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No Space for Race?

The Bleaching of the Nation in Postcolonial Jamaica

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It will be seen from what has been said that Jamaican society differs from other contemporary societies faced with colour problems chiefly in that the majority of the Jamaican population is black or coloured while the cultural background of these people is predominantly European . . .

The public expression in newspapers and at meetings of views on colour prejudice is not as frequent as might be imagined from the evidence of strong colour feeling or consciousness. There is in existence a strong sense of constraint against speaking too openly about colour inside a group. Similarly individuals will not do so with members from another group. Thus a fair person would not discuss the position of the black people with a black individual. To discuss such matters in a newspaper or in a public meeting at which all colours may be represented is to offend the Jamaican sense of propriety.

Editorial policy regarding such matters appears to be not to give undue prominence to “racial” items. On the other hand, the activities of “society” people occupy an extremely prominent position in the daily papers. This means that the activities of white and fair people are reported at great length in the papers the majority of whose readers are black. There seems to be no comment from any group on this anomaly.

– Fernando Henriques, *Family and Colour in Jamaica*

If Selwyn Langley had been born in eighteenth or nineteenth century Britain and of upper-class parentage, he would have been called a black sheep. He

would have been sent off to Jamaica and would have met Ella O'Grady and chosen her from among his stock to be his housekeeper. He would have given her two children, made his fortune and returned to England as an ordinary sheep ready for his rightful place in the fold there and she would have been left with a small consideration, and her children, with what she could make of it, along with their very profitable skin colour.

– Erna Brodber, *Myal*

Jamaica's motto, "Out of Many, One People", suggests a multicultural, multiethnic society not unlike that of the United States or Brazil. It conveniently occludes the fact that "while nearly 80 percent of the population is unmistakably black some 95 percent of Jamaicans are people with some degree of African blood" (Nettleford 2003, 37). The "many" in the motto refers to what Rex Nettleford describes as "an intensely Eurocentric (predominantly white) upper class", one that, far from being homogeneous, incorporates "Sephardic Jews, Lebanese-Syrians, Whites of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock and some 'high-brown Jamaica (functional) whites' " whose entrenched common interests overcome their natural differences in relation to the rest of society. The "many" also includes the indentured labourers of Indian and Chinese descent who were brought to countries like Jamaica in the latter half of the nineteenth century after slavery was officially abolished. In the Jamaican context, however, unlike Trinidad or Guyana, the numbers of the indentured were minuscule compared to the overwhelming majority of African-descended people that constitutes the base of society.

It so transpired that the creolized culture that emerged from this population was overwhelmingly biased towards white or European culture "in terms of an abiding Eurocentrism which puts everything European in a place of eminence and things of indigenous (that is, native born and native bred) or African origin in a lesser place" (Nettleford 2003, 4). Writing in the early 1970s, Neville Dawes, one of the earliest black directors of that very colonial institution, the Institute of Jamaica, talked about two fallacies that operated in Jamaica. One was that "our culture is really European (which meant English or Anglo-Saxon) and that we must strive to make it more so" and the other was that "our culture is really African and we must strive to make it more so". A popular prejudice that "African" and "culture" were

mutually exclusive categories was prevalent at the time, so that Dawes went on to talk about the widespread attitude of reverence for European culture:

[T]his total acceptance of the hegemony of “European” culture in Jamaica went much further and touched, in a curious way, our Chinese and our Indian cultural heritage. So that we had a situation of attitudes where the “cultured” person of Jamaican origin, black, white or mixed, if they thought of music considered that Chinese music sounded like cats fighting and that Indian music sounded like a dog howling in agony and that the music of the black majority of Jamaicans was like beasts fighting in a jungle but music was Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. (Dawes 1975, 36)

The bleaching or whitening of official Jamaican culture away from its African origins persists today and manifests itself in all sorts of ways from actual skin bleaching to the seamless assimilation of colonial norms, values and practices on the part of the middle and upper classes. Nowhere is the persistence of these contradictions more visible than in the elite-controlled world of visual art in Jamaica, which recently threw up an exemplar in the form of the emancipation monument, *Redemption Song*, by Laura Facey-Cooper. Unveiled at Emancipation Park on 1 August 2003, the bronze monument depicts an eleven-foot tall black male figure accompanied by a black female figure that is ten feet tall. Both are portrayed naked. The figures are thigh-deep in a pool of water, arms by their sides with faces uplifted to the sky. The base of the statue is inscribed with the words “None but ourselves can free our minds”, a quote attributed to Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey.¹

