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V. S. Naipaul, Mimicry, and the Fictionalization of Caribbean Black Power in *Guerrillas*

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Abstract: V. S. Naipaul's 1975 novel *Guerrillas* is the earliest example of Caribbean fiction that purports to provide a realistic depiction of Trinidad's brief but historically significant Black Power movement. Naipaul was an Indo-Trinidadian expatriate who immigrated to the U.K. in 1950 and remained there until his death in 2018. He was famously Anglophilic; and given his notorious insistence that culturally the West Indies are derivative, not creative, it is unsurprising that Naipaul depicts Black Power as an empty form that Trinidad and Great Britain import to their detriment from the U.S. In its fictionalization of the story of a real-life figure on the periphery of Black Power, *Guerrillas* presents Black Power's presence in Trinidad and the UK as a failure and a sham. My article traces Naipaul's transformation of what was originally a journalistic account into his novel *Guerrillas* in order to highlight the tendentiousness of his representation of Trinidadian Black Power. The plot of the novel repurposes the crux of Naipaul's essay "The Killings in Trinidad" in which he reports how a Trinidadian Black Power poseur known as "Michael X" conspired in the January 1972 murder of a white woman named Gale Ann Benson. Crucial to Naipaul's dismissal of Black Power as a derivative fiction, this article argues, is the fraudulent Michael X, himself a mimic man par excellence in his embodiment of Black Power as an empty and parodic form devoid of original content. I demonstrate how Naipaul's marginalization of Caribbean Black Power depends on formal mimicry and on his selection of this marginal player/mimic man as representative of the movement in Trinidad.



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The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false. If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce. For the epic intention of the civilizing mission, "human and not wholly human" in the famous words of Lord Rosebery, "writ by the finger of the Divine" often produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe l'oeil*, irony, mimicry, and repetition. In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.

—Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"

1. Introduction

V. S. Naipaul's 1975 novel *Guerrillas* is the earliest example of Caribbean fiction that purports to provide a realistic depiction of Trinidad's brief but historically significant Black Power movement. Naipaul was an Indo-Trinidadian expatriate who emigrated to the U.K.

in 1950 and remained there until his death in 2018. Not only was he famously Anglophilic but Naipaul also had, as Rob Nixon reports, an “almost reverential curiosity” about the culture of the American South (Nixon 1992, p. 164).¹ This Anglo-American reverence helps to explain his dismissal of Caribbean culture as derivative, which also chimes with his characterization of West Indian expressions of Black Power as imitative of a superior U.S. model. In its fictionalization of a real-life figure on the periphery of Black Power named Michael Abdul Malik, who according to the historical record was more of a grifter than a revolutionary, *Guerrillas* presents Black Power’s presence in Trinidad and the UK as parasitic. This article highlights Naipaul’s tendentious representation of Trinidadian Black Power by focusing on how the author transforms his anti-Black Power journalism into his novel *Guerrillas*. The plot of the novel repackages “The Killings in Trinidad”, an essay in which the death of a white woman named Gale Ann Benson is sensationalized by Naipaul as a Black Power murder. Though he succeeds in bringing much-needed attention to the slaughtering of a young woman, he unfairly recasts her murder as quintessentially a West Indian expression of Black Power.

In “The Killings in Trinidad”, Naipaul turns the tragic 1972 murder of Gale Ann Benson into a case study in which he makes fallacious generalizations about Black Power’s emergence in Trinidad and the U.K. I contend that Naipaul misrepresents Black Power not only in this journalistic piece but also compounds this misrepresentation in *Guerrillas*. Through historicizing Black Power in Trinidad in the late 1960s and early 70s, I supply some important context to Benson’s murder that Naipaul elides to construct his specious argument. In his essay, Naipaul apprehends something at the scene of Benson’s death that he defines as “literary” and of a quality that is irresistible to the writer. He then pursues to its limit the literariness of Benson’s death and of the actors involved in it, especially Michael Abdul Malik. *Guerrillas*, though ostensibly exposing a so-called Black Power murder, mostly reveals Naipaul’s writerly preoccupations; or, as Joan Dayan puts it, “In this novel, perhaps more than anywhere else, Naipaul unintentionally demonstrates what he masks in his nonfiction writings: the reciprocity between his obsessions and his identity” (Dayan 1993, p. 166).

As the last section of my article illustrates, the narrative form of *Guerrillas*, the novel that Gale Ann Benson’s murder inspired, is determined by historical and literary phenomena. This novel suggests for itself several provisional reading strategies—from intertextual reflections (via allusions to *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *Clarissa*), to a hermeneutics of suspicion, and allegory—only ultimately to resist any but a deeply paranoid “parody of the history” of Trinidadian Black Power and its proponents (Bhabha 1994, p. 88). Though the novel’s title suggests that it will be about revolutionaries, it presents a narrative in which the characters symbolically represent colonial relations. Naipaul relegates his Malik figure to the margins of *Guerrillas* by making a white couple the central characters of his ostensibly Black Power novel. Therefore, much of my later discussion of *Guerrillas* will pertain to its white protagonists.

In what follows, this essay shows how Naipaul reinvents Malik and his murder of Benson in the service of turning a radical project for black liberation into what the author describes as merely a sub-literary and parodic movement of dangerous fiction. The lingering effects of what Homi K. Bhabha has identified as “colonial mimicry”, the process by which the colonized fashion themselves in the image of their colonizers, informs Naipaul’s prejudice against the movement. I argue that, as an ideal “mimic man” in his embodiment of Black Power as an empty and parodic form devoid of original content, Malik is crucial to Naipaul’s dismissal of Black Power as a derivative fiction. In other words, Naipaul’s marginalization of Caribbean Black Power depends on his selection of this peripheral player as representative of the movement in Trinidad. Ultimately, the author

takes the marginalization of black lives to the extreme by centering his supposedly Black Power novel on a white couple. Admittedly, across “The Killings in Trinidad” and *Guerrillas*, Naipaul’s misogynistic and racist depictions mar his art. Nevertheless, it is useful to return to works of this kind in order to demonstrate the lingering colonial structures that underpin postcolonial literary representations.

2. The Mimic Man Integral to Naipaul’s Work on Caribbean Black Power

Homi K. Bhabha’s essay “Of Mimicry and Man” signals its debt to V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* by citing that novel’s first-person narrator, Ralph Singh, who identifies himself as one. A “mimic man” can be any British colonial subject of color, like Singh, who is taught to be “English” in all other respects. Singh is counted among the “parodists of history”, about whom Bhabha writes: “Despite their intentions and invocations they inscribe the colonial text erratically, eccentrically across a body politic that refuses to be representative, in a narrative that refuses to be representational” (Bhabha 1994, p. 88). English post-Enlightenment discourse has seduced colonials such as Singh with narratives “rich in the traditions of *trompe-l’oeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition” (Bhabha 1994, p. 85). The mimicry by which they have been “appropriated” marks them as “inappropriate”, and as parodists mimic men refuse representation in favor of repetition (Bhabha 1994, pp. 85, 88).

I point to these hallmarks of colonial mimicry because, I contend, they abound in V. S. Naipaul’s postcolonial writings about Caribbean Black Power. My essay will demonstrate how the effects of colonial mimicry that Bhabha finds to be “profound and disturbing” shapes Naipaul’s re-presentations of Black Power in Trinidad (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). Given Naipaul’s inability to see the colonized as creators (for him, they are imitators only), it is unsurprising that he depicts a Caribbean-inflected Black Power as an empty form that Trinidad and Great Britain import to their detriment from the U.S. As Naipaul sees it, Caribbean proponents of Black Power merely mimic U.S. Black Power in the same way that they once mimicked their English colonizers. It is this line of thought that Naipaul narrativizes in *Guerrillas*.

