

RACIOLOGY, GARVEYISM AND THE LIMITS OF BLACK NATIONALISM IN THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA¹

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West Indian and Caribbean nationalists, including Garveyites, contributed to the anti-imperialist and decolonization movements and struggles. However, West Indian nationalists broadly did not question capitalism and the class relations of exploitation on which it has rested. In the end, the nationalist movement left the struggle for independence with major deficits, including those nationalist narratives that sought to produce “national literatures based on working class and peasant culture” (Rosenberg 1). When nationalists speak in the name of the working class, they leave the impression of espousing a working class political agenda. However, their project does not break with bourgeois consciousness and they never manage to see a way beyond capitalism. They may imagine ways to reduce foreign penetration, domination and what passes for ‘cultural imperialism,’ however this stance reinforces capitalist class relations and bourgeois ideology while it fails to benefit the working class in any fundamental way. Leah Rosenberg says exile helped to shape the “joint emergence of Caribbean nationalism and literature” (4) within an anti-imperialist context that gave rise to a cultural nationalist consciousness that left a strong and often damaging imprint on the character of the working class and labor struggles around decolonization and independence.

There is no doubt that among the nationalists, Garveyites did much to awaken the ideological and political consciousness of masses of West Indians at home and in the African Diaspora. Frank Furedi has shown, in The Silent War: Imperialism and the Silent Discourse of Race (1998), that British and American diplomats in the West Indies and in Africa were very concerned about what they reported on as a high degree of race consciousness among Caribbean blacks with respect to the meaning and implications of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, as well as about the racialized class domination and exploitation and racist oppression in the Caribbean.

Garveyism therefore contributed to the development of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism among ‘African Diaspora’ populations. However, it is necessary to make distinctions between Garveyism as articulated by Marcus Garvey, especially his emphasis on the racial nationalist and the ‘Fascist’ basis of his ideology and political aspirations, and the ways Diaspora blacks appropriated his ideas and applied them to their concrete situations in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. In fact, the political significance of Garvey’s contribution transcended his way of trying to invert white supremacy to promote a form of racial black supremacy around his notion of ‘Africa for Africans.’ Garvey gave the mistaken impression that there was or could be a racial essence to blackness that transcended the horrible experience of enslavement, racial and gender oppression, the racialization of class differences and the horrors of colonialism and imperialism.

¹This essay draws on a much larger paper, “Race and International Relations: Raciology, Garveyism and the Limits of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean Diaspora,” delivered at the 49th Annual International Studies Association Conference, San Francisco, California, March 26-29, 2008.

Rosenberg's observations on the pitfalls of nationalist consciousness in the Caribbean are equally applicable to the contributions by labor leaders and political and cultural nationalists. George Lamming has been one of the most astute observers and critics of West Indian political and cultural nationalism. Lamming understands race as a social construction but he shares with nationalists certain romantic conceptions about the nation that have conditioned how he looks at decolonization, self-determination and independence. Lamming contributes to an impression that the crafters of the independence movements did not get nationalism right, a perspective that seems to target the symptoms of the problem rather than the substantive problems with nationalism which bring us back to epistemological questions about the nature of nations and culture (see Clarke *passim*). These are issues that sooner or later turn on methodological and theoretical questions about the nature of history, human nature, culture and matters of space and time. When we make the state of nature our starting point for theorizing about history we invariably end up historicizing and objectifying nature and naturalizing history, culture and time-space with the effect of immobilizing theory by superimposing on it a teleological interpretation of events (see Jahn).

In the arguments I develop below, I address issues surrounding the racialization of power and class relations. I treat the concept of race as a social construct, rather than a matter of phenotype (see Mills 127). I discuss the conceptual and logical problem with using something which does not exist — biological race — as the starting point for proving its existence which pertains to raciology and raciological thinking (see Watson). I will argue that mainstream or 'moderate Enlightenment' discourses, which were associated with certain major thinkers such as Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Montesquieu, Turgot, and Smith, among others, tended toward a monist conception of universal humanity (see Israel); however, those individuals contradicted themselves by attributing the causes of inequality to racial differences (see Malik). In effect, the moderate (mainstream) Enlightenment contributed to the racialization of history and helped to lay the foundations of the ideological and political domination that has been used to justify racialization and global white supremacy.

