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## The Boomerang Effect of Colonial Practice

### Free-Born Englishmen and Cavalier Slaves

Servitude, loss of liberty, imprisonment, are no such miseries as they are held to be: we are slaves and servants the best of us all: [...] and who is free? Why then dost thou repine?

Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*

In 1659, the last year of the short-lived English republic, London witnessed two events that, though apparently discrepant, allow to be read together as entry points for a speculation on the ways in which the notion of the citizen/subject is intertwined with coloniality. The first of these two events is the production, in January 1659, of William Davenant's play, *The History of Sir Francis Drake*, in the Cockpit Theatre, Drury Lane; the second, a debate in the April session of parliament on a petition submitted by one Colonel Terrill. Neither of these two incidents appears to be particularly noteworthy at first glance: After all, plays get written to be put on stage, and petitions are routinely submitted in order to be debated. And yet the two occurrences were, to some extent, anomalous. For at least according to conventional ideas about the Puritan republic, they should not have happened at all: As far as Davenant's play is concerned, its public production forms a veritable breach of the parliamentary ban on theatrical performances enforced in 1642 and re-enforced in 1647; and what the republican parliament was dealing with in its April session was again something unheard of: a "Cavalier petition" submitted on behalf of royalist supporters of Charles Stuart (who was soon to get reinstated as Charles II).

The two texts, Davenant's play and Terrill's petition, are therefore to some extent transgressive documents; more importantly, they may

help to shed some light on a crucial and paradoxical feature of early modern subject formation as played out and articulated in the polarised force field of liberty and slavery: While Davenant's play celebrates an English overseas mission of liberating an enslaved people from brutal colonisation, Terrill's petition puts the freedom of English subjects from slavery on the agenda. As I wish to suggest, however, it would be misleading to reduce this binarism of freedom and enslavement, shared by both texts in question, to a merely rhetorical repertoire of collective symbols allowing for discursive positionings; as I hope to show, the polarised rhetoric that these texts deploy refers to very material practices of slavery, especially in the areas of colonial expansion, cross-cultural encounters and enforced mobilisation.

### **The 'Slavish Subjection' of the Freeborn Englishman**

In the revolutionary rhetoric of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, one of the most influential tropes of Britain's political modernity begins to take shape: the figure of the freeborn Englishman, conceived as a subject endowed with inalienable 'birthrights' irrespective of rank, status and wealth. Proceeding from this claim, the proper rule of law gets envisioned as a set of legal and juridical arrangements that serve to grant every freeborn citizen his absolute natural right. In his classic *The Making of the English Working Class* (1962), E.P. Thompson delineates how the notion of the freeborn Englishman was crucial for the Radical, Owenist or Chartist rhetoric of the 1810s through the 1850s; he also shows that the egalitarian model of democracy advocated by these movements "had been voiced before – by the seventeenth-century Levellers" (Thompson, 1972, 24). Indeed it was not only the Levellers but political pressure groups all across the ideological spectrum of the Civil War period that employed the figure of the freeborn Englishman. Thompson's own analyses of late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century radicalism are replete with instances in which the flipside of this political figure is invoked: the un-free, the bondsman or, most starkly, the slave. "We were men while they were slaves", proclaims the concluding slogan of the London Corresponding Society's 1793 *Address*, favourably comparing the status of English commoners to their pre-revolutionary French counterparts (*ibid.*, 91). What Thompson's account leaves largely un-

explored are the mechanisms of a discursive economy in which this counter-figure, the slave, becomes constitutive of the freeborn Englishman's profile and cohesion. In that perspective, the freeborn Englishman begins to take shape in contrast to his shadow, the slave.

In the decades bracketing the English Civil War, the polarised trope of liberty versus slavery is so commonplace and ubiquitous that it takes on the status of a "collective symbol". I use this term with recourse to Jürgen Link who defines *Kollektivsymbole* as "complex signs that, due to their sociohistorical relevance, acquire a collective centrality in public discourses" (Link 1988 286). Analyses of collective symbols help to delineate how historical actors involved in a struggle against each other deploy *the same* limited repertoire of semantic and rhetorical means. As a consequence, the very ubiquity of the collective symbol appears to point to some kind of overarching consensus enforced by the ineluctability of the shared linguistic code: Understood as a "*positive historical a priori*" (Foucault 2005, 143), discourse seems not only to define what can and what cannot be spoken, but furthermore to delimit the stage on which historical agents act and which script they have to enact, prisoners in the house of language all. But what if the given script could be performed creatively (Spivak 1999, 63)? What if linguistic (and by extension, political) agency were simultaneously limited *and* enabled by the script precisely because this latter interpellates "subjects in subjection" and thus provides "a scene of agency from ambivalence" (Butler 1997, 163)?

