

Gerald Horne , Charles Mills and ‘Constructed Silences’ - Part 1

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There are issues of critical importance to the Black world that will be illustrated by reviewing some of the work of Gerald Horne and Charles Mills. This is an opening shot in what may be a long campaign. It is an initial note as many of the issues will deserve fuller explanation and that will require more time. However as the issues are pertinent to almost all scholarly activity in the Black world it is important that a bugle call be sounded immediately and that other scholars and activists be alerted to the issues.

Gerald Horne’s path breaking work is of fundamental importance¹ but there are weaknesses that conceal its critical importance to many. Critically, Horne’s work is lacking in two areas. His work appears to be devoid of any formal understanding of military strategy. This can lead to misunderstanding of key issues and an inability to see the technical differences between riot, uprising, rebellion, and successful liberation. Issues of ‘Grand Strategy’ which were critical for Toussaint L’Ouverture are invisible in Horne’s work as battles become simply a stochastic series of events. For Horne African resistance is evidenced merely and only in ‘fighting’ and ‘physical resistance’. Sun Tzu’s dictum that battles are won or lost before they start is lost on him.² Further Horne repeatedly notes occasions where Black rebels were less than straightforward. If he had been aware of Sun Tzu’s dictum: ‘All warfare is based on deception’³ he might have explored the matter in a more sophisticated and appropriate manner.

There is a tangible sense of a conflict between the disciplinary demands of a modern western historian, the requirements of ‘grand strategy’ and the discipline of philosophical reflection. The absence of deep understanding of military strategy by Black scholars is a matter of appalling regret as if military matters were inappropriate to the intellectual demands of serious study or beneath the dignity of Black academics, as if military matters were simply a matter of ‘fighting’. This military blindness or rather ability to entirely misunderstand a military complex vitiates historical understanding leading to massive simplifications of both defeat and success. It means that critical factors for success get overlooked and the inevitability of conflicts misunderstood.

An example of the difference between strategy and ‘fighting’ would be the battle of Cuito Cannavale. Fidel Castro, in evaluating his military strategy, suggested that ‘it may lead to success

¹ A list of Horne’s work can be found at (Wikipedia, 2019)

² As Sun Tzu states: ‘The general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought’. (Tzu, 1910 ch 1:26)

³ (Tzu, 1910 ch 1:18)

without a major battle⁴. This engagement was a strategic disaster for apartheid South Africa and led to the Chester Crocker mediated settlement, the US acting for apartheid South Africa in negotiations with the Cubans and Angolans, which involved the immediate independence of Namibia, the unbanning of the ANC, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the termination of armed struggle i.e. the shift from military to primarily political activity. Though this was a strategic catastrophe for apartheid South Africa, very little fighting actually took place.

Another area where Horne is lacking is in proper philosophical evaluation of the key concepts that he uses. It may be unreasonable to expect a historian to be a fully fledged philosopher⁵. Horne is a master of unearthing that which has been kept silent. It is Horne who sheds light on the pro-slavery motivations of the opposition to the English King that led to the 'Glorious Revolution'⁶ and that the American War of Independence was fueled by the fear that London was about to crack down on slavery. In the received version it has been the thirst for liberty rather than the desire to circumvent the King's monopoly on the slave trade that accounts for such rebellion. Horne is no respecter of received opinions when seeking the facts. However at a conceptual level he is hamstrung by an acceptance of received wisdom. It is here that Black philosophers should have come to his rescue. Horne's concept of 'white supremacy' is aching with holes.

Charles Mills could have been the philosopher to come to Horne's rescue. On the one hand neither reference the other in their work. On the other hand, while Horne's work⁷ is highly relevant to Mills' own, regrettably Mills' work is of no help to Horne. Astonishingly, Mills offers obeisance to the White women's movement.

Rather than illuminating the philosophical nature of the concept behind 'white supremacy' Mills simply uses a comic book version of the same with no nuance or historical circumstance. Mills concept of white supremacy is based on a feminist notion of male dominance so that white supremacy becomes a matter solely of white men. Obviously to members of Africa's armed liberation movements, the idea that they were only fighting against say white Portuguese men would be utterly derisible.