I identify a contrasting 'radical Enlightenment' which insisted on the equal worth of all humans without respect to differences in culture, geography, language, ethnicity, or level of material development and social consciousness. Theorists of the 'radical Enlightenment' adopted an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist perspective and insisted that Europe did not have a monopoly on progressive ideas (see Israel). In *The Theft of History* (2006), Jack Goody condemns the teleological reasoning that locates Europe at the center of the universe and insists that the habit of tracing European progress to the ancient Greeks and Romans, while denying the contributions of other societies, contradicts reliable historical evidence. I argue that naturalistic materialism impeded the development of theoretical consciousness and knowledge partly by superimposing religious ideas on reason and science, a tendency that was evident among a range of Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Turgot (see Israel).²

²Naturalistic materialism is a philosophical tendency that rests on a 'dualistic opposition' between mental and manual labor that obstructs the realization of a 'mutual dependence' between 'knowledge and labour.' Proponents of naturalistic materialism subject science to the sway of religion which is conducive to objective

Antinomies of Naturalistic Materialism and Idealism:
Their Influence on Wilmot Blyden, Marcus Garvey and Garveyism

Naturalistic materialism derives both ideas and social factors from the purely “physical properties” (van der Pijl 131) and idealism derives all reality from “purely mental forces (spirit)” (131) and separates contemplative intellectual functions from any shared social experience. Naturalistic materialism and idealism, which conditioned the ideas and beliefs of Marcus Garvey and Garveyism as a ‘black nationalist’ ideology and political movement, is reflected in Garvey’s way of superimposing a religious ideology (Christianity) on science and scientific interpretations of historical change. Contextually, Garvey’s ideas worked against the integration of manual and mental labor, with the effect of undermining the growth of theoretical consciousness, given its anti-materialist, anti-humanist, and its decidedly romanticist and heavily racial-nationalist and Christian outlook. Wilmot Blyden asserted that black Africa was plagued by ‘tribal paganism’ and he advocated a role for Christianity and Islam to purge Africa of its tribal pagan traditions to bring its people into the modern world. Blyden’s interpretation of African history rested on a dualist conception that anticipated the coming of Western modernization theory with its linear conception of change.

Realistically, the internationalization of social life helps to undermine national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness and helps a society to develop and strengthen its “creative capacity to shape its own destiny” (van der Pijl 129) as part of the larger struggle for our universal humanity. Kees van der Pijl argues that the tendency toward the transformation of “contemplative philosophy” into “experimental natural science” (130) was at an early point in its development when the Enlightenment was taking shape. He contends that the moment was not marked by the convergence of physical labour and practical philosophy in science and industry, and it was in this specific context that naturalistic materialism arose within social and political thought with the effect of idealizing ‘purely mental forces (spirit)’ and rupturing the integral relationship of contemplative intellectual functions with shared social experience. In order to achieve the “social synthesis” (130) of manual and mental labour, there has to be a deepening of social relations at the international level along lines of scientific, technological and cultural change which requires breaking down the arbitrary separation between forms of national and international life (130). Racial nationalist interpretations of history of the sort that typify white supremacy and Garveyism obstruct progress toward the integration of national and international life.

The environment necessary for ‘social synthesis’ to occur requires a social setting with material and subjective conditions of a high level of material culture. Naturalistic materialism could not foster such conditions because it rested on a “dualistic opposition”

idealism. Under naturalistic materialism, the metaphysical notion of ‘God and soul’ acquires an existence that is independent of scientific inquiry, fostering a ‘dualistic opposition’ between mental and manual labor that obstructs the realization of a ‘mutual dependence’ between ‘knowledge and labour,’ and stifling the development of materialism and introducing a false dichotomy between politics and religion and between science and religion (van der Pijl 2002: 131, 132, and 134; see also Israel 2006).