Link's, in any case, is not an "entrapment model" (Sinfield 1992, 39) that would jettison the very potentiality of cultural and political agencies in the name of a "consensual idealism" (Holstun 2000, 218) grounded in the inescapability of a common cultural code. Rather the other way around, it is precisely the commonality of the code which, instead of enforcing consensus, enables polemics in the first place: Collective symbols are never used neutrally since their activation always involves a positive or negative evaluation and therefore an intervention into what Yuri Lotman has called the "semiosphere" (Lotman 2001, 123). Like Lotman (or Bakhtin for that matter), Link conceives of the semiosphere primarily as a site of dialogic or polylogic engagement so that any activation of the collective symbol implies responses to preceding utterances and will in turn be responded to by succeeding utterances. What Link strongly emphasises, however, is the dimension

of conflict inherent in ‘dialogue’ as “the system of collective symbols allows for the play of polemics of antagonistic discursive positions within the framework of a shared cultural code” (Link 1988, 300). This assertion resonates strongly with Fredric Jameson’s earlier objection to consensual idealism: “Within the apparent unity of the [...] code, the fundamental differences of antagonistic [...] positions can be made to emerge” (Jameson 1981, 88).

It can of course not be attempted in an article like this to put the Janus-faced figure of the freeborn Englishman/slave as a collective symbol on the map of the semiosphere of 17<sup>th</sup>-century England. Suffice it to briefly touch upon a few well-known and lesser known articulations. John Milton opens his famous anti-censorship plea, *Areopagitica* (1644), with a very liberal translation of a passage from Euripides’s *Suppliants*, according to which “This is true liberty when free born men | Having to advise the public may speak free” (Milton 1999a, 3). Addressed as it is as an open letter to the Long Parliament, Milton’s text is itself a manifest contribution to the uninhibited public sphere that it advocates, hence an enactment of that which it demands: The word materialises not as flesh but word, and as such it evidences the actually virtual. The euphoric thrust and breathtaking pace of *Areopagitica* is, I think, to a large extent derived from this dual status of the text, through which the creative potential of the utterance, traditionally reserved for the divine “omnific word”, gets rigorously secularised and democratised as “the privilege of the people” (ibid., 27), a prerogative of the free collective subject. As a pre-emptive move against the impending reintroduction of censorship, Milton addresses the parliamentarians in the role of a spokesman on behalf of a nation that has been liberated from slavery by those very same legislators to whose political liberality he now appeals:

Ye cannot make us now less capable, less knowing, less eagerly pursuing of the truth, unless ye first make yourselves, that made us so, less the lovers, less the founders of our true liberty. We can grow ignorant again, brutish, formal and slavish, as ye found us; but you then must first become that which ye cannot be, oppressive, arbitrary and tyrannous, as they were from whom ye have freed us.  
(ibid., 44)

A parliament that would revert to a policing of the public domain would therefore not only annul the liberation from 'slavish' ignorance that it had itself put underway; it would also transmogrify into the very same kind of tyranny 'from whom ye have freed us'. Apparently Milton here acknowledges liberty's contingency on the structure of the political regime, so that the freedom of the early 1640s appears as a new acquisition: The free people of England appear onstage not as 'freeborn' but as a newly constituted collective subject whose prior position was that of the slave. Milton all the same emphasises the foundational status of freedom – including the freedom to transgress – as a feature of the species according to divine decree:

When God gave him [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force. (ibid. 23)

From here, the priority of freedom and slavery gets reversed: It is only in the historical realm of politics that the slave precedes the free subject; at the more fundamental theologically encoded level, man has been designed as free in the creator's master plan. If *Areopagitica* thus constructs a nexus between an innate, natural or divinely intended freedom and, as a consequence, the demand for according political liberty, it is fully consistent that Milton, in 1649, should celebrate the execution of Charles I. and the abolition of monarchy as heroic acts of "repudiating slavery" and reclaiming the English people's "natural birthright" to freedom (Milton 1959, 321/322). Later, in proportion to his intensifying disillusionment with the English Revolution and its degeneration into a military dictatorship to be followed by the restoration of the monarchy, he does not simply take shelter to high art and early capitalist authorship (as Holstun suggests) but instead rehearses the dichotomy of slavery and liberty in ways that, at least in the Satanic verses of *Paradise Lost* and more obviously in *Samson Agonistes*, take on outright militant forms.

But certainly the importance of the slavery/liberty dichotomy in Milton's works alone would not justify the claim that we are addressing a collective symbol. For this it is important to take into account how, all through the 1640s, radical pressure groups such as the Levellers and the Diggers invariably 'reveal' the enslavement of the free-

