

COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS: The Discourses of Bermuda's 1995 Referendum on In/Dependence

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(Draft prepared for Barnor Hesse Ed. (2000 forthcoming): 'Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions')

'To most people Bermuda is known as an island of rest, a haven to which North Americans flee to escape the aggravations of winter and the vulgarities of American culture. Tourist brochures project this Atlantic Island quite justly as a scenic outpost where it is still possible to find the vestiges of the old colonial society which has long since disappeared from the American mainland'.

Selwyn D. Ryan (1970:5)

'Because we are a small island society, we have developed a code of manners which enables us to live - despite all the myriad of frictions that actually exist - in quite good peace and harmony... There are a very large number of mutual confidences which must be routinely kept by a very large number of people whose paths cross in many different settings... we do demonstrate... an inclination to say one thing in public, and do or say something very different in private...'

Larry Burchall (1991:79)

INTRODUCTION

Highlighting the colonial formation of contemporary politics in Bermuda is like trying to film ships or areoplanes as they vanish into the fabled *Bermuda Triangle*. With one point off the coast of South Carolina and the other off the shores of the Bahamas, Bermuda is the third point and namesake of this mysterious phenomenon.¹ Covering an expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, the Bermuda Triangle's phenomenality is rooted in its reputation as an area where ships, planes, navigators and passengers have disappeared without a trace and to date and with no reasonable explanation. In Bermudian politics a similar

disappearance occurs where there is a ritual displacement of references to the colonial themes of its underlying structural antagonisms. This includes the impact of transatlantic slavery, the implications of British colonial administration and the legacy of white, male, minority rule. It is as if the very engagement of the persisting social inequalities rooted in and exacerbated by these legacies is considered unbecoming of acceptable political discourse. Much like the planes, ships and people swept into the Bermuda Triangle, central tenets of local colonialized ruling practices become untraceable. Largely disavowed and rendered unsubstantiated, debate and interrogation becomes problematic, deemed not only ill-mannered but beyond the realm of what is 'speakable'. Dissimilar to the Bermuda Triangle, however, is the re/appearance of these same underlying antagonisms. For despite all manner of denial, local legacies and continued colonial imperatives of rule are intricately woven into the fabric of Bermudian society. Pushed beyond the parameters of legitimate political discourse, these formations of localised colonial power have not vanished, but rather have been reworked as dis/appearing and re/appearing signifiers of unresolved structural inequalities that inhabit and inhibit the constitutional anatomy of Bermuda's body-politic.

I want to consider this as a metaphorical background to Bermuda's 1995 referendum on whether the island should move to establish constitutional independence from Britain. The event marked a rare occasion when the tiny Island colony was spotlighted in international news. In the fleeting images of globally signified political events however, the legacy of the colonial entanglements surrounding the liberal-democratic question 'Do you favour independence for Bermuda' were all but air-brushed out. With the fantasy photographs and hype of sun, beauty and tranquillity so often used to describe this tourist destination soon back in place, what was largely glossed over were the momentary but unavoidable exposures of underlying social antagonisms of political life in Bermuda. This perhaps is what prompted one British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, to describe the protracted independence episode as 'one of the strangest liberation struggles the Empire has seen' (6th Jan 1995). My concerns in this chapter lie with the nature of the specific configuration of local and colonial power/discourse in Bermuda that pervaded the independence debate. The momentary exposure and disappearance of the influence of colonial formations in current political discourse is a central theme. Situated in the colonial *absented present*, I will argue that ruling practices in Bermuda remain as much determined by the enduring legacies of the colonial regime as they are by the continual disavowal of these colonial imperatives. The identity of Bermuda lies somewhere between the formations of an *extant* British colony and an *ex-British* colony. It is a place where colonial denial is so pervasive, where notions of colonialism have become so ambiguous, and where the articulation of legacies and continuities of colonial rule seem to evade political discourse. The main question underlying this chapter, is what can the entanglements of colonial societies such as Bermuda tell us about contemporary formations of representation in quasi-colonial political cultures? I begin by providing a brief

over-view of Bermudian society. Secondly, I examine how the question of independence was articulated in different political discourses and how these became implicated in under-stating colonial and western points of entanglement (Hesse, 1997). Finally, I consider some of the political and discursive logic involved in facilitating Bermuda's *conjuring tricks* and *disappearing acts*.