The plot of *Guerrillas* repurposes the crux of Naipaul’s essay “The Killings in Trinidad” in which the author reports how the self-described Trinidadian Black Power leader known as Michael De Freitas / “Michael X” / Michael Abdul Malik conspired in the January 1972 murder of a white woman named Gale Ann Benson. Bookending its fictionalization as *Guerrillas* is the essay’s first appearance in the London *Sunday Times* in 1972 and its republication in expanded form in the 1980 collection *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad*. In every iteration, Naipaul’s representation of the Black Power movement in Trinidad is limited by the author’s reliance on, indeed mimicking of, British literary forebears. This adherence prevents him from addressing uniquely Trinidadian expressions of Black Power. He also discounts both Trinidad’s creolization of European languages and the oral literary cultural production particular to the people of that island. To bolster his claim that Benson’s is a “literary murder” by a Trinidadian of Portuguese and Afro-Caribbean descent, Naipaul alludes only to British literary texts and traditions even as he insists that Malik was functionally illiterate. Below, I show how Naipaul’s work obsessively casts doubt on Black Power’s revolutionary potential by repeatedly reducing it to the murder of a white woman and mentioning only a few black male characters incidental to the movement.

3. The Inspiration Behind Naipaul’s “The Killings in Trinidad”

Naipaul has said that in the early 1970s ideas for novels eluded him. The nonfiction he wrote instead includes a story about what he dubbed the “literary murder” of a woman named Gale Ann Benson (Naipaul 1980, p. 73). According to Naipaul, his nonfiction at this

time “bridged a creative gap . . . [when] from the end of 1970 to the end of 1973 no novel offered itself to me. That perhaps explains the intensity of some of the pieces, and their obsessional nature” (Naipaul 1980, “Author’s Note”). The title of his essay, “The Killings in Trinidad”, makes Benson’s murder only partially eponymous; for the essay concerns two murders, of which Benson’s is the most salacious. *Guerrillas*, to be discussed subsequently, is Naipaul’s 1975 novel that her murder also inspired, and five years later the author added a postscript to “The Killings in Trinidad” before republishing it in a 1980 essay collection. All of my citations below concerning Benson’s death are taken from the 1980 version of the essay.

Naipaul explains that the orchestrator of Gale Ann Benson’s murder, née Michael de Freitas, renamed himself twice. Born in Trinidad to someone whom Naipaul dispatches as “an uneducated black woman from Barbados”, de Freitas owes his patronym to a shopkeeper of Portuguese descent who after fathering Michael decamped to St. Kitts (Naipaul 1980, p. 26). It was as a “de Freitas” that 24-year-old Michael came to England in 1957. In Trinidad, he had been a seaman, but his résumé became criminal in Notting Hill where he worked, Naipaul records, as a “pimp, drug pusher and gambling-house operator; . . . [and] strong-arm man for Rachman, the property racketeer” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 3–4). Thereafter, Michael’s conversion to Islam is not taken seriously by Naipaul, not least because de Freitas parodies Malcolm X to give himself the same algebraic surname. In London, the race-man Michael X is more famous than the strong-arm man Michael de Freitas. Of the former, Naipaul designates him as a “Black Power leader”, “poet”, and “writer” only when quoting newspaper descriptions of Michael X as such; the citations then read as scare quotes. The suggestion is that the British press was credulous in connecting Michael X to black political leadership and literature (even though this is the same connection that Naipaul explicitly makes himself). As Naipaul tells it, journalists numbered among the many dupable people whom Michael in one way or another swindled. For example, in 1969 a rich patsy funds Michael’s most ambitious con—a black commune in Islington. Its failure and “more trouble with the law” precipitated his flight back to Trinidad, under “the Black Muslim name of Michael Abdul Malik”. The brief history Naipaul gives of Malik’s London rise and fall enables “The Killings in Trinidad” to frame Malik’s 1972 murder of Benson as an anti-white act that had been anticipated partly by a 1967 “anti-white speech he had made at Reading”, for which “he was convicted under the Race Relations Act . . . and sent to jail for a year” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 3–4). Malik’s 1971 Trinidad homecoming therefore promised and inevitably delivered much worse.

Michael Abdul Malik was not the only black man with a Muslim name to betray Gale Ann Benson. The African American lover she had followed to Trinidad before he played her falsely called himself Hakim Jamal. Like Malik and Jamal, Benson assumed another name. The new name she took scrambles together the letters of “Gale” and “Hakim”. Naipaul reads the resultant anagram “Halé Kinga” as a cipher that, given it “wasn’t a Muslim or an African name . . . suggests that in her madness there was an element of middle-class play” (Naipaul 1980, p. 6). Even if the name strictly speaking wasn’t African, its garish exoticism mimicked the African garb in which the white Briton clothed herself. As Naipaul describes it, Benson’s black radicalism was entirely ornamental. To have Benson on his arm likewise secures for Jamal, at least initially, Malik’s esteem until the prosthetic whiteness that Benson lends her lover starts to repulse Malik. “The Killings in Trinidad” hints that the only evidence to define Jamal as “an American Black Power man” is his Boston birth and Benson, the white woman over a decade his junior whom he degrades (Naipaul 1980, p. 5). The fact that both Benson and Malik admired the disreputable Jamal suggests to Naipaul that neither one was very bright. The author’s estimation of Malik as dull and impressionable explains Malik’s affinity for someone who, like him, was but another Black

Power poseur. But Naipaul decides that what must have made Jamal attractive to “Benson, the twenty-seven-year-old English divorcee, in her self-created role as white-woman slave to Jamal’s black master” (Naipaul 1980, p. 56), is that Jamal fed best her perverse penchant to fetishize race sexually.

Naipaul finds that the only thing new about Michael is his Muslim name as Malik recycles old ideas in starting another black commune upon his return to Trinidad. When Gale and Jamal visit him in Arima just outside Port of Spain at the end of 1971, Benson’s presence arouses suspicion, which suggests that something distinguished her from Malik’s followers even as it is asserted that within Malik’s circle, Benson was, as Naipaul discerns, “a fake among fakes” (Naipaul 1980, p. 6). Certainly, her strange artificial name and ethnic costume were inadequate to color over her ineradicable whiteness. But “Benson’s distinction in the commune”, Naipaul insists, was “her private cult of Jamal. Not her whiteness; there were other white people around, since for people like Malik there was no point in being black and angry unless occasionally there were white people to witness” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 5–6). Naipaul sees that the history of Malik’s dependence on white spectatorship (and sponsorship) presages the commune’s doom. The implication is that its association with another set of deluded white people promises the ultimate failure of Malik’s second, supposedly black, commune.

“The Killings in Trinidad” does concede, however, that some white people in Malik’s orbit were less suggestible than others. Naipaul observes that at Malik’s new commune, there were other white people present, of whom perhaps the luckiest was a British woman named Simmonds. “Total involvement” is how Simmonds describes her sexual affair with Steve Yeats, one of Malik’s black lackeys (Naipaul 1980, p. 22). Her use of a return airplane ticket to England—after only a six-week stay—undercuts the photograph of her saluting Black Power in Trinidad and, like Benson’s death, warns other white women to avoid “total involvement” with Afro-Caribbean men on their home turf. But perhaps what warned Simmonds herself to leave the island was her lover’s suspicious death by drowning, another “killing” to which Naipaul’s title refers.