In keeping with the tradition of artist-produced public statuary in Jamaica, *Redemption Song* drew a wide array of negative responses ranging from protests about the graphic nudity of the naturalistically sculpted figures to concerns about how adequately the monument addressed the theme of emancipation from slavery. The emanating controversy, the passionate discussions in the public sphere for and against, the defence offered by the art establishment, the artist’s explanations, the general reception of the artwork, in particular the response of journalists who mediated much of this debate, all provide valuable information on how Jamaican society functions and how issues of race and representation are mediated in the public sphere here.²

Interestingly, while issues of race and representation were clearly at the centre of the intense debate that took place in the Jamaican media around the emancipation monument, the nature of this public sphere precluded any straightforward discussion of the race factor. Thus the fact that the sculptor, Laura Facey-Cooper, was continuing the celebrated Jamaican tradition of white/light women sculpting black bodies or even the irony of a wealthy Jamaica white representing emancipation from slavery for an African-descended population in the twenty-first century were hardly discussed at all.³ Instead, the discussion focused on the nudity of the bronze figures caught in a pose that seemed to bear little or no connection to the theme of emancipation; on its negation or disregard of prevailing local practices of clothing the body and ornamenting it into a stylish and stylized rejection of the strictures of the status quo; and on the numerous contradictions embodied by the two giant figures who, disregarding the sentiment inscribed on their base, looked heavenward for redemption.

The very title of the emancipation monument – *Redemption Song* – hints at the inherent problem of the work, for it betrays the reformist intent of the tradition Laura Facey-Cooper is honouring. This tradition or tendency, known informally as Drumblair,⁴ “has depended upon the moral-political progressivism that inspired the nationalist-modern desire for a suitably reformed, disciplined and uplifted popular” (Scott 1999, 194). The spirit of Drumblair exemplified the middle-class Creole universalism assumed by the “Out of Many, One People” motto of the Jamaican state.

Writing in 1962 about “the political problems of welding a multi-cultural, multi-racial society into a homogeneous nation” (in the anglophone Caribbean), anthropologist Vera Rubin suggested three alternative tendencies such emergent postcolonial societies might adopt in response to the racist ideology that bolstered colonialism. The first option was open race conflict; the second, racism in reverse, as in the ideology of negritude; and third, the concept of non-racialism – “the denial of the existence of race in either a biological or a moral sense” (Rubin 1962, 434).

The Creole universalism of Drumblair was based on the third option, the denial or repression of race and a conscious policy of “non-racialism” which it was felt would promote cultural assimilation, this being the goal of Caribbean societies. The nationalism of Drumblair was a bourgeois one whose emphasis in producing suitable subjects for the new nation was on

Jamaicanness, taken to be synonymous with non-racialism, denying the existence of discrimination based on race and claiming that, in countries such as Jamaica, all races exist in harmony. According to Deborah Thomas, “Creole multiracial nationalism was a narrower assertion of a specifically Jamaican identity more closely resembling classical European nationalism. That is, it was founded on a concept of common history and culture rather than race and, as in Europe, obscured the conflation of class with race” (Thomas 2004, 55).

In Trinidad, too, similar policies were adopted under the mantle of “cosmopolitanism” which was seen as being synonymous with cultural assimilation (Rubin 1962, 441). Nettleford, though clearly sceptical of claims about “multiracial” democracies brimming with racial harmony, quotes Norman Manley’s explanation of Jamaica’s unique position: “We are neither Africans though we are most of us black, nor are we Anglo-Saxon though some of us would have others to believe this. We are Jamaicans! And what does this mean? We are a mixture of races living in perfect harmony and as such provide a useful lesson to a world torn apart by race prejudice” (Nettleford 1998, 23).

In other words, Jamaica was imagined as a non-racial nation and non-racialism, besides being a distinctive feature, was described as an essential ingredient of Jamaican identity. According to Nettleford, ignoring the reality on the ground, “Jamaican leaders make non-racialism into an important national symbol by declaring at home and abroad that ‘nowhere in the world has more progress been made in developing a non-racial society in which also colour is not psychologically significant’ ” (Nettleford 1998, 23–24). Thus, “it is the Jamaicanness of the Jamaican that really matters rather than his being White (Euro), Black (Afro), Chinese or East Indian” (Nettleford 2003, 6).

