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Social change in selected West Indian novels

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This study, based on novels written originally in English by writers from English-speaking West Indian nations during the period 1949 to 1980, explores the authors' vision of the motives, nature and processes by which liberation from colonialism is sought and achieved. Extended discussion is given to the following: V.S. Reid's *New Day* (1949), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), John Hearne's *Land of the Living* (1961), Andrew Salkey's *A Quality of Violence* (1959), Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1975), and Michael Thelwell's *The Harder They Come* (1980).

Whereas *New Day* asserts the reality of a West Indian identity, *In the Castle of My Skin* stresses the need for a collective awareness of racial identity and its socio-political implications. *A Quality of Violence* and *Land of the Living* attest to the importance of establishing (in West Indian societies) spiritual values which are not Western and which are connected to the people's cultural history. Similarly, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* illustrates that a sense of history can greatly influence the struggle to achieve social change. Even though *Guerrillas* uses a chaotic situation on a specific West Indian island to suggest socio-political and cultural confusion in the West Indies generally, this novel nevertheless reveals the need for fundamental socio-political change. Unlike *Guerrillas*, *The Harder They
Come stresses the creative potential of the West Indian people as an agent for such change.

Thus in conclusion it is argued that these novels confirm the West Indian nations' need to change their societies in ways which are more egalitarian and less colonial. But to bring about that change, the writers generally agree that psychocultural resistance requires a consciousness that no longer accepts the dictates of an oppressive culture but attempts to rediscover its own validity. This attempt at rediscovery of individual, communal, and racial identities indicates an increasing vitality in the struggle for change in these societies, whose past has been stolen, whose present is being directed, and whose future has been planned by external agencies.
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INTRODUCTION

The toll which the institution of slavery took on the lives of Africans and their descendants in the West Indies has been well documented. Also well documented is the resistance which the enslaved masses put up in an effort to overthrow the system of slavery. As John Hope Franklin indicates, "On almost every island there is record of some serious revolt against the plantation system."1 The colonial power was especially threatened by the maroon communities. By 1730, for example, the maroons in Jamaica, under their leader Cudgo, had terrorized the white slave holders to such an extend that England was compelled to send out two additional regiments to protect the plantation system and to preserve its dehumanizing nature.2

Even after the legal abolition of slavery, which did not bring about any real change in the lives of the West Indian masses, the fight for real political and economic independence continued. Especially after World War I, which emphasized "democracy," the West Indians began nation-wide movements designed to foster democracy, self-elevation, self-respect and freedom. Put another way, West Indians tried to shape their society in ways which furthered the process of their psycho-cultural liberation.

It is hardly surprising, then, that some West Indian novelists demonstrate a concern for the process of social change. Nor is it surprising that these writers often illustrate these processes through which the people try to shape the society for their own liberation. In essence, as the writer will show throughout this study, the process of social change in the West Indies is a struggle between the colonizers and the colonized. In fact, the post-emancipation history of the West Indies reveals that, politically and economically, West Indian societies generally are plagued by slavery.
in a modern dress. The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore the West Indian writers' visions of social change—its motivation, nature and process. This discussion will eventually show that West Indian novelists look at social change as it relates to the economic, political and psychological liberation of West Indians from the shackles of colonialism.

To explore this topic, the writer has limited the selection of novels in three ways. The first is that the writer is concerned only with novels in which the writers' exploration of the issue of West Indian social change is of major thematic interest. The emphasis here is on the West Indians' struggle to liberate themselves from the clutches of colonialism and to bring about a society which responds to the needs of the masses—mainly blacks—rather than to vested colonial interests. Secondly, the writer shall deal only with novels written originally in English by writers from the English-speaking West Indies. Thirdly, the novels discussed are novels written between 1949 and 1980, since this time frame best serves the purpose of this study. 1949 marks the publication of V. S. Reid's New Day, the novel which epitomizes the struggle for cultural autonomy in the English-speaking West Indies. It was with this novel that West Indian writers began to portray their own comprehension of West Indian reality. Within these limitations, the writer shall explore the visions of social change illustrated by the following West Indian novels: V. S. Reid's New Day (1949), George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953), John Hearne's Land of the Living (1961), Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959), Paule Marshall's The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), V. S. Naipaul's Guerrillas (1975), and Michael Thelwell's The Harder They Come (1980). The discussion, which may include brief references to other novels, will focus on those aspects of the novels which directly relate to the topic of discussion—social change.
Endnotes


2 John Hope Franklin undertakes a more detailed discussion of slavery in the West Indies, in Chapter IV of “Seasoning in the Island,” printed in *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans.*
CHAPTER ONE
WEST INDIAN SOCIAL CHANGE: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Every stage of West Indian history reveals the struggle of West Indians to liberate themselves from the forces of colonialism through dynamic social change. The critic who attempts to understand West Indian socio-political history is faced with a preponderance of evidence that European colonialism contributed heavily to the economic, political and psychological oppression of West Indians. Also affecting every era of history, however, is the collective effort of the West Indian people to resist European domination and to move their society toward their own liberating ends. In this cycle of oppression and resistance, West Indians have been struggling not only for their economic or political rights, but also for their own psychological liberation. This multi-leveled struggle meant that they gradually had to liberate themselves from the white-supremacist doctrine of European colonialism. Throughout the post-emancipation period, West Indians have struggled to assert their own identity and pride not as Europeans or Africans but as West Indians who have their own unique culture and history. In fact, this psycho-cultural attitude became the springboard to their liberation and decolonization. In this chapter, then, the writer shall attempt to expose the nature and significance of social change in the West Indies by summarizing the history of the English-speaking West Indies--as that history relates to social change--and by commenting on that region's present psycho-cultural situation. Such as background is necessary for the understanding of the West Indian novels which will be discussed throughout this study, novels which illustrate the motive and nature of the West Indian attempt to effect social changes consistent with their desire for socio-political autonomy.

Even as early as 1511, the date of the arrival of the first slave ships in the West Indies, the need for change has been apparent to anyone who treasured the
inherent humanity of human beings in general, for "the institution of slavery was based upon Europe's attempt to dehumanize Africans for the advancement of Europe's own social, political, economic and aesthetic ends."¹ This traffic in human degradation owed much of its momentum to the Renaissance, which, according to John Hope Franklin, gave to people a new kind of freedom--"the freedom to pursue those ends that would be most suited to their own purposes."² But such freedom was the freedom of some to violate the rights of others. This new concept of freedom led to a commercial revolution. The breakdown of feudalism, the rise of towns, the heightened interest in commercial activities, and the new recognition of the strength and power of capital--all were essential elements of the commercial revolution--brought about exploitation of any commodities that could be viewed as economic goods. The spirit of the Renaissance and the practice of the commercial revolution brought new approaches to the attainment of wealth and power. The institution of slavery and the slave trade constituted one of these new approaches. Thus the institution of slavery expanded with the discovery of the "New World," which Europeans saw as a means to greater wealth and power. Consequently, European imperialism emerged as a system based on exploitation of the "New World." As far as the West Indies are concerned, this system was based on the subjugation of the newly arrived Africans.

West Indian history reveals the systematic attempt of European countries--such as Spain, France, England, Portugal and Holland--to exploit the persons of African origin and descent. The method of exploitation was to use Africans as laborers on tobacco plantations. Since the islands had no mineral wealth, the planters concentrated on the industry of tropical crops like tobacco. At first these tobacco plantations didn't depend upon the slave labor because there was still indentured white labor there. But as Franklin indicates, "by 1639 the European markets had become so glutted with the weed that the price decreased sharply, and the West Indian planters sustained a great loss."³ Taking a hint from the success of
the sugar plantation in Brazil, the island planters started the sugar cane plantations. For this new venture of extensive sugar cultivation, they needed more labor; white indentured labor was insufficient. Consequently, the planters turned to the importation of African slaves. This change from a tobacco-based economy to a sugar-based economy brought about an important shift in the plantation labor force from temporary white servants to permanent black slaves. Because the sugar plantation depended upon this large portion of the African slave labor, the black slaves became the major labor force in the West Indies.

The system of slavery was to lay the foundation for a social structure from which West Indians are still trying to liberate themselves. As Philip Sherlock states, "West Indian plantation society can be imaged as a pyramid, with a small apex of whites, a narrow middle of free people of color, and a broad base of black and colored slaves." Consistent with this pyramid image, each tier of society has a specific social and economic function in the maintenance of the hierarchy, and each tier had its own hierarchical structure. The whites—planters, officials, overseers, book keepers and poor whites—belonged to the first tier, and their gradings were decided according to property owned and official position. Freed people belonged to the second tier, and their gradings were based on color and property—the near-white at the top and the dark-skinned at the bottom. The slaves belonged to their third tier, and their gradings derived from color and occupation—domestic workers or skilled workers at the top and field workers at the bottom. To preserve this hierarchical society and to keep the rapidly growing number of slaves in a subservient position, European countries enforced slave laws. As Franklin indicates, "Those laws were based upon the theory, created by Europeans, that slaves were barbarous, wild and savage." Consequently, the laws were strictly enforced.

Although there are not many West Indian novels which deal with the period of slavery, one novelist who addresses this topic is Herbert George De Lisser. De
Lisser depicts, in his novel *Psyche* (1980), the tragedy not only of slaves but also of slave owners chained by the system of slavery. The tragedy reveals De Lisser's resistance to slavery, a system which degrades people. The main character in this novel is an African slave in Jamaica who falls in love with her white master. But she uses poison to kill a white lady who attracts him because, under the system of slavery, murder is the only way for her to get her master back. But later her daughter, Psyche, commits suicide with the same poison, ironically, because she loses her lover in the chaos of the emancipation proclamation. The whole plot of the novel thus emphasizes the psychologically and morally debilitating effects of the institution of slavery.

Even in this brutal situation, slaves realized that they needed to bring about changes designed for their own freedom as human beings. This desire for freedom motivated slaves to struggle against slavery and oppression. Some slaves ran away from the plantations to the mountains and founded separate communities. These runaway slaves, called maroons, were numerous, especially in Jamaica. They harassed the planters by stealing and by trading with the slaves and enticing them to run away. They also undertook a military conflict with the colonial forces. Incidentally, the power of these maroon societies is illustrated in a few novels. *New Day* (1949), by V. S. Reid is one of those novels. In this novel, villagers in Stoney Gut, Jamaica, instigate the Morant Bay Rebellion, but they fail to get support from the maroons. Consequently, they fail to overthrow the colonial government.

Because of several slave revolts and because of the increasing cost of producing sugar, the planters gradually abandoned their plantations. At last in 1834, Emancipation came to the British West Indies. But even after Emancipation, social change for free black West Indians was still necessary because they still lived in a society which kept the pyramidal structure of the former colonial regime. As Cyril Hamshere observes, freed blacks were still chained to the apprenticeship system, which "was merely name disguising the legalized extension of slavery."
Rightly, the freed blacks saw this system as a denial of freedom. However, planters saw it as a form of compensation to them for the loss of their slaves. Furthermore, the planters made little effort to make a success of apprenticeship because they considered the emancipation itself as the ruin of the West Indian society. Even though freed people were starting to establish their own homes and villages, the governments in Europe were not convinced that they were responsible for providing social services such as education, medical care and transportation systems. Thus the socio-economic hierarchy was as rigid as before. Blacks continued to have the lowest status in the society, and they were denied legal rights. Because of this situation, blacks were determined to protest against the society in order to obtain their human rights, and they were equally determined to create institutions which met their needs as a free people.

In this post-emancipation and pre-independence period, the challenges of the black West Indians were clear. First, they had to defeat the concept of white supremacy through self-confidence and self-respect nurtured by an appreciation of their own history. Secondly, they had to undertake national movements against all levels of colonialism, movements which eventually forced constitutional changes allowing for egalitarian participation in each island's government. This national movement involved all levels of the black society--those who returned from World War I, those who wanted to bring about a state of democracy in their homelands, and those who studied in Britain--and was inspired and motivated by nationalism in India and West Africa. As a result of this movement, constitutional changes took place, adult suffrage was introduced, and many West Indian countries obtain independence. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago became sovereign states in 1962. In 1966, Barbados became independent and in the same year Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis-Anguilla, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent entered into a free and voluntary association with Britain as Associated States, each fully self-governing in all its internal affairs, with Britain retaining responsibility for defense and foreign
affairs. Self-government on a more limited scale was granted to Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. British Honduras got full internal self-government in 1964.7

As will be seen in this study, V. S. Reid and George Lamming are the two novelists who concern themselves with this post-emancipation situation. V. S. Reid captures in his novel, New Day, the history of social change in Jamaica. First, black Jamaicans vainly engage in a bloody rebellion, but gradually they realize the necessity of winning constitutional change through peaceful negotiation with the colonial power. Similarly, George Lamming depicts in his novel, In the Castle of My Skin (1953), the need for and significance of the West Indian's psychological liberation. He emphasizes that black West Indians must first awaken from their racial complacency if they are to resist the oppressive forces of colonialism.