RE-MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE

Bermuda is a small colony with a history that is in many ways distinct from many of the former colonies in this region of Caribbean islands. Colonised in 1612, Bermuda was the second British colony to be established². Proving an early success, Bermuda started out as a plantation colony, but by the end of the seventeenth century the land had been forsaken for the more lucrative seafaring pursuits. This resulted in a large white resident population out of which emerged Bermuda's local oligarchy. This form of local government continued with the rise and decline of the seafaring industries that characterised early Bermudian slave society and the shift to horticulture soon after slave Emancipation³. A small seafaring community with a large number of resident whites (the numerical majority until the 1830s), Bermuda is also distinct in that unlike the colonies in the Caribbean where the local oligarchies (save Barbados and the Bahamas) were replaced in the making of crown colonies, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, local oligarchic rule in Bermuda remained intact. In place since the seventeenth century, it was not until 1963 that the ancien regime of the local oligarchy was usurped. This is what Ryan (1970) alludes to when he reminds us, 'Bermuda is more than a major resort. It is also an Island on which live a distinct people with a political system and style of life that is unique.' (Ryan, 1970:1) It was under this political regime that tourism and international trade developed in the first decades of the twentieth century. This resulted in unprecedented economic growth and development, consequently by the mid-twentieth century Bermuda, under the continuing social dictates of a white oligarchy, was ensconced in an economic boom that was to last unabated until the 1980s.

Describing political life before the 1960s transformations, Gordon Lewis (1968) observed that, 'it remained the private game. of the Assembly parliamentarians', the political issues, 'the picayune (or petty) matters that affected their constitutional dignity or their commercial interests, generating factional passions that left the inert majority unmoved' (Lewis, 1968:313). In 1950s Bermuda (as in Bermuda's more distant past), a meeting of the merchants and businessmen who owned the local banks, businesses and offices along Front Street, the main street of Bermuda's capital, could easily have been mistaken for a session in the House of Assembly, such was the overlap. It was these men and their forefathers, brothers, uncles-in-laws and sons who ran the major local businesses and occupied the great majority of the parliamentary seats. Thus until the 1960s economic and political power in Bermuda remained rooted in the crosscurrents of inequalities which were an imperative to both local white minority rule and colonial dictate. In describing the logic of this enduring local formation framing colonial Bermuda, Frank Manning (1978), observes:

'generally known in Bermuda as either Front Street (their commercial Address) or the Forty thieves (their acquisitive style) ... (power) had been maintained through the instruments of economic patronage: jobs, loans, credit, recallable mortgages, charitable donations. Supporters of Front Street found it a paternal, even benevolent oligarchy. Opponents usually lost all they had' (Manning, 1978:17).

Central to the rule of the oligarchy was control of the franchise, racial segregation and clear differentiations between gender, the classes and white ethnic groups. A limited, property-based franchise ensured that political power remained in the hands of a small white minority. With gender, as much a constitutive marker of difference as 'race', power remained in the hands of *white men*. In 1944, when propertied women were granted the right to hold office and vote in municipal, parochial and parliamentary elections, it was done so with the stated understanding that there would be no further changes⁴. With an increasing number of 'coloured' Bermudians becoming eligible to vote and a concerted effort underway to increase their numbers in the House of Assembly, local ruling practices continued to be dictated by those who were white, male and propertied. This had been strenuously guarded and with a population of 43,000 in 1958 only 7,203 people were eligible to vote

However, although privileged by 'race', in local formations of power and rule, disenfranchised working and middle-class whites and the descendants of migrant Portuguese workers who had been recruited in the late nineteenth, faced social and political exclusion⁵. The imperatives of white, minority rule worked to exclude all those non-white, non-male, non-propertied and this was reflected in all aspects of Bermudian society. Again unlike many of the colonies in the Caribbean, efforts made to establish trade unions and a political party system in Bermuda were thwarted. Effective resistance against the attempts by the Crown for reform, together with the imperatives of local rule framing the emergent tourist and international trade industries, ensured that Bermuda's oligarchy remained economically and politically intact.