As Naipaul understands it, the fact that Simmonds and others patronized Malik at all makes them complicit in feeding his black radical monstrosity. More broadly, Naipaul especially takes to task “people in England” for virtually inventing Malik:

Malik was uneducated, but people in England had told him that he was a writer; and he did his best to write. There were also people who had told him . . . that he was a leader (though only of Negroes). So he had read books on leadership; and once, borrowing a good deal from what he had read, he had even written a paper on the subject. “I have no need to play an ego game”, he wrote, explaining his position, “for I am the Best Known Black man in this entire [white western world *deleted*] country”. . . . But it was not always pleasant to be a leader. “Leaders are feared even by those closest to him . . . here one needs an Iron Hand for one may be tempted to placate the doubter with a gift, and the only real gift one can give is silence”. Borrowed words, almost certainly; but Malik was made by words. (Naipaul 1980, p. 18)

That most if not all blacks are tractable is suggested by the text’s parenthetical caveat that Malik was a “leader (though only of Negroes)”. Indeed, according to Naipaul, Malik himself is an example of black tractability in being so easily persuaded that he could write. Ironically, Naipaul proves that Malik was no writer by taking his work seriously enough to reconstruct a genetic text, integrating into the citation Malik’s emendations and reproducing his creative process only to doubt Malik’s creativity and suggest instead that he cribbed liberally. Naipaul borrows Malik’s words, his ungrammatical English, to remake him upon the page, and consequently, Malik becomes Naipaul’s literary monster.

It is important to stress that Malik was at the center of the Black Power Movement in Trinidad only in Naipaul's imagination. Indeed, in returning to Trinidad a year after the February Revolution of 1970, Malik might have been too late to do more than pander to Black Power dilettantes like Simmonds, derided by Naipaul as "the revolutionaries who visit centers of revolution, but with return air tickets, the people for whom Malik's kind of Black Power was an exotic but safe brothel" (Naipaul 1980, p. 29). For Trinidad's Prime Minister Eric Williams, the "racial enthusiasm" that brought him to power in 1956 had by 1969 grown unwieldy, in large part because it had gone global (Naipaul 1980, p. 39). Here, some historical context is necessary. Since it epitomizes an international antiracist resistance that was partially inspired by American Black Power, in the next section I recall an incident involving the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Montreal, particularly since this event and what happened in its aftermath prefigure what Naipaul would later satirize. As such, it is an important example of what could be interpreted as the global reach of black radical politics against which Naipaul pushed back heavily.

4. The 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad

In February 1969, West Indian students at Sir George Williams [now Concordia] University in Montreal alleged racist discrimination and demonstrated against the administration and faculty. The student protests deteriorated into occupation of, and fire damage to, the university's computer center. Of the students Canada brought to trial for arson in January 1970, ten were Trinidadian. A month later the accused found supporters in Trinidad and Tobago's National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) and others who marched their show of solidarity in Port of Spain. That march makes 26 February 1970 doubly significant, for it marks the anniversary of the Sir George Williams incident and is the Trinidad Revolution's putative start date.

One day after the NJAC-led demonstration paraded from the Royal Bank of Canada to the nearby Roman Catholic Cathedral, "nine of the leaders were arrested; these arrests", Brinsley Samaroo remarks, "set in motion a wave of public protests" (Samaroo 2014, p. 101). Over the next two months across Trinidad and Tobago, the NJAC organized more meetings and marches. However, when on "March 12, over 6000 Afro-Trinidadians marched into the largely Indian sugar belt of Caroni in Central Trinidad, to actively demonstrate for racial unity between African and Indian 'black people'", the state prepared to stop the NJAC in its tracks (Meeks 1996, p. 21). The meeting in Caroni threatened to forge the immediate rapprochement between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians that many—among them Prime Minister Eric Williams's government—did not want. But even if sympathetic to the cause, most Indians nonetheless declined to shade themselves into the "black" of Black Power that the NJAC proffered. Perhaps the "black" of "Black Power" lacked nuance. Brian Meeks argues that the "very name the movement gave itself was ... often a liability in the specific ethnic complexity of Trinidad and Tobago" (Meeks 1996, p. 22). Meeks then cites Samaroo who imagines that the "Trinidadian Indian feels hardly welcome in a power demonstration" that signals the fist-pumping Black Panthers in the U.S. and an aesthetic imported from Africa but nothing from India (Meeks 1996, p. 22).

A second march to Caroni was planned for April 20, but in the interim the month of April was cruel. On April 6th young NJAC activist Basil Davis was "martyred" for the revolution when a policeman shot him dead. Davis's 30,000-strong funeral cortege on April 9 was impossible to police. On April 15 the state's refusal to permit Trinidadian native son Stokely Carmichael's homecoming from the U.S. furthered the public's ire. "It was during this period of heightened unrest", writes Samaroo, "that the leaders of NJAC, in collaboration with the university-based Society for the Propagation of Indian Culture (SPIC) announced the proposed march to Caroni and back to Port of Spain over April 20

and 21. The fact that this second march was supported by East Indians . . . signaled to Williams that the matter had gone too far" (Samaroo 2014, p. 102). Samaroo agrees with Ken Parmasad and Franklin Harvey that the prime minister called a state of emergency on April 21 deliberately to sow division before Caroni became a site of an Afro-Indo confederacy (Samaroo 2014, p. 105; see also Meeks 1996, p. 30). Williams then arrested NJAC and Black Power leaders and carted them off to a Nelson Island prison for a brief detention.

The state of emergency clashed with some obstinate sugar workers. In Port of Spain, stones were thrown. But once the leaders of civil unrest were incarcerated and the materials of the people's resistance to military power were but stones thrown at police, it is no wonder that, in Meeks's apt phrase, "the mass movement crumbled" (Meeks 1996, p. 30). However, rather than treat the Trinidadian people as enemies, a few of Williams's soldiers disobeyed orders. They revolted and repaired to Teteron Bay's army base where the state negotiated with the rebels in bad faith, later arresting every seditious officer. Though the soldiers insisted they wanted no irrevocable putsch, Meeks doubts that the insurgents had any chance of frustrating the state of emergency; for Venezuela and the United States had sent warships to shore up Trinidadian state power. Hindsight may consider the United States' mobilization of "2000 marines to evacuate 1000 American citizens" on Trinidad a rehearsal for Ronald Reagan's invasion of Trinidad's neighbor Grenada thirteen years later (Meeks 1996, p. 34). In the event, however, under international threat after the mutineers' arrest, the two-month-old Trinidad Revolution stalled.

The abortion of the February Revolution after only two months which saw no meaningful change radicalized a few dozen youths. They called themselves the National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF) and absconded "to the hills of the northern range, from whence they waged guerrilla warfare against the establishment in the mode of the maroons, who had resisted slavery by escaping into the hills and carrying out raids on the plantations" (Samaroo 2014, p. 103). But most of these men soon died in police shoot-outs. Eric Williams's regime had won, prompting Gordon Rohlehr to proclaim that in 1970, "Williams proved to be the perfect product of the repressive colonialism against which he had, two decades earlier, thundered" (Rohlehr 2019, p. 18).

5. "The Killings in Trinidad": Naipaul's Initial Narrativization of Gale Ann Benson's Murder

As we have seen, history records that by the late 1960s and early 1970s Afro-Trinidadians, as former subjects of the British Empire, were prepared to trade a former colony's grievances for the Black Power modeled only somewhat after the resistance movement in the United States; and in the wake of the failed Revolution, they more than ever needed political activism that Michael Abdul Malik did not give them. As I have outlined above, the history of the Trinidad Revolution is one in which Malik does not figure; it also required much more than what Trinidad received from him: a Black Power-inspired "commune" that deserves the quotation marks with which Naipaul ironizes it—for it was mostly, if not all, talk.