born English people while their royalist opponents justify absolutism by recourse to the right of the conqueror to enslave the vanquished. Both camps in this rhetorical struggle deploy the collective symbol in its articulation as the trope of the “Norman Yoke” which allowed precisely for that ‘play of polemics’ that Link attests. For the radicals, the Norman Yoke made it possible to denounce the landed and propertied classes in racial terms as descendants of the invading Normans who had “established the tyranny of an alien King and landlords” (Hill 2001, 52). Apologetically used, the trope emphasised the normative positivity of extant power relations. The Tudor lawyer Henry Blackwood’s treatise *Apologia pro Regibus* (1581), widely discussed in the pre-Civil War years, exemplifies a royalist discursive positioning of the ‘Norman Yoke’ trope: Blackwood postulated the normative facticity of William the Conqueror’s (and by implication, his successors’) absolute power; as a consequence, the vanquished Anglo-Saxons and their descendants had positively lost all the rights they may have had before – a condition of subjection that Blackwood illustrates in a telling recourse to trans-Atlantic colonialism by comparison of the English common people with “the American Indians after the Spanish conquest” (qu. in Hill 2001, 56). Needless to state, such royalist/loyalist argumentation is unintentionally double-edged in the extreme, as it suggests an identification of the ruling elite with the national enemy, Spain, and class dominance with foreign rule. In this critical logic, the trope of the Norman Yoke gains momentum in the first half of the seventeenth century as a means to denounce and expose the Stuart monarchy as a regime of foreign invaders and “intruders [intending] to bring us into slavish subjection to their wills” (Walwyn/Overton 1998, 38):

The history of our forefathers since they were conquered by the Normans does manifest that this nation has been held in bondage all along ever since by the policies and force of the officers of trust in the commonwealth, of which we always esteemed kings the chiefest. [...] It was done by war and by impoverishing of the people to make them slaves and to hold them in bondage. (ibid., 34)

In this vein, republicans and radicals polemicise against the “slavish condition” in which the English people are deprived of their “native liberties”, and ‘reveal’ or ‘discover’ the “origins of all slavery in England

and everywhere” (Winstanley 1941, 627). This discourse of denunciation gets linked with the invocation of a return to the mythical ur-democracy “before the Conquest” (Cowling 1998, 102) so that the realisation of the radical natural right of the freeborn Englishman would be a restoration rather than an innovation. It is “to recover our birthrights and privileges as Englishmen” that the majority of the New Model Army rank-and-file have ventured out into the struggle in the first place (Sexby 1998, 120). After the crushing of the radical uprisings within the republican New Model Army in 1649, the discourse of a ‘restoration’ of pre-Conquest liberties gives way to a lamentation about the new repressive regime of the Protectorate. Thus, the radical discourse of liberation canonised in Milton’s vision of the uncensored, self-regulating public sphere of *Areopagitica* is suffocated by newly established state control and repression of this public domain: “We cannot talk or discourse about our lost freedoms or open our mouths of our oppressions, but we are in as bad a condition as our fore-fathers were in the days of William the Conqueror” (Lilburne, 1998, 183). Hence, the radical denunciation of a tyranny “as the like never was in England [...] since the days of the Conqueror himself: no captivity, no bondage, no oppression like unto this, no sorrow or misery like unto ours (of being enslaved, undone and destroyed [...])” (*ibid.*, 184).

It was not the egalitarian camp that by 1649 had gained the upper hand within the republican camp but the ‘grandee’ faction whose rhetoric posited an inextricable nexus between the “freeborn and the propertied Englishman: in short, the gentry” (Underdown 1996, 90). But even slaveholders did employ this rhetoric in order to justify their own insurrectionist stance: After the motherland had been declared a republic, the royalist plantation owners in Barbados or Virginia refused to submit to the new regime, declaring that they would “prefer an honourable death before a tedious and slavish life”. In the 1650s, observes Carla Pestana, it was a standard refrain of royalists in England that “Parliament conspired to enslave them” (Pestana 2007, 102).

## Paper Slaves

All this talk about liberty and slavery is conspicuously silent about the one form of *actual* slavery that one, from the present perspective, would expect to dominate this whole discourse: the African slave trade. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the slave is routinely derived from classical antiquity, the Bible, or the myth of the Norman Yoke, and always an Englishman defending, reclaiming, or being deprived of his birthright. Since the figure of the African remains excluded from all these texts, the slave appears as merely metaphorical – a virtuality in relation to which the freeborn Englishman can be thrown into relief. In fact, if we only had the political prose of the period, we could be tempted to assume that slaves existed only in print at that time. In this vein, literary critic Joanna Lipking writes:

Long before the English knew slavery in practice, they knew it as one half of a familiar opposition between liberty and slavery, a rhetorical trope used from ancient times as a rallying cry to promote one government or policy over another. During the fierce contests of the mid-seventeenth century over England's true heritage and course, this rhetoric served to justify the execution of Charles I.  
(Lipking 1997, 159)