In a maiden speech in the House of Assembly during the dawning years of the twentieth century, one white MCP, Colonel Thomas Dill, proudly proclaimed, 'I think the sole reason we have not gone the way of a great many sister colonies is due to the fact that we are not a democratic country. We are an oligarchy... (A)t any rate there is nothing like, and I hope there will never be, anything approaching adult universal suffrage.' (Philip, 1987:4). However, although intact, the strident arrogance of such power had by the mid twentieth century weakened. It was challenged by women from the white elite, woman suffrage campaign (1921 - 1944), coupled with rising criticism from within sections of the oligarchy, and reinforced by the emerging politicisation of the black community who had long fought against the imperatives of white minority rule. By the 1950s oligarchic authority had been considerably undermined. In addition subsequent

influences drawn from contemporaneous anti-colonial struggles in the *Third World* and the United States civil rights movements catalysed mass demonstrations and boycotts by black Bermudians calling for desegregation and universal suffrage. By 1965, racialized segregation had been outlawed, universal suffrage had been granted and wide-ranging social and economic reforms were being implemented.

It was also during this period that the first political parties were established, the Progressive Labour Party (PLP) and the United Bermuda Party (UBP). With the PLP dedicated to 'promoting the cause of blacks and labour,' (the Bermuda Recorder, February 16th, 1963), and the UBP comprised of the majority of already elected MCPs, the two parties were very quickly taken to be representative of the racial polarities which had for so long been the basis of local rule⁶. By 1968, the symbols of democratic rule - universal suffrage, political parties, and equal rights - had replaced those of white minority rule. However having the majority of members of parliament already in office, the UBP immediately became the party in power and at the time of the 1995 referendum had been in power for over three decades. Reworked, unresolved legacies of white minority rule continued to shape Bermudian society.

COLONIAL ARTICULATIONS AND DIS/APPEARING ACTS

Colonial rule is entangled in Bermuda in the legacy of white minority rule which it for so long legitimised and endorsed. The PLP have contested it since inception, just as the UBP has advocated for its continuance since its formation. By the 1970s, however, the UBP government moved to a more neutral position on independence, albeit one that increasingly defined independence in terms of dollars and cents⁷. This was to continue until 1994 when quite dramatically, the UBP leader and Premier of Bermuda, Sir John Swan, announced that the question of independence was to be put to the people. Raised unexpectedly and catching politicians and Bermudians generally off guard, by the time the date had been set for the referendum, the issue of independence was at the forefront of political debate and consideration.

It is possible to identify the articulation of three main discourses during the run up to the 1995 independence referendum: Firstly that Bermuda enjoyed and must maintain its economic stability, which was largely ensured by political stability and continued coloniality; secondly, that independence was the next necessary step to taken in the political development of the Island; and thirdly, that independence was inevitable, but that local, constitutional changes must preface a change in Bermuda's status as a colony. These three dominant political discourses clearly reveal the changed considerations facing countries seeking independence in the late twentieth century. In connecting the viability of remaining a British independent territory with the perception of political stability the international business world insisted upon, the thrust of independence as the liberation of an colonised people that had been such a rallying cry decades before was bizarrely displaced. At a time when colonialism is for so many people

and nations a legacy of the distant past, independence as a measure of Bermuda's coming of age was rendered markedly different from the past strident and difficult struggles to end colonial rule. Although the entrenchment of the colonial imperative in the structures and processes of local governance that had also been critical to other countries desire to end colonialism seemed, on first glance at least, to be equally susceptible to dislocation, careful reflection however, reveals something else. For Bermuda has been convincingly described quite cynically as a place where there is a "code of manners" regulating all discourse, where people are by necessity "public liars and private, very private, tellers of truth" (Burchall, 1978). What such an observation reveals is the impact of silenced manifestations of rule and power. As Burchall argues contextually, 'we still have to live, cheek by jowl, with our fellow Bermudians... (S) imilarly, no matter how strong your disagreement is with someone on this island, he or she will always be visible, and relatively close to you' (Burchall, 1978: 178).

This means in the wider realms of political discourse and debate, where subtleties and contradictions are perhaps well established and expected, the loss or the dis/appearance of pertinent aspects governing Bermudian society attains greater significance. It is in the realm of public political discourse in particular that any interrogation or critique of the structural antagonisms underpinning this British colony is necessarily momentary, unstable and fraught with ambiguity. Thus despite the appeals to economic and cultural considerations seemingly freed from social context and racialised and genderized consequence, these discourses can be (re) read as signifiers of 'otherness'. They can be understood as coded voice-overs with regard to the underlying repertoire of systems of meaning and representation in which cultural differences and inequalities evolve, and contested imaginaries of Bermuda remain rooted. Below I consider in turn each of the three discourses to the independence debate.