Mills and White feminism

He sees the work on gender as opening up new vistas for the definition of philosophy:

'The clearest example of this phenomenon is seen in new work on gender' and this invites 'parallel possibilities may be opening up around the question of race.'⁸

Very strangely the challenge against Western philosophy is African American ... not the rest of the world! Not Africa, not China ..just African American civil rights? This 'opening up' for Mills is to allow African American points of view into Philosophy. Why would the Chinese wish to bow the knee to Western feminists?

In "the Domination Contract" Mills writes: 'Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988) has become a classic text of second-wave feminist theory Its influence is not restricted to gender issues, since it was

⁴ (Gleijeses, 2013, p. 717)

⁵ Quentin Skinner is a well known exception.

⁶ (Horne, 2017 ch 8)

⁷ In particular (Horne, 2017)

⁸ (Mills, 1998 Preface)

the inspiration for my own book, *The Racial Contract* (1997) .. (p.49) ⁹ Mills subordinates the Black struggle in philosophy to not only the white women's movement but through that to the Western tradition of philosophy ... and of course where does that leave Africa?

Mills 'willing subordination to white women's movement'

There is considerable irony in Mills' willing subordination. All talk of 'men' in most canonical Western texts refers to 'white men' and this is something that is clearly demonstrated in the canonical texts. Suddenly Mills allows white women to talk about 'women' without challenging them to clarify which kind of women they are talking about. When they talk about the history of women's rights this is solely a talk about the history of white women's rights and ignores the varied and different histories of African and Asian women.

Mills talks about 'following the lead of white women's movement' as they somehow have shown the way. From an African perspective this is quite outrageous. The liberation of Africa in many parts a lengthy bloody armed struggle owed nothing to the 'white women's movement'. Why should African countries look toward White women as leaders in their future development? Mills talks about liberating philosophy but the issues arise for African, Asian and other continents, not just for Black American civil rights.

On the one side he refers to 'white supremacy' as a global phenomena and on the other allows only white women and African Americans as the only legitimate players?

The failure of philosophical and lexical analysis of the reference of 'women' is mirrored by the political failure to analyse correctly the relation between the white women's movement and many Black struggles.

Pateman's views of women are clearly statements about White women for from an African point of view the story she tells is entirely untrue. As University of Chicago Professor of Egyptology, Janet Johnson, confirms: 'From our earliest preserved records in the Old Kingdom on, the formal legal status of Egyptian women (whether unmarried, married, divorced or widowed) was nearly identical with that of Egyptian men....in the legal arena both women and men could act on their own and were responsible for their own actions. This is in sharp contrast with some other ancient societies, e.g., ancient Greece, where women did not have their own legal identity, were not allowed to own (real) property and, in order to participate in the legal system, always had to work through a male, usually their closest male relative (father, brother, husband, son) who was called their "lord." Egyptian women were able to acquire, to own, and to dispose of property (both real and personal) in their own name. They could enter into contracts in their own name; they could initiate civil court cases and could, likewise, be sued; they could serve as witnesses in court cases; they could serve on juries; and they could witness legal documents.'¹⁰

In fact what we have here is a replication of the Western hubris and racial arrogance but this time in the service of the white women's movement. Whereas under Kant and others 'men' referred to 'white men', under modern western feminists 'women' refers to 'white women'. Under both 'society' and 'state' refers to the society and state of 'white people'.

⁹ (Mills, 2008, p. 49)

¹⁰ (Johnson, 2019)

How does Pateman see her work on global terms? 'I am resurrecting the story in order to throw light onto the present-day structure of major social institutions in Britain, Australia and the United States - societies which, we are told, can properly be seen as if they had originated in a social contract ...many of my general arguments will also be relevant to other developed Western countries'.¹¹

But this is seriously incoherent. How can basing an argument on the experience of Anglo-Western women be in principle relevant to all other 'developed' Western countries? Also what is the meaning of this qualifier 'other developed Western countries'? At the level of sociological explanation one can understand an attempt to relate to levels of economic and social development but then why the 'Western' qualifier? Japan, Singapore and South Korea are at similar levels of social and economic development. It is obvious that this is a mere euphemism. 'Other developed western countries' simply means other white societies. This incoherence is extensive. She mentions that 'we are told' that certain countries can be understood as originating in social contracts but there are no references to who the 'we' are, 'who' is doing the telling and 'what' evidence they might have. This is implausible scholarly behaviour. She then extends her theory to other developed Western countries but no basis is provided for such an extension.