This, to be sure, is an accurate rendition of the discursive function of 'slavery' in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England; but one cannot avoid the suspicion that Lipking is a little bit too credulous when she seriously claims that all these texts were written "long before the English knew slavery in practice", as if there had first been a proliferation of purely textual slaves who only later were followed by embodied ones. What if it were the other way around and the English began to deploy the rhetorical opposition of slavery and freedom precisely at that moment at which slavery practically came back to the political agenda? Could it be that, roughly analogous to Foucault's observation on Victorian sex, slavery in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England got dragged into discourse – "driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence" (Foucault 1990, 33) – precisely because, like sex for the Victorians, it was a 'dangerous' practice for the Britons of the mid-seventeenth century? Still structurally following Foucault, slavery would then permanently be talked



about so that it could be controlled, regulated and normalised. The political discourse of inborn English liberty emerges – like Foucault’s medical and pedagogical discourses – in order to fend off this potential danger: namely, that one – everyone – could become actually enslaved. It is against this threat that a whole array of texts is being produced that, all differences notwithstanding, converge at one point: to bring forth a subject position that would be ontologically proof against enslavement. If, as Judith Butler assumes, subject positions emerge through the interpellation of “subjects in subjection”, then the figure of the freeborn Englishman as a model subject emerges indeed from the ground of slavish subjection: The freeborn Englishman comes after the slave. Without slavery no free subject. The rhetoric of innate freedom is a discursive countermeasure to the actuality of slavery, and it gains momentum precisely then when slavery comes back to England like a boomerang.

For slavery was, as Maureen Quilligan insists, “far more than a metaphor” in 17<sup>th</sup> century England (Quilligan 1999, 174). It was an actual social practice in at least three manifestations that are very different from each other and yet interrelated inasmuch as they are all implicated in the process of empire building: First, and most obviously, there is England’s increasing involvement in the African slave trade. Historian David Eltis has recently estimated that between 1630 and 1680, the ratio of people shipped to America on English vessels must have been one British person for every 40 African slaves (Eltis 2000, 47). The volume of the British slave trade intensifies substantially all through the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to Joseph Inikori, English slave traders shipped at least 431,000 Africans to the Americas between 1620 and 1680.

Secondly there is, as Linda Colley suggests, an increasing awareness of British peoples’ vulnerability to captivity and enslavement at the hands of foreign powers like the Ottoman Empire or the pirate states of North Africa as well as the indigenous inhabitants of the North American colonies: “For seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Britons, slavery was never something securely and invariably external to themselves” (Colley 2002, 51), and hence an integral part of the experience of being British. This constant threat of pirate raids and corsair attacks that British seamen, passengers and even villagers along the southern coast of England were exposed to (see Wilson 2005, 93) entered into the emergent cultural modes of constructing

modern subjectivities and of giving representational shape to these modern subjectivities. In a highly persuasive argument Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse close their study on *The Imaginary Puritan* with the assertion that “English fiction comes from captivity narratives” (Armstrong/Tennenhouse 1992, 216): On hat reading, the experience of transcontinental and/or colonial enslavement and captivity gets remapped as constitutive, indeed indispensable, for the emergence of the novel, that allegedly purely European genre through which the modern Western subject begins to gain artistic contours as an individual. Against received Eurocentric narratives of the ‘rise of the novel’, Armstrong and Tennenhouse delineate how the modern subject emerges from the writings of “abducted bodies” fallen into the hands of alien powers but “ward[ing] off the threat of another culture by preserving the tie to her mother culture through writing alone” (*ibid.*, 210). What should be added, however, is that the trajectory from Mary Rowlandson’s account through *Robinson Crusoe* to *Pamela* exemplifies how the subject position of the abducted body as a source of writing gets increasingly removed from the institution of slavery, or how, in other words, slaves are gradually re-transformed and domesticated into merely textual figures: While Rowlandson identifies herself over large sections of her autobiographical narrative as the property of ‘her master’, Robinson moves through the stages of the slave in Sallé to that of the Brazilian slave owner only to come out as the benevolent, Providence-ordained monarchical master of an island and its inhabitants. Pamela, finally, insists successfully on her freedom as an individual that produces itself through writing: “my soul is of equal importance with the soul of a princess, though in quality I am but upon a foot with the meanest slave” (Richardson 1981, 197). And yet does the actual slave make a marginal appearance even in Richardson’s novel when, towards the ending of the first volume of *Pamela*, the by now fully furnished heroine receives reports about Mr B.’s illegitimate daughter being given “a little *Negro* boy, of about ten years old, as a present, to wait upon her” (*ibid.*, 504). Strikingly, Pamela’s pity is not for that peripheral figure but for the girl’s mother who had less success than herself in engaging the ruddy squire in a long-term relationship. With Pamela, then, the structure of the captivity narrative, while remaining largely intact and visible, gets strictly confined to the provincial reach of England only, thus largely but not quite

completely covering up the trans-Atlantic experience from which the narrative is derived.

To come back to the experiential horizon of seventeenth-century Britain, a third way of slavery to confront ‘freeborn Englishmen’ deserves attention (and will indeed form the focal point of interest for the remainder of this paper): the governmental practice of deporting convicts, ‘street urchins’ and prostitutes to trans-Atlantic destinations. This relatively well-documented policy shades off easily into the far more obscure practices of ‘spiriting away’ (i.e. abducting) and literally selling off British subjects into slavery in the new ‘plantations’ of Barbados or Virginia. The peculiar coincidence of Davenant’s play and Terrill’s petition in 1659 might help to illustrate these diverse modes of coercing entire sections of populations into mobility.