Independence as an economic consideration: Rooted in an economy which since the opening decades of the twentieth century has depended on foreign investment and tourism, the servicing and dependence of multinationals has not been seen as a problem, but rather as a pivotal, though precarious feature of Bermuda's economic base. Unlike ex-colonies faced with recolonization (i.e. 'the further consolidation and exacerbation of capitalist relations and exploitation' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxi) from powerful nations other than those whose colonial rein they had initially been under), what was seen as paramount in Bermuda was maintaining the economic stability such dependence had long engendered. Unless deemed economically expedient, independence was seen as too great a risk. As James Ahiakpor (1990) commented, in his analysis of Bermuda's engagement with its status, 'the issue of greatest concern in the debate over political independence for Bermuda is the impact of such a decision on the country's economy' (Ahiakpor, 1990:35). Grounding this economic consideration was the narrative of Bermuda's long legacy of local representative government and the suggestion that having had a large measure of self-governing for so long, Bermuda had lost the stain of colonial rule. Economically

prosperous and self-sufficient, allowed to fly its own flag (although the Union Jack are is included), having a Bermuda national song much like an national anthem, and with Bermuda Day having replaced Empire Day, Bermuda had taken on the air, if not the status, of a self-governing nation. "Independence", opponents asked, "from who?" (Musson, 1979:65).

This was a discourse in which all other considerations were seen to pale into insignificance. For Elton Trimmingham, chairman of the local bank of Bermuda, the 'we' in 'can we afford independence?' was an inclusive 'we' which transcended all others considerations (see The Royal Gazette July 20th, 1995:3). Mention or consideration of 'race' was deemed 'emotive, divisive and unnecessary'. It was insisted by the main instigator of the referendum, the Premier, Sir John Swan, that a move would bring 'the races closer together was 'dismissed as one that could only backfire'. (The Bermuda Royal Gazette, August 14th, 1995:3). It is in the tracking of this particular debate that its coded nature becomes clear. Read as a discursive signifier the discourse of economic expediency and the drawing on the history of local rule in the Island marked less the advent of a new relationship between colonised and coloniser, than the ways in which structural antagonisms underlying the legacies of local white minority rule and the continuities of colonialism had now come to be articulated.

Usurped by the socio - political transformations of the 1960s, the residual power of Bermuda's local oligarchy nonetheless remained. The formation of Party politics in 1963 resulting in the birth of the United Bermuda Party which, although seeking 'non-white' membership, was nevertheless made up of leading representatives of the political arm of the oligarchy. The result had been one of gradual reform and the denial and silencing of the past. With slogans and election manifestos such as 'Together the United Way' (1968), 'Bermuda on the move together: The United Way' (1972), 'The Partnership that Works' (1976) sending out messages of unity and commonality amongst all groups, the economic and political processes remained, under the UBP government, dictated to the needs of Bermuda's white elite (Wilson, 1977; Manning, 1978).

Thus, it was that the legacy of white oligarchy and its racialised logic that continued to be largely reflected in the Island's areas of economic and political power. Writing on Bermuda in the late 1970s Jeyaratnam Wilson underlines this point where he observes, it is the 'fear of ultimate black domination on the part of the whites and the resentment by the blacks of continuing white supremacy (that) characterise the socio-political setting in Bermuda' (Wilson, 1977:258). Central to this logic has been negation and denial. This together with the imperatives of integrative partnership and cultural diversity structuring all political discourse since the transformations of the 1960s has meant that the unresolved and discursively forced aside antagonisms have become that much more coded.

In the months and weeks leading up to August 15, 1995, the scheduled day of the Referendum on Independence, the coding of such denials became

increasingly fragile and problematic. Although independence was spoken of as an economic consideration that would eat into the pockets of all Bermudians, it was clear that to speak of economic considerations and the legacy of self-rule was to invoke a history of white economic dominance and hegemony. Underlying this particular discourse was a largely coded defence against further destabilisation and possible eradication of the socio-economic and political structures which were rooted in the legacies of white minority rule - a power base traditionally legitimated by, although seen to be somewhat removed from the dictates of the English Crown. What was at stake was not only the changing of Bermuda's colonial status, but the ending of a significant symbol, on which the authority and legitimating power to rule had so long rested and which, although transformed, remained ingrained in whiteness.