Even after independence, severe social problems still remained, and those problems limited the freedom of black West Indians. The social hierarchy created during slavery still remained in West Indian society. After Emancipation, there was no legal barrier to upward movement in the hierarchy. There were, however, other economic and educational barriers. Whether people could move upward or not depended upon their education. Higher education was available to those with money, the only exceptions being a few talented ones who won grants or scholarships, and only the well-educated could obtain well-paid jobs. In this system, black West Indians didn't have equal opportunities to get jobs and education. As a result, most of black West Indians continued to be poor and this poverty still remains today, as in fact, does the pyramidal nature of the economy. The problems of poverty and social stratification are illustrated in several novels. The Harder They Come (1980) illustrates the unsuccessful and tragic attempt of a poor village boy to throw off the shackles of poverty. A Quality of Violence (1959) also reveals the life of poor people in the rural regions during a period of drought. Here also the poverty is pervasive, and attempts to check it are futile. Also, the impotence of the poor lower classes is illustrated in Guerrillas (1975). In this novel, people are
restricted by the social stratification and, as in *The Harder They Come*, the slum gangs violently rebel. However, they have no real leader and, consequently, their rebellion fails. Furthermore, Herbert George De Lisser, in *Jane's Career* (1971), dramatizes the frustration experienced when a poor peasant girl tries to climb up to socio-economic ladder. What happens, ironically, is that she takes on all of the oppressive values of the people from whom she is trying to escape and, consequently, helps to repeat the cycle of oppression. De Lisser becomes one of the growing number of West Indian novelists who illustrate how difficult it is to overcome the social stratification in the West Indies and to change the social conditions.

These problems of the social stratification and poverty profoundly influenced the West Indian psyche. The collective psyche needed to be changed because it became a barrier to the people's political and economic independence. Rex Nettleford mentions that "in the minds of many West Indians," the society consists of "... a poor-black, a middle-class and privileged brown man and a rich or wealthy white man." This concept is the result of the social stratification in the system of slavery and the post-emancipation, European-directed education which the black West Indian received. Middle-class blacks received higher education in European countries, and the lower-class blacks were taught to admire educated blacks. Therefore, at all levels of society, blacks pursued the Western values and culture, a fact which demonstrated the persistence of a belief in European supremacy. Particularly, according to Nettleford, black West Indians are easily westernized unconsciously because "psychologically they don't possess such a strong racial memory of great cultural achievements as these European, Chinese and Indian compatriots." One of the West Indian writers, C. L. R. James, says that "the race question didn't have to be agitated; it was there. But in our little Eden, it never troubled us." Also, the Barbadian writer, George Lamming declares that "the lack of ... hostile forces, the freedom from physical fear, has created a state of
complacency in the West Indian awareness." Therefore, because of the influence of a European-directed education, West Indians had and still have a strong class consciousness, but racially they are complacent.

It is quite apparent, then, that the West Indian psyche, which was profoundly influenced by Western-directed education, also needed to be changed, if the people were to be liberated from the shackles of colonialism. In the 1960's, because of the influence of nationalism in India and Africa, and because of the Negritude movement, which affirmed black consciousness and black cultural heritage, the search for their own values, identity, self-pride and racial assertion was accelerated in the West Indies. The people became more vocal in their rejection of European culture and values. For example, in novels such as *New Day*, writers started to promote the artistic use of a creole language, which was despised by Europeans and sometimes by West Indians themselves. These writers encouraged the growing sentiment that the language of the folk is not a broken language, but their own national language. In fact, all novels the writer shall discuss in this study reflect this changing attitude toward the use of a creole language. In *New Day*, however, even the narrative voice is creolized.

In this nationalist movement, black West Indians protested against the influence of Western politics and economics which still controlled the West Indians and contributed to their poverty. In the 1960's and 1970's, many riots broke out in the people's attempt to destroy the systems of oppression.

Thus at every stage of West Indian history, the necessity of social change for West Indian liberation can be clearly seen. As has been shown, some levels of social change have already been achieved, but the English-speaking West Indies still are struggling to bring about deeper levels of freedom and justice. Even thought they are independent countries, they are still controlled, at some levels, by Western policies politically, economically and psychologically. They are, however, (as the
novels discussed in the following chapters will illustrate), in the process of winning their freedom.
Endnotes


3Franklin, 46.

4Sherlock, 256.

5Franklin, 50.


7Sherlock, 295.


9Ibid., 35.


CHAPTER TWO

EARLY FICTIVE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The first fictive treatment of the motivation, process and nature of a West Indian society's attempt to decolonize itself was rendered by the Jamaican, Victor Stanfford Reid in *New Day* (1949). As Gerald Moore indicates, "... it was with *New Day* that a new generation of West Indian writers really began the task of breaking free from the colonial cocoon and flying with wings of their own, in a distinctly tropical sky." With its publication, West Indian novelists began to accept the challenge of shaping their own literature and, simultaneously, validating their own perception of reality. For this and other reasons *New Day* is genuinely acclaimed. George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) also concerns itself with the nature, process and consequences of social change in a specific West Indian community. Both novels focus on the lives of ordinary village folk, their joys and fears, and the socio-political forces in their society. Because of the authors' ability to capture the sights and sounds of West Indian peasant life, and because of their ability to reveal the psychological states of their characters, the world of each novel seems authentically West Indian. Since each novel depicts a society caught in the throes of socio-political upheaval, the reader comes to appreciate the nature of individual and social change in these two West Indian communities. This chapter focuses on Reid's and Lamming's rendering of this process of social change. The discussion attempts to consider the following questions: What motivates the drive for social change in these West Indian societies? What form or forms does this change assume? What kind of new society is envisioned? What potential does the newly emergent society have for its greater psychological liberation?

*New Day* deals with the period (of Jamaica's historical struggles to shape its society) from the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 to Jamaica's Declaration of
Independence in 1944. One of the thematic claims of this novel, consistent with the lessons learned from this period of Jamaican history, is that even though violence can bring some change in a society, it is just a starting point on the long journey for total liberation in the West Indies. Profound social change must be brought about by political reform and must take place gradually over several generations.

The place and period in which Reid sets this story reveal the necessity for Jamaicans' decolonization. As Louis James indicates, "The history of Morant Bay Rebellion can be seen against the background of the people's total experience rooted in the cycle of nature." In rural places like Salt Savannah or Morant Bay, the setting for the first part of this novel, the lives of the people are totally dependent upon agriculture, which is dependent upon nature—rain, sun, soil, etc. The meteorological situation (a drought) is a reflection of the people's socio-economic or socio-political situation. During this socio-economic situation caused by drought, black West Indian peasants realize that even though they become poorer, white planters become wealthier—a result of socio-economic and political exploitation by colonialism. Angered by this realization and by the denial of their pleas for changes in the system of taxation, the people revolt.

This close linkage between the life of the people and the nature of the land makes black West Indians aware not only of their socio-economic and political exploitation but also of their own national identity as Jamaicans. They can affirm who they are only by their common experiences as they relate to the natural context of their own land. This affinity to their own geographic place, coupled with their attempt to control their own socio-political situation, helps them to appreciate the uniqueness of their situation as Jamaicans.

Through the change of setting from a rural village to the urban city of Kingston, Reid illustrates the process and development of social change in Jamaica—from the village people's realization of colonial socio-political exploitation to their assertion of their national identity as they achieve socio-political independence from...
the British. In Kingston, Garth Campbell, who becomes the Jamaican leader, successfully leads the labor union in its demonstration against the negotiation with the Crown government. Through this success, Reid indicates that real liberation for Jamaicans will come only as they gain control of Kingston, the center of colonial power in the country.

The history of the Jamaicans' struggle for social change is illustrated through the struggle of the Campbells, a mulatto planter family who, like the majority of the darker-skinned blacks, are members of the peasantry. Their long path to freedom starts with the head of the Campbells, Pa John Campbell. He is a very strict, religious "buckra" land-owner. He believes that if change is necessary in a society, it will be brought only by God, not by human beings. He says to his son, David Campbell, a member of Paul Bogle's church, which tries to bring social change even through bloodshed, "Is what it you want? Change, you want to change God's order? You and those others can no' wait for Jehovah's plan? Paul Bogle's wickedness is better than the ordinance o' St. Paul?" He accepts everything as "God's order," but what he means by "God's order" is what the white colonial paster in St. Thomas parish preaches:

"Because Almighty God has seen fit to visit His wrath on these people for their laziness and hardness of heart, because He has seen fit to seal off from their lands the rains of heaven for these past three years, they have rebelled against His ordinance and seek to supplant those whom He has set in authority over them. . . . Be obedient, servant."

Ironically, then, the colonial forces justify their economic or political oppression and exploitation through "God." Pa John, a purely religious person, is controlled by "their God." This psychological colonialism renders him subservient. Through Pa John's strict Christian's attitude, the author suggests that Christianity is used as one of the colonial devices to opiate the spirit of the colonized "God," who is supposed to bring peace, but who turns his face against Jamaicans when the Morant Bay Rebellion breaks out. Pa John tries to make reconciliation with the British Government through negotiation, still believing in a God who never brings bloody
war: "I will ask to see Governor Eyre. I am no' a Stoney Gut man. The English will no' make war on Christians."5 Ironically, he is shot down by British redcoats. Thus, his murder verifies the impotence of Christianity against the faces of colonialism. However, the murder also hastens the death of British paternalism in Jamaican minds, and with the confirmation of Pa John's death in the bloody Morant Bay Rebellion, Jamaica begins to stand on its own feet.

The significance of Pa John's death is communicated through Davie Campbell, Pa John's son. Through Davie, Reid illustrates the shift in motivation for socio-political change, from religious to socio-political arguments. Davie, realizing the socio-political inequality and necessity for change, asks in a conversation with Pa John:

"Wickedness? You call it so? Wickedness to want even rice and flour osnaburg while buckra Englishman eats bacon and wears Shantung silk? Why do they no' make us govern ourselves and see if we would no' eat bacon too? Why they will no' give the vote to all o' us and make us choose our own Council?"6

Furthermore, Reid affirms that the Jamaican socio-political concerns stem not from a racial base but from a socio-political one. This perspective is clear from Davie's speech to his little brother John:

"Is true it, that our family are no' badly off, for near-white we are, even if poor, and ha'been landowners for three generations, and now Father is an estate headman. But no'-the-less, Johnny, and listen well to me, we are Jamaicans--six o' one and half dozen of t'other to the Buckra English."7

Also, in New Day, nationalism looms both as the motivation for and the result of the quest for decolonization. As Melvin Rahming suggests, "the bloody violence in Reid's novel has nothing to do with black nationalism or negritude--even though this rebellion assumes some degree of racial flavor and fervor in an island where blacks constitute an over-whelming majority--but, rather, it has everything to do with nationalism."8

After the rebellion, Davie refuses to repeat the violence of the Morant Bay Rebellion. But he never abandons his attempt to establish a community for
Jamaicans. In Morant Bay Cays, he devotes himself to assisting the establishment of an autonomous banana-growing community. But there, as Louis James indicates, "human nature proves to be too weak to live by spirit alone." Davie infuses people with the spirit of his idealism and, as a result, the community becomes restive and rebellious. Just before he dies, he admits that his idealism has failed to achieve freedom for Jamaicans. He confesses it symbolically: "I was wrong. She [Davie's wife, Lucille] should no' be caged on this cay." Through Davie's life, Reid suggests the futility of isolationism and suggests, by extension, that the decolonization demands some form of confrontation with the colonial power structure.

The attitude of Davie's wife, Lucielle, toward social change allows Reid to illustrate the significance of a gradual reform without bloodshed. Lucielle Dubois is a daughter of half-black, half-white Haitian parents who fought in the Haitian Revolution. She opposes the revolutionary change that Deacon Bogle advocates because it merely brings confusion and chaos in the society. She learns a lesson for her experiences form the Haitian Revolution: "But when the [Haitian] revolution came, the poor people forgot who had been their friends and simply killed anyone who appeared to be a white. . . . If the Revolution had come slowly, it might have come without bloodshed." But even after the bloody memory, she insists that Jamaicans must convey the spirit of independence by fighting not only for themselves but also for the dead and the unborn. When Davie refuses to give evidence of the Morant Bay Rebellion before the British commission, Lucielle says, "what can be the use of his [Davie's] memories? He [Davie] says the Commission cannot bring back life to the dead. Will his bitter memories do that? . . . You [Davie] have not got the courage to fight back to freedom." Through Lucielle's statements, Reid suggests that people can learn about the nature of social change from the past and that they must attempt to transmit their knowledge to future generations, and, therefore, continue to struggle for their own liberation. Accordingly, Lucielle's spirit is transmitted to Garth Campbell, her grandson.
By shifting the focus from Davie to Garth, Reid illustrates the development of idealism to the intricate realism of politics, as a consequence of the long struggle for decolonization. Trained as a lawyer in England and being the safety valve between Jamaica and England, Garth advocates full Jamaican participation in the politics of this country through non-violent demonstration, and he leads them to the political independence. As he sees it:

"People must be found who will give of their time unstintingly to cultivate and water this young growth. It's the only way out of these countries of darkness. They must grow tall and strong, fearing no man. . . . Without fear and without this second skin. . . . They are my people, all of them, regardless of the color of the skin. We are all Jamaicans."

In the process of social change over a period of time, Jamaican consciousness lives on. With the achievement of national identity, Jamaicans become psychologically independent. Finally they achieve social change in the form of political independence through peaceful negotiation.

It can now be seen that, through the life of the Campbell's, New Day explores the motivation, nature and process of Jamaican social change. The Jamaicans' attempt to decolonize themselves stems from a socio-politically motivated need to assert their equality and freedom as Jamaicans. And their impulse to autonomy originates in an affinity, between people and land, which shapes their identities.