There is another way of understanding Pateman's position which is to go back to Kant¹². What she can be read as saying is that the only women's experiences that matter is that of primarily White Anglo Western women and that this is a model for other women throughout the world. Only Western women and primarily Anglo Western women have 'historical personality' and the history of other women is largely primitive and or irrelevant.

If one wanted to make statements about the role of women generally it would be useful to have an understanding of how other societies handled the matter. But Pateman declined to do this. Other women are of no consequence theoretically.

White women and US slavery:

Stepanie Jones-Rogers in her book 'They were her property' makes clear that white women were at least as brutal as the men and as committed to the institution of Black enslavement.

'White women could be as brutal as male slave owners when it came to meting out punishment, she writes. Some husbands actually had to intervene to stop the brutality, and one woman's violence toward their slaves drove her husband to abandon her and take his slaves with him. Others forced female slaves to work in brothels in New Orleans, something Jones-Rogers says has been ignored by historians.

"Southern white women's roles in upholding and sustaining slavery form part of the much bigger history of white supremacy and oppression," Jones-Rogers writes in the epilogue. "And through it all, they were not passive bystanders. They were co-conspirators."'^{13 14}

¹¹ (Pateman, 1988 ch 1)

¹² (Ladimeji, 2019b)

¹³ (Brooks, 2019)<https://www.thelily.com/many-white-women-were-active-and-enthusiastic-participants-in-the-business-of-slavery-according-to-this-book/>(Brooks, 2019)

¹⁴ (Jones-Rogers, 2019)

It is hard to forget the response of the majority of white western women to Diallo's allegations of rape against IMF boss Dominique Strauss Kahn¹⁵. The French press, despite France's strong penchant for privacy, named her, commented on her looks and investigated her private life¹⁶. A former French Minister of Justice, Ms Elisabeth Guigou, objected to US prejudicing the IMF boss by treating him like they would any US citizen and clearly supported the IMF boss.¹⁷ When a French journalist Tristane Banon, emerged with similar allegations of attempted rape against Strauss Kahn she was not subjected to attacks on her credibility or her private life investigated¹⁸. In the end Strauss Kahn settled the 'grievances out of court for undisclosed sums of money with both the New York hotel maid and the young French journalist'¹⁹.

Rather than supporting Diallo many White women, (whose presence on the streets in protest was highly noticeable by its absence - in contrast to the wave of support the MeToo movement generated for mostly white victims), questioned her credibility in direct opposition to the feminist mantra that victims should be believed. Apparently this mantra applies only if you are white like Tristane Banon.

Jo Carillo exposes well this conflicted relationship between White women and women of color:

'Our white sisters
 Radical friends
 Love to own pictures of us

 And when our white sisters
 Radical friends see us
 In the flesh
 Not as a picture they own
 They are not quite as sure
 If
 They like us as much.
 We're not as happy as we look
 On
 Their
 Wall.'²⁰

It is hard to understand the basis for Black subordination of their struggle to white feminists. If Patemen's views are ethnocentric, privileging White women over non-White women, Mills willing submission to this point of view and recommendation of the subordination of the Black struggle to the White women's movement (possibly on the absurd premise that both are fighting against White male dominance) reveals a personal abject surrender of the Black freedom struggle. While such a position might be good for Mills' career it is catastrophic for Black

¹⁵ (Lichfield, 2011)

¹⁶ (Reporter, 2011)

¹⁷ (Guigou, 2011)

¹⁸ (Schechter, 2011)

¹⁹ (Walt, 2015)

²⁰ (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983, p. 63)

America and constitutes a total denial of the role of Africa in the past, present or future. All this is concealed under the rhetoric of fighting 'white supremacy'.

