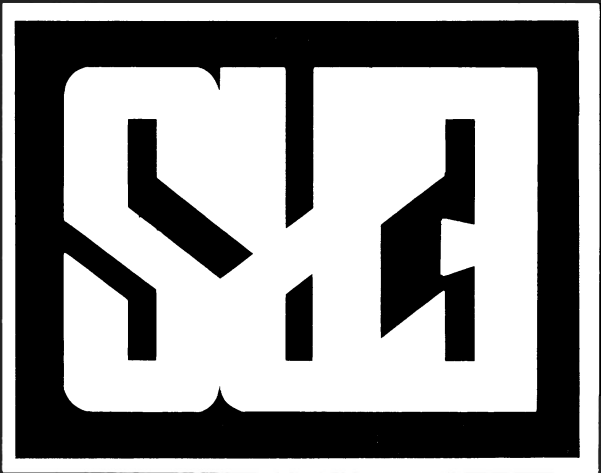


Ethnic and Racial Studies



assumption that it *has* emerged and has thus created a sharp underclass/majority class polarization.

Eclecticism is both the strength and the weakness of social democratic theory, and *The Modern Social Conflict* tends to accept certain contentious ideas (such as the 'crisis of ungovernability' analysis of the late 1970s and early 1980s) rather readily. Race