Based on ideas of cosmopolitanism adopted as an antidote to the “presumed privilege” of the black majorities of postcolonial Caribbean society, it now becomes obvious how and why it is possible, indeed normal, in Jamaica for white artists to represent blackness and the histories thereof. Thus, when asked in an interview about the politics of white women representing black bodies, Facey-Cooper’s response was:

I am Jamaican – born, bred and schooled! Remember our motto – Out of Many

One People – and I’m not as white as I may look. On my father’s side, there is the English forebear, Sampson Facey born 275 years ago, who, in 1744 came to Jamaica at age 14 as an indentured person. With Phyllis Smith, a free Negro woman, he had seven children. From that time until my mother there has not been another Caucasian in the family. (Dacres 2004, 134)

Of particular interest here is the desire expressed for black identity, suggesting a need to pass as black in order to gain legitimacy as a white or light-skinned artist in a black society. What is curious is the claim, often proffered, that, despite their physical appearance, artists such as Edna Manley and Laura Facey-Cooper are actually black, because in both cases there was a foreparent – in Edna Manley’s case, her mother – who, technically, had the requisite drop of black blood that would, in a country such as the United States, have justified their claim. In her 1992 book, anthropologist Lisa Douglass provided a wealth of information on white elites in Jamaica, making the distinction between white Jamaicans or local persons of European ancestry and Jamaica whites, “people of some African ancestry who appear white”. Such persons, according to her, can decide to privilege their African ancestry, no matter how minimal, and claim blackness, an identity which they feel is more in line with Jamaican identity (Douglass 1992, 8).

The claim to having African ancestry, no matter how slight, suggests a belief that race is a biological category rather than a socially constructed one. Of course, the racial categories of “black” and “white” signify a variety of ways of belonging and being in the Caribbean that should not be taken as self-evident. Lisa Anderson-Levy rightly points out, for instance, that Caribbean whiteness implies an elasticity that may not be reflected in Euro-American notions of whiteness (Andersen-Levy 2005).

What is equally noteworthy in this respect is that it was just as common in countries like Jamaica for people of predominantly African ancestry to aspire to social “whiteness”, though such claims were inevitably contained within certain limits. “Everywhere else,” proclaimed Zora Neale Hurston, “a person is white or black by birth, but it is so arranged in Jamaica that a person may be black by birth and white by proclamation (Hurston 1990, 7).” There are numerous instances of such attempts on the part of black Jamaicans to become “census whites”, some of them expressed in fiction and poetry. There is the hilarious poem by Louise Bennett in which Miss Jane’s daughter

writes proudly from “Merica” to say that, though she has failed her exams, “she passin dere fi white” (Bennett 1983, 101–2). An equally hilarious story is told by one of Edna Manley’s grandchildren who described growing up completely confused because she was constantly confronted with the spectacle of her white grandmother claiming to be black while her brown/black grandparents resolutely maintained that they were white.⁵

Of course, in the rare instance when a black person is accorded white status it goes without saying that such a person has to display a mastery of white culture by the painstaking acquisition, by emulation, of European customs and culture and the discarding of Afro-Caribbean or black cultural traits. In general, blacks who aspired to social whiteness had to prove themselves worthy of it. As Neville Dawes observed, “black men who had ‘achieved something’ were always lurching at the Myrtle Bank but . . . the whites and very fairs who dined there had only achieved the colour of their skins” (Dawes 1960, 105). Sylvia Wynter refers to the incident where the comment of a young French boy, “Look a nigger!” brings home to Frantz Fanon his status as a “nigger”. He had not realized this was his identity before because his mother brought him up on the warning not to “be a nigger” since, as Wynter went on to point out, in the Caribbean, “you could *behave* in such a way as to prove you’re *not* a nigger [Wynter’s emphasis]” (Wynter 2000, 131). These are merely some of the asymmetries concealed behind the declaration and practice of non-racialism and cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean.

Anderson-Levy rightly emphasizes the importance of the processes through which whiteness is constructed and “the productive tension between non-whiteness and whiteness in varying historical or geographical locations”. These categories, according to her, are “constructed by and through social relations of power, which change not only social (cultural) but also biological (natural) meanings mapped onto race. This broader conceptualization allows for the re-positioning of people formerly ‘unqualified’ for whiteness by virtue of their ‘obvious’ characteristics, fundamentally altering the category and hegemonic structures that depend on its existence” (Andersen-Levy 2005).