### **Davenant’s *History of Sir Francis Drake***

When William Davenant’s play, *The History of Sir Francis Drake*, was produced in the Cockpit Theatre, theatres were still closed officially according to a Parliamentary decree from 1642. Even if the Puritan ban on entertainment was not as harsh as common knowledge of the English republic has it, the fact remains that there were only two officially sanctioned public theatre performances between 1642 and 1660. And those performances were, needless to say, subject to heavy state control. So, in order to get his Drake play onto the stage, Davenant had to convince the Council of State that the play was politically serviceable to the cause of the republic (see Wiemann 2009).

*The History of Sir Francis Drake* offers an apotheosis of Englishness as benevolent colonial practice, of imperialism as chivalry. In the play, Drake and his English crew come to Peru as liberators of the ‘Peruvians’ from Spanish oppression. And there, unexpectedly, they find military and political allies in the community of ‘Symerons’, who, according to Davenant’s stage direction, “were a Moorish people, brought formerly to Peru by the Spaniards as their slaves, to dig in mines; and, having lately revolted from them, did live under the government of a king of their own election” (Davenant 2002, 275)<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Subsequently qu. in my text as D + page number.

The English therefore gain their specific profile in a complex contact zone, namely in relation to three distinct other groups: the Spaniards, the Symérons, and the Peruvians. The Spaniards, needless to state, act as agents of genocide and enslavement, while the Peruvians figure only as their passive victims yearning to be set free by the 'higher virtue' of their English liberators; as a contrast, the Symérons have already liberated themselves from the tyranny of Spanish domination. As active supporters of Drake's campaign, they appear as almost but not quite equal. In his dialogue with the Symeron king, Drake envisages a post-Spanish America as one vast empire of liberated African slaves. But notably, even this prospective dominion would remain under the tutelage of England, and the future Symeron king of the whole West Indies would – although a self-liberated free man – remain a subject-in-subjection, indeed a 'slave' of Elizabeth: "Slave of my Queen! To whom thy virtue shows | How low thou canst to greater virtue be" (D 278). Interpellating the Symeron monarch as a self-subjecting servant of the Queen, Drake does not necessarily – and certainly not purposefully – denigrate his interlocutor's dignity; rather the other way around, the assumed submission of the Symeron king to the English queen testifies to the former's 'virtue' and, moreover, puts him on par with Drake himself; for after all, the historical figure of Francis Drake had been conveniently canonised by the 1626 publication of *Francis Drake Revived* as conversant in the art of fashioning himself as the "poore vassal" of Elizabeth, "to whome I have deuoted my selfe, liue or dye" (Drake 1971, 4).

In their capacity to both self-liberation from Spanish tyranny and self-subjection to English majesty, then, Englishmen and Symérons appear to be virtually the same. But they only appear so. In order to introduce and maintain a crucial and essential difference between Africans and Englishmen, Davenant's script has to resort to a racialising strategy that prefigures what Homi Bhabha has called colonial mimicry – "the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object" (Bhabha 1994, 88) as "*almost the same but not quite*" (*ibid.*, 89). If colonial mimicry powerfully distinguishes between essence and veneer, between being and seeming, "between being English and being Anglicized" (*ibid.*, 90), then this distinction is clearly at work in that episode of Davenant's *Drake* play in which the apparent sameness of English and Symeron is abruptly revealed as delusion. In the course

of the joint effort against the Spanish colonial regime, the Symerons launch an assault on a Spanish wedding party including civilians and, notably, women. This episode brings to light “all those cruelties” that “Moorish malice” is prone to indulge in (D 288). All the higher ‘virtue’ of England is required to discipline these unruly and obviously not-quite civilised allies who now stand revealed as lacking one central component of what early modern intellectuals considered a benchmark of full humanity: civility. It is not only the life and honour of the bride that is at stake here; more importantly, the “renown”, the honour of the English gentlemen regime itself is in danger, as one of Drake’s officers clearly points out:

Drake, thy beloved renown is lost  
Of which thy nation used to boast:  
Since now, where thou a sword dost wear,  
And many marks of power doest bear,  
The worst of licence does best laws invade.  
For beauty is an abject captive made. (D 287)

The rule of ‘the best law’ under the governance of the chivalrous Drake is threatened by the ‘worst of licence’. But where English colonial power holds sway, the code of chivalry may not be and will not be broken. The Symerons are put in their place in an educational disciplinary campaign, so that the rule of colonial chastity gets reinforced. Colonial chastity has been the bottom line of the official self-description of English colonialists ever since Raleigh and Drake:

I protest before the majesty of the living God that I neither know nor believe that any of our company, by violence or otherwise, ever knew any of their women, and yet we saw many hundreds, and had many in our power, and of those very young and excellently favoured, which came among us without deceit, and stark naked. [...] which course so contrary to the Spaniards drew them [...] wonderfully to admire our nation. (Raleigh 1971, 44)

Again relying on Raleigh as his major source, Davenant marks English imperialism as unpossessive and emancipative by encoding it in sexual terms; the abstemiousness and virtuous self-control of the English gen-

tlemen thus stands in clear and advantageous opposition to both “the cruel and extreme dealings of the Spaniards” (in Hakluyt 1985, 176) and the apparently inborn “Moorish malice” of the Symérons. Raleigh, of course, gives himself away at precisely that moment at which his *Discovery of Guiana* turns into an advertisement for the colonial appropriation and exploitation of Guiana, “a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead, neuer sacked, turned, nor wrought” (Raleigh 1971, 73). Again articulated sexually, colonial conduct is now no longer figured as chivalric protection and chaste indifference to ‘stark naked’ women ‘in our power’, but as defloration, if not rape.