between mental and manual labor that obstructs the realization of a “mutual dependence” between “knowledge and labour.” Under naturalistic materialism, science is subject to the sway of religion which is conducive to the objective idealism that typified the outlook of the ‘moderate’ Enlightenment and Romanticist tendency from Locke, Turgot, Voltaire, and Kant to G. W. F. Hegel and Max Weber (van der Pijl 131-132; see also Israel). Locke, Turgot, Kant and Hegel embraced naturalistic materialism as expressed in the metaphysical notion of “God and the soul” existing independently of “scientific inquiry” and human material and social existence. The emergence of agnosticism did not only stifle the development of materialism, it also introduced a false dichotomy between politics and religion and between science and religion (van der Pijl 134).

Naturalistic materialism has also influenced the interpretation of race and the development of raciological thinking of the sort that racial (cultural) nationalists privilege. Ashley Montagu argues that race “is itself a racist term not simply because it represents a congeries of errors . . . but . . . most importantly, because its baleful influence constitutes a threat to the very existence of humanity” (47). Richard Lewontin argues that

human racial classification is of no social value and is positively destructive of social and human relations. Since such racial classification is . . . of virtually no genetic or taxonomic significance either, no justification can be offered for its continuance. (396-97)

Paul Gilroy writes that

there is something worthwhile to be gained from a deliberate renunciation of ‘race’ as the basis for belonging to one another and acting in concert. . . . The idea that action against racial hierarchies can proceed effectively when it has been purged of any lingering respect for the idea of ‘race’ is one of the most persuasive cards in this political and ethical suit. (12).

Kenan Malik points out that “equality is not an ‘inalienable’ right” (39) but a social right that is created “through human endeavour” (39) which highlights the “social nature of equality and the dilemmas this often creates” (39) and underscores “the ambiguous attitude of Western society towards the notion of race” (39). Malik insists that it is not “racial differentiation that has led to the denial of equality, but the social constraints placed on the scope of equality that has led to the racial categorization of humanity” (39). It is “inequality that gives rise to ‘race’” (39) and racial classification in modern class society. The racialization of states and their societies and the institutionalization of racial nationalism and ‘racial rule’ by and through the modern state, mask the actual class basis of economic inequality and oppression (see Goldberg). The problem posed around the monist interpretation of history that Enlightenment thought advanced is that it failed to overcome naturalistic materialism and idealism both of which subordinate science and material process to religious ideology and other teleological accounts of history. This problem came to light in the Enlightenment scientific (monist) idea that race and racial difference (understood in biological and raciological terms) were the causes of inequality in the world.

Marcus Garvey and Garveyism drew on ideological currents that had already germinated in Europe, the United States, and the colonial world. There is evidence of strong Eurocentric ideological currents within Garveyism. It is this fact that draws our attention to the international cultural context that shaped both International Relations (IR) as an

area of academic inquiry (see Jahn 2000: xi-xvi) and Garveyism as a political and ideological movement for the mobilization, politicization, and redemption of Africans and people of African descent. Garvey's assertion that his was the first fascist movement is indicative of the European roots of his ideological orientation. Garveyism bears the hallmarks of what Paul Gilroy calls 'transatlantic modernity.'

Garvey viewed capitalism as the proper model of development for Africa and the African Diaspora. He saw capitalism foremost as a modernizing force for the uplift of Africa and the people of African descent around the world. The problem with this particular conception of progress is that Garvey imposed a raciological conception of history on economic change, thus subordinating the rationalist and scientific process of capitalist expansion and development to teleological (raciological) forces. Like earlier leading English thinkers who sojourned in the British West Indies (BWI) and/or wrote about the interests and property rights of British capitalists under African enslavement — Bryan Edwards, Edward Long, and James Anthony Froude (see Froude; see also Benn) — Garvey also drew heavily on teleological arguments to develop his perspective. The response by J. J. Thomas of Trinidad to the writings of Froude about Africans and their descendants in the New World differed by degree rather than kind from what English and European thinkers asserted.