Reid reinforces the spirit and validity of Jamaican independence by using the dialect of the Jamaican masses through the narrative voice of Johnny Campbell. As Louis James suggests, Reid used the dialect several years before Creole became acceptable in Jamaica." For a long time, Creole language like the Jamaican dialect was used mainly to produce a comical effect because it was considered as a broken language, not a national language. But Reid regards this Creole language as an important literary form and as the national language of Jamaica. The following passage, typical of language of the entire novel, exemplifies the Jamaican Creole language as the medium for serious reflection and introspection and as the authentic voice of the masses:
Mas'r is a heavy night; this memory is pickny at me mind, and restlessness is a-ride me soul. I scent many things in the night-wind, night-wind is a-talk of days what pass and gone. But the night-wind blows down from the mountains touching only the high places as it comes; so then, 'member, I can remember only these places which stand high on the road we ha' traveled.15

The rhythmic repetition and personification are a far cry from earlier usage of dialect by writers such as H. G. De Lisser, as induced in this extraction from De Lisser's Jane's Career (1971):

'Who you gwine to send for policeman for?' demanded Sarah, also at the top of her voice and with arms kimbo. 'Me! Yu must be drunk! Look at the mallata (mulatto) ooman how she stand! Yu t'ink I am a schoolgal, no? Yu t'ink you can tek exvantage for me! If it wasn't for one ting, I would hold you in here an' gie Yu such a beaten dat you wouldn't walk for a walk16

By stylizing dialect, Reid not only refuses to exploit the comic and vulgar dimensions of dialect, but also represents it as a valuable, sophisticated medium for artistic communication. Moreover, recognizing it as Jamaica's own national language, Reid affirms Jamaica's control of what is perhaps the most fundamental expression of national independence and national identity—language.

Even the people's affinity to nature and place is rendered in terms of the Jamaican dialect, shifted through the consciousness of the narrator:

Is remember I remember one August morning when rain was a-drown the earth. For two weeks now the sun has no' shone. Black is the morning, black the evening, and Mas'r God's heaven does not look on us at all. Yallahs and Morant and Plantain Garden rivers heavy so, until you do not know where rivers end and land begins. That was the time when an alligator swam clear up to the barrack and took away my friend Timothy's baby bro' . . . . For two weeks we have not come out of the house 'cept to the kitchen to dry our osnaburgs at smoky damp-wood fires. Miserable it is, and mud a-clog your toes outside and damp a-creep into your bones inside and at nights you sleep on sodden kitty-up. Then one morning when day-cloud was peeping, I woke and did no' hear the rain. Creeping out o' my kitty-up, I went to the door and pulled the latch-wood--Wayah!17

The use of dialect makes readers appreciate that John's affinity to nature and place is a representation of this quality of the collective possibility of Jamaicans. It also makes the readers appreciate that in the West Indies there is a collective yearning toward a national perspective on language. The growth toward a national language,
therefore, becomes a part of a multi-faceted process of social change which includes the rejection of paternalism, the abandonment of isolationalism, the fact of ideological confrontation, the venture into negotiation, and the on-going insistence on national autonomy.

Whereas Reid emphasizes the motivation for social change, George Lamming, in In the Castle of My Skin, is more concerned with the process and nature of social change itself. In the Castle of My Skin is an autobiographical story which illustrates the growing sensibilities of a boy from age nine to 18 in a small peasant village in Barbados. Like New Day, one of the themes of this novel is that to achieve national independence and cultural identity, the colonized people must first free themselves psychologically from the old order created by colonials. But, unlike New Day, this novel specifically and emphatically suggests that a prerequisite for Barbadian identity is the people's awakening to their own racial identity.

In this novel, the urge toward a new socio-political order is motivated by a growing sense of loss, "which is inseparable from a simultaneous pattern of social, political and psychological change."

The main character, G (George Lamming, himself), is burdened by this sense of loss, which he "cannot comprehend and for which, consequently, he has no name." And the whole tone of the first person narration suggests that the sense of loss is not only individual but also communal. At the beginning of this novel, on G's ninth birthday, his sense of loss is expressed:

That evening I kept an eye on the crevices of our wasted roof where the colour of the shingles had turned to morning black, and waited for the weather to rehearse my wishes. But the evening settled on the slush of the roads that dissolved in parts into pools of clay, and I wept for the watery waste of my ninth important day.

For nine years, the rain has marred his birthday, but his awareness of loss and absence, goes deeper than mere lack of sunny celebrations; his father has left his mother and him; his grandfather is dead and grandmother has gone to Panama:
My [G's] birth began with an almost total absence of family relations. . . . and loneliness from which had subsequently grown the consolation of freedom was the legacy with which my first year opened.21

It becomes clear that G has lost a sense of a family history. Consequently, he is rootless and has no sense of cultural direction. The absence of his past is the absence of his present and his future, finally of his own self. This loss of self (his unknown inner world which he must learn to explore and finally possess) is symbolized by the images of monstrosity, which haunt his waking hours:

I opened my eyes and saw enormous phantoms with eyes of fire and crowned with bull’s horns stalking through the dark. I closed my eyes and the phantom went. . . . My eyes opened and closed, opened / closed opened / closed opened / closed, but they would not go.22

But a unique characteristic of the Barbadian village, one which is a result of a rigid colonial order, prevents G from searching for his own self and finding an answer as to what the loss is. John Hearne comments on this characteristic of Barbadian villages:

[The Barbadian] is English in a way [other West Indians] are not. History englished him. . . . Nor should the Barbadian be ashamed of his 'Englishness.' It is a source of real psychic strength. . . . There is a 'wholeness' to the Barbadian that I have not found in any other English-speaking Caribbean territory.23

But this extraordinary "Englishness" both camouflages and spotlights this feeling of individual and communal loss that nobody seems to apprehend.

Like G, people in the community don't appreciate their relationship to Barbadian history, a condition which is due to their colonial education. Aspects of this colonial attitude are revealed in G's summary of his school teacher's remarks to the class:

It [slavery] had nothing to do with people in Barbados. No one there was ever a slave, the teacher said. . . Thank God, he [one of the school boys] wasn't ever a slave. He or his father or his father's father. Thank God nobody in Barbados was ever a slave. It didn't sound cruel. It was simply unreal. The idea of ownership. One man owned another. They laughed quietly. Imagine any man in any part of the world owning a man or a woman from Barbados. They would forget all about it since it happened too long ago. Moreover, they weren't told anything about that. They had read about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundred years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that. It was too far back for anyone to worry about teaching it as
history. That's really why it wasn't taught. It was too far back. History had to begin somewhere, but not so far back. And nobody knew where this slavery business took place. The teacher had simply said, not here, somewhere else.  

Lamming illustrates that Barbadians are cut off from their past and that they accept their colonial status as victims as a part of a divine plan. This passive acceptance is implicit in G's reflections about his mother:

> My [G's] mother who is a Sunday School teacher has explained it [slavery] well. There is nothing for us to do, she tells me, but rejoice in our bondage. That is what she calls it. She doesn't say slave. She says bondage. When the time comes we shall be taken out of the bondage by what she calls grace... We're all going to the garden again, free again, and especially those who here on earth belonged to the empire.

Because of their ignorance of the cultural significance of history, Lamming's Barbadians are accustomed to accept everything which the colonial order imposes. This acceptance is consistent with the colonizer's attempt "to create in the colonized peoples a sense of devotion to and an affectionate embracing of all things English." The success of the English colonizer in this regard, consequently, causes the people's collective loss of self-hood even as it blinds them to the socio-political significance of their blackness.

Their servitude—that is, their acceptance of colonialism—is symbolized in the mood evoked by Lamming's depiction of nature. Appropriately, the novel begins with a flood, against which the people are powerless: "The floods could level the stature and even conceal the identity of the village." The symbolism is clear: Lamming is demonstrating that the power of colonialism affects the village as naturally and as thoroughly as a flood. Thus, Lamming shows that the psychological situation of the colonized Barbadian community (and their sense of loss) is a result of colonial forces—ironically, the same forces which later motivate their rejection of colonialism.

Although, in Lamming's novel, psychological change is inseparable from socio-political or socio-economic change, it is the process of psychological change which is thematically emphasized, especially through the experiences of G, his
friend, Trumper, and a school teacher, Mr. Slime. Thanks largely to the efforts of Mr. Slime, the community reaches an awareness of its deprivation and eventually rejects its colonial state of existence. This psychological change is the matrix for a new and emerging social order. Mr. Slime, an ex-teacher, founder of the Penny Bank Friendly Society and spokesman of the village, leads the demonstration of the poor peasants against the economically oppressive politics of the government; and despite his own motives for getting his own benefit from the colonial administration, he does facilitate the people's growth to a new level of political awareness. He reminds them that, as the backbone of the village's economy, they can own the land and share in the economic progress of the community. Pa, who represents the historical voice of the village, is impressed by Mr. Slime's program for the development of the village:

'I ain't know exact, Ma, an' Mr. Slime never so much as say except that he feel that you an' all the rest who been here for donkey years, 'tis time that we own it [land]. If Mr. Creighton an' all the Creightons from time past can own it, there ain't no reason why we mustn't.'

This is a radical thought because it portends fundamental changes in the socio-economic order. Furthermore, a comment made by the village shoemaker typically expresses the criticism concerning the ruling class, a criticism which implies the villagers' recognition of the need for change: "They [the Great] can give orders and all that, but they can't do one honest day's work". The shoemaker also expresses the sentiment concerning the village's landlord, Mr. Creighton, who, they realize, is also in instrument of colonial exploitation: "There was something suspect in the Englishman's attachment." The villagers question not only the legitimacy of the landlord's domination but also principles on which colonial domination is based.

Thus, it becomes apparent that Mr. Slime inspires the villagers' psychological change of attitude toward the colonial practices by appealing to their desire to own their own land. The desire for confrontation and change is so strong and so pervasive that a riot breaks out in the village. The riot causes Creighton, the
English landlord, to flee the village; he sells his estate to the Penny Bank and Friendly Society. Eventually, however, Mr. Slime betrays the villagers by secretly selling the land to the middle-class people in the village. The riot, then, does not accomplish the economic liberation of the lower-class, for the economic power passes into the hands of the middle-class who feel estranged from and threatened by the lower class. In fact, G is convinced that the middle-class blacks regard the poor blacks as their enemy:

Occasionally the landlord would accuse the overseers of conniving, of slackening on the job, and the overseers who never risked defending themselves gave vent to their feelings on the villagers who they thought were envious and jealous and mean. Low-down nigger people was a special phrase the overseers had coined. The villagers were low-down nigger people since they couldn't bear to see one of their kind get along without feeling envy and hate. . . . Each represented for the other an image of the enemy. 

Therefore, it becomes clear that the living conditions of the lower peasant class in no way improve. The poor are still oppressed. However, they never stop questioning their oppressed situation, even though they don't find a solution to their economic and socio-political problem. Lamming illustrates that this attitude, which prompts their questioning, is, in fact, indicative of an important change in the people's collective consciousness. Never again can they be ignorant of or passive to socio-economic oppression. The reader realizes that the struggle must be continued by the younger generation, as represented by G's friend, Trumper.

Trumper is the antithesis of Mr. Slime. Whereas Mr. Slime helps people to understand the colonial situation only to undermine their attempts to rid themselves of exploitation, Trumper is depicted as "a man who will help them understand the neo-colonial situation," by making them aware that the nameless loss that they feel is the loss of self-assertion. By criticizing Mr. Slime's traitorous plan, Trumper reveals his understanding of the collective possibilities of the poor people, and he communicates this understanding to the people:

"If everyone o'you refuse to pay a cent on that land, and if all o'you decide to sleep in the street or let the Government find room for you in the prison
house, you think they dare go through with this business o'selling the land?"33

However, he has a better grasp and appreciation of the situation only because he had spent a few years in the United States, where he learned much concerning the nature of racism and racial identity. As Ambroise Kom stresses, "Exile gave Trumper the perspective needed to judge accurately the nature of the changes in Barbados."34 Moreover, as Kom declared, "He understands much better than his fellow Barbadians the international character of the problems which beset his country, and from this point on he identifies with all oppressed blacks."35 Thus, he defines himself through his racial assertion. A key moment in the novel comes when Trumper attempts to communicate to G the significance of his experience in the United States and the nature of his new found identity. Before G leaves Barbados for Trinidad, Trumper introduces Paul Robeson's music as the Negro music to stir racial identity in G’s mind:

"You know the voice? Trumper asked. he was very serious now. [G] tried to recall whether I might have heard it. I couldn't. 'Paul Robeson,' he said. 'One o' the greatest o' my people.' 'What people? I asked. I was a bit puzzled. 'My people,' said Trumper. . . . 'The Negro race,' said Trumper. . . . 'or better, my race. 'Twus in the States I find it, an' I'm gonner keep it till they kingdom come.' . . . 'Twus what I mean when I say you don't understand' life,' Trumper said, 'An' I didn't understand' it myself till I reach the States. If there be one thing I thank America for, she teach me who my race was. Now I'm never goin' to lose it. Never never.' 'There are black people here too,' I said. . . . [Trumper said] "Course the blacks here are my people too, but they don't know it yet. You don't know it yourself. None o' you here on this islan' know what it mean to fin' race. And the white people you have to deal with won't ever let you know. . . . There be clubs which you an' me can't go to, an' none o' my people here, no matter who they be, but they don't tell us we can't. They put up a sign, 'Members only,' knowin' full well you ain't got no chance o' becomin' a member. An' although we know from the start why we can't go, we got the consolation we can't' cause we ain't members. . . . They (Afro-Americans) suffer in a way we don't know here. We can't understan' it here an' we never will. But their suffrein' teach them what we here won't ever know. The race, our people."36

The narrator is impressed with the new Trumper:

He [Trumper] had found something to cradle his deepest instincts and emotions. He was a Negro and he was proud. Now he could walk in the sun or stand on the highest hill and proclaim himself the blackest evidence of the white man's denial or conscience. And if there was a God in heaven and any possibility of justice on earth the revelation of this new difference
would have been a justification for this existence. To be a different kind of creature. 