Thus, Marcus Garvey, that champion of black identity, observed that “Men and women as black as I, and even more so, had believed themselves white under the West Indian order of society” (Jones 1995, 6). This “West

Indian order of society” was described by Elsa Goveia as being governed by “the belief that the blacker you are the more inferior you are and the whiter you are the more superior you are” (Goveia 1970, 10). According to her, this was the factor that continued to integrate West Indian societies, making the use of force unnecessary because “The majority of the slaves on the whole tended to acquiesce in their condition as subordinates of the small minority of whites, and to help this acquiescence to become more internalized the whites insisted throughout the period of slavery on the inferiority of the Negro groups in the society, interpreting this inferiority once slavery had become well established as an inferiority of race not just of social position” (Goveia 1970).

There were numerous ways to produce and perpetuate inferiority. Erna Brodber, whose writings incisively and insightfully explore what she refers to as the “continent of black consciousness”, touches on some of these:

To make a human being into a slave, the enslaver has to reduce him, in Orlando Patterson’s terminology, to “social death”. This design involves: making him into an outsider in the society in which he lives; defining him as powerless within that social system; treating him as one without honour; presenting him within the society in terms of negative stereotypes; keeping him isolated from his kind by a partial integration into the master’s group. (Brodber 2003, 24).

This self-regulating system was also recognized by Oliver Cox who described the situation of modern slavery as requiring the definition of the enslaved as “irredeemably subsocial”; however, “the pith of this ideology is not so much that the coloured people are inferior as that they must remain inferior” (Cox 1970, 357). In return, members of the white ruling class are “envied, admired, and imitated religiously” by the remainder of the population which is portrayed as being obsessed with “achieving increments of whiteness” rather than challenging the status quo. Louis James describes how slaves, being deprived of their own culture, were continually fascinated and influenced by the ways of their masters. He quotes John Hearne as saying that “the white man and woman ate, conversed, dressed, fell sick, took their baths, quarrelled, courted, bore children and died before a large, interested audience . . . Familiarity with the European master’s way of life did not breed contempt. Rather it bred respect and a desire to emulate it” (James 1968, 23).

Reading such behaviour as imitative and indicative of excessive respect for white customs and lifestyles may not grasp the complexity of the situation adequately. It is possible that, correctly gauging the high status accorded to whiteness, black slaves set out to acquire such status by emulating and acquiring white culture. Such an approach shows a sophisticated comprehension of the socially constructed nature of race and race position in society as opposed to the more simplistic one of biological determinism.

In H.G. de Lisser's novel, *Psyche*, the protagonist, a newly arrived Mandingo slave girl who was a priestess of high status in her home territory is treated well by her master who, ignoring her slave status, clothes her in dresses, stockings and shoes. Psyche assesses the lie of the land in her new country and calmly informs her master that she wants to be a white woman. He is amused by her presumption:

“So you want to be white, is that it?” he asks.

“No master for I can't be white in colour. But I want to be a white woman,” Psyche answers.

Her master asks her to explain this enigmatic statement:

“I mean,” she said in a forthright fashion, “that I always want to dress like I am now and to wear shoes always, though they hurt. And I want to live in this house and look after you and it, and have slaves under me, like the wife of your headman . . . And then when we have children they too will be white, and they will grow up and be white.” (De Lisser 1980, 28–29)

All these frantic women of colour in quest of white men, as Fanon once remarked. But in stepping into white shoes, Psyche is forced to take off the anklets she arrived in from Africa, never putting them back on. It is clear that the reference here is to white as in status and not white as in colour, an ambiguous distinction Barry Chevannes draws attention to in his lecture “Ambiguity and the Search for Knowledge” (Chevannes 2001). What Psyche is demanding here are the privileges of whiteness, regardless of the fact that her skin was “quite black”. Eventually, she receives all that she asks for including a daughter by her master, Psyche Jr, who passes for white and grows up in England as an aristocrat. England is thus presented as a more enlightened society, calling for the emancipation of slaves, among other

things, and counterpoised against the hypocritical and corrupt plantation system that prevails on the island. This plantation society, ruled over by local whites, refuses to recognize Psyche's claims to whiteness or her superior status, recognized in England, accorded by her marriage to a European aristocrat.