Independence prefaced by local constitutional change: Was this counter-hegemonic discourse or acquiescence? Independence had been advocated by the PLP since its inception. There were those like PLP activist and Barrister Phil Perinchef who loudly advocated an affirmative reply. In a newspaper article he asserted that 'the narrow traditional right wing politics' that produced segregation and a host of other inequalities are 'dead on their feet. Their burial is imminent. Their days are numbered. The game is up. The black man (sic) is in ascendancy in Bermuda' (Bermuda Royal Gazette, August 14th, 1995:3). By the 1990s such militancy and single-minded passion for independence was no longer emanating from the PLP leadership. With independence less of a matter of emancipation and liberation from the yoke of colonialism as it had been described during the 1960s and 1970s, independence was seen more as an inevitability that must be prefaced with local constitutional change. This is what was articulated most strongly by the Opposition Party and it was on this basis that the PLP advised its supporters to refrain from voting in the referendum. The thrust of the PLP campaign was that reforms to the local political structure and the constitution had to be implemented before independence could be considered. The reforms included an unfettered electoral system - essentially one person, one vote, each vote of equal value. The PLP had been fighting for these objectives since the revamped electoral system came on line in the early 1960s. With the UBP having neither provided an indication as to the path independence would take, nor addressed the electoral and constitutional reforms insisted on by the PLP, it was argued that to move to independence would be to lock into existing inequalities (Bermuda Royal Gazette, July 14th, 1995).

Moreover, considering a referendum not an ideal way to determine such an important step, the PLP insisted that Independence be a part of an Election platform, so that all the political parties would be forced to present a detailed plan of their vision of an independent Bermuda to the people - a plan that would get the people's endorsement on Election Day. As the chairman of the PLP referendum campaign committee explained, 'to withhold the vote and not chose to participate in the upcoming referendum is an active means of protest and of registering dissatisfaction with the manner of deciding independence for

Bermuda' (The Royal Gazette, August 14th, 1995)) This point was driven home by the PLP campaign slogan: 'Independence Yes! Referendum No!'

Stigmatised for its ardent opposition to racial and class inequality and unable to break the power of the UBP who had in the past accused the PLP of fostering 'disharmony and advocating (reverse) racism' (Wilson, 1977:269), it was apparent that by 1995 the PLP had moved away from a pro-black socialist position to one decidedly, (though not acknowledged) conservative. It is possible this could be regarded simply as a political tactic with local constitutional change a concern for all Bermudians. But if we trace the historical logic of this discourse, it becomes clear that the constitutional considerations the PLP were so adamantly concerned with were rooted in the political re-structuring of the Island that had taken place in the early 1960s. It was during this period following the establishment of universal suffrage and desegregation, that the electoral districts had been remapped to ensure that if voting was conducted along racial lines there could never be a black majority in power. The 'one man, one vote' campaign, begun in the 1960s was a direct response to this re-structuring. The call for local constitutional change was also a call to change the reworking of a hierarchy of inequalities, revolving chiefly around 'race', which had been put in place in the very dismantling of white minority rule.

During the Referendum debate, the PLP's stress on constitutional change perhaps came closest to exposing Bermuda's 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1992) in a more covert interrogation of the continued racialised logic of Bermuda's political structures. But it was also a position that seemed to give succour to strident defences of the colonial past. Many veteran PLP members such as Phil Perinchief, took exception to this decision and publicly opposed the PLP campaign. Thus, to speak of local electoral reform, much like the their opponents insistence on the legacy of the Island' economic and political stability, was inadvertently to evoke the racialization of those crucial aspects of Bermuda's history that in the political climate of 1995 they had sought to avoid and rework in the coded narrative of constitutionalism. In what Toni Morrison (1992) has called a polite, 'graceful even generous act' of ignoring 'race', the expansive rhetoric of constitutionalism worked to foster another 'substitute language' in which direct and sustained interrogation of the colonial entanglements were expediently evaded.