As Mbatau Kaburu Wa Ngai states, "Trumper washed away the colonialist lies that had sought to negate his place in history and that they fed him with." Through Trumper's experience, Lamming seems to be suggesting that by discovering their own racial identity and history, West Indians come into a knowledge of the betrayal, discrimination, and brutality of colonialism. As Gareth Griffiths declares, "it is an uncomfortable gain but a necessary one if there is to be any hope of change." This importance of racial-identity is stressed by the portrait of G.

G quickly grasps the importance of Trumper to his own educational process:

We were all involved in the sale of the land, but Trumper was the first person who had given me the feeling of tremendous injustice in the transaction.

Thanks to Trumper, G realizes for the first time that the situation where he lives is not normal, that inhuman brutality and injustice through colonization are taking place. He also realizes that he had been too assimilated into the colonial process to question it:

Trumper made his own experience, the discovery of a race, a people, seem like a revelation. It was nothing I had known and it doesn't seem I could know it till I had lived it.

What G is implying is that in order for black Barbadians to know their own cultural, economic and political situation, it is necessary for the people to assert themselves as a race. The loss which G and the community have been feeling is thus identified as the loss of racial assertion. In the Castle of My Skin illustrates that the starting point for the people's journey to autonomy is their recognition of the cultural and political importance of their blackness. On an individual level, G has to find the meaning of his blackness by venturing beyond the confines of Barbados, since, as Trumper reminds him, Barbadians are racially complacent. Only then can he help the people in their struggle against oppression. Thus, the novel ends with G's acceptance of Trumper's words as his: "I am going to fight for the rights of negroes, and I'll die fighting."
It can be concluded, then, that both New Day and In the Castle of My Skin suggest that social change stems from a socio-politically motivated need, made more acute by the affinity between people and their land. Both authors stress the necessity of political and economical independence and illustrate that the road to meaningful social change is a long and painful one. In the case of Lamming's novel only the first stage of this journey is illustrated--the violent rebellion against oppressors. But the most telling difference between these two novels is that whereas Reid emphasizes the advent of a new consciousness without racial assertion, Lamming sees the matter of racial assertion on individuals and collective levels as a priority.
Endnotes


4Ibid., 49.

5Ibid., 166.

6Ibid., 18.

7Ibid., 25.


9Reid, New Day, 68.

10Ibid., 243.

11Ibid., 70.

12Ibid., 199.

13Ibid., 281.

14Ibid., 64.

15Ibid., 85.


17Reid, New Day, 42.

18Rahming, 74.

19Ibid.


21Ibid., 5.

22Ibid., 7.


24Lamming, 52.

Lamming, 3.

Ibid., 84.

Ibid., 94.

Ibid., 96.

Ibid., 18-19.


Lamming, 294.


Ibid.

Lamming, 303-305

Ibid., 308.

Ngai, 55.


Lamming, 295.

Ibid., 306.

Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE
RELIGIOUS CULTISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Some West Indian writers illustrate the significant role that West Indian religious cults play in the struggle against colonialism. The history of the West Indies reveals numerous violent rebellions against colonialism. Invariably, the rebelling forces are made up mainly of black peasants whose chosen religion gives them a sense of identity outside of a colonial context. One of these religious sects, the Jamaican-based Rastafarians, for example, is given considerable fictional treatment by some of the most prominent West Indian novelists. These religious cultists, who worship a black God, accept a mythology which safeguards them from a psychological identification with Europe and which, consequently, helps them to resist, even revolt against, the policies and strategies of colonial governments. Although these fanatical groups have little political power and although they are powerless by themselves to affect meaningful social change, in their own way they play a significant role in promoting the people's psychological independence. One of the prominent authors who illustrate this limited but undeniable role of the Rastafarians is John Hearne. In his novel, Land of the Living (1961), he gives a cursory but revealing depiction of Rastafarianism. Although Hearne's depiction correctly gauges the political impotence of this cult, it also illustrates cult's psychological and philosophical alienation from mainstream West Indian society.

Unlike Hearne, whose Rastafarian portrait constitutes only a minor theme in the novel, Andrew Salkey focuses his entire novel, A Quality of Violence (1959), on Pocomanian cultists, whose physical and spiritual lives are deeply affected by a severe drought. The drought forces them to act in such a way that the reader comes
to appreciate the role of religious fanaticism in resisting and promoting social change.

This chapter focuses on Hearne's and Salkey's illustration of the role of religious cults in social change. The discussion will explore these authors' visions of the relationship between religious cultism and social change, with particular attention to the role of cultism in promoting or obstructing meaningful social change.

John Hearne's *Land of the Living* is the story of Mahler, a Jewish Zoologist from Germany who comes to the fictional Caribbean country of Cayuna, after his experiences in World War II, and tries to heal his emotional wound through love for a black woman. Through the protagonist's relationship to an old Rastafarian, Hearne suggests that for the liberation not only of West Indians but also of all the races in the world, what is most necessary is neither political nor economic change but moral and psychological resurrection.

The setting of this story depicts moral devastation and the necessity of a moral resurrection as well. In Cayuna, distinctive social stratification still exists because of the legacy of slavery. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o states, "The black man has suffered both on the basis of his skin color and more fundamentally as one of the class of exploited peasants and workers,"¹ and a few upper class whites exploit the large black lower class. This situation is revealed by Joan, one of the white members of the middle class in Cayuna, in a conversation with Mahler:

"Edna Hyde [a white middle-class woman]. She's never quite believed that she has a black daughter-in-law... She won't be the only one. A lot of people feel like that about the sort of marriage Oliver [a white middle-class man who gets married to a black woman] made. That it isn't real. It's something horrid from the way we were brought up to think. People like Oliver and Andrew [a white middle class man] and me were always us, and people like Sybil [Oliver's wife] were them."²

Thus, Joan's comments reveal Cayuna as a place where black people are still despised and pushed away from the mainstream of the society because of the prevalence of the myth of white supremacy, popularized during slavery in order to
justify the selling, buying and killing of black people. As Joan's comments also hint, this belief in this myth has created "something horrid" in the white upper classes' perception of reality.

In Cayuna, not only blacks but also women are treated as inferior. Women are seen by protagonist Mahler as a target for sex. About his attitude to Bernice, a black Cayunan, Mahler confesses:

Not that I looked at her [Bernice] with love, or even desire. In this moment of silent indignation, I saw her only as another victim of that crude and tedious limitation to the Caribbean scope: the sexual snobbery of the West Indian male. Pampered, flattered and indulged from birth by their women, the men of Cayuna, I had recognized early, are all sexual aristocrats, with that discreet, insipid respect for the accepted or proven which so often characterizes aristocratic taste.3

For men, women don't have personalities. They are the property of men. Both black people and women are not treated as human beings. They are still chained to the moral devastation in the society. By presenting the black and female characters as victims in Cayuna, Hearne emphasizes the moral decay and human greed and implies the necessity for a moral resurrection.

Furthermore, to facilitate his rendering of the thematic concerns of the novel, Hearne sets this story in the period just after World War II and presents a protagonist who is a psychological and moral casualty of that war. Thus World War II functions as a symbol of moral and psychological degradation. Partly to overcome the economic ravages of that war, European countries denied the rights and freedom of colored peoples and justified the exploitation and murder of them in order to pursue their own vested interests. For example, Mahler knows that Germany massacred thousands and thousands of Jews and justified that holocaust in the name of nationalism and alleged German superiority. This was a period of spiritual degradation in the world and in human history. After that war, people in the world were confused morally and spiritually. By utilizing this period in his novel, Hearne makes us aware that the biggest and the most urgent problem to solve--not only in the West Indies but also in the world--is moral confusion and spiritual chaos.
It becomes apparent in the novel that unless morality is revived, people like Mahler will never be saved from debilitating confusion.

This need for and significance of moral revival is demonstrated by one of the characters, Marcus Heneky, a leader of the Pure Church of Africa, who believes that black people in Cayuna can set themselves free only by returning to Africa. Facets of this Pan-Africanism are revealed in a conversation between Heneky and Mahler:

"It is God you white people take mine from. God an' pride. An' until both of these restore how the black man will ever know himself, eh? How him will ever find deliverance?" "Deliverance?" I [Mahler] asked him. "You mean freedom?" "I [Heneky] mean deliverance from the past. That is what destiny is. That is why my race can't find our destiny. Because our past lie abandoned in Africa."

First, what Heneky tries to do through his religious cult is to elevate his own race--black people in Cayuna--spiritually and to liberate them from psychological colonization. He tries to make them aware that their spiritual home is Africa, not a dark continent but one with a splendid history. This African consciousness makes them discover themselves as members of the black diaspora and heightens their racial identity. According to Heneky, this "back to Africa" philosophy is necessary for black Cayunans because "There is no history in Cayuna; only politics." As Heneky implies, this absence of a connection with history defeats the possibility for black pride in Cayuna and makes them vulnerable to the immoral influence of colonial politics.

Consequently, Heneky attempts not only to elevate his own oppressed race and the protest against the white society which shackles black people but also to free all the races in the world from colonial chains. It is through Mahler's conversation with Andrew, a journalist, that the reader comes to appreciate the profound nature of Heneky's call for social change:

"There are some men who feel that the pain of this world is one pain. Who try to assume it, struggle with it and free us from it. Marcus Heneky was like that. . . . The triumph of Africa and the black race was only the external part of it. He wasn't just a common little fanatic, for all his limitations. . . . Perhaps he didn't even know what moved him or what he was really trying to do, but it was there all the same: the necessity to erase
another bit of the lie that makes slaves of us. . . . It [this lie] varies from
time to time and place to place. In Heneky's case the lie was that black
man was faceless. What he had to do was to try to change that, to give the
black man the sort of vision of himself that would make him free. And
make the whites and the browns free, because they were shackled to the lie
too. But it wasn't just a matter of giving the black man a vote, or a
ministerial portfolio, or an equal income. All those things come into it, but
there is something else needed." "What?" [Andrew asked] "A territory the
heart can occupy." "You mean, you think that he was right in all that back
to Africa nonsense?" "Not right in your terms, Andrew. Not in your
politician's terms. But true. A truth of passion. . . ."

As Heneky knows, all of the races represented in Cayuna, including blacks,
are ignorant of black identity. Moreover, they don't notice their own ignorance.
That's why whites can justify their exploitation of black people and refuse to put an
end to this period of moral decay. What Heneky attempts to do through his
religious cult is to make the cultists recognize their own ignorance, to set them free
from the myth of the world and to restore the sense of morality in the world. Thus,
Heneky's religious sect invites participation not only from the lower-class blacks but
from all the races in the world. He notices the reality of the world's moral decay
and tries to purify the world's spirit through his sect. Therefore, as Ngugi wa
Thiong'o indicates, "his religious cult is neither romantic nor mysterious but
realistic".

Heneky never allows political activity to obscure his belief in the necessity of
psychological change. Although he never attempts political reform, he intends to
give black people their own visions through political activity. Heneky tells them:

"You don't dare look 'pon yourselves! Because there is nothing to see,
except what them teach you to see. . . . the black man, come down, an'
Porlock, the brown man, come down, an' they is both one an' the same
thing."

His purpose is not political but psychological reform. As Wilfred Cartey points out,
Heneky's purpose reflects Hearne's "a sharper and more incisive skepticism toward
the usefulness of political action with its efficacy, its practitioners and its goals."

As is true of Hearne's novels generally, politics or politicians never play
major roles in bringing about social change because Hearne believes politics is
impotent. Still, he suggests that psychological reform is necessary for West Indian
liberation from the oppressive forces of colonialism. However, Heneky, who has a "truth of passion," fails in his attempt to bring about a moral regeneration because of the violence of the Sons of Sheba, another sect which advocated Rastafarian philosophy even through violence.

In another novel, The Faces of Love (1957), Hearne also depicts the tragedy of a man who possesses the "truth of passion." In this novel, Jojo Rygin desires to get his ex-lover, Rachal Ascom, from the Englishman, Michael Lovelace. In Jojo's comments, the reader discusses his (and Hearne's) rejection of false values:

"You [Andrew, a journalist] have to add to things and do something new all the time. . . . Things weren't made to leave alone. . . . You think I'd a work if it was money alone in it. A man couldn't be fool like that. Not a man like you. Or me. Money just happens. You have something else, you hear? I don't like to live in something that somebody else has built. I like to make my own place."10

Clearly Jojo, like Heneky, has a passionate desire to shatter the accepted order of things and to expose the hidden truth. However, also like Heneky, Jojo is defeated by the oppressive society. Jojo mistakenly puts his faith in money as a means of winning back Rachal and making changes in their lives. In the portraits of Heneky and Jojo, Hearne seems to be demonstrating that religious cultists have no real hope of dramatic economic and political changes in the colonized society despite the fervor of their call for psychological liberation, unless the world realizes the importance of moral revival, because fanaticism easily leads to violence and political impotence. Therefore, despite the admirable quality of Heneky's goals, he is little more than a dramatic aberration in this morally and psychologically ill society.

