires étaient encouragées par le projet blanc «de civilisation» à rejeter les traits négatifs «africains» et à se «blanchir», ce qui entraînait une «conscience double» nuisible et déroutante qui se compliquait par les rapports changeants entre les sexes.

**Neil Charlton, «Pour défendre la théorie marxiste du savoir»**—Pour répondre aux attaques répétées du contenu matérialiste de la vision marxiste du monde, une nouvelle présentation des idées fondamentales des bases matérialistes de la théorie marxiste du savoir vient au bon moment. Dans sa polémique contre les tentatives de marier science et idéalisme philosophique, et plus spécialement un idéalisme subjectif, Lénine n’a pas seulement défendu la théorie marxiste du savoir avec son fondement matérialiste, mais l’a faite également évoluer. L’auteur étudie les traits les plus importants de cet effort.

**Parti communiste allemand (DKP), «Le socialisme—l’alternative historique au capitalisme»**—Un projet pour la présentation de l’idéologie socialiste en Allemagne aujourd’hui.

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