Independence as the next step in Bermuda's political evolution: Having initially gained the support of his party, the push for independence came directly from the Premier and leader of the UBP Sir John Swan. Also drawing on the economic success and the long history of self-rule, the argument made was that independence was the next evolutionary step in Bermuda's political development. Rooted in the concern to represent Bermuda as striving to take its place in the modern world, Independence was taken to be a sign of the Island's maturity and economic stability. This ideal of independence was also constructed as coterminous with the apparent evolution of racial and ethnic power relations in

the Island, marking a heightened sense of empathy and harmony freed from the legacies of the past. The push was to conceptualise the economic and social successes of the Island with a united partnership amongst all Bermudians, thereby vanquishing along with colonial rule, all the traces of monoculturalism and white hegemony. Taking on board the economic stability as well as the cultural legacy of self-rule, the argument was one that sought to promote a new vision of Bermuda. Articulated most vehemently by the Premier it was a vision built neither on the direct negation of the colonial legacy nor on its covert evasion, but one where these factors simply no longer mattered.

Much like the two other discourses disseminated in the months and weeks leading up to August 15th, 1995, this discourse proved untenable, and quickly shifted to an insistence that 'this will be our country, each of us will be responsible for it' and that independence could be a 'powerful and incredible catalyst for a subtle shift of attitude' (Bermuda Royal Gazette July 19th, 1995:5). Although the discourse had begun as a step heralding the end of white hegemony and the inequalities of the past, it had reinvented its vision of independence as a panacea for a 'divided society' (Ibid). It was here that the 'conjuring tricks' of Bermudian political discourse faltered and revealed themselves. If the issue of independence was seen as a litmus test of Bermuda's ability to successfully keep its structural divisions not just displaced and "somewhere out there" but vanquished, forever considered of no great consequence, it was contaminated at its point of enunciation by the very opposite message.

In the weeks leading up to the 1995 referendum, the usually latent and hidden notions of white supremacy clashed with the push to end the colonial imperatives which had always under-pinned that social order. In addition the 'code of manners' (Burchall, 1978) so central to discourse and representation in Bermuda was breached and the denied and evaded racialized logic continuing to underpin Bermudian society became clearly, albeit momentarily and intermittently, visible. The colonial legacy was something that had to be re-represented in order to be negated, it could not be dismissed without being summoned. In the end the opponents of independence and the PLP were victorious, the people of Bermuda voted 'No' and the Premier resigned as he had promised. Yet despite the triangular disagreements each of the competing political discourses appeared incapable of avoiding the social dictates of denying the relevance of contested colonialities.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL DICTATES

In this section I want to reflect on some implications of the entanglement of the colonial legacy for the meaning of politics in Bermuda, all of which were symbolised by the competing reactions to the independence referendum debate which nevertheless revealed a colonial consensuality. William Connolly (1988) has suggested that the elimination of conflict in political discourse is tantamount to the elimination of politics. In the Bermudan referendum despite the existence

of three distinct political perspectives, the question of 'race' was consensually expelled from the political agenda. In being naturalised, rather than politicised this meant that the colonial formations of Bermuda had to be emptied of contemporary meaning so there could be no doubt as to what Bermuda signified as a unifying national identity. Yet paradoxically it was precisely the different ways in which the logic of denial and disavowal were put to work in these competing political discourses that actually signified Bermuda as an 'essentially contested concept'. And as Connolly points out 'essentially contested concepts' are central to the formation of *political discourse*. These two aspects of Connolly's analysis must be understood as contextualizing the argument presented in this chapter. Firstly, the concept of political discourse refers to a vocabulary that is commonly employed in the relation between political thought and action. It describes the way in which meanings 'conventionally embodied' in a vocabulary define the framework in which political thought is articulated and the criteria that must be met before an event or reference can be established as political. Only when this framework is endorsed and related criteria met can the status of political be accorded (Connolly, 1988). There is of course a certain circularity to this reasoning, it means for example that within Bermudian political discourse the idea that 'race' and colonialism belonged outside the remit of politics signified the necessary and sufficient criteria of what counted as political discourse. The paradox was however that in order to invoke the outside of political discourse, the 'unspeakable' had to be articulated, 'race' and colonialism had to be connotated within political discourse, in this way casting Bermudian national identity within the frame of the second aspect of Connolly's analysis, an *essentially contestable concept*. This can be characterised in two ways. As an 'appraisive' concept, it suggests that a desired state of affairs should be understood as a valued achievement. Thus Bermuda as it was represented in each different political discourse was the contested object not only of different value claims on the future, but of different exclusions in the formation of (post) colonial discourse. While as an 'internally complex' concept Bermuda had several dimensions, including agreed and contested rules as to which of its representations were shared and which were open to interpretation. As an essentially contestable concept then, the meaning of Bermuda was bound to 'involve endless disputes' (Connolly, 1988) during the referendum. It was because these disputes were prolonged within the acceptable parameters of political discourse that the intermittent references to 'race' and the colonial legacy successively interrupted attempts to polarise the colonial past and the quasi-colonial present.