Hearne exposes the society's spiritual degradation also through the main character, Stefan Mahler. As someone who has been deeply wounded in emotion and personality by the Nazis, he sees his kinship to Heneky:

"We [the Jewish and the blacks] have been wounded in the same accident; just as you'll never completely believe that a white man can call you 'sir' without patronage, so I'll never be quite sure that any Gentile of my world doesn't make a reservation when he meets me; we both demand proof; and that's silly dangerous; it's an invitation to the world to hurt you again. . . . the fact that in each other we detected the same ailment and hurt of the
psyche: we saluted each other with the distant yet intimate understanding of two veterans determined to survive the same campaign. . . . Strange the way we took to each other. Almost resentfully, as though attraction was a weakness. Almost as though we both regretted a false past which had to be redeemed and which would never permit us more than a cautious exchange."

As one of the Jewish people who are oppressed and murdered like black people, he is a victim of the immorality in the world. That is why Heneky and Mahler feel an affinity toward and understand each other. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o demonstrates, "The Jew also was a slave and an exile from home. Since then, he has wandered in search of home. He waits for his deliverance and return home from exile. He also loses his spiritual home." By representing the white victim who has a similar experience, Hearne points out that the necessity for social change or moral resurrection is not limited to the West Indian society, but is, in fact, a global reality. But Hearne portrays Mahler as a rather passive character, unlike Heneky. Heneky is very positive because he tries to save the world through moral revival. Mahler is never positive in that sense, but he does make a personal moral resurrection through his relationship to Bernice. First Mahler loves Bernice because she soothes his emotional wound, giving him motherly love, but later he falls in love with Joan. He can't break up with Bernice, however, even though he no longer loves her, because Joan doesn't give him motherly love. He finally realizes that he has to break up with Bernice, not because he is white and Bernice is black, but because it is immoral and selfish to keep his relationship to Bernice after his love for her dies. Through Mahler's personal moral resurrection, Hearne implies that even though people can't take positive action to revive their spirits in the world, personal moral revival is the starting point of global moral resurrection.

Bernice, who is the daughter of Marcus Heneky and the lover of Mahler, is another victim of an immoral society. It is her womanhood that is victimized. Although she is a target of sex for Cayuna men and although she considers herself as a victim of immorality in the society, she passively accepts whatever role society thrusts upon her: She merely sits still and waits for deliverance. Therefore, she
voices her rejection of her father's "Back to Africa" idea because it is against the society which she accepts: "All that African foolishness now. What him [Heneky] think say Africa have to do with we here? Is here we belong now, an' is here we must work and pray God for guidance. . ."13 However, although she is passive, she has a sense of morality which her society seems to have lost. This sense of morality is implied in her attitude toward violence in the society. When policemen fight against Heneky and his followers at Long Shore violently, she tries to persuade him to surrender: "At least, I must try. Suppose another many get shot like that one? Or him [Heneky] get shot? And I know say that maybe I could have prevent it. How you [Mahler] think I going to feel?"14 She tries to sacrifice herself to make people stop hating and killing each other because she knows instinctively that violence and hatred are morally degrading. Her efforts, like her life, are cut-down, however; for she is ironically killed by one of Heneky's followers when she goes to take him from Long Shore, where he and his followers have been hiding. Hearne seems to be suggesting that Bernice's kind of integrity is exactly what her society needs if it is to experience a moral resurrection.

Like the portrait of Bernice, the portrait of the Sons of Sheba illustrates that a moral resurrection can't be catalyzed by violence—violence never promotes and can't save the society from spiritual chaos. As observed earlier, the Sons of Sheba adopt a Rastafarian philosophy:

"Dis land an' de whole eart' belong to de white man, an' de black is his slave. You [white men] come here fe' mek more plot against we black. But our day come. Our God will come. . . Black an' shinin' an' terrible. . . . Africa's children will turn and rule. . . . Africa's children will turn and rule. . . . Africa will rule an' de children of Africa will be as princes over all on dat day. . . . Blood will flow for de blood of we, an' de whie man will be broken. . . . It is written in de book dat each color will have its day of glory an' dat de black shall be de last an' for evermore. . . . All the nation shall bow down to Africa an' to de Emperor of Ethiopia an' to his people."15

The Sons of Sheba respect Africa as their spiritual home but what they try to do is to retaliate against the white world. Unlike Heneky, they never intend to elevate or redeem the moral state of the society or the world. The Sons of Sheba is just an
outlet of emotional distress and fanaticism. Hearne seems to be implying that what Rastafarians advocate is morally wrong only if the philosophy is translated into a pasture of violence. The chaotic and self-destructive nature of the Sons of Sheba is proof of their own socio-political and moral impotence.

Another author who deals with the destructive and emotional nature of religious cult in the quest for social change is Andrew Salkey. He explores an intense Afro-Jamaican religion, Pocomania, in his first novel *A Quality of Violence*. Being different from Heneky's religious cult which aims at spiritual elevation, Pocomania is only an outlet for distressed rural Jamaicans, and, like the Sons of Sheba, it promotes chaos and violence.

*A Quality of Violence* is a story of the reactions of rural Jamaican people to a severe drought. Throughout this story, Salkey emphasizes that even though African religious cults give hope and faith to the people in a depressed situation, as a method of social betterment they are impotent unless they direct their collective forces to moral elevation without the use of violence and without fanaticism.

A rural village, not in contemporary Jamaica but at the turn of the century, is the setting for Hearne's novel. The peasants in rural areas are the most oppressed class in colonized Jamaica, but Salkey discusses their collective potential for the kind of self-assertion which can lead to liberating social change. Unfortunately, as Salkey illustrates, what limits their great potential power is their obsession with religious mysticism, an obsession which makes them feel important in a society which denies them socio-economic growth, an obsession which gives them hope for a better life than the seemingly hopeless life which Jamaica offers. Dada Johnson, a leader of Pocomania, is aware of this role of religion in the people's lives:

"I give those people plenty to believe in. I give them a cause to have a faith. I know that you [Brother Parkin, who doesn't believe in Pocomania] think it is just a lot of foolishness and all that. But, you have other things to hold on to. . . ."
The drought, with which Salkey begins this story functions also as a symbol for the socio-political and socio-economic austerity of the peasants, much like the situation of the peasants in New Day. Salkey's description of the drought hints at its symbolic import: "Lateness was death... Lateeness was the drought; a stranglehold."17

Unlike the violence demonstrated by Heneky's Pure Church of Africa in Land of the Living, the violence which is a part of the Pocomanian rituals is just a release for the emotional distress of the oppressed peasants. There is no intention to liberate themselves from colonialism or to move collectively toward their socio-economic or socio-cultural liberation. Salkey seems to be implying that religious cults like Pocomania are powerless to affect significant social changes and that the people are, in effect, awaiting their demise:

"The people are going to be worse off, in the long run. This Jamaican tat we living in nowadays, always give me [Dada Johnson] the feeling that it destroying itself, year after year. This island is just one big suicide place. The people is living and at the same time just waiting for the suicide to come... If it is hurricane coming on the land, one month, then the next month it is a thunder-storm or river flooding. Then you have the earthquake and all the rest of the other things... I really getting so frighten up and worried that I going have to make a change sooner or later."18

Dada Johnson admits his inability to save villagers from colonial oppression which is symbolized by "hurricane," "a thunder-storm," "river flooding" and "earthquake." Even though he is powerless to improve the lives of people, they depend upon the faith and hope that he gives them. They know that "His strength... lay in the personal relationship he had fostered in the days when he was starting the meeting yard--the private commissions he had undertaken without payment, the family secrets he held, the intimate knowledge of family histories he shared."19 Although he has their confidence, his fanaticism never allows him to translate that confidence into a course of action which can give them economic or political autonomy. Instead, that confidence, misdirected, helps to bring about their self-destruction.
After the death of Dada Johnson, his wife, Mother Johnson, exploits the sickness of a child to try to assume her dead husband's place, his power over the villagers. In an attempt to gain their confidence, she reminds them of their common history:

"Me and you [Miss Mellie] and the rest-a-people in St. Thomas all belong to the days that pass by when slavery was with the land. Everybody is a part of slavery days, is a part of the climate-a-Africa and the feelings in the heart is Africa feelings that beating there, far down. Dada did know that. I know that, too. We all come down from Ashanti people who did powerful plenty, and we have the same bad feelings that them did have. We have the same power-house brains that them did have. Then now, that is why I saying that them and we have the same feelings that breaking out in St. Thomas. Is the same feelings that the drought trying hard to suffocate. Little gal pickney Doris who gone to her rest did have the same feelings in her heart. Is a thing we musn't fight. We must live with it wherever we find weself in the world. No matter where! That is why you must come back to me and stop ripping we common heart into two pieces. I know that it take time to find the meaning, but I got it, and I willing to show you the promise land. Believe me!"^20

Thus, Mother Johnson exploits the people's African consciousness and their oppressive Jamaican history for her own selfish purposes. As we have seen, Marcus Heneky in *Land of the Living* also recalls the people's African consciousness, but, unlike Mother Johnson, he doesn't desire to establish his power over them. Rather, he encourages the decolonization of their minds and attitudes. When Mother Johnson is compared to Marcus Heneky, the impotent emotionalism and fanaticism of Pocomania become more apparent. There can be little doubt, then, that Salkey is asserting that, although religion may have great possibilities for productive social change, these possibilities are never recognized because of the purposeless squandering of energies and the leaders' selfish exploitation of the people's trust.

Salkey also demonstrates that fanatical religious cults like the Pocomania tend to incite violence and to prevent rational decisions. In this novel, Salkey uses Brother Parkin, a brown planter, as the lone voice of morality and reason in the midst of the irrational and violent cultists. When the villagers try to kill Mother Johnson because of her cheating, Brother Parking argues against the killing:
"No! She is not that guilty. If you follow you stupid feelings and give way to them, you're going to be sorry sooner or later. Her death will cause the whole of St. Thomas to go mad. . . . What d'you think we have police station for? What about the court house. . . . Do you know what you are all heading for? . . . Murder! You're heading for murder. All of you. . . . You're carrying on like the people you most hate and would love to forget. You're no better than slave-drivers! No better than the scum that shovelled filth on the dead bodies of our people during the Morant Bay rebellion! You will be just as nasty and bloodthirsty as the man who ordered the soldier to shoot the women and children in the square at Morant Bay. . . ."21

Brother Parkin suggests that bloodshed and violence never bring the solution for this depressed and oppressed situation, but, rather, that they bring chaos and confusion. But like Dada Johnson and Mother Johnson, Brother Parkin does not have in mind a feasible program which can liberate the villagers from their oppressed condition. He, like the other two leaders, is aimless. Therefore, even though he speaks rationally and understands the cultists' potential for violence and self destruction, he is powerless and vulnerable. Rationalism fails in the face of immoral and emotional violence.

The people's emotions are so intense that they cannot be controlled by aimless rationalism. Even thought the leader of the killers understands the reason or morality that Brother Parkin suggests, he can't stop letting out his oppressed emotion. He finds the target for his emotional release--Mother Johnson. He is no longer able to make moral or rational decisions, and, as Bill Carr points out,

"Emotive concepts such as race take control of his mind:

"Look! See for yourself! Any of them [Brother Parkin and the brown planters] really black? You don't see that them mix up dad like mild coffee and bush tea brown? How you expect them to be one with we, same way? How you going to get them to feel 'bout Mother Johnson in the same way that we feel 'bout her? . . . I saying the only thing to do is to forget Parkin and come let we do what we know is the right thing . . . ."22

In the end, Mother Johnson is killed by the villagers; violence and destruction prevail.

Throughout this novel, Salkey dramatizes the confusion and destruction brought about by religious cultists in an oppressed setting. He suggests that socio-political depression is one reason for the appeal of fanatical religion and that the
followers of these religions should try to address the socio-political situation which oppresses them—as Heneky tries to do in Land of the Living. But even though Pocomania is different from Heneky's religious cult, they have the same motivation. The motivation for the existence of these religious cults is neither mysterious nor racial, but socio-political. Consequently, both Hearne and Salkey suggest that if the people are to win their liberation from their oppressed and depressed condition, they must use their religion to address socio-economic and socio-political concerns.
Endnotes


3Ibid., 78

4Ibid., 159

5Ibid., 89

6Ibid., 109.

7wa Thiong'o, 89.

8Hearne, 204.


11Hearne, Land, 114.

12wa Thiong'o, 89.

13Hearne, Land, 163.

14Ibid., 271.

15Ibid., 49.


17Ibid., 156.

18Ibid., 42.

19Ibid., 55.

20Ibid., 147.

21Ibid., 194.

CHAPTER FOUR
HISTORY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The history of the West Indian battle for liberation is thematically reflected in the novels of some of that region's most prominent writers. New Day and In the Castle of My Skin, which were discussed in chapter two, depict the historical attempt of Jamaicans and Barbadians to affirm their national identities while at the same time participating in a common West Indian culture. Their quest for psychological, political and cultural autonomy expresses their desire for liberation from colonial control. Another novelist who concerns herself with the role of history in the West Indian quest for psycho-cultural liberation is the Barbadian Paule Marshall. In The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), she demonstrates that the knowledge of West Indian history is necessary for an understanding of the West Indian present and for the construction of the West Indian future. With concentration on this novel, this chapter will explore Marshall's perception of the role of history in the West Indian quest for social change.