Indeed, in "The Killings in Trinidad", the only thing Malik talks into any significance is himself. Naipaul supports this claim by likening Malik to a kind of incantation—he writes that "Malik was made by words, his and other people's" (Naipaul 1980, p. 51). Naipaul surmises that Jamal's part of the spell involved "turning Malik into an American, infecting [him], in the security of Trinidad, with the American-type racial vehemence Malik had so far only parodied" (Naipaul 1980, p. 59). If it appears that Naipaul would have had the "infect[ious]" Black Power movement quarantined in the United States, perhaps it is only because after it emerged in Trinidad it turned Malik not into an American but into a rather terrible novelist. The novel Malik writes anticipates Naipaul's fictionalizations of

him and Gale Ann Benson: “‘Nigger,’ success as a kind of racial revenge: these are among the themes of the novel Malik was writing about himself in a cheap lined quarto writing pad At least fifty pages were written; and some of them survived the events they seem so curiously to foreshadow” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 59–60). Thereafter, although what is meant by putting the n-word in quotation marks is not unpacked, verbatim quotes from Malik’s solecism-riddled, cacographic, and poorly punctuated manuscript substantiate Naipaul’s summation that “Malik had no skills as a novelist, not even an elementary gift of language” (Naipaul 1980, p. 88). But if the content of Malik’s novel-in-progress is not worth the cheap paper it is printed on, its form is noteworthy: “The narrator is a thirty-year-old Englishwoman, Lena Boyd-Richardson” (Naipaul 1980, p. 60). Naipaul’s exegesis of this text implies that Malik’s first step in exacting “racial revenge” is to make a thinly disguised Gale Ann Benson narrate his execrable novel. The result, Naipaul intimates, is much more masturbatory than it is literary, for when Malik focalizes his autobiographical fiction through what he imagines to be Benson’s consciousness “his awe at himself grew” (Naipaul 1980, p. 47).

Given what appears to be the paucity of Malik’s imagination, Naipaul’s ascription of Malik’s work to the genre of fiction helps to signify Black Power’s presence in Trinidad as an imposture:

Malik’s career proves how much of Black Power—away from its United States source—is jargon, how much a sentimental hoax. In a place like Trinidad, racial redemption is as irrelevant for the Negro as for everybody else. It obscures the problems of a small independent country with a lopsided economy, the problems of a fully “consumer” society that is yet technologically untrained and without the intellectual means to comprehend the deficiency. (Naipaul 1980, p. 70)

Naipaul traces Black Power back to a United States origin to suggest he has no objection to it in situ. But in Trinidad, he insists, Black Power victimizes inapt “consumer[s]” keen to buy what is only a bill of goods. He then defines Black Power on the island as “a deep corruption: a wish to be granted a dispensation from the pains of development, an almost religious conviction that oppression can be turned into an asset, race into money” (Naipaul 1980, p. 70). This pronouncement clarifies what the author means by “racial redemption”. Beyond its nod to the definition of “redemption” as the conversion of paper money into coin, Naipaul’s idea of “racial redemption” suggests that Caribbean Black Power pursues a kind of racial alchemy that attempts unsuccessfully to transmute the baser Afro-Trinidadian into something of more value.

Even if Malik was a hack writer, what happened to Gale Ann Benson deserves to be called a “literary murder”, as Naipaul phrases it, not least because Malik and Jamal’s conspiracy to kill her can be read as an aesthetic decision to serve a larger plot. Naipaul determines that Jamal’s reason for wanting Benson dead was cosmetic, for “Jamal, when he understood that Trinidad wasn’t the United States, began to feel that on an island where the majority of the population was black, he didn’t ‘look good’ with a white woman at his side” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 73–74). In 1970s Trinidad, to have Benson’s whiteness flank him makes Jamal appalling. And the race and class privilege that Benson represents likewise should have embarrassed Malik. Naipaul elaborates:

[Benson’s murder] was decided on by both Malik and Jamal. It was at the time when the two men were working on one another and exciting one another and producing “reams of literature”. Jamal was writing his exalted off-the-mark “nigger” nonsense about Malik; and Malik, in his novel, with this Jamal-given idea of his power . . . was settling scores with the English middle class, turning the fascination of . . . “Lena Boyd-Richardson” into terror. (Naipaul 1980, p. 73)

Put otherwise, Malik and Jamal—each man the other’s muse—wrote fiction that rendered real people as flat characters. This flattening of historical figures in fiction, as my argument will show later, is what Naipaul himself does in *Guerrillas*.

What explains Malik’s failures as a novelist, Naipaul theorizes, is that his solipsism makes prose the wrong medium for his art. Malik “was too self-absorbed to process experience in any rational way or even to construct a connected narrative. But when he transferred his fantasy to real life, he went to work like the kind of novelist he would have liked to be” (Naipaul 1980, p. 88). Malik’s scenario for Gale Ann Benson’s murder earns Naipaul’s exclamatory praise only because it marks Malik’s better-suited return to manipulating people instead of words: “Such plotting, such symbolism!” (Naipaul 1980, p. 88). Per Naipaul, Benson’s death was a political statement that Malik could not otherwise articulate.

Unlike the symbolism behind Benson’s death—its subtext—which he has no trouble comprehending, Malik’s novel manuscript tests Naipaul’s reading skills. In Malik’s novel Naipaul discovers a diegetic blunder: “There is a stumble in the narrative: the writer, without knowing it, suddenly loses his narrator, Lena. In a few connected lines, the writer moves from the first-person narrative to the third person and then back to the first. But now it is Sir Harold, Lena’s father’s friend . . . who is the narrator” (Naipaul 1980, p. 62). Sir Harold’s appearance means only that Malik’s fairytale demanded a white knight. “There remains”, however, “the mystery of Lena Boyd-Richardson, repelled, fascinated, involved, and then abruptly disappearing as narrator” (Naipaul 1980, p. 64). In the event, we see that like Jamal, who Naipaul fears must have worried that his interracial romance sent the wrong message, Malik changed his mind about ventriloquizing himself through a white woman. This muting here of Lena Boyd-Richardson adds to the symbolism in the fatal stab wound Gale Ann Benson later receives at her throat. In implicitly connecting Benson to the narrator whom Malik “disappear[ed]”, Naipaul suggests that Malik disposed of her because, as the white lover of a black man who discoursed on Black Power, Benson created a storytelling problem.

To murder Benson, Malik and Jamal recruited others. Most of the men directly guilty were black. What mitigates the criminal participation of two Indians, Naipaul speculates, is that Malik must have debauched them. These two were “Parmassar, an Indian boy who was glamourised by Malik and was a member of Malik’s group” and “a well-to-do Indian of good family called Chadee, who had become mixed up with the commune in December” (Naipaul 1980, pp. 66, 78). If Naipaul’s intercession on behalf of Parmassar and Chadee asks us to inculcate only Benson’s executioners, admittedly that leaves only three black men, named Kidogo, Stanley Abbott, and Steve Yeates. Kidogo was an acquaintance Jamal had summoned from the U.S. expressly to kill Benson. For the same reason, Malik’s peremptory telegram to England retrieved underling Stanley Abbott. Already at the commune was Steve Yeates. Parmassar and Chadee watched Abbott subdue Benson while Kidogo slashed ineffectually at her with a cutlass. But Yeates, after confiscating the cutlass, inflicted her mortal wound. Perhaps he did so charitably, given the prolonged suffering Kidogo put her through. Even if that were the case, it remains inexplicable why Trina Simmonds, another of the commune’s resident white women, upheld Yeates subsequently as “an excellent lover . . . compassionate . . . understanding . . . a wonderful man” (Naipaul 1980, p. 65). If nothing else her retrospective praise reminds us that, unlike Benson’s, Simmonds’s “involvement” with Yeates is an encounter that she survived.