Wilmot Blyden asserted that Africa was plagued by 'tribal paganism' and he called on European Christianity and Islam to extirpate it. Blyden implied that African cultures were static and unchanging and needed external intervention to liberate them from what he saw as their natural backwardness. Blyden read African history in a linear fashion. He saw Africans as an anachronism and he banished them from the time and space to which they belonged, much the way the Europeans imagined the Amerindians a few centuries before (see Jahn). In Blyden's estimation, the cultural practices of Africans had to be destroyed to transform them into modern subjects in order to live under the civil law of capitalism and bourgeois property relations based on the political economy of labor time.

Substantively, Blyden's 'tribal paganism' is a cultural invention for the expansion of a particular civilization. He contributes to the dualistic conception of the world and presages European modernization theory with its idea of backward non-European cultures juxtaposed against modern and naturally progressive European cultures. Like certain nineteenth century black American thinkers such as Martin Delaney, Blyden also imagined 'Africa for Africans' and Europe for Europeans, a raciological mode of reasoning that appealed to Garvey. Jack Goody argues against such a linear account of historical change by insisting that only through processes of complex interactions has cultural progress been achieved in the world. There is a fundamental difference between Blyden's ideas and Jack Goody's — Goody sees something useful in all cultures while Blyden emphasized negative forces in African cultures.

Garvey's Assertion of the Fascist Roots of his Ideology

Garvey wanted to rearrange the chairs on the deck of the ship of liberal imperialism rather than to abolish imperialism. He was not an anti-imperialist and his credentials as black racial nationalist separates him from emancipatory strategies that could liberate blacks from oppression and economic exploitation. Garvey insisted that those who

fought against capitalism were "enemies of human advancement" (see Padmore 83-84), sensing that capitalism was the driving force behind the juggernaut of imperialism and the dominant nation-states in the West which he imagined that he could emulate (see Persaud). Like the Nazis, Garvey also eschewed socialism and communism and he extolled the virtues of capitalism within a narrow racial communitarian context. He appealed to the Ku Klux Klan to help him secure black American autonomy in exchange for his support for the Ku Klux Klan to control whites as a pure race to maintain the imputed purity of the white race.

George Padmore argued that Garveyism was an obstacle to the "mass Negro struggle for liberation against American imperialism" (xv). Padmore sought to separate Pan-Africanism from Garveyism, arguing that Pan-Africanism "identifies itself with the neutral camp, opposed . . . all forms of oppression and racial chauvinism – white and black – and associates itself with all forces of progress and goodwill, regardless of nationality, race, color, or creed, working for universal brotherhood, social justice, and peace for all peoples everywhere" (xvi). Padmore insisted that Pan-Africanism embraced "much that is true in the Marxist interpretation of history" (xvi), while rejecting the intolerance of doctrinaire Communism. He asserted that a "society in which all men are equal regardless of their color or race is to most Europeans utopian" (320). Even after Padmore broke with Moscow, he did not embrace the outlook Garvey held toward socialism and communism which Garvey rejected as ungodly.

Neither Garvey nor his defenders have managed to tell us how his 'back to Africa' notion could be translated into practical activity, how many of the new diaspora ethnic groups who had been forged on the workbench of capitalism under enslavement and post-emancipation would be willing to return to places they did not know and that were linguistically and culturally alien to them. For Blyden, the Africans would have to subject their desire, which had been shaped fundamentally by the requirements of subsistence production, to the wage labor imperatives of the capitalist production process, as part of the price for becoming modern. Blyden imagined that such a transformation was essential for dispensing with the tribal paganism he attributed to sub-Saharan Africans. Of course, many Africans had been integrated with modern production under imperialism in conditions where their labor power was still much cheaper than technology, hence the extended day and brutal working conditions that were the norm.

What Garvey thought could be cured through wage labor, Blyden had already imagined to be an inherent property of the existence of the African. Garvey relied on a teleological interpretation of capitalism which he equated with an inherent drive in human nature, a view that reflected his pessimistic view of history, the nature of the world, culture and change. All things including race and racial conflict seemed predetermined by God, a belief that removes human agency from the equation of change. One would be hard pressed to argue that Garvey offered a scientific theory of history and human progress.