A similar rhetorical somersault occurs in Davenant’s play when Drake’s officers unabashedly point out that liberation is only the noble name given to a practice that in fact implements servitude: “such as to our power submit | may take delight to cherish it, | And seem as free as those whom they shall serve” (D 281, my emphases). At this moment, the duplicity of Davenant’s rhetoric of anti-conquest becomes as apparent as it did in Raleigh: Those who are under British rule receive not actual freedom but only its semblance. They are only seemingly liberated in order to actually serve. In case the English gentlemen colonisers encounter already liberated populations – such as the Symérons – those others are constructed as profoundly uncivilised and therefore in need of instructive discipline. In either case, the discourse of anti-conquest ensures the right to demand the subservience of the other, and prepares for the status of England as chief agent of a global civilising mission. This stance had been notoriously envisaged by Milton in one of his more jingoistic moments, in which he constructs England as the elect nation entitled “to teach other nations how to live” (Milton 1959, 232) – which is precisely how Drake deals with the Peruvians and the Symérons. In Milton, the prerequisite for such imperial instruction or instructive imperialism is an already achieved self-liberation at home. Only the *free* English subject is authorised to colonise others, and to be colonised by the free means to be elevated from the condition of enslavement and ignorance to liberty and civility. For Milton, however, self-liberation is not a given, not an inherent feature of some essentialised Englishness, but rather a task that the republic has set itself; by the time Davenant composes his *Drake* play with its barely disguised advocacy of English imperialist domination of others, Milton has already become a fervent critic of

the drive to foreign expansionism: In the course of the ‘corruption’ of the English republic, the nation has not only proven to be “incapable of governing and ordering itself”; it has in this decline from freedom effectively forfeited its legitimacy as imperial instructors: “what you arrogate to yourselves with so much eagerness, the government of others, when like a nation in pupillage, you would rather want a tutor, and a [...] superintendent of your own concerns” (Milton 1999b 412). Effectively re-enslaved as they are, the English can at best imagine themselves to be “still conquering [but in fact remain] under the same grievances, that men suffer conquered” (Milton 1991, 429).

“As free as those whom they shall serve”: All claims to foreign domination apart, this statement from Davenant’s play delinks the notion of English freedom from its republican, Miltonic dynamics, according to which the English have to gain, safeguard and develop their liberty in the face of oppressive forces at home; Davenant transforms this notion into an essence according to which the English are actually free, once and for all. Posited as already extant, freedom is thus de-politicised. The notion of the freeborn Englishman gets transformed into a device by which the English are rhetorically united against the (colonial) others who ‘shall serve’ them. This version of the freeborn Englishman will have a vital role to play for centuries to come after Davenant, not only on the colonial scene but also in the arena of the national pedagogy of the state. Already in Davenant’s play, the ontology of the free-born Englishman engenders further overseas projects of liberation as the global mission of the English. The concluding chorus impels the audience to mobilisation, and interpellates them as subjects in both freedom and mobility:

Our course let’s to victorious England steer!  
Where, when our sails shall on the coast appear,  
Those who from rocks and steeples spy  
Our streamers out, and colours fly,  
Will cause the bells to ring,  
Whilst cheerfully they sing  
Our story, which shall their example be,  
And make succession cry, to sea, to sea! (D 294)

## Terrill's Petition

But not for all Englishmen in 1659 did the rallying cry, “to sea, to sea!”, spell out free and voluntary movement. Instead, mobility could for some have meant an extremely coerced mobilisation. In its April session, the English Parliament was debating a petition submitted by one Colonel Terrill on behalf of seventy-two “free-born people of this nation, now in slavery in the Barbadoes” (Stock 1924, 249). The petition states the apparently unthinkable, namely that the seventy-two Englishmen in question had been deported to the Caribbean there to be “sold [...] for one thousand five hundred and fifty pound weight of sugar a-piece, more or less, according to their working faculties, as the goods and chattels” (*ibid.*) of plantation owners. What is at stake here is not indentured labour (which provided a generally accepted source for the population of the ‘plantations’ in the Americas with the British poor) but slavery proper, and more outrageously, slavery imposed by Englishmen on Englishmen; as such it gets exposed by the petitioners who write from a “most deplorable, and (as to Englishmen) unparalleled condition”, namely, “to be sold as their goods” to “merchants that deal in slaves and the souls of men” (*ibid.*). By harking back to the figure of the freeborn Englishman, the petitioners try to expose their condition as “a breach [...] made upon the free people of England” (*ibid.*).