After Gale Ann Benson is hacked to death, Naipaul autopsies her in prose. He judges that “[h]er execution, on 2 January 1972, was sudden and swift” (Naipaul 1980, p. 6). But, as we shall see, “swift” inaccurately measures the time it took for Benson to die, which is drawn out in his account for dramatic effect. Naipaul continues:

She was held by the neck and stabbed and stabbed. At that moment all the lunacy and play fell from her; she knew who she was then, and wanted to live. Perhaps the motive for the killing lay only in that: the surprise, a secure life ending in an extended moment of terror. She fought back; the cuts on her hands and arms would show how strongly she fought back. She had to be stabbed nine times. It was an especially deep wound at the base of the neck that stilled her; and then she was buried in her African-style clothes. She was not completely dead: dirt from her burial hole would work its way into her intestines. (Naipaul 1980, pp. 6–7)

To Naipaul, Benson's defensive wounds indicate that being stabbed soberes her—it disabuses her of an un-inhibiting "security". When he counts these wounds, the author points to Kidogo's awkwardness with a cutlass even as he acknowledges Benson's admirable attempts at self-preservation. Finally, the fact that African kitsch becomes her shroud and the meaning behind the geophagia that the paragraph ultimately discovers make the description of Benson's death especially tragic. To add insult to injury, the hole in which Benson's corpse is interred the "well-to-do" Chadee fills partially with manure.

The ungenerous post-mortem that Naipaul gives Benson continues. For example, he remembers her as "shallow and vain and [as] parasitic as many middle-class dropouts of her time" (Naipaul 1980, p. 71). In calling Benson "vain", he at once complains about what he considers to be her excessive self-regard *and* emphasizes the futility of her resistance. For it would appear that she "dropped-out" before learning her lesson—that men like Malik and Jamal will play hosts only temporarily to "parasites" like Benson. Thereafter, Naipaul villainizes the victim, arguing that Benson "became as corrupt as her master [Hakim Jamal]; she was part of the corruption by which she was destroyed. . . . Benson was, more profoundly than Malik or Jamal, a fake. She took, on her journey away from home, the assumptions, however little acknowledged, not only of her class and race and the rich countries to which she belonged, but also of her ultimate security" (Naipaul 1980, p. 71). In Trinidad, the empire that Benson must always represent by virtue of her class and race makes her attempt to play the slave carnivalesque—that is, "fake". However, in the remainder of my essay, I argue that Naipaul's resuscitation of Benson, in the thinly veiled portrait of her in the novel *Guerrillas* (1975), can function as an attempt to save her from having *died* [in] "vain". This argument would help to explain the seeming paradox of why Naipaul's critique of what he saw as an American-style Black Power in the U.K. and in Trinidad is animated by the figure of a British white woman who, fatally, is not in her element.

6. How "The Killings in Trinidad" Becomes *Guerrillas*

It is relevant that even the barest plot summary of *Guerrillas* makes impossible the avoidance of allusion, suspicion, and clumsy symbolism. As has been discussed, *Guerrillas* is based on the factual story of the murder of Gale Ann Benson by the Black Power "leader" known as Michael Abdul Malik. This essay's final section presents a close reading of *Guerrillas* with particular attention to its correspondences with and departures from its source material. When this material explicitly takes the form of a novel, Naipaul changes "Michael" to "Jimmy", renames Gale "Jane", and invents a character named "Roche", seemingly to make the names "Jane" and "Roche[ster]" suggestive for readers of Charlotte Brönte.² The Caribbean island to which Jane follows her lover Roche from London lends itself to allegory by remaining unnamed.³ At a commune called evocatively "Thrushcross Grange", Roche introduces Jane to Black Power radical Jimmy Ahmed. Meeting Jane inspires Jimmy to write a semi-autobiographical novel that renames Jane "Clarissa", a name resonant for readers of Samuel Richardson, especially since Jimmy menaces his own invented Clarissa with rape. Over the course of *Guerrillas*, Jimmy and Jane have

two parabolic sexual encounters—the first anticlimactic and the second tragic: in the first, the black revolutionary ejaculates prematurely; in the second, he sodomizes and murders Jane. The above synopsis, which just skims over the novel's surface, is in keeping with the author's description of the woman whose murder inspired it—Naipaul wrote that Benson was "impenetrable" (Naipaul 1980, p. 6). To call a woman who has been stabbed to death "impenetrable" is in poor taste, but her impenetrability combined with Naipaul's taste in literature explains why the author's fictionalization of Benson depends so ponderously upon literary allusion.

Guerrillas's several allusions to other novels in the English canon may leave some readers flummoxed.⁴ For example, if we read allusively the novel's first sentence—"After lunch Jane and Roche left their house on the Ridge to drive to Thrushcross Grange"—we find that one-and-a-half characters have been transplanted from a Charlotte Brönte novel ("Jane and Roche[ster]" from *Jane Eyre*) to a setting in an Emily Brönte novel ("Thrushcross Grange" from *Wuthering Heights*) (Naipaul 1975, p. 3). *Guerrillas*'s first sentence thus locates readers, by way of allusion, in England. A problem with our allusive reading is that Jane and Roche take their post-prandial drive in the Caribbean, not in England whence they came. "Thrushcross Grange" in Naipaul's novel names a 1970s Caribbean commune where young black men, apprehensive in both senses of the word, suffer Jane and Roche as intrusive and incongruous white foreigners. Accordingly, to begin reading *Guerrillas* allusively, then, is immediately to discover that English transplants to the West Indies can create a disorienting reading problem. Multiplying this problem exponentially is the fact that while "[t]he names Jane and Roche echo the Jane and Rochester of *Jane Eyre*", as Neil ten Kortenaar (1990) notes, "an allusion to *Jane Eyre* set in the Caribbean is also an allusion to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a rewriting of the Victorian novel" (1990, p. 330). Kortenaar's remarks reiterate John Thieme's (1979) suggestion "that what Naipaul is attempting in *Guerrillas* is a reworking of one of the classic encounters in English fiction, especially since his white characters have been given the names Jane and Roche" (1979, p. 127). In venturing beyond *Guerrillas*'s first sentence, we may continue to map the spatiotemporal triangle that Kortenaar's and Thieme's arguments schematize, wherein Naipaul "echo[ically]" (in 1975) "reworks" Brontëan "encounters" (from 1847) that have been subjected already to Rhys's "rewrit[e]" (in 1966). But we also might try to resist such a reading, as the two Janes in question seem to do. Because *Guerrillas*' Jane "hardly qualifies as a case of virtue under siege", one critic describes Naipaul's eponymous "rework[ing]" as a *reversal*, "an ironic inversion" of *Jane Eyre* (Zahlan 1994, p. 98). The irony of an ex-colonial subject's allusion to a former imperial power's discourse is to be expected when we remember Bhabha's claim that "mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise", here between Naipaul's identity as a West Indian author and the history of the English literary tradition that he attempts to enter (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). Naipaul's "ironic compromise" in *Guerrillas* results from what Mary Lou Emery has identified as a "problem faced by colonial artists of color—the requirement that they enter the realm of art in order to develop as a modern subject-who-sees, and the immediate risk of imitation, that is, of *being seen* as only parroting, rather than truly creating, within the realm of aesthetics" (Emery 2007, pp. 8–9).