Garvey, War and Imperialism

It is well known that Garvey admired the European ruling classes for the steely determination with which they expanded their empires and he saw them as his role models. In fact, he imagined that the motion of history was determined by the innate

conflict and struggles among the races (see Watson). This point perhaps more than any other necessitates addressing the question of war in relation to Garveyism. There was no reliable evidence that Africans and diaspora negroes sought revenge through war and violence against their enslavers and imperialist oppressors, along racial or racist lines (see Furedi in this regard). The rebellions and other forms of insurgency that slaves organized and executed in the Caribbean were fundamentally about asserting their humanity and freeing themselves from the multiple forms of oppression and dehumanization to which they were subjugated. In asserting their humanity through their acts of rebellion they were also implying that it was possible to liberate their oppressors. It was not clear however that, as the St. Domingue Revolution demonstrated through its specific unfolding, the aim was to end the exploitation of man by man. Whether the Haitian Revolution was capable of becoming a complete (social) revolution in the geopolitical context of its own articulation raises larger theoretical and empirical questions.

Gilroy argues that whatever problems we might encounter in categorizing the Ku Klux Klan as fascist, it is necessary to keep in mind the issue that “justifies an association between an openly Nazi organization and a spiritual movement dedicated to the emancipation, uplift, and protection of Africans abroad. It is . . . the acquisition of sovereign territory, a national homeland, a piece of ground, that legitimates these aspirations” (236) that remains an enduring force in the formation of national subjectivity. In 1974, Marcus Garvey, Jr., one of Garvey’s sons, said that

African National Socialism postulates that the children of the Black God of Africa have a date with destiny. We shall recreate the glories of ancient Egypt, Ethiopia and Nubia. It is natural that the children of mother Africa scattered in the great diaspora will cleave together once more. It seems certain that the world will one day be faced with the black cry of an African ‘Anschluss’ and the resolute demand for African ‘lebensraum’” (Garvey, Jr. 387; also qtd. in Gilroy, 236).

Clearly, Marcus Garvey Jr. ideas had not matured beyond the ideological consciousness of his father. The notion of an African ‘Lebensraum’ implied fighting old battles of imperialism in an age where classical imperialism had already given way to an emerging transnational capitalist hegemony.

Could blacks in Africa and in the African Diaspora benefit from the promotion of an emancipation struggle waged on fascist criteria (see Black; see also Kuhl)? What technologies of war might Garvey’s mother Africa employ to execute its ‘lebensraum’ project, and at what point do we confront the reality that war can be employed as an instrument against the particular state Marcus Garvey Jr. had in mind (see Reid)? What form of internationalism might Garvey have mounted to sustain international solidarity and internationalism among Africans and ‘Diaspora Negroes’ within an imperialist, anti-socialist context, considering that internationalism was a decidedly socialist and communist project that he eschewed?

Unyielding racial nationalism had driven Nazism to its extreme practices of brutality, masculinism and violence in war and genocide. Broadly-speaking, Garvey’s values resonated with conservative Christian precepts and anti-humanist individualism. He said:

In our desire to achieve greatness as a race, we are liberal enough to extend to others a similar right. . . . All races should be pure in morals and in outlook, and for that we, as Negroes, admire the leaders and members of the Anglo-Saxon clubs. They are honest and honorable in their desire to purify and standardize our race. (338)

Garvey compared his strategy with the white supremacist project which amounted to inverting white supremacy to suit his designs. The implication was that under different circumstances white supremacy could become black supremacy. Yet, as Charles Mills argues, the question does not turn on phenotype but on power relations (127). Garvey found it difficult to think of power outside of racial terms. He wanted a racial order that would suit his aims, which meant reducing race to a pure biological category in the same way that Adolf Hitler sought to dehistoricize the concept of race in order to create a new 'anti-historic order.' Hitler wrote in a letter to Hermann Rauschning that

I know perfectly well just as all those tremendously clever intellectuals that in the scientific sense there is no such thing as race. . . . I as a politician need a conception which enables the order which has hitherto existed on historic bases to be abolished and an entirely new and anti-historic order enforced and given intellectual basis. . . . With the conception of race, National Socialism will carry its revolution abroad and recast the world. (Qtd. in Montagu, 81)