Paule Marshall's second novel, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People is a story about the attempts of an American development team to modernize Bourne Island, a fictional Caribbean island, where the people seem anchored to their unchanging ways. Illustrating the clash between modernity and tradition, Marshall reveals that an appreciation of the historical attempts to exploit the English-speaking West Indies in the name of philanthropy is vital to the construction of their future. Indeed, knowledge of their history serves "as an ideological underpinning for the political, social and economic battles they must wage." Moreover, as Peter Nazareth observes, in dealing with an exploited people, Marshall "doesn't limit herself to just the black people from the colonies--she is dealing with all exploited
peoples, including the Jews."² Thus Marshall deals with the matter of social change not only as it relates to the West Indies but also to the Western world, and she underscores the necessity to confront the nature of the colonial past for the emerging of a new and more liberated order.

As already implied, Bournehills represents all the exploited communities of the West Indies. The description of Bourne Island, as seen from the plane which takes an American development project team there, symbolizes the West Indies' powerlessness and vulnerability in the world:

From this height it was simply another indifferently shaped green knoll at the will of a mindless sea, one more in the line of steppingstones that might have been placed there long ago by some giant race to span the distance between the Americas, North and South. Like the others, it was small, poignantly so, and vulnerable, defenseless. At any moment the sea might rise and swallow it whole or a hurricane uproot it and send it flying. Like all the rest, it seemed expendable: for what could it be worth to the world, being so small?³

This physical description of the island—it is small, vulnerable, defenseless and expendable—is not only a representation of the people's economic and political vulnerabilities but also an anticipation of the novel's thematic concern with the struggle against exploitation. Despite its status as an independent country, Bourne Island is still politically and economically oppressed by ex-colonial forces. In fact, the village of Bournehills is thematically linked with all the exploited places everywhere. Thus, Dr. Saul Amron, a director of the development project and an anthropologist who has worked in many "backward" places, feels familiar with Bournehills:

Bournehills, this place he had never seen before, was suddenly the wind-scoured Peruvian Andes. The highlands of Guatemala. Chile. Bolivia, where he had once worked briefly among the tin miners. Honduras, which had proved so fatal. Southern Mexico. And the spent cotton lands of the Southern United States through which he had traveled many times as a young graduate student on his way to do field work among the Indians in Chiapas. It was suddenly, to his mind, every place that had been wantonly used, its substance stripped away, and then abandoned. He was shaken and angered by the abandonment he sensed here, the abuse.⁴
As Sasha Talmor indicates, Bournehills represents "all those places in the world whose importance for the world is in terms of their product--sugar canes, cotton, coffee and cacao." Because of this conquest, exploitation and devastation necessarily follow. By connecting Bournehills with other exploited regions of the world, Marshall demonstrates her concern with European domination and sees its necessary suspension as a universal problem.

Whereas the "Chosen Place" represents universal colonization, the phrase "Timeless People" suggests the importance of exploring the history of the colonized people for insights into their future needs. The Bournehills people are maligned, ignored and hated by the island's bourgeoisie because they resist and continually scorn the attempt of the bourgeoisie and other philanthropic and external forces to "civilize" them. The contempt in which they are held is obvious from the comment which, the young lawyer, Hinkson, makes to Saul:

"I tell you, Bournehills is like someplace out of the Dark Ages. . . . And the television set that a British firm gave them for the social center played one day and then mysteriously broke down. . . . The jukebox from America didn't last a week. . . . There's no understanding those people. . . . Those people? They're a disgrace!"

Bourgeois contempt notwithstanding, the Bournehills people are heart-warming and hard working. If they don't produce much, it is not because they are lazy, but because their resources are limited, and their energy is dauntless. This fact impresses Saul as he watches the people at work in the cane field:

As front man Stinger set the pace of the cutting, which even today with the early heat, was formidable. Following him up the steep shoulder of the hill upon which the field lay, Saul was impressed, amazed. All the strength in the man's slight, wiry body had been poured, it seemed, in some highly concentrated form, into his right arm, and with this he slashed away without pause at the canes, his billhook describing the same beautifully controlled downward arc as in the rumshop that first night.

They are not idle, but the colonizers make them look so because they refuse to maintain the machines and other "improvements" which are forced upon them. Consequently, it becomes obvious that the colonizers take little responsibility for improving what they exploit. Bournehills people regard all new efforts to "civilize"
them as a conspiracy because they never forget their history of exploitation—slavery. The protagonist of the novel, Merle, who is herself one of the Bournehills people, testifies to the quality of their collective memory: "We don't ever forget anything, and yesterday come like today to us..." Moreover, they know what will happen in the future because they know their repeated history. They know what the neo-colonial government offers as "aid" is nothing more than "the old system in modern dress." Thus, they refuse any change forced by persons or influences from outside their own culture and habitat. They intend to resist such aid until a revolutionary change can be achieved. Therefore, their "timelessness" represents their protest against westernization which, to them, is a modern form of slavery. Their resistance is epitomized by Cuffee Ned, who, decades ago, had led a revolt against the British colonization. Even long after he was killed, the Bournehills people re-enact the historical events of Cuffee Ned's revolt every year at carnival time in order to keep alive the revolutionary spirit. They are waiting for a new Cuffee Ned, a new leader who will inspire social change. It is clear, then, that the people of Bournehills demonstrate Marshall's awareness of the role of history as an instrument of liberation and, similarly, as an agent for social change.

This emphasis on the role of history is further illustrated through the characterization of Harriet Amron, who represents the type of the colonial white supremacist with whom the indigenous people have had to deal in every phase of their history. True to her racist history, she tried to dominate everything and everyone, refusing to see herself as the intruder and manipulator that she is. She is the wife of Saul Amron, the director of the development team, and she comes from a family who made money through the institution of slavery. Her family offers much funds to this development project in Bournehills. At first, Harriet appears to be sympathetic to Bournehills people, but she doesn't understand—and makes no attempt to understand—their culture and their lives. Her domineering attitude is revealed through her relationship to the Bournehills people. It is expressed through
two incidents. The first incident occurs when Harriet goes to visit Gwen, one of the Bournehills wives. She is shocked to find that Gwen has gone out, leaving the children apparently hungry. Her sense of motherhood offended, Harriet immediately prepares a breakfast with some eggs which she finds in the kitchen. She does not stop to consider that she may be interfering in a carefully ordered domestic situation. It is her husband Saul who attempts to show her the error of her ways:

"If only you would stop and ask, Harriet, before taking things into your own hands! I'm sure it never even occurred to you to find out if the eggs hadn't been left there for a reason. . . . There's this thing in you which makes you want to take over and manage everything and everybody on your own terms."\(^{10}\)

In Harriet's response to Saul's comments, the reader discerns her attitude of superiority: "... it doesn't make any sense to sell perfectly good, nourishing eggs to buy that awful rice they all eat."\(^{11}\) Again Saul contradicts her: "... but it does [make sense] to Gwen."\(^{12}\) Without understanding the colonized people's way of life, Harriet "makes Bournehills in her own image, her own order."\(^{13}\) Marshall emphasizes that this arrogant attitude of the oppressors devastates and destroys the colonized people's lives because it results in the attempt of the colonials to impose their own perception of reality on other people.

The second event occurs at carnival time when Harriet gets lost in a group of young marchers from Harlem Heights, a shanty town. She thinks that the group is going to march straight into the sea and drown, and she tries unsuccessfully to divert them into Queen Street. She gets a shock when she realizes that they don't even see her. She can't control them even though she wants to. She is "seized then by a revulsion and rage that was almost sexual in its forces."\(^{14}\) After this realization, she cuts off her relationship to the black villagers. Marshall illustrates the process of her thoughts concerning this experience:

What was it they wanted? She could not have said. But it was too much, of that she was certain. She could not give it, whatever it was, without being herself deprived, diminished; and worse, without undergoing a
profund transformation in which she would be called upon to relinquish some high place she had always occupied and to become other than she had always been.\textsuperscript{13}

She recognizes that if she and other colonials like her give the people what they want—not what she thinks they want—the whole society will be change and she will lose everything she has, and that, moreover, she will lose her position of superiority over black people. Her colonial attitude can be satisfied if she continues to treat black people as inferior and thus preserve her own historical role.

This dominant aspect of the oppressors is also delineated by Harriet's relationship to men whom she loves. She thinks that a woman should help a man. Therefore, a man who has accomplished all he had set out to do with his life holds no interest for her, because "There would be nothing a woman could do for them [such men]."\textsuperscript{16} She divorced her first husband, Andrew Westerman, because he accomplished his life's purpose; she didn't have to help him and she could not control him. She determines to marry Saul because she believes that Saul needs her to help him recover from his severe past. She believes, in fact, that she can control him. But after she finds out about Saul's affair with Merle, she shuts herself off from him, as she cuts off her relationship to the Bournehills people. Marshall explains: ". . . in that way she had of dealing with anything she found truly unpleasant, she had, working at it quite consciously over the weeks, simply closed her mind to it."\textsuperscript{17} But with her closed mind, she tries to continue to control Saul. In the end, she tries to control Saul by killing herself. Her suicide reveals the rigidity of her personality.

Harriet tries to help others on her own terms. Her need to dominate others and her ignorance about their lives are due, in part, to the fact that she never understands her own past, her history, and its cruelty to others. She says in her letter to her uncle, Chester Heald, ". . . I was never one to dwell on the past."\textsuperscript{18} But in Bournehills, she recalls her black nanny, Alberta, (who was a slave) and Alberta's nephew (who was beaten by whites). But she doesn't want to recognize the
connection between her relationship to these black people and her relationship to
the oppressed Bournehills society—or, for that matter, to any oppressed society—
because such recognition will shatter her very ordered world. Again the narrator
explains:

Alberta, whom Harriet had once believed the fairies had turned black
because of something naughty she had done when little! She saw her
gathering together their used clothes and toys—hers and her two brothers'—
to send to her nieces and nephews in Virginia, and she saw herself, the
child she had been then, clinging dry-eyed and adamant, unyielding, to the
toy she had refused to send them at that time. What had it been? Sitting
at the table waiting out the darkness she became obsessed by the need to
remember. For what might have been hours she searched her mind, trying
to discover what it had been, believing obscurely, beyond thought, that if
she could but recall the toy this would in some way serve as a reprieve.
But her mind, clouded over, numb, already anesthetized against the final
pain, refused to offer up its secret.

Through the characterization of Harriet, Marshall implies that the neo-colonials
must accept the responsibility for their history and must learn from it the lessons
which can change the present order of oppression. Two other major characters,
Saul Amron and Merle Kinbona, expose the role of history in indicating new
directions for an oppressed society.

Merle and Saul's relationship suggests the possibility for understanding
between exploited cultures, an understanding which can assist the process of social
change. Saul, a Jewish anthropologist and head of the American development team,
finds it easier to empathize with the Bournehills people (unlike his wife, Harriet)
because, like them, he descends from a people who had a history of suffering and
exploitation. As one of the exploited people, he always feels that he ought to try to
bring about a real change, but he never makes a final commitment to the
Bournehills community, because his energy is blocked by the guilt he feels about his
own personal history. While he was in the field work in Honduras, his first wife,
Sasha, who had been a victim of a Nazis' concentration camp, died from
miscarriage. Saul blames himself because he thinks her death is his fault:
Maybe, as she [Sasha] said, I did have some puffed-up image of myself as a latter-day Moses come to deliver the poor and suffering of the world, including her, only to fail them.20

Saul can't go beyond his past. He never tries to understand the meanings of Sasha's death--indirectly she was killed by colonialism, for she was in a part of Honduras where she could not receive the proper medical attention, thanks to the economic stratification of neo-colonialism. The narrator reveals Saul's reactions to those occasional moments when the memory of Sasha's death overtakes him:

But he had refused [to consider its meaning]; and to spare himself he had simply gone numb. And now here she was back again with the old demand; and worse, with the question of her death which he had closed his mind to.21

That "question of her death" is "why had something like this happened to her? Why had she been made to suffer so? What had she done?" Still, he insists on blaming himself and never tries to see the connection between Sasha's suffering and the suffering of all oppressed and exploited people. If he did he would continue his field work to help the exploited even after he leaves Bournehill. Failing to understand his past, he can't find his present--what he should do--or his future--where he should go. He is paralyzed by his own spiritual and emotional impotence. Therefore, he can't devote himself fully to the exploited people.

Similarly, Merle Kinbona, Saul's lover, is restricted by her past, mainly because of two events. When she was a little girl, Merle, a daughter of a rich mulatto man and a poor black woman, saw her mother murdered by one of her father's lovers. She was too little to remember how and by whom her mother was killed, but this painful memory continues to haunt her. The second event is that, years later when she was a poor student in England, she allowed herself to be seduced into a lesbian relationship to a rich English woman in Hampstead. After enduring that relationship in which she felt demeaned, she married an African man, Ketu, and gave birth to a daughter. However, Ketu left Merle when "the woman in Hampstead" told Ketu about Merle's affair with her. Ketu, taking the child with him, went back to Africa. This loss of husband and child crippled Merle
emotionally and spiritually. Like Saul, she still blames herself, and she can't go beyond her past. Their interaction and paralysis illustrate Marshall’s contention that recognition of the past is necessary for the fulfillment of the present and the future.

After learning of Merle's past, Saul attempts to help Merle to come to terms with her past experience:

"That's like blaming yourself for the entire history that brought it about. . . . I know what you're trying to do. This with your mother is all part of your attempt to come to terms with the things that have happened in your life. To go back and understand. And it's a good thing you're doing. More of us should try it. It's usually so painful though: looking back and into yourself; most people run from it. I know I did for a long time. But sometimes it's necessary to go back before you can go forward, really forward. And that's not only true for people--individuals--but nations as well."