There is another way in which Jane presents a reading problem. According to Roche, Jane is "very white, with a color that wasn't at all like the color of local white people. She was white enough to be unreadable" (Naipaul 1975, p. 8). In other words, it does not matter if Jane functions as a literary allusion when she, or at least her whiteness, can't be read. What Roche posits only bolsters my claim that Jane threatens a disorienting reading problem precisely because she is not "local" to the Caribbean.

Another of the novel's ironic inversions is that its characters with black skin mimic the unreadability of Jane's whiteness. At the fledgling commune that is Thrushcross Grange,

there is a hut (an ersatz barracks) that the third-person narration, alternately focalized through Jane and Roche, scans and parses into beds, boys, and black blanks—surfaces that, on the one hand, reflect and, on the other, refuse to recognize the opaquely white Jane.⁵ Within this hut, Jane finds that “Four or five of the beds were occupied. The boys or young men who lay on them looked at Jane and Roche and then looked up at the corrugated iron or at the opposite wall. Their shiny black faces were blank; they did nothing to acknowledge the presence of strangers in the hut” (Naipaul 1975, p. 8).

If, like Jane’s very white skin, the boys’ black faces, despite their shine, illuminate nothing, it might be because Jane and Roche barely glance at the young men, failing even to complete an accurate bed count. Then again, as I am arguing, the extent of the scene’s presentation is such that black skin is but another unreadable surface. Whichever it may be, the relationship between reading and race stymies Jane just as much as it does Roche once Jane meets Jimmy Ahmed, the commune’s mixed-race (Asian and Afro-Caribbean) leader who, at the end of the novel, will have Jane murdered:

The man was at first in silhouette against the white light outside. When he came into the hut he could be seen to be naked from the waist up . . . As he came down the wide aisle between the metal beds, moving with short, light steps, he gave an increasing impression of physical neatness. The neatness was suggested by the slenderness of his waist, the width of his shoulders, by the closed expression of his face, by his full, closely shaved cheeks, by his trimmed mustache, and by his trousers, which were of a smooth, fawn-colored material, and tight, so that he seemed smooth and tight from waist to shoes. . .

Jane had been expecting someone more physically awkward and more Negroid, someone at least as black as the boys. She saw someone who, close up, looked distinctly Chinese. . . . His eyes were small, black, and blank; that, and the mustache, which suggested a mouth clamped shut, made him seem buttoned up, tense, unreadable. (Naipaul 1975, pp. 9–10)

Jane’s fragmentation of Jimmy into waist, shoulders, face, cheeks, and mustache evinces how, as Bhabha argues, “Black skin splits under the racist gaze . . . reveal[ing] the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body” (Bhabha 1994, p. 92). It is also important that, in looking over Jimmy, Jane flattens him into a two-dimensional silhouette, measuring only Jimmy’s length (“from the waist up”, “from waist to shoes”) and breadth (“the slenderness of his waist, the width of his shoulders”). The novel’s description of him is another way of hinting that Jimmy is all form and no content. It is as though Jimmy presents only an illusion of depth, a *trompe-l’oeil* effect that fails to trick Jane’s eye. And yet because she expects to read Africa, not China, in Jimmy’s face, his physiognomy still presents Jane with a disorienting, or dislocating, reading problem. Nevertheless, what is at least partially “Negroid” about Jimmy are his eyes that—appropriately enough, given his biracial status—mirror the blank black boys even as they reciprocate the threat of unreadability that Roche believes Jane’s white skin might pose. If Jane is unreadable to Jimmy, however, it is because he turns blind eyes to her: “He nodded to Jane without seeming to see her” (Naipaul 1975, p. 10). Conversely, it could be said that Jane’s vision also is impaired; for, ultimately, Jane’s scratching at the surface of Jimmy does not direct us out of the cul-de-sac of unreadability.

However, given her history, Roche does not expect Jane to be incisive when it comes to apprehending West Indian men. When Jane and Roche were in London, evidently her penchant was blandly to summarize “West Indian bus conductors”, for example, as “efficient and good-humored and . . . subjected to much racial abuse”. Jane’s antiracist self-image, built on such thin description, Roche’s excoriating critique debunks:

Jane said she had recently walked out of the house of a friend who had begun to say harsh things about “immigrants”. Roche could see her walking out of the house. He could see her making some abrupt gesture, sitting forward perhaps, and then, with this physical movement, finding herself committed to the whole action: picking up lighter, bag, gloves, getting into coat—swift, large gestures . . . But he doubted whether she had left the friend’s house solely on account of the bus conductors; he doubted whether she had left the house at all. And though Jane said “Nothing would ever induce me to talk to her again”, he doubted whether there had been any serious breach. (Naipaul 1975, p. 90)

Picturing Jane gesticulating in her gloves and coat—surfaces upon surfaces—Roche guesses that Jane’s response, if there was one, was more volitional than intentional. Intentions would speak to her psychology, but Roche’s imagination only gestures towards Jane’s interiority, because what Roche triply doubts is that Jane has any depth. He pinpoints within Jane what one critic has called “[t]he collation of the inability to see beyond the surface of things, and the concomitant failure to manufacture a position, which is, in fact, the necessary result of forsaking depth for surface” (Gajjarawala 2012, p. 302). Certainly, Roche does not believe that the gloved and coated Jane of his conjecture, protected beneath her “surface of things”, speaks from tactile experience with West Indian bus conductors. The suggestion is that Jane’s insulated knowledge of and sympathy for West Indians is not even skin deep.

When he cannot credit her words and actions, it is no wonder that Roche should think Jane unreadable. Nevertheless, *Guerrillas*, like colonial “texts rich in the traditions of . . . repetition” repeatedly stages Caribbean, but also racial, foils against which Roche attempts to read Jane (Bhabha 1994, p. 88). The question of how Roche may best read Jane remains open. Roche’s skepticism and the fact that “[n]o one believed in her passion” recommend that he approach her with what might be described as a hermeneutics of suspicion:

At Mrs. Grandlieu’s one evening Roche had seen the young wife of a lawyer grow silent as Jane had talked on; and then the young woman, a pretty brown-skinned woman, neat in a tight-waisted blue dress . . . had refused to acknowledge Jane’s presence. This was done quietly; not many people would have noticed; but Roche, contrasting the woman’s neatness and gravity with Jane’s gobbling talk and nervous manner which now began to appear strident and hysterical—and Jane that evening was in a sack dress made of a kind of striped North African sacking—Roche for the first time, and to his great surprise, began to detect in Jane a physical gracelessness. Jane talked on; she seemed not to be aware of the effect she had been having. But she did know, and she had been wounded. (Naipaul 1975, pp. 94–95)

Once again Jane and a West Indian who repudiates her are hinged together into a diptych in which each is presented as the inversion or ironic mimic of the other, but in this instance, the juxtaposition renders Jane readable. Indeed, it is only her encounter with a “pretty brown-skinned” woman that makes manifest (to Roche, anyway) Jane’s latent “hysteri[a]” and “gracelessness”. It is conceivable that though Jane “talks” throughout the scene, the narrator’s failure or refusal to record her verbatim suggests that what she says is not worth reading. Instead, the reader can interpret only Jane’s surface appearance—the exotic sack in which Roche’s memory dresses her—which again results only in a white woman’s disorienting relocation—this time to North Africa. The set piece is but another instance in which Jane functions as only a cipher in the novel with no hint of depth, reduced to a silly white woman, out of joint. The fact that Jane is “wounded” by an almost undetectable rebuff confirms Roche’s suspicion that Jane is superficial.