From the two passages quoted above, it is clear that Hitler and Garvey acknowledged that the historical conception of race did not suit their purposes. The racialization of global politics with a view to the creation of a new hierarchical (racial) international order was central to Hitler's project. Hitler acquired the state power and force to execute his fascist project to create the impossible — an Aryan race. Garvey thanked white supremacists for helping to purify that which did not exist in the world — a biological African race — with the aim of making blacks come to terms with the imperative nature of their emancipation. Garvey's assertion of the fascist basis of his project did not offer a viable means toward the liberation of those in whose names he claimed to speak from the "repertory of power that produced their sufferings in the first place" (Gilroy 14, 6). A world viewed in terms of struggles among races is a world destined to reproduce itself through the medium of violence, force and war.

What we need is a critique of the

strategy of power that informs the development of social relations under the duress of the modern state. . . . The counter-strategic tradition exposes the ways in which this conception of war as a dialectical form only serves to reproduce the methods by which the state governs the force of war, bringing its movement within its control, and countermanding it to its own degenerative purposes. (Reid 295)

It is necessary to think dialectically of the "substance of the relation between war and politics" (295) as part of a strategy for advancing individual and social consciousness beyond patriarchal centrism, masculinism, brutalism and fraternal notions on which the 'man question' in International Relations theory rests (see Zalewski).³

³The 'man question' in International Relations (IR) theory is a concept that emerged in Feminist/Critical IR theories. It highlights and questions the dominant tendency in mainstream IR theory of arguing that IR as process and as an academic field is

In the Prussian tradition, Karl von Clausewitz viewed war as a “conflict of living forces” (85; also qtd. in Reid, 279), a “form of commerce and international transactions and as the continuation of policy with other means” (85; also qtd. in Reid, 279). Garvey’s concern with war connects with his interest in commerce, though he did not develop any successful commercial ventures within the highly competitive environment of capitalist imperialism. He implied that race and, by extension, the notion of a collective black consciousness constituted a fixed identity that served as the absolute structuring principle in interstate relations.

Garvey’s ideas do not tell us how it is possible to protect societies from the state and war in spite of the fact that, dialectically, war can be pursued as a force against the state — as a form of the “violence of a movement that breaks from the distribution and strategization of forces that compose existing social relations” (Reid 287, 288, 294). Individuals like Garvey, whether they be European or other, who reject the radical Enlightenment in order to embrace nationalist western or non-western philosophical thought, must account for where they stand on the “basic equality of all men, tactically endorsing the subordination and disadvantaging of long despised minorities . . . as well as of women” (Israel 869) and other victims.

Conclusion

Garvey’s project was a bourgeois class project that eschewed revolution and insurgent liberation as a way of resolving underlying social contradictions. His pessimistic view of history (see Watson) leaves many issues unresolved as to the future of Africa in the epoch of modern imperialism. Garvey did not offer any insights into the possibility of a dialectical ontology that opens up the possibility of transcending the modern state in the direction of postnational subjectivity. Substantively, “Nationalist modes of political regulation are the form of appearance of the terror that the world market society of capital entails. In short, nationalist displacements of anti-capitalist struggles replicate what they denounce” (Bonefeld 169), reinforcing false inside/outside dichotomies of ‘them’ versus ‘us’ and with the effect of neutralizing “anti-capitalist struggles for the democratic organization of socially necessary labor time by the associated producers themselves” (Bonefeld 169). Historically, nationalist movements have been impervious to the fact that sovereign autonomy is not equatable with self-determination under capitalism. Our human destiny does not rest on racial struggle; rather we must pursue it as part of the quest for our universal humanity

gender blind and gender neutral in a patriarchal order – i.e. when mainstream IR theorists say man/men they also automatically include or otherwise account for women. The ‘man question’ therefore stresses the importance of identifying and emphasizing the male dominance and masculinist nature of IR theory and practices, on the way to addressing the problem.

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