We should not of course assume that the configural but denied role that 'race' played here is not unique to colonial Bermuda. It shares similarities with societies such as the Jim Crow states in the southern United States prior to the 1960s and even South Africa where racial demarcation was "endemic to their socio-political fabric and heritage" (Higgenbotham: 1996:186). Examining the American south prior to racial desegregation, Evelyn Brook Higgenbotham argues that where racial demarcation is endemic to the socio-political fabric and heritage of a

society, 'race' serves as a sign, a 'metalanguage' that 'lends meaning to a host of terms and expression, to a myriad of aspects that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race' (Higgenbotham, 1996). This is irrespective of whether or not it is denied, as in the case of Bermuda. Similarly the *conjuring away* of 'race' is not unique to Bermuda. This is a theme that Toni Morrison (1992) explores in a powerful series of essays where she reflects on the dis/appearing presence of African - American people in the nationally coded literary imagination. Morrison argues that although hidden and literally silenced in the historically racialized society of the United States, the presence of African-Americans can be tracked in the canonical nineteenth and twentieth century literary work of writers such as Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe , Herman Melville and Ernest Hemingway. For Morrison the formation of the United States was rooted in the Constitution and its necessarily coded language and purposeful restrictions to dealing with "the racial disingenuousness and moral fragility " (Morrison, 1992: .6) that lay at its heart. This process also shaped US literature, the founding characteristics of which extended into the twentieth century. The consequences of cultural formations of denial suggests Morrison obliges us to decode the logic of their 'conjured silence' (Morrison, 1992: 51).

Morrison's work is helpful here because it helps us to appreciate that the racialized logic underpinning colonial Bermuda is not unique but has analogous features in the founding and permeating structures of western societies generally. In her (re) reading of (white) American literary writers, Morrison indicates a way of underscoring the hidden Africanist presence. The methodological reward of this approach to analysis is undoubtedly the delight in finding proof of such a presence, rather than remaining at the level of disappointment in the 'uncoded' ways of reading. This points to a need to be ever mindful of the contested historical specificities of place and power in the inscription of political discourse. In the confines of colonial Bermuda the jettisoning of 'race' beyond the parameters of acceptable political discourse is not simply the necessary discursive erasure of a central, organising power dynamic of coloniality. Rather, it is also as Burchall has rightly contended rooted in the socially consensualising 'code of practice' which insists that in the small confines of the Island, 'despite all the myriad of frictions that actually exist' polite and non-jarring language dictates respectable political practice (Burchall, 1991:79). Hence the apparent crisis when the dream of a Bermuda freed from such constraints revealed what was generally held to be concealed. This was as much a response to the sensibilities and dictates of Bermudian culture as it was to the revelation that these vestiges of colonial rule were so blatantly exposed. If Connolly (1988) provides us with a theoretical understanding for the consensual yet contested logic underpinning political discourse in Bermudian society, then Higgenbotham (1996) and Morrison (1992) provide critical insight into the racialized nature of its systematic disavowals. These cultural specificities are of signal importance in attempting to understand the dis/agreements framing the political in/dependence of Bermuda in 1995.