This metaphorical wounding that Jane experiences is significant in that it foreshadows her literal, and fatal, stabbing. The racial politics at stake in this novel mean that the contempt with which Afro-Caribbean characters treat Jane specifically, and white women from England generally, must not be taken lightly. Indeed, we find that the antipathy to Jane by black characters like Adela,⁶ Roche's maid, evokes suspicious readings that can be particularly instructive:

Adela was young but devout. She was plump and healthy, but she went to all the faith healing meetings that itinerant Southern American preachers held in the city. It had at first amused Jane to hear of these meetings . . . But Jane had soon regretted the encouragement she had given Adela; for Adela, when she understood that Jane and Roche were not married and were living "in sin", became permanently annoyed. In her white uniform, on which she insisted, she walked through the large house like a Friday night woman preacher, filling the rooms with her annoyance, and looking for fresh signs of sin. (Naipaul 1975, p. 55)

Ironically, though it is Adela who is insubordinate, the blameworthy one in this exchange is Jane. The lesson to be learned from all this is that West Indian blacks are not to be given "encouragement", at least not by white women away on holiday looking to be "amused".

Moreover, the novel construes white women's turn to black people for amusement as perilous. When Mrs. Stephens, the mother of one of Jimmy's commune boys, apprises Roche of this peril, her theory that "White women marry their own. But they like the Negro men" also implies that white women do not like the white men they marry, and they do not marry the Negro men they like (Naipaul 1975, p. 107). These faithless women Mrs. Stephens blames indirectly for her son's delinquency as she laments England's and China's influence upon the Caribbean. About her son she protests, "Knolly was a good boy . . . When he was here I always used to see a few cents. I don't know what kind of sweetness he find up by that Chineer man. I don't know how he could believe that other people could look after him when they can't even look after their own" (Naipaul 1975, p. 106). Her boy's errancy has cost Mrs. Stephens money, for which she blames Jimmy, "that Chineer man". The import of her [mis]racialization of Jimmy is that the problem he presents—as with the most salient problems in this novel—is not indigenous to the Caribbean. The sweetness she thinks her boy has found in another embitters her. But what partially absolves Jimmy for Mrs. Stephens is the fact that England has spoiled him on a diet of "rotten meat", her epithet for white women with a taste for black men. According to Mrs. Stephens, such "rotten meat" "is what they feed up that Chineer man on in England. That is the only sweetness he know. That is what they feed him up on and then they send him down here. Parading through the town with their tight pants sticking up in their crutch. They *stink*, Mr. Roche. They stink like rotten meat self" (Naipaul 1975, p. 107). Mrs. Stephens's "crutch" is but another word for "crotch", but her use of the former emphasizes that for these women sex is a prop, the inappropriate means by which they support themselves. When Mrs. Stephens accuses British white women of preparing Jimmy to poison the Caribbean, what might account for her logic is England's long history of exporting to its colonies inferior and potentially dangerous products. In this respect, the targets of Mrs. Stephens's racially inflected misogyny also function as "instances of metonymy" for the [former] Mother Country (Bhabha 1994, p. 90). Though Jimmy Ahmed is born in the West Indies as Jimmy Leung, being the biracial son of a Chinese father debases, in Mrs. Stephens's eyes, his identity as West Indian, even as the novel describes her as a "well-proportioned mulatto woman" (Naipaul 1975, p. 102).⁷ And as it is the site of his radicalization and Islamization, his affiliation with England only further taints him as "other"—or, as Bhabha would have it, Jimmy's appropriation by

England makes him inappropriate on the Caribbean island—giving Mrs. Stephens more reasons to repudiate him.

“That is what they feed him up on and then they send him down here”: the final deictic element of this sentence—“here”—requires unpacking. The novel’s nameless setting makes “here” impossible to pinpoint, which helps obfuscate Jimmy’s exact origin. Mrs. Stephens further muddies the water when she acknowledges only Jimmy’s Chinese father and the British white women who, so to speak, nursed him. Mrs. Stephens’s subtle disavowal of his Caribbean origin is in keeping with the novel’s insistence that originality is not something that Jimmy can claim here in the West Indies. For example, that Jane reads Jimmy’s political “philosophy” on “duplicated sheets” emphasizes the fact that even his commune’s manifesto is a copy (Naipaul 1975, p. 10). Hinted at again here, of course, is Jimmy’s mimicry and repetition.

What also remains in question here is exactly what Jane and Roche and the white foreigners they represent are doing on the Caribbean island in the first place. In the job for which he has come to the West Indies, Roche “was a doer of good works, with results that never showed, someone who went among the poor on behalf of his firm and tried to organize boys’ clubs and sporting events, gave this cup here and offered a gift of cricket equipment there. He worked with Jimmy Ahmed, whom he took seriously, more seriously than the people who gave Jimmy money; he bribed slum boys to go to Thrushcross Grange” (Naipaul 1975, p. 47). The fact that the outfitting of cricket teams is no match for the problems that vex the island shows the work Roche does as thoroughly vacuous. Paradoxically, if “Thrushcross Grange” names a place that he must bribe “slum boys to go to”, then his inducements accomplish only the further impoverishment of young men who already are poor, a job description which clarifies why the company that hired Roche for such “public relations” work can be analogized to “a firm of colonial shopkeepers” (Naipaul 1975, p. 44). Moreover, if those who subsidize Thrushcross Grange apparently consider it trifling, then Roche’s bribing of slum boys to furnish the commune indicates ironically that he discounts them; it also discredits the claim that he takes Jimmy seriously and explains why Jimmy insists on calling Roche “Massa”. This contempt for the island’s slum boys under the guise of charity marks Roche and Jane as tourists. Indeed, Jane’s mortal flaw is her ambivalence to being interpellated as a tourist. We see this in the novel’s early pages in Jane’s first meeting with the slum boy Bryant whom Jimmy at the plot’s conclusion will recruit to kill her:

She [Jane] heard a hiss. It was one of the street noises she had grown to recognize on the island. It was how a man called to someone far away: this hiss could penetrate the sound of traffic on a busy road. The hiss came from a boy on one of the beds. She knew it was meant for her, but she paid no attention . . .

“Sister”.

She didn’t look up.

“White lady”.

She looked up.

. . . [T]he boy . . . said more loudly . . . “Give me a dollar”. (Naipaul 1975, pp. 11–12)

It would be a mistake for Jane to answer to “Sister”, because it is too intimate an address; the closeness it would suggest would make the hiss inappropriate to the occasion. “White lady” succeeds in eliciting her response because it justifies the necessity of the hiss, and it explains why it was “meant for her”: in the Caribbean, it is her polarizing identity as a visiting white lady with money that positions Jane as “someone far away” from the poor

young black man who importunes her. Ironically, the gulf between Bryant and Jane is most visible when they are proximate to each other.