It is precisely that nexus between liberty and nationality, or, the ontology of the freeborn mobile Englishman, on which the official self-description of the republic crucially relied, and which in Davenant's play finds its confirmation in the fantasy of a benevolent, liberating colonial practice. The incident of the English slaves in Barbados, literally brings home the dark flip side of this lofty self-identification. It brings home some of the actual practices of early modern British imperialism; picking up a remark by Michel Foucault in another context, one could indeed speak of “the boomerang effect colonial practice can have”: “A whole series of colonial models [writes Foucault] was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonisation, or an internal colonialism, on itself” (Foucault 1997, 103).

It should by now no longer come as a surprise that both the supporters and the opponents of Terrill's petition deploy the collective symbol of the free-born Englishman. For the opponents, however, the petitioners had disqualified themselves, had denuded themselves of



their national birthright. They are not so much Englishmen but ‘Cavaliers’, that is, supporters of the monarchy. As such they are “notorious enemies of this nation” (Stock 1924, 252), and have hence exiled themselves from the community of the freeborn. As agents of tyranny they have already enslaved themselves prior to any government verdict. Therefore, the secretary of the House points out, in a logically consistent argument, that the enslavement of the 72 men in question has nothing whatever to do with a general breach of English civil liberties: Those who were enslaved were explicitly no longer members of the people of England. The imagined community becomes exclusive, and those who are excluded from it are no longer shareholders of its privileges and in the last resort available for enslavement.

In defence of the petition, other members imagine the community of the freeborn English as inalienably inclusive. Freedom is virtually a signature of the race. Hence the supporters of the petition state that they do “not look on this business as a Cavalier business; but as a matter that concerns the liberty of the free-born people of England” (*ibid.*, 253); that “Slavery is slavery, as well in a commonwealth (republic) as under another form of state” (*ibid.*, 250). Hence, the practice of slavery threatens the edifice of the republic at its foundations: “to make merchandise of Englishmen” (*ibid.*, 252) runs contrary to the aims for which the Roundhead party had fought the Civil War in the first place: As one sympathetic MP claims, “if we have fought our sons into slavery, we are of all men most miserable” (*ibid.* 254). Another member fears that the toleration of slavery makes “miserable slaves” of us all; but he goes on to state that “If we allow this, our own lives will be as cheap as those negroes” (*ibid.*, 256). What is at stake, again, is not slavery as such but the enslavement of Englishmen. The injustice inflicted on the petitioners can only be grounded in these men’s higher status: “I consider them as Englishmen”. Clearly the strategy of the defenders of the petition rests on the difference between Englishmen and ‘Negroes’, and it exposes how something is wrongfully inflicted on Englishmen that is rightfully done to others.

The defenders denounce that which Foucault has called the boomerang effect of colonial practice; but in order to do so they have to establish and bring into their discursive positioning an insight into the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the ‘freeborn’ subject of modernity: The freeborn Englishman does not emerge autonomously; it rather depends on the presence of its other, the ‘Negro’ and slave.

## The Transmodern Constitution of Modernity

Of course, the seventy-two Englishmen in Barbados were only the tip of the iceberg. It would be possible to construe a much larger and at the same time much more fundamental nexus between a colonial practice of English 'plantations' in the Americas, the African slave trade, and a politics of enforcing mobility on certain sections of the domestic population. In 1654, Henry Whistler who was part of the expedition sent out by Cromwell to challenge Spanish hegemony in the Caribbean, wrote about his visit to Barbados, in English possession since 1625: "This island is the dunghill upon which England casts forth its rubbish: rogues and whores and such like people are those which are generally brought here" (in Pestana 2007, 89). This remark refers to the obscure history of coerced transportations of 'undesirables' from Britain itself: Though this practice was denounced as a violation of the Magna Charta, between 1615 and 1679, when the Habeas corpus Act was passed, the deportation and sale of all sorts of people to the colonies was legalised, however precariously. In 1615, the Privy Council decreed that convicts could be transported to "parts abroad" where they "might live and yield a profitable service to the commonwealth" (Jordan/Walsh 2007, 84). In 1620, this regulation was extended to so-called urchins, that is, street children, and again two years later to female prostitutes. This motley crew of criminals, underclass children, and convicted prostitutes formed the majority of coerced migrants into the American colonies. Their deportation exemplifies not so much an expansionist politics of settling English overseas colonies but rather a kind of population management at home: the forced removal of those undesirable elements which threatened, in hegemonic discourses, the health of the body politic.