CONCLUSION

Both commissioned and official Government reports continue to highlight the continued inequalities of Bermuda. Although with a large black middle class, Bermuda remains a place where white Bermudians and residents still enjoy better jobs and higher rates of income; where significant steps are said to be needed to tackle institutional racism in Bermuda's business sector; and where the presence of Portuguese-Bermudians remain unacknowledged in official statistics differentiating between 'black', 'white' and 'other'. (endnote) At the same time Bermuda remains a colony where the interrogation of inequalities is deemed highly problematic and troublesome. In Bermuda, irrespective of major political reforms - the most recent and most dramatic one being the ending of three decades of UBP rule with the PLP General Election of 1998 - the vestiges of the 'old colonial society' are very much alive. These explain the apparent ideological crisis which emerges when we begin to theorise the "public secret and very private obsession" (Lewis, op.cit: 325) of 'race' in the island and the entanglements of disavowal its resources. It is only by examining how such avoidance and marginalisation becomes politically encoded as a cultural practice and social dictate that we cease to be perplexed by a country like Bermuda that apparently advocates colonial independence and colonial dependency, simultaneously as if without contradiction.

END NOTES

1 Bermuda is located in the Atlantic Ocean, some distance away from the Caribbean islands. Although linked by similar colonial legacies, the overwhelming projection of Bermuda by Bermudians is that the Island is distinct and different, and only recently have efforts been made to forge definitive links with the Caribbean. T

2 For background on Bermuda see Lefroy's Memorials of the Discovery and Early development of the Bermudas or Somers Island, 1515 - 1685 (London: Longman, 1877); Wesley Craven's An Introduction to Bermuda (Bermuda: Maritime Press, 1990); and Henry Wilkinson's Bermuda from Sail to Steam: The History of Island from 1784 - 1901, (London: Oxford Press, 1973). Books covering Bermudian slave society include Cyril Packwood's Chained on the Rock: Slavery in Bermuda (New York: Eliseo Torris, 1975); James Smith's Slavery in Bermuda (New York: Vantage Press, 1976). Also important is Kenneth Robinson's Heritage (London: Macmillan Press, 1985).

3 For a discussion of Bermuda's political development see Frank Manning's Bermudian Politics in Transition (Bermuda: Island Press, 1978); Jeyaranan Wilson's 'Bermuda and the Future. The politics of Biracialism' (Round Table Debates, 1978); and Gordon Lewis' The Atlantic Perimeter. Bermuda and the Bahamas' in The Growth of the Modern West Indies, (London: MacGibbon and Kee), 1968.

4 The Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society (BWSS) was founded by a small number of white women belonging to Bermuda's ruling class. For twenty-one years, the BWSS campaigned for the right of propertied women to vote. The suffragists' victory did not result in the greater participation of women in the political process, but it was central in the weakening of white minority rule. For an overview of the BWSS see Colin Benbow's *Gladys Morrell and the Woman Suffrage Movement in Bermuda*, (Bermuda: Writer's Machine, 1994)

5 The presence in the colony of people from the islands of the Azores and Madeira dates back to the late 1840s when indentured workers had been recruited to work as horticultural labourers. Despite objections that their presence would further curtail the economic opportunities of the working class and despite labour policies that effectively tied them to the horticultural industry, the numbers of Portuguese migrant workers grew. By 1939, they made up 8.3% of the total population. Although many still worked in horticulture, some had entered other occupations as land and shop owners, taxi drivers and hotel workers. (Richardson, 1948) Based on cultural difference (religion, language) and their continuing stigma of their initial recruitment, Portuguese- Bermudians continued to be socially and politically excluded. It was not until 1963 that the first Bermudian of Portuguese descent was elected to the House of Assembly. For information on Portuguese Bermudians see Patricia Mudd (1991).

6 . Local writers Ira Philip (1987), Eva Hodgson (1988) Barbara Harris-Hunter (1993), and Walton Brown (1994) have written extensively on the transformations that occurred during this period.

7 The government reports presented during the late 1970s include *The Green Paper on Independence* (1977) and *The White Paper on Independence* (1979) Also important is James Ahiakpor's, *The Economic Consequences of Political Independence. The case of Bermuda*, (Canada: The Fraser Institute Press). Information regarding the debates raging during this period was taken from the local papers, *The Royal Gazette* and *the Bermuda Sun*.

8 The Bermuda House of Assembly Journals (Bermuda: Bermuda Archives, 1959 - 1963), provide insight into the parliamentary debates and the opposition against the openly stated logic that underpinned the re-organising of Bermuda's electoral districts during this period.

9 See Dorothy Newman, *Bermuda's Stride toward the twenty-first century* (Bermuda: Bermuda Government), 1994.

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