Brodber, too, notes that concubinage with the master class delivered no change in status "vis-à-vis larger society", that is, plantation society, though it produced a perceptible boost in status for the slave concerned, within the ranks of the slaves (Brodber 2003, 23). How would such a society transform this iniquitous system of race relations into a viable and healthy polity in the twentieth century? That was the question facing the light-skinned ruling elites of this predominantly black country, echoing the question faced by their colonial predecessors: "How can we help these ex-slaves and their children develop their potential while seeing to it that they continue to serve us?" (ibid., 105-6). The solution was to erase race completely, to imagine Jamaica as a Creole nation, implying a supposedly neutral, colourless, raceless, secular space that, while claiming to erase all difference, actually privileged a Euro-American worldview. Officially referred to as non-racialism, this worldview insisted that, despite the racial background of the majority of Jamaicans, it would be most unnatural to talk of an African or black aesthetic and most natural to look to European and American heritage for fitting antecedents, resulting, as Nettleford put it, in the absurd situation where "a numerical majority is called upon to function as a cultural minority" (Nettleford 1998, xiv). Walter Rodney, the Black Power advocate, also remarked on this phenomenon, saying, "This is a black society where Africans preponderate. Apart from the mulatto mixture all other groups are numerically insignificant and yet the society seeks to give them equal weight and indeed more weight than the Africans" (Rodney 1990, 30).

This situation persists to this day. It was interesting that, in the whole debate surrounding the emancipation monument, the media was quicker to warn against the expropriation of the rights of those whose "melanin count may not reach, for the purposes of populist discourse, a critical threshold" (*Jamaica Observer*, 8 August 2003), that is, a high degree of solicitude for melanin-deficient minorities, while being downright hostile to expressions of African-Jamaican solidarity and difference.⁶ Thus, in a bizarre inversion, the melanin-rich majority is treated as a minority while society bends over

backwards to accommodate elite minority groups whose wealth, power and prestige ensures their continued hegemony in the public sphere.

In fact, protests against Laura Facey-Cooper's depiction of emancipation were often trivialized in the media as racist objections to the fact of her whiteness. For, regardless of being able to claim a black ancestor in the distant past, the sculptress is undeniably a product of white Jamaica, a sociopolitico-cultural complex with a completely different relationship to slavery, emancipation, the teachings of Garvey or even to clothing than the majority of the people the monument is supposed to represent.⁷ What, for instance, is the role of clothing in Jamaican society today?⁸ Whereas for members of the elite, clothes may be nothing more than a practical encumbrance, the discarding of which represents a sort of freedom or emancipation, dress was used by ex-slaves to challenge the rigid social stratifications of post-emancipation Jamaica which still threatened to imprison and oppress them. For emancipated Jamaicans, clothing has been one of the "strategies of distinction" between their status as slaves and their newly bestowed status as freedmen.⁹ With no other possessions to enable this distinction to be made, clothing, and a profusion of it, became and remains an active signifier of freedom and liberty and an integral facet of black Jamaican identity. Clothing the body, lavishing time and attention on the immaculately manicured and encased physical self of the formerly enslaved, became a strategy in the practice of freedom. This can be seen historically in Garvey's adoption of resplendent military-like regalia for himself and his followers as well as in more contemporary rituals of dressing to be found in Jamaican workplaces, churches and the dancehall. David Scott also recognizes what he calls "the practice of *ruud bwai* self-fashioning" as an instance of what Foucault referred to as "an ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom" (Scott 1999, 213).

An insufficient regard for the role of clothing in Jamaican society could also be the reason Edna Manley's 1965 portrayal of Paul Bogle, another historical monument, sparked such outrage in its day, for her sculpture showed Bogle shirtless, like a labourer, with a machete and very African features.¹⁰ The only existing photograph of Bogle represents him, on the contrary, as a well-dressed, refined-looking individual.¹¹ In *Drumblair*, Rachel Manley recounts a conversation between her grandparents on the subject of the Bogle statue. Edna refers to Bogle as a "simple" man,

comparing him to “the workers, the uneducated or the poor” struggling to find their voice; her husband Norman remonstrates with her, saying, “Deacons are not necessarily simple people” (Manley 1996).

According to Deborah Thomas, Bogle was “a black Baptist preacher and literate landowner with voting privileges” (Thomas 2004, 32), but Edna, using the licence modern art allowed her, gave the people her vision of their hero, a hero stripped of the customary status markers and costume and endowed instead with a new set of signifiers – thick lips, broad nose, machete, muscular bare chest – considered suitable for a black hero. Although the public disapproval of the monument is often cited as an example of black self-hatred, it could just as well be interpreted as a protest against being represented in such stark, uninflected terms.¹² That the black underclass was and continues not to be a homogeneous group is worth emphasizing. Brodber noted, for example, that Sam Sharpe and his 1831 rebellion represented “the upper reaches of the slave system, of people many of whom and certainly most of its leaders, had never had a lash on their back” (Brodber 2003, 49).