He notices the necessity of looking back to the past not for the purpose of blaming oneself but for constructing the present and future:

"It's that people. . . . who've truly been wronged--like yours, like mine all those thousands of years--must at some point, if they mean to come into their own, start using their history to their advantage. Turn it to their own good. . . . You have to try and learn from all that's gone before--and again from both the good and the bad--especially that! Use your history as a guide, in other words."

Thus Saul sees their common predicament, and by attempting to help her he also helps himself. Consequently, he realizes that both of them can try to answer the haunting questions about their past experiences by helping the exploited people--Bournehills people--to change their society. Through his relationship with Merle, Saul is thus able to move forward again--beyond the paralyzing moments of his past.

After interaction with Saul, Merle also begins to come to terms with her past. She has always blamed only herself for what went wrong in her life. But as a result of her conversation with Saul, she gives vent to her deeper feelings and places some of the blame on her husband:

"Brute! How could he have just walked out like that? Without a word. With not so much as a note. Just gone. You come home one day and find the bloody flat empty. . . . What right had he? She was as much mine as his. I was still her mother, no matter what I had done or how I had lived, and that gave me some say in what was to happen to her. . . . Was he God...? Or was I the only person who ever lied to someone they loved or
tried to cover up their past? I only did it because I didn't want to risk losing him. I couldn't bear to have him know what a botch I had made of everything before meeting him. I wanted him to think well of me. Is that so terrible? Does that make me the worst person in the world? Oh, damn him!25

At last Merle looks at her past clearly and directly and realizes that she was not to be condemned for what she had done when she was much younger. By understanding her past, she, like Saul, accepts herself and prepares to go beyond her past. To live in the present and to search for the future, she decides to leave Bournehills and to look for her child and her husband in Africa. She intends, however, to return to the island and to use her knowledge of her birthplace and the west to rouse her people to action.

The significance of Saul and Merle's alliance reveals the possibilities of unity and understanding between all the exploited people in the world. Although Saul is white and Jewish and Merle is black, both are linked by their exploited past. Moreover, they share the present and future of decolonization. This kind of alliance can eventually give people the power and resources to break the system of exploitation and to establish their own future. One of the Bournehills people, Delbert, advocates this important alliance:

"We know we're not a people famous for helping out one another.... Not anymore at least. Years back when Cuffee was alive and we was running things around here ourselves we did different, maybe because we knew then that if we had lived selfish we couldn't live at all. Well, it's the same now. Kingsley and them has shut down Cane Vale, saying the main roller's broken, and leaving our canes standing in the ground, and we must needs get them out and over to Brighton before they develop red-eye and are no use to anybody. We're faced, in other words, with a grave emergency down here in Bournehills, and we're going to have to see whether we can't work together, help out the one another, as we did back in Cuffee's time, if only for this once. Because if we don't, if it's going to be every man for himself and to hell with the other fella, not one, but all of we are goin' to lose out. . . ."26

Marshall emphasizes that all the exploited people must speak up for what they need and must stop the practice of accepting only what neo-colonials want them to accept. But this new attitude must be shared by all of the colonized. If even one of them gives up or refuses to cooperate, all of them risk loss. In other words, the
destiny of the oppressed falls on each of their shoulders. This awareness is in fact the motto of the people of Bournehills: "All o' we is one." 27

Thus, in this novel, it is apparent that Marshall suggests that, despite the painful realities of the present, the knowledge of history can be a weapon against economic, political and psychological westernization. And this appreciation of the history guides people to real change for their own, not western countries' benefit.
Endnotes


4. Ibid., 100.


7. Ibid., 160.

8. Ibid., 102.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid., 408.

16. Ibid., 196.

17. Ibid., 172.

18. Ibid., 236.

19. Ibid., 458.

20. Ibid., 326.

21. Ibid., 218.

22. Ibid., 325.

23. Ibid., 325.

24. Ibid., 315.

25. Ibid., 336-337.
26Ibid., 394-395.

27Ibid., 200.
CHAPTER FIVE

GANGSTERISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Whereas the novels which I discussed so far focus on the reaction of the peasant class against imperial power, some West Indian writers choose urban slum dwellers as a class which has the potential for liberating social change. Frantz Fanon, the black Martiniquan psychiatrist, presents the possibilities of this class in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1969):

"The shanty-town sanctions the native's biological decision to invade at whatever cost...the enemy fortress...[I]t is the sign of the irrevocable decay, the gangrene ever present at the heart of colonial domination. So the pimps, the hooligans, and unemployed, and the petty criminals, urged on from behind, throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working men."

Given the right historical conditions, Fanon argues, gangs may become guerrillas: "The gangster provides an heroic blueprint for revolutionary action." Some West Indian writers also deal with the role of the gangster in the struggle for liberation as one of their prominent themes. For example, the Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul depicts the struggle of the slum-gangsters against neo-colonialism, in his novel, *Guerrillas* (1975). Also the Jamaican Michael Thelwell explores the revolutionary potential of a Kingston slum gang as its members struggle against neo-colonial forces, in *The Harder They Come* (1980). Both writers deal with the socio-political possibilities of urban gangsters in the social struggle against neo-colonialism. This chapter focuses on Naipaul's and Thelwell's rendering of the gangsters' contribution to social change. This discussion will attempt to consider the following questions: Do these authors suggest, like Fanon, that the urban slum gangs can make major contributions to the struggle for social liberation? What kinds of society do they envisage? Furthermore, what are the reactions and attitudes of the middle class toward the gangsters' involvement?
Naipaul's *Guerrillas* grows out of his reporting on the career and ultimate demise of Michael Abdul Malik (Michael X), a black power advocate from Trinidad who, having enjoyed great success among the English middle class during his tenure in England, returned to Trinidad, became the leader of a revolutionary band of slum dwellers, and eventually died on the gallows for the murder of one of his followers. What Naipaul suggests in this novel is the impotence of this kind of black power movements in West Indian countries. Naipaul further insists that nothing vital can originate in these societies because they have no real vision of themselves, no real history. Consequently, their attempts at revolution will eventually be leaderless and chaotic, remaining under oppressive forces of one kind or another.

In his description of the landscape of an imaginary Caribbean island which he chooses for the setting of this novel, Naipaul captures what he perceives as the chaotic, ravaged, and purposeless existence of this representative society:

The sea smelled of swamp; it barely rippled, had glitter rather than color; and the heat seemed trapped below the pink haze of bauxite dust from the bauxite loading station. After the market, where refrigerated trailers were unloading; after the rubbish dump burning in the remnant of mangrove swamp, with black carrion corbeaux squatting hunched on fence posts or hopping about on the ground; after the built-up hillsides; after the new housing estates, rows of unpainted boxes of concrete and corrugated iron already returning to the shantytowns that had been knocked down for this development; after the naked children playing in the red dust of the straight new avenues, the clothes hanging like rags from back yard lines; after this, the land cleared a little. And it was possible to see over what the city had spread: on one side, the swamp, drying out to a great plain; on the other side, a chain of hills, rising directly from the plain.

As Ronald Alexander Williams observes, "A sense of desolation and waste, potential chaos pervades [this island]." Through this description of confused place, Naipaul suggests that nothing can be created in this West Indian island. Naipaul captures the people's awareness of the island's chaotic state but suggests the people's resignation to their situation—a resignation which results from their lack of identity, their lack of a vision of themselves. All they can do, Naipaul illustrates, is to increase its disorder. Hence, this landscape is essentially the same at the end of the novel:
"... the field with the broken-down tractor standing against the wall of bush, past the dry flattered ridges and the furrows choked with bright green weeds, past the blocks of old bush, the spiky wild palms, the red-and-black-striped barrier pointing at the sky, the Sablich's sign, still new, announcing Thrushcross Grange, past the ruins of the abandoned industrial park, the overgrown pillars still standing in rows, the flat paved areas cracked open by grass and wild young trees, rusty reinforcing metal showing here and there through broken concrete. . . . The junked cars beside the road; the country settlements; the burning rubbish dump, trucks and people amid the smoke and the miniature hills of confetti-like refuse, the big-breasted black corbeaux squatting on the fence posts or hopping about on the ground; the shanty-town resettlements, their population spilling out of rows of identical tin-and-concrete huts, back to back and face to face down long red avenues that seemed regularly to open and close as he drove past; the bauxite pall; the hot, squalling afternoon city, melting tar, honking buses and taxis and enraged, sweating cyclists."

Furthermore, this landscape reflects the violent and destructive potential of lower-class gangsters in their lawless mood:

The wild disordered men, tramping along old paths, across gardens, between houses, and through what remained of woodland, like aborigines recognizing only an ancestral landscape and insisting on some ancient right of way. Wild men in rags, with long, matter hair; wild men with unseeing red eyes. And bandits. Police cars patrolled these hillside suburbs. Sometimes at night and in the early morning there was the sound of gunfire. The newspapers, the radio, and the television spoke of guerrillas.

Even the novel's title, Guerrillas, aptly captures the barbaric images expressed in the passage above: "wild, disordered men;" "wild men in rags, with long, matted hair;" "wild men with unseeing red eyes;" and "bandits." In other words, the disorder of the people is inseparable from the disordered landscape. They can violently rebel against their situation, but "they just create their own version of chaos."

Accordingly, the sterility and purposelessness of the society are captured not only in the description of the landscape but also in the characterization. Through the characterization of Jimmy Ahmed, the fictional version of Malik, for example, Naipaul caricatures the presence of West Indian chaos and the absence of West Indian vitality. Half-black and half-Chinese, Jimmy was encouraged in his revolutionary postures by London liberals but also ridiculed as their "play thing." Thus, he was nothing but "an old-style coon." In London, he was accused of sexual assault and abandoned by his supporters. therefore, he returned to the island and
became a leader in an agricultural commune populated by slum youths. The experience of London provided him the illusion of importance and dignity. Even after his return in the island, he attempts to prove his power and dignity, seeing himself as the necessary link between the neo-colonial powers and a potentially rebellious people:

"They thought they were trapping me. Now they see they've trapped themselves. Eh, massa? They've got to support me, massa. Sablich's and everybody else. They've got to make me bigger. Because, if I fail--hmm. I'm the only man that stands between them and revolution, and they know it now, massa. That's why I'm the only man they're afraid of. They know that all I want in my hand is a megaphone, and the whole pack of cards will come tumbling down. I'm not like the others."10

But on the island he eventually realizes his powerlessness. Unlike London, the island has no heiresses to support the entertainment contained in his tirade against white oppression. Also, the whole society provides no focus for his revolutionary acts. This is why he starts a commune, called Thrushcross Grange, a fantasy world where he attempts to restore his dignity and to carry out his revolutionary plans. But even here his destructive impulses come to the surface:

I feel that to destroy the world is the only course of action that is now open to sane men. The destructive urge comes on me at times like this, I want to see fire everywhere, when I stop and think that there is no hope of creative endeavor being appreciated, it is all for nothing, and on a night like this I feel I could week for our world and for the people who find themselves unprotected in it. When I think how much I expected of my life at one time, and when I think how quickly that time of hope dies, I get sad, and more so when I think of the people who never expected anything. We are children of hell.11

So to compensate for his impotence in the society, he attracts a following as a leader who has absolute control. His method of control is unscrupulous, as in his sexual relationship with Bryant, one of his devoted followers. Thus Jimmy "can't construct a coherent self,"12 because he lives between the worlds of powerful fantasy and powerless reality, and he is not able to tell where one world ends and the other begins. Naipaul suggests that Jimmy, as a leader of this gang, cannot inspire a revolution; he can only lead the society to its downfall; he represents leaderless and purposeless anarchy, violence without coherent ideas: "[Jimmy's] dangerous because
he's famous... because he's nothing at all... Anybody can use that man and create chaos in this place."13

Gangs who follow Jimmy are not different from Jimmy himself. They are abandoned, but still appreciate the colonial power, as Jimmy does. For example, Bryant, Jimmy's homosexual devotee, longs to be a movie star like the West Indian Sidney Poitier. As Hana Wirth-Nesher explains, "Bryant hopes for a black identity that has been manufactured by the American movie industry and portrayed by the actor often referred to as 'Hollywood's Uncle Tom.' Poitier's characters are always perfect by white Western standards."14 Other gang members, like Bryant, accept neo-colonial values and attitudes which deny and despise them. They are frustrated with this contradictory reality. Finally, their frustration causes them to explode into violence. However, since this violence lacks the theoretical basis of a real revolution, it becomes anarchy, as Harry, one of members of black middle class, indicates in his report about the violence that eventually erupts on the island:

"They say the police cracking up. Guys taking off their uniforms and running away... I don't see how you can blame the police. They don't know who they fighting or who they fighting for. Everybody down there is a leader now. I here there isn't even a government."15

This riot never changes the situation of the lower classes because it never moves beyond the city. The gangs never attack the Ridge, the stronghold of the privileged, exploiting class. As Williams observes, "from the beginning, the revolutionary energy consumes itself."16 Also, the gangs accept American intervention easily. This acceptance implies that they do not really believe "the world can be turned upside down."17 They are not guerrillas, merely gangs, because to each of them, the revolution means fighting "his own little war."18 In other words, the gang members are just creating their own form of chaos without giving thought to the real meaning of liberation.