The deportation of the underclass was instigated and supervised by the Virginia Company, a chartered joint stock company founded in 1606. It is their functionaries who are responsible for the lobby and pressure-group work that eventually led to the introduction of deportation to forced labour first as a punishment, but soon as a means of social engineering, that is, as a tool for the removal of undesirables. Ideologically, this move was underpinned by intense scaremongering concerning the increase in poor and hence potentially criminal subjects who allegedly "infested" the country, especially the urban centres. Here is one of the most prominent advocates of this strategy

of demographic hygiene, the dean of St. Paul's, none less than John Donne, the metaphysical poet, in his sermon "preached to the Virginian Company" in November 1622:

[the colony in Virginia] shall conduce to great uses; it shall redeem many a wretch from the jaw of death [...]. It shall sweep your streets, and wash your doors, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and employ them: and truly, if the whole country [of Virginia] were but such a Bridewell [i.e., the prison of London], to force idle persons to work, it had a good use. (Donne 1839, 227)

It is interesting to see that Donne is not so much focusing on delinquents to be transported, but on 'idle persons' and their children. Idleness, somehow, merges into criminality, at least, we have to assume, when found among the poor. Later, John Locke will in his *Second Treatise* equate "waste landers" with aggressors against whom not only wars are justified but also enslavement. Meanwhile, Donne employs the tradition of organic body politic rhetoric to praise the effect of enforced overseas migration as a social cleansing: While Virginia, in Donne's scenario, gets transformed into one vast prison and workhouse, this penal colony enacts itself the transformation of the useless or even damaging elements into a useful and productive mass. The national pedagogy through enforced labour does not only cleanse the motherland of its rotten elements; in the process, the unproductive underclasses themselves mutate from a pest into healthy subjects: "it is already, not a spleen, to drain the ill humours of the body, but a liver to breed good blood" (*ibid.*).

This scenario of identifying and 'treating' undesirables engenders a planning utopia of social or demographic engineering, reminiscent of what Zygmunt Bauman, in a different context, has called the "gardener's vision". According to Bauman, the garden as a harmonious and utopian metaphor reverses into a gruesome dystopia of total social manipulation:

Apart from the overall plan, the artificial order of the garden needs tools and raw materials. The order, first conceived of as a design, determines what is a tool, what is a raw material, what is useless, what is [...] a weed or a pest. (Bauman 1991, 92)

It is not by coincidence that this kind of policy emerges in tandem with the intensification of English overseas activities, both the scramble for the Americas and the Atlantic slave trade. In order to work on the raw material of the English population, this kind of policy requires not only the legendary “maidenhead lands” in the New World as a receptacle for the ‘human weed’; it also requires that a set of tools and practices be in place that make such coerced population ‘flows’ possible. These logistic infrastructures, of course, had already been implemented by large-scale systematic slave trade. Bauman’s metaphor of the ‘garden’ allows for a reading of this conjuncture as genuinely modern. What needs to be added, though, is that the ‘gardener’s tools’ are the outcome of a trans-continental economy of displacements and mostly coercive interactions – in other words, that the emergence (or bringing-forth) of Europe’s modernity did not occur in a self-enclosed process (see Armstrong/Tennenhouse 1992, 204); that modern power is inextricably tied in with coloniality (Mignolo 2000, 37); that modernity is indeed the outcome of planetary interconnections and interactions, not “a phenomenon of Europe as an *independent* system” (Dussel 1998, 4). For this planetarity of the modern, Dussel proposes the term ‘transmodernity’.

The key tenet of transmodern historians is that modernity, despite its Eurocentric self-description, has never been a purely European venture but rather the outcome of planetary interrelations and collaborations. It is true that this revision tries primarily to point out the contribution of the non-European world to the ‘achievements’ of modernity. In a rudimentary way, Davenant’s play envisages precisely such a harmonious conjuncture: Symerons and Englishmen collaborate in the common practice of liberating the world from the Spanish yoke. The incident of the cavalier slaves may serve as an example for this global interconnectedness but it points towards a more sombre logic: The non-West was, in this perspective, not only indispensable as a vast reservoir of knowledge systems and technologies that were ‘borrowed’, appropriated, incorporated and then identified as genuinely European. The non-West also served as a testing ground and experimental field for the elaboration of mechanisms of power that could not have emerged in an isolated, provincial Europe alone: The large-scale deportation policies that I have been describing share this characteristic with the implementation of other, later forms of dis-

ciplinary power, many of which can be interpreted in terms of Foucault's boomerang effect.

What remains to be underlined is that the boomerang effect of colonial practice also mobilised and even enabled resistance. Paul Gilroy has delineated how the violence of dominant modernity has empowered, in the force field of the Black Atlantic, a wide range of "black political countercultures that grew inside modernity in a distinctive relation of antagonistic indebtedness" (Gilroy 1993, 191). In its radical democratic formulations, the figure of the free-born Englishman as propagated by the Levellers or Diggers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century may well become readable as an icon of such a political counterculture that is indebted to precisely that global modernity which it opposes. Profiled against the abstract figure of the slave (that stands in for the absent African as well as the absent English deportee), the free-born Englishman of the Levellers and Diggers is an outcome of a vast transcontinental network of coerced mobility, enslavement and exploitation; only due to its antagonistic locatedness within this coercive network does this figure gain its inclusive and universal impetus, and comes to be a signifier of a uniform and inclusive form of entitlement – a citizenship theoretically so inclusive and universal that the Levellers' and Diggers' freeborn Englishman could be imagined also as a black and as a woman.

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