At a time when there were very few images of black people, Edna Manley considered it her mission to make “blackness” representable, as Krista Thompson outlines in her essay “‘Black Skin, Blue Eyes’: Visualizing Blackness in Jamaican Art (1922–1944)”. As Thompson goes on to say, “She and her contemporaries not only introduced black subject matter into art, but also had to encourage the local populations, particularly the island’s black majority, to learn to see themselves as representable in the realm of art and as worthy of artistic representation” (Thompson 2004).

Ironically, Edna Manley, this generator of suitable black subjects and champion of self-government, was herself an incongruity according to her granddaughter Rachel who described the embarrassment she felt at her grandmother “standing there looking Caucasian, delivering her theatrics against British imperialism in her flawless English” (Manley 1996, 396). This was in the Black Power days of the late 1960s when a new radicalism was sweeping the Caribbean, putting race on the front burner and problematizing the policy of non-racialism that characterized the new ex-colonies and the elites such as the Manleys who ran them.

Vera Rubin noted that it was primarily in the British areas that the non-racial philosophy prevailed. According to her, “The concept of the

non-racial society has flourished officially, has been written into political planks and proclaimed on public platforms . . . The concept of non-racialism is used primarily to denote race harmony and also to imply the lack of race discrimination and of racism and race conflict.” Rubin then goes on to remark, “that there are serious discrepancies between the real and the ideal of race relations in the West Indies is nevertheless revealed even by casual observation” (Rubin 1962, 437).

The role played by functional whites, such as Laura Facey-Cooper and Edna Manley, in the Jamaican art world *could* be seen as a triumph of the brave new social order the ruling elites had tried to usher in, one that purported to level the postcolonial playing field by eliminating racism and race discrimination. In actuality, however, the social framework strategically constructed and painstakingly maintained through colonial times into postcoloniality ensured “the subsumption of the race question under the national question” (Puri 2004, 54).¹³

Thus, the very natural race consciousness of a black population was systematically overwritten in the formatting, as it were, of the new Jamaican subject. Writing almost forty years after Fernando Henriques (see epigraph), Lisa Douglass also noted that colour is practically a taboo subject among Jamaicans who prefer to believe that inequalities in status are the result of class hierarchy rather than colour hierarchy.

They want to believe it seems, that people earn their social position through class mobility rather than inherit it through the meanings attributed to colour and gender. Thus, they say social power and prestige differences are a result of education or proper socialization rather than consequences of colour or status at birth (Austin 1983, 236). By focusing on class as an achieved quality unaffected by colour or gender, Jamaicans promote their belief in a meritocracy and in egalitarianism. In this way, responsibility for a person’s situation, or for its transformation, lies in the effort, striving and disciplined behaviour of the free individual, not in the power relations of the social order at large. (Douglass 1992, 9–10)

So-called non-racialism also occluded the variance in “cultural ideas and social institutions” between the different groups making up Jamaican society. M.G. Smith noted, for instance, that at the very apex of Jamaican society stood “a tight handful of expatriate and Creole whites who, by virtue of their

economic assets and contacts, are largely able to dictate economic conditions to the people and government . . . This white section, despite its divergent economic and other interests, also shares a very distinct complex of values, ideas, interests and understandings which, together with equally distinct patterns of social relations and interaction, constitute and perpetuate their de facto corporate core, in contraposition to those of the black/Indian populations and the coloured Creole section of this society” (Smith 1990, 34–35).

Widening the parameters of racial definition to include individuals such as Manley and Facey-Cooper, functional whites, as “black” requires that the category of blackness undergo a kind of cultural bleaching, as it were.¹⁴ Since such a “universalistic incorporation” demands a steadfast denial of the importance of race and ethnicity, sociocultural nuances such as local attitudes to clothing and nudity were systematically ignored and sidelined in the emancipation monument debate. This repression of race and ethnic difference can also result in a sinister silencing of uncomfortable/inconvenient cultural histories. Thus, as one letter writer on the subject of the emancipation monument pointed out, “Nowhere in Emancipation Park [the location of the monument] do we see a display of the history of plantation slavery, the liberation struggle that was energized when the evangelical missionaries began preaching to the slaves in the late eighteenth century, or of how it culminated in Emancipation and the enduring challenge to live in a free and well-ordered community” (Mullings 2003, n.p.).

Nor, he goes on to say, are any of the nation’s symbols represented in the park. “Given the resonance of emancipation in our as yet unhealed history, such a cluster of omissions is utterly astonishing . . . it is then no surprise to see the emerging consensus that the commissioned statues are irrelevant and offensive to *a broad but often derided, censored and ignored cross-section of the community* [emphasis mine]” (ibid.).