The maintenance of distance is what the [mis]readings that pervade this novel recommend. When characters try to bridge distances between each other, problems occur. For example, the narrator recounts the problematic first meeting between Roche and Jane in London:

He had just published a book about his experiences in South Africa. He had been arrested, tortured, tried, imprisoned, and then, after international protests, deported, his assets in the country frozen. He had made little impression on her at their first meeting. But later she had read his book, and she had then approached him through his book. And this was soon to strike her as strange, that she should have assumed from his book and the experiences he described in it that she knew him. (Naipaul 1975, pp. 43–44)

Given that his South African experience is so readily synoptic and as such is indistinguishable from any number of apartheid resistance narratives, it makes sense that so much about Roche still eludes his book's reader. The harsher critique of the book is made by Meredith, an Afro-Caribbean solicitor and part-time radio program host who grills Roche about "our trouble here", Meredith's circumlocution for the incendiary racial climate on the island. When Meredith speaks on behalf of the West Indies that "We are too vulnerable to other people's ideas. We don't have too many of our own" (Naipaul 1975, p. 200), he identifies ideological gaps that Roche's book cannot fill. For, as he lectures Roche, "the guerrilla activities you describe in your book, the little acts of sabotage—they really cannot be compared with the guerrilla activities of other people in other countries" (Naipaul 1975, p. 205). Meredith's argument provincializes Roche's radical political history to insist that it is not portable. If Jane's objection to the book is that it tells us about "experiences in South Africa" but not about Roche, then Meredith's analysis only extends Jane's reading: Roche's book tells us about a South African experience but not about *anything* else. Taken together, Meredith and Jane's book review finds that Roche's guerrilla activities have little utility outside South Africa. Roche's book therefore provides evidence for Meredith's claim that one country's subversive anti-racist resistance movements "really cannot be compared with . . . [those of] other countries".

If we take Meredith's claim as the thesis of *Guerrillas*, we can begin to make sense of how Naipaul's foreign, white protagonists and allusions to English literature function in a novel that ostensibly is about Black Power and revolution in the Caribbean. Everything and everyone not native to the islands is depicted in *Guerrillas* as conspicuously incongruent with the project of Caribbean independence and black self-awareness. In this respect, foreign influence, be it from the U.K. or the U.S., is indistinguishable from interference. The following dialogue between Roche and his maid Adela provides an exemplary case for Meredith's implicit argument that the achievement of racial uplift in the Caribbean requires only indigenous gestures that foreigners need not touch:

She [Adela] said, "You know Dr. Handy Byam, Mr. Roche?"

He had seen the posters for this latest American evangelist, but now he was confused by Adela's aspirates and wasn't sure whether the evangelist's name was Andy or Handy.

"I feel so good, Mr. Roche, after last night. So good. Handy Byam say he wasn't going to heal anybody with his own hands. Last night he say the people have to do their own healing now and he is just here to guide them. He say that Israel is in her glory and the power is now on the Nig-ro people. He ask us to turn to

whoever was next to us and to hold their hands and to pray and pray hard, so that every man would heal his neighbor". (Naipaul 1975, p. 113)

Over and above Adela's petition to Roche, what also recommends Dr. Byam in this novel is that "the power . . . on the Nig-ro people" of which he speaks models a Caribbean Black Power that has no need for American aid; for what most distinguishes him and his program, and suggests why both are effective, is the fact that the guidance he offers is decidedly hands-off, unlike the methods of, say, Jimmy Ahmed, whom Meredith imagines "in the bush bugging a couple of slum boys" (Naipaul 1975, p. 137). Of even more importance in this example is that "American" describes Handy the evangelist but not the remedy which, in the West Indies, is already at hand. "The Nig-ro people" of the Caribbean, Handy insists, can "do their own healing".

7. Conclusions

In this essay, I have tried to elucidate how Naipaul's connection of Caribbean Black Power to Gale Ann Benson's murder, particularly in *Guerrillas*, is spurious given that he presents the Movement allusively and incongruously via the depiction of interracial relationships in which the characters involved act out racist and sexist stereotypes. Here we see how this ex-colonial's Caribbean novel, with its allusions, Standard English, and tropes favoring British literary traditions, illustrates Bhabha's claim that "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 1994, p. 85). On the one hand, the novel can be read as an act of mimicry in that Naipaul in many respects "repeats rather than re-presents" his previous invidious argument about Caribbean Black Power and his misogynistic depictions of the white women involved, even peripherally, to the movement. *Guerrillas* finds that a proliferation of flat characters and the deployment of what could be described as a form of hyper-fictionalization (that is, the further fictionalization of characters whom others have invented—Michael Abdul Malik, Jane, Roche) is necessary to expose Caribbean Black Power as a false front for criminal activity and fraud. On the other hand, in painting Jimmy Ahmed as a mimic man who first fictionalizes and then kills the embodiment of the Mother Country who aids and abets her subversive subjects, the novel also suggests that colonial mimicking of an imperial power promises a dead end for all involved. Indeed Malik, the historical figure behind Jimmy Ahmed, died by capital punishment. Perhaps unwittingly, then, *Guerrillas* constitutes Naipaul's self-critique of his own mimetic project.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge alternative literary representations of Black Power in Trinidad, particularly by one of Naipaul's Trinidadian contemporaries, Earl Lovelace. In his 1979 novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Lovelace [1979] 1981), Lovelace initially aligns himself with Naipaul when he metaphorizes Caribbean Black Power in the form of a U.S.-branded police vehicle that literally runs out of gas in Trinidad. However, in his most recent work of fiction *Is Just a Movie* (Lovelace [2011] 2012), Lovelace returns to Trinidad's 1970 February Revolution and reverses course by redefining Black Power's emergence on the island as autochthonous self-expression, wherein lies its considerable and unique value. Additionally, the author extends his critique of masculinity to help rectify the male chauvinism that plagued Naipaul's texts as well as Lovelace's earlier novel, *Dragon Can't Dance*. As such, Lovelace's latest work, when put into articulation with "The Killings in Trinidad" and *Guerrillas*, marks the much-needed recuperative intervention into the way that Trinidadian Black Power is recorded and remembered in literature.

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Notes

- ¹ An explanation for Naipaul's more positive view of the United States is offered by Gordon Rohlehr: "the lucrative rewards [Naipaul] received for his books in the American market softened somewhat his opinion of Americans and Americanization". See (Rohlehr 2019, p. 147).
- ² Maria Grazia Lolla offers that "The adoption of symbolical names . . . is a signal that the characters are meant to be fictional, not real people camouflaged, and to be vehicles of Naipaul's vision, elicited, not constrained by reality" (Lolla 1990, p. 48). For a description of the many correspondences between Michael X and Jimmy Ahmed, see (Thieme 1987, p. 171). Naipaul's fictionalization of Michael X into Jimmy Ahmed is also explored by Supriya Nair (2013) in *Pathologies of Paradise* and, more recently, by Rita Keresztesi (2020) in *Literary Black Power in the Caribbean*.
- ³ Gordon Rohlehr suggests that in not naming the island where his work is set, perhaps Naipaul's aim is "to indicate the . . . indistinctness of the island's emerging post-Independence identity" (Rohlehr 2019, p. 146).
- ⁴ To explain how allusions function in *Guerrillas*, John Thieme writes that "Naipaul develops ideas inherent in the works to which he alludes to comment on the situation in Trinidad and the other societies about which he writes". Later, Thieme adds that Naipaul's "uses of allusion frequently reveal his characters' sense of their lack of a secure social world, while at the same time providing an index of the distance of his fiction from the novel of manners of . . . European societies". See (Thieme 1987, pp. 11, 13). On the allusions particularly to *Wuthering Heights* and *Clarissa*, Hana Wirth-Nesher argues that "By employing these two landmarks of English literature in *Guerrillas*, Naipaul signals the effect of literacy in the experience of colonialism". See (Wirth-Nesher 1984, p. 537).
- ⁵ "Polyphonic" is how Johannes Riis describes *Guerrillas*'s "narrative technique". See (Riis 1979, p. 110).
- ⁶ "Adela" is perhaps another dark allusion to *Jane Eyre* in that her name recalls "Adele", Rochester's illegitimate "daughter". As such, it is fitting that she points here to *Roche*'s extra-marital relations.
- ⁷ In this novel, "well-proportioned mulatto woman" could describe Mrs. Stephens's body-type and/or her racial mixture.

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