White Supremacy

Mills sees the importance of race in philosophy as emerging from 'a recognition of the centrality of race in the encounter between Europe and the non-European world'²¹. There is no reference to the work of Horne. Mills concept of 'whites' is almost synonymous with 'masters' as in : 'Those termed *white* have generally had a civil, moral, and juridical standing that has lifted them above the other "races" They have been the expropriators; others have been the expropriated'²². Any reading of Horne's work would show that this is simply not so. Englishmen in the early Atlantic period (16th century et seq) were frequently captured and sold into slavery in North Africa. Major state efforts had to be made to ransom Englishmen from slavery with England making a pact with Tunis in 1662 to avoid the enslavement of upper class Englishmen.²³ European states made similar if not more effective efforts for their citizens. Almost 1 million white Europeans were captured and sold into slavery in North Africa between 1530 and 1780, '... most would end their days as slaves in North Africa, dying of starvation, disease, or maltreatment.'²⁴

There is no possible sense in which all whites were masters.

Mills' views of non-whites renders them entirely subordinate and derivative. Their world is: 'historically focused on issues of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, white settlement, land rights, race and racism, slavery and jim crow, reparations, apartheid, cultural authenticity, national identity..?'.²⁵ This view has all the apparent pretence of radical critique but in fact renders the non-western world without its own history and cultural development. History only starts with the arrival of Europeans. Mills' apparent radicalism can be seen as starting with an acceptance of Kantian denigration of non western societies and then supporting their protests against exploitation but not challenging the basic protocols of this false history.

Another failing of this point of view is that it masks the often murderous intra European conflicts, gives no explanation for the dynamic of intra European rivalry, and overlooks the promptness of Europeans to ally with non-whites in their struggles against each other, so well documented by Horne.²⁶

The internalised oppression of Charles Mills

When Mills writes: 'Those termed *white* have been the expropriators; others have been the expropriated' he is only reflecting the white oppressor's aspiration not any actual fact. But by adopting it, treating it as fact, he has internalized the white racism and oppression. Karen Pyke writes:

'we can begin to talk about internalized oppression at the moment that the oppressed accept the identities imposed on them by oppressors..... When the oppressed come to

²¹ (Mills, 1998 Preface)

²² (Mills, 1998 Preface)

²³ (Horne, 2017 ch 7)

²⁴ (Davis, 2011)

²⁵ (Mills, 1997 Introduction)

²⁶ (Horne, 2017)

accept these identities as “real,” they are in effect internalizing their subjugated status in their definition of self.²⁷

This often leads to ‘the simultaneous assimilation of White supremacy and the glorification of Whiteness’²⁸ which we witness in Mills descriptions of all whites as masters and all non whites as exploited and oppressed.

For Pyke this internalisation of racism is essential for the system of racial oppression to reproduce itself, and the academic ‘taboo’ or silence about the issue she considers to be part of racial oppression: ‘the taboo on the study of internalized racism can be considered, in and of itself, an example of internalized racial oppression’²⁹. Pyke explicitly addresses the potential and actual conflict between White and non-White women and that the strategies adopted by White women to resist patriarchy may for non-White women reproduce racial oppression. She states: ‘resisting one form of domination (e.g., gender) can comply with and reproduce oppression along another dimension (e.g., race).’³⁰

Pyke identifies a reluctance in White women to accept the possibility of racism in white feminist theory. She concludes: ‘Every instance of internalized racism among the racially subordinated contributes to the psychic, material, and cultural power and privilege of White folks.’³¹

Any familiarity with the work of Stuart Hall, a major Black scholar of world renown, would have rendered Mills more sensitive and self aware about the issue of hegemony and internalisation of oppression. This is even more surprising as much of Hall’s work addresses the same issues that Mills seeks to address in discussing ‘white supremacy’. Hall provides a more subtle and nuanced view of how domination may work through alliances and co-options of different groups in society under a dominant or leading class rather than the flat homogeneous model implied by Mills. Hall can be seen as

‘viewing *oppression as a cooperative achievement*. The hegemony of a culture is not achieved through coercion but requires some degree of consent from the subordinate class.’³²

Hall insists that racial domination does not rely exclusively on coercion but seeks consent and complicity on behalf of the subjugated in their own subjection. Also this hegemony is always multifaceted. Following Gramsci, Hall writes:

‘There is never any one, single, unified and coherent dominant ideology which pervades everything.’³³

Rather than a single object - white supremacy- Hall invites us to consider:

‘The object of analysis is therefore not the single stream of dominant ideas into which everything and everyone has been absorbed’³⁴

but rather a differentiated terrain, an ensemble or discursive formation. Mills view can be seen as de-historicising and universalising racism and Hall derides the view that:

²⁷ (Pyke, 2010, p. 557)

²⁸ (Pyke, 2010, p. 558)

²⁹ (Pyke, 2010, p. 563)

³⁰ (Pyke, 2010, p. 564)

³¹ (Pyke, 2010, p. 566)

³² (Birmingham, n.d., p. 2)

³³ (Hall, 1986, p. 22)

³⁴ (Hall, 1986, p. 22)

'because racism is everywhere a deeply anti-human and anti-social practice, that therefore it is everywhere the same'³⁵.

Hall insists that racism in Britain of the 'high imperial era' is quite different from post colonial racism of a period of relative economic decline and of indigenous work forces. For Hall the differences are greater and more significant than the similarities.

Hall sees the multifaceted view of racism as allowing one to appreciate how the victims can become complicit in the racism and oppression:

'one of the most common, least explained features of racism: the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them.'³⁶

Contractarianism

Mills following Pateman locates himself in a contractarian tradition, but is apparently unaware of the severe criticisms to which this point of view has been subjected. As Baumgold states: 'instead of regarding classic English contract theory as the seed of modern democratic politics, we would do better to see it as the culmination of medieval resistance theory.'³⁷

'Constructed silences'

This is one of the major points this paper seeks to make. Both Horne and Mills express irritation at the frequent omission of facts in the conventional academic narrative. Mills complains that white philosophers find it hard to 'see' race.³⁸ They are both unaware of the role of 'constructed silence', where it is agreed among a class not to mention something. An example would be the 'agreed silence' about the fate of the majority black population of Argentina in 1850's. At a meeting of the Royal Society of Arts in London I described this as like sitting in a room where there is dog poop on the carpet but everyone has agreed not to mention it, and while pretending it is not there and that they cannot see anything unusual, nevertheless taking good care to avoid stepping in it. Similarly academics may pretend something is not there or is unknown to them, while taking great care not to draw attention to it, and this precise act itself revealing their full awareness and complicity. Heidegger did not invent this but he illustrated it most openly. Absence is also a form of 'mentioning' and Heidegger has explicitly described the role of 'silence' in his work, 'keeping silent (is) something positive and something deeper than all speaking'³⁹.

If Horne and Mills would understand the role of silences as deliberate and constructed they would see beyond their current horizons and not accuse white scholars of inability to see what is in front of their noses.

Summary & Conclusions:

³⁵ (Hall, 1986, p. 23)

³⁶ (Hall, 1986, p. 27)

³⁷ (Baumgold, 2010, p. 25)

³⁸ (Mills, 1998 Preface)

³⁹ (Heidegger, 2001 On the essence ... s.5 d)

Pateman's work we have shown is fundamentally incoherent once we take into account the African history of women rights. The Old Kingdom takes us to 4,000 BC! This casts a penetrating light on the history and underlying ideology of the 'white women's movement', and a cautionary note for any Black scholar wishing to associate too closely with it.

A matter of some concern is the failure of both Mills and Horne to reference either each other or other major work by Black scholars directly relevant to their field. This suggests a level of competition and indifference that is both regrettable and appalling. Hilary Beckles made very relevant discoveries in the UK public records about the official government involvement in maintaining the slave trade to the extent of authorising assassinations of any African leader or king who sought to stop the trade.⁴⁰ Stuart Hall has produced canonical work on cultural oppression. There is also the radical new work of Michael Gomez covering the multi-millennial African history prior to the Atlantic slave trade.⁴¹

If Black scholars do not read each other's work and do not reference each other then this does not bode well for the future of Black scholarship.⁴²

⁴⁰ (Beckles, 2013)

⁴¹ (Gomez, 2018)

⁴² (Ladimeji, 2019a)

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