Naipaul confirms the gangsters' incompetence through Jimmy's action after the riot, when Jimmy again reverts to his fantasy world, still needing success to give
him dignity. To his mind, the only way left for him to attack the white neo-colonial world is to dominate, sexually, women, whether or not they are willing. Thus, Jimmy forces Jane, an English woman, to have sex with him. But as Robert Hemenway indicates, this action dehumanizes him and "makes him into a rapist and ultimately--since it is the logical extension of the personal violence of rape--into a murderer."19

Not only gangsters, but also black middle-class members or white revolutionaries reveal their futility in trying to create the new society. Peter Roche, a white liberal who was once tortured for his anti-apartheid work in South Africa and who is now a public relations and welfare worker for a firm "that attempts to make up for its tainted past as slave traders by financing Ahmed's commune,"20 comes to the island with the desire to help the West Indians. However, because of his lack of political connection and know-how, his romantic desire "grows into a gesture of solidarity with blacks."21 Even though he has a reputation as a revolutionary, he is one of the destroyers of the world. Like Jimmy, he is confused and impotent. This confusion and impotence are symbolized by his smile:

[This smile of his] held sarcasm, frustration, pettishness. . . . The corners of his mouth rode up over the receding gums on his molars, which showed long, with black gaps between them.22

It was like a glimpse of teeth in a skull, like a glimpse of a satyr; . . . like a glimpse of the inner man.23

This "inner man" is the real Roche, a neo-colonial employee of a big colonial firm. As the narrator records, Roche admits that he doesn't know what to do to bring about positive social change:

He thought: I have trapped myself. . . . And he could neither act nor withdraw; he could only wait. . . . he had no political dogma and no longer had a vision of a world made good, and perhaps had never had such a vision. If he had had a system, a set of political beliefs, it might have been easier for him to have set it aside, to have admitted error. . . . to have blamed the system or to have blamed the world for not living up to the system, and without any sense of reneging to have made a fresh start. But he had no system; he distrusted systems; he had a feeling of responsibility for what he had done. Responsibility didn't end with failure, or with the abandoning of beliefs that had prompted certain actions.24
Once he starts, he can't admit his mistake--his purposelessness, his uselessness and his deception.

Roche's lover, Jane, a white Englishwoman, is equally confused and impotent. She attaches herself to Roche because she thinks he is a man of actions. She finds her life's purpose in her mate and not in herself. In fact, she has no real identity. This lack of identity is captured in the description of her face: "It seemed characterless, soft, without definition; it could become many faces." Her lost identity leads her to develop an incoherent and chaotic personality. "She was without consistency or even coherence... she was indifferent, perhaps blind, to the contradiction between what she said and what she was so secure of being." Like Jimmy and Roche, Jane is also contradictory. She pretends to help the people in the island, but her attitude is that of a colonial mistress. It may remind the reader of Paule Marshall's Harriet, the white character who cannot help the black people in the island because she believes them to be inferior to white colonials, in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*. Like Harriet, Jane imposes herself on others. And if she is refused, she closes her mind and detaches herself from life on the island.

After her disillusionment with Roche, the only thing that makes Jane remain on the island is her attraction to Jimmy, who she thinks is really revolutionary. However, she also finds out Jimmy is nothing but a failure. She concludes that nothing revolutionary can be done on this island and decides to leave. But here again, Naipaul confirms her uselessness and meaninglessness as a would-be neocolonial revolutionary through her murder at the hands of Jimmy's lover, Bryant--a murder which Jimmy encourages. Moreover, her existence itself on the island can't even be officially verified because she has been on the island without official permission. By this incident, Naipaul asserts that her existence on the island, like her life, has no meaning.

Naipaul also demonstrates the despair of the black middle classes concerning the issue of social change. For example, Meredith, a middle-class black and a
minister of communications who assumes a posture of nationalism, resigns himself to the idea that neo-colonialism on the island will never die. He reveals this despairing point of view in a parlor game with Jane and Roche. Meredith states that "... no one will make a fresh start or do anything new." He attests that, as Victor J. Ramraj points out, "this [resignation] is applicable to countries," where people never elevate or liberate themselves. So, Meredith advocates what he doesn't actually believe as a nationalist in order to acquire his credentials. Thus he is also a contradictory and chaotic man.

Through those characters, Jimmy (as a gang member)--Jane and Roche (as white revolutionaries), and Meredith (as a nationalist)--Naipaul illustrates that nobody on the island can be political guerrillas because all are trapped by a gigantic system of neo-colonialism. Moreover, even though they may try to overthrow the neo-colonial government, the attempt is doomed to failure because they have no political or coherent direction. What they do merely leads to further chaos in the society.

Whereas Naipaul emphasizes the futility of the gangs in overthrowing neo-colonial forces, Michael Thelwell, in his novel, The Harder They Come (1980), suggests that the gangsters may become guerrillas who resist the neo-colonial government and who do so with a sense of direction. Moreover, contrary to Naipaul, Thelwell confirms that despite economic exploitation and socio-political confusion, something useful and authentic can be created in the West Indies--reggae music is an example of this fact. This creativity is indicative of the great potential which the lower classes have for liberating social change.

Like Naipaul, Thelwell uses the description of the setting to reveal the chaos of the society:

Ragged people were digging in the rubble, pulling and tugging, while over their heads squadrons of vultures wheeled in the smoky air. The mountain of trash seemed to stretch very far, then gradually without perceptible demarcation or boundary it became something else. But what? A jumbled and pathless collection of structures. Cardboard cartons, plywood and
rotting boards, the rusting and glassless shells of cars, had been thrown together to form habitations. These shanties crowded each other in an incoherent jumble of broken shapes without road or order. Out of the detritus of urban life, they made a dense mass, menacing in its ugliness and carrying in its massed, sprawling squalor a meanness and malevolence that assaulted Ivan's spirit.29

Because of neo-colonial oppression, poverty, incoherence and orderlessness spread all over the city. The people wander physically and psychologically. But gradually they become irritated with this chaotic situation and the city falls into the danger of violence, as Ivan, the novel's protagonist notes:

But yet it seemed to him that people were poorer, hard-pressed. Their nerves were bad; they were quick to anger and even violent in a way they had not been before. They had always been loud and contentious, demonstrative, but before it had been tempered and cooled by humor and forbearance. Now what humor there was was bitter and very angry... and everybody was irritable.30

However, even though the people stage a riot to protest their victimization at the hands of Babylon (their name for westernized Jamaican society) the riot, like the one in Guerrillas, is easily subdues by the governmental forces: "The police gave only token pursuit, some of them seemed to be laughing... The next morning's paper [of the riot] carried banner headlines: INVADERS REPELLED: THE CITY IS DELIVERED and treated the incident as low comedy."31 "Babylon" calls people who attempt to overthrow the government "invaders," and even though the city functions as a prison to the lower classes, Babylon confirms, ironically, that the city is delivered. This ironic situation suggests that the lower classes are impotent because of the overwhelming power of neo-colonialism. Even though the rioters--the majority of them are Rastafarians--have a sense of identity, they lack the political methods and machinery to overthrow the government. What they can do is to continue their sporadic uprisings in the name of Rastafari and justice.

Another group of lower-class gangsters, who are not Rastafarians, also struggle against the governmental forces. They seem not to be able to escape from brutal poverty. These gangsters are the victims of a modern form of slavery. This exploitation is clearly illustrated by Jose, one of their leaders, who in order to free
himself from jail, is forced to make a secret deal with a police agent; he must control
the marijuana trade in the slums and give a huge portion of the profit to the police.
Because of this deal, the ganja (marijuana) traders in the slums can't make big
profits. In other words, police allows these poor people to do ganja-business as long
as the police can make huge profits from it. Therefore, gangs are of no benefit to
Babylon. Like Jimmy in Guerrillas, they are puppets of the corrupt neo-colonial
system.

Unlike Naipaul, Thelwell uses his hero to portray the possibility that gangs
may become a potent threat to the neo-colonial government. After his
grandmother's death, Ivan Martin leaves his village home, comes to Kingston, and
starts his slum life as a ganja trader. He endures his hard life because he knows that
he can always go back to his village home. But these hopes are dashed by the
system of Babylon. First he is tricked into selling his hit-bound reggae recording for
a mere fifty dollars. Then, when he visits his village after a long separation, he finds
out that the village has changed completely, because of urbanization. He feels
selfless because his identity with his village has been a part of himself: "He felt
rootless and adrift in a world without rules or boundaries. 'Ivan Martin, you no
come from nowhe'." Feeling dispossessed, he commits himself to the life of a
gangster. However, he realizes that gangsters are exploited and controlled by the
system of Babylon through its control of the ganja trade. Eventually, Ivan decides to
make a revolutionary act against the criminal and oppressive regime. With his
blazing six-guns, he kills several policemen to show the real power of a gangster and
to form a rudimentary trade-union to protect his fellow ganja-dealers against the
power of the crime bosses and their allies in the police. The serious political
implication of Ivan's action doesn't exist in the case of Stephens in Guerrillas. The
action of Stephens, the little gang leader who is killed by police forces at the middle
of protest against neo-colonial power and who becomes no threat to the system of
their government, "is always in a shadow and never provides political resonance,"33
as Michael Neill observes. Ivan's political and physical resistance is neither impotent nor chaotic. He is a real threat to the neo-colonial establishment because his action appeals to the lower classes. They hold him as their hero because he does what they want to do--attempt to blow up Babylon, which oppresses them. Therefore, his act of killing stirs the collective forces of the lower classes and inspires them to protect Ivan from the police.

Ivan's reggae hit, "The Harder They Come" is also his expression of identity and defiance of oppressive authority. And there is no denying the political implications of the lyrics of Ivan's song:

Well they tell me for a pie up in the sky
Waiting for me when I die... 
But between the day you born and when you die,
They never seem to hear you when you cry...
But as sure as the sun will shine
I'm gonna get mine, what's mine...
For the harder they come...
is the harder they faalll.
One an' aawll...
The oppressor is trying to keep me down
making me feel like a clown,
just when he thinks he' got the battle won
Ah say, "forgive them Lord, they know not what they done..."
Because, the harder they come...
But I'd raddah be a free man in mah grave
dan living as a puppet or a slave
So, as sure as the sun will shine
I'm gonna get mine...34

These lyrics confirm Thelwell's conviction that neo-colonialism never concerns itself with the desires of the indigenous people and is blind to the crimes which it commits against the people. However, the people have their pride and will continue Ivan's fight for power and liberation--"I'm gonna get mine." Because of Ivan's heroic stature, his spirit will live from generation to generation. The Harder They Come seems to predict that Ivans are all over the city, and that they will undertake other revolutionary actions in order to liberate the people from their oppression.
Thus, Naipaul and Thelwell have opposite points of view toward the contribution of gangsters to social change. Whereas Naipaul illustrates the impotence of the gangsters in shaping their own new society, Thelwell confirms the potential of gangsters to win their freedom because of their political appeal to the lower classes. Thelwell also suggests that to free themselves from neo-colonialism, people in the West Indies must explore their creative potential in order to inspire the masses to change the oppressive structure of their society.
Endnotes


2 Ibid., 54.


5 Naipaul, 22.

6 Ibid., 28.

7 Williams, 308.

8 Naipaul, 22.


10 Naipaul, 23.

11 Ibid., 41.


13 Naipaul, 159-160.

14 Ibid., 539.

15 Ibid., 211-212.

16 Ibid., 309.

17 Neill, 44.

18 Naipaul, 95.


20 Wirth-Nesher, 532.

21 Hemenway, 195.

22 Naipaul, 13.

23 Ibid., 50.

24 Ibid., 99-100

25 Ibid., 74.
26 Ibid., 20.

27 Ibid., 169.


30 Ibid., 206.

31 Ibid., 213.

32 Ibid., 323.

33 Neill, 44.

34 Thelwell, 254 (c.f. 281, 293).
CONCLUSION

The novels discussed in this study emphasize several aspects of the struggle of West Indians to liberate themselves from a legacy of colonialism. Whereas New Day asserts the reality of a West Indian identity, In the Castle of My Skin stresses the need for a collective awareness of racial identity and its socio-political complications. A Quality of Violence and Land of the Living attest to the importance of establishing (in West Indian societies) spiritual values which are not Western and which are connected to the people's cultural history. Similarly, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People illustrates that a sense of history can greatly influence the struggle to achieve social change. Unlike Guerrillas, The Harder They Come stresses the creative potential of the West Indian people as agents for socio-political change. Thus, it seems that these novels confirm the West Indian nations' need to change the society in ways which would be more egalitarian and less colonial. But to bring about that change, the writers generally agree that psychocultural liberation is a priority, and, with the possible exception of Lamming (In the Castle of My Skin), the writers illustrate that social change in the West Indies is motivated socio-politically, not racially.

As discussed in chapter one, there still remains strict social stratification in the West Indies, and the majority of people in the English-speaking West Indies belong to the lower classes and are black. Consequently, even though West Indian resistance to colonialism has a racial flavor, social protest has a socio-political motivation, and the object of the protest is invariably an exploitative governmental or economic system. As we have seen, all of the novels in this study deal with this socio-politically motivated resistance.
Some novelists also stress the need for unification of all the exploited people in the struggle against colonialism. George Lamming emphasizes that black West Indians should consider themselves as a part of the African diaspora in order to break the chains to colonialism. Also John Hearne (Land of the Living) and Paule Marshall (The Chosen Place, The Timeless People) suggest the need and significance of unity among all the exploited, regardless of race. Collectively, the novels imply that the need for social change is an urgent problem not only in the West Indies but in all societies where people are socio-politically or culturally oppressed.

Even though not all the novels which have been discussed in this study affirm the success of social change, the resistance illustrated in these novels suggests consciousness that no longer accepts the dictates of an oppressive culture, but attempts to rediscover its own validity. This attempt at rediscovery indicates an increasing vitality in the struggle for change in these societies whose past had been stolen, whose present has been directed, and whose future has been planned by external agencies.
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