The erasure of race and the history of slavery from the discourse of nationhood and national belonging requires that traumatic subjects such as emancipation be rendered palatable by de-emphasizing and neutering crucial aspects of it. Thus, as Narda Graham observed after noting Laura Facey’s deliberate decision to anchor the monument to a narrative of personal liberation and healing:

What is highly interesting is that in this description, the sculptor, a Jamaican of predominantly European ancestry, claims a stake in Emancipation in two ways: First and more simply, she reveals that, despite her physical appearance, one of her ancestors was in fact African and a slave. Secondly, and more significantly, she converts Emancipation to a theme that is individual and, paradoxically, therefore universal (that is, that which can be experienced by individuals of all types, everywhere). In doing so, she removes the specificity of Emancipation from its context as the end of a painful, specific period in history, as experienced by a specific group of African peoples. She has also removed the collectiveness of the Jamaican Emancipation experience, replacing it with a personal inner journey to freedom, which she has experienced and hopes others will duplicate for themselves. However, a monument is nothing if it is not a community experience. (Graham 2004, 176)

It is the elision of such community experiences in the official sphere of Jamaica that is the problem. In addition, the ability of those already in positions of privilege to extend this privilege by “claiming an identity we thought they despised” is troubling.¹⁵ David Scott cautions against the

now tediously familiar postmodern (and liberal) view according to which the unencumbered self can step back from the identifications that have, so to speak, imprinted upon it the form in which it finds itself at any conjuncture and choose from among the elastic range of available options . . . We do not simply choose our selves. One is not black simply by choice; one’s identity is always in part constituted – sometimes against one’s own will – within a structure of recognition, identification and subjectification. (Scott 1999, 125)

Unlike the literary field, the field of visual art in Jamaica is still very much shaped by the reformist vision of Drumblair, one that strives for “a Creole cohesion” at the expense of marginalizing the majority identity. As Scott points out:

the project of this middle-class nationalist-modern was to integrate progressively the social and cultural formations that composed the plurality of Jamaica around a single conception of the national good and a single portrait of the national citizen-subject. So that by Independence in August 1962 the new nation could congratulate itself on its achievement of a seemingly viable pluralist consensus (that is, the “Out of Many, One People”, proclaimed by the national motto). (ibid., 191)

As Wynter has noted, this ideal of Creole nationalism envisioned democracy *not* as a social system incorporating human beings at large but as one that represented only “those categories of people who attain to our present middle-class or bourgeois conception of being human” (Wynter 2000, 157). The problem with this was that “you cannot have a middle class as the norm of being human without the degradation of what is not the middle class, which is the working class and the jobless” (ibid., 136). Scott observes that the dissonant voices of the popular modern, as represented by singers such as Bob Marley, Anthony B and other dancehall DJs, reflect a popular desire “to resist precisely this integration into the available forms of middle-class identification offered by the postcolonial state”. Increasingly such voices are refusing to be “made over into a liberal citizen- subject who knows to leave his disreputable, unrepresentable difference behind when he enters the public realm” (Scott 1999, 216).

What is needed, it seems to me, is a genuine pluralization of the nation-space, one that enables the different communities that make up the Jamaican nation to coexist on a basis of equality and mutual respect. Instead of problematizing and trying to erase difference, this nation-space should enable identity transactions to take place without demanding the erasure or bleaching out of particular social and cultural identities that may be viewed as threatening or inconvenient to powerful minorities. Such a nation should produce a public sphere where no axis of difference, whether race, class or gender, is considered taboo or proscribed from public debate and contestation.

In the absence of such a pluralized polity the outcome is predictable. Deborah Thomas discusses the ascendance of what she calls “modern blackness” – “a bracketed blackness that continually deconstructs the creole nationalist motto by calling attention to the relations of power that are often erased within the creole formulation” (Thomas 2004, 12–13). This “unapologetically presentist and decidedly mobile” blackness is a rejection of Drumblair’s “utopianist vision of what blackness could do, could be, if it were to get with the creole program, a vision of a ‘tamed’ blackness that mirrored the values that have come to be associated with the creole professional middle classes” (Thomas 2004, 13).

A good example of one such eventuality has occurred in the discourse of visual art in Jamaica which rests on the fault lines of an unreflexive middle-

class Creole universalism. Thus, it is not surprising that an institution such as the National Gallery has largely run aground today, floundering in its own irrelevance to a large and vibrant body politic vigorously representing itself in music, dance and video both locally and internationally. The question is no longer the early twentieth century one of “making blackness representable”; the popular classes have arrogated that right to themselves for some time now. That it is time to officially start privileging Jamaica’s African heritage is something the state has begun to concede. As Deborah Thomas points out in relation to the country’s new cultural policy titled “Jamaica: Towards a Cultural Superstate”, “A delicate balance is being performed here, a two-step that seeks to privilege the histories, cultural practices, and experiences of black Jamaicans without undoing the Creole model of national cultural identity” (Thomas 2005, 112). Whether this balance will be achieved in the future remains to be seen; the case of Jamaica’s 2003 emancipation monument made it clear that the Creole vision of Jamaicanness still prevails, in the field of artistic representation, at any rate.

NOTES

1. In the wake of the furor caused by Facey’s sculpture, the Bob Marley Foundation’s proprietary claim on the line quoted on the monument’s base “None but ourselves can free our mind” has proved punitive enough to convince the sculptor to efface the words in question completely. The Marley line was itself a quote from Marcus Garvey, though one word made all the difference. The Garvey original exhorts the freeing of “the” mind while Bob sang of “our” mind. This solitary collective noun allowed the Marley Foundation to demand JA \$300,000 for the use of the quote. The sculptor having declined to pay the fee, the words were accordingly removed from the base of the monument.
2. For a discussion of some of these, see Annie Paul (2004).
3. The tradition started with British-born Edna Manley who is described as the “mother” of Jamaican art. Manley’s 1936 sculpture *Negro Aroused* virtually enjoys sacred status as a nationalist icon. Her cousin and husband Norman Manley was Jamaica’s first premier and is known as the father of the nation. According to Sylvia Wynter, the Manleys represented in Jamaica what the WASPS represented in the United States. “We tend to forget that in an

- ex-British colony like Jamaica, hegemony was not merely defined by the colour white but rather by the entire WASP/English complex. Only *its* style of life, *its* mode of being, was truly normative [emphasis Wynter's] (Wynter 2000, 171)".
4. Drumblair was an influential cultural/political movement associated with the Manleys whose house, the locus for their meetings, it was named after (Manley 1996; Buddan 1997).
 5. This story was recounted to me by a friend who heard it first hand from the Manley grandchild. For reasons of privacy, I do not wish to disclose the name of either individual.
 6. John Hearne quoted in Louis James (1968, 23).
 7. "Be Careful of Intellectual Commissars", *Jamaica Observer*, August 8, 2003. Professor Carolyn Cooper, a vocal critic of the monument, was dismissed as an "intellectual commissar", curtailing the freedom of artists to express themselves.
 8. Nettleford refers, for example, to "functional whites" and "the cultural commitments such persons betray". According to him, the term "Jamaica White" covers "those with the tarbrush (however minuscule), to the 'genuine articles' as well as persons of Jewish and Lebanese extract and some of the in-between mixtures that have graded skin tones" (Nettleford 1998, xxxiv).
 9. For an entire thesis on the subject see Buckridge (2004).
 10. Tarlo quotes Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Distinction, and the strategies thereof, in relation to Indian sartorial practices. The concept is equally applicable in the Jamaican context (Tarlo 1996, 318-19).
 11. Paul Bogle, national hero, is celebrated for having led a landmark insurrection against the colonial authorities in Morant Bay in 1865.
 12. I am indebted to Faith Smith for this insight into Bogle's social status as represented in the photograph in question.
 13. Similarly with the Christopher Gonzalez's statue of Bob Marley which also portrayed Marley in uncompromisingly black terms, the protest was characterized as another example of black self-hatred rather than a desire for visual veracity.
 14. Puri (2004, 54), citing Vera Kutzinski, discusses the claims of racial transcendence in Cuban nationalist discourse in which "the idea of cultural synthesis encodes a strategic avoidance of race".
 15. At a forum titled "Edna Manley Today" held at the Edna Manley School of Art on March 6, 2006, David Boxer protested a panelist's reference to Manley as a white Jamaican, claiming that Edna would have been horrified, as she never thought of herself as white, she was a coloured hybrid.

16. Gordon Mullings, "Looking for emancipation in the park", *Daily Gleaner*, August 16, 2003.
17. Mullings 2003.
18. In this essay, Kim Robinson makes a case for the legitimacy of white West Indian writers such as Winkler, Michelle Cliff, Robert Antoni and others on the basis of their identification with and sympathy for the black population as indicated by their assumption of black identity. Robinson claims that "the manipulation of one's identity may be, and most often is, an external imposition, but to some extent it is an internal manipulation, a matter of personal choice" (Robinson 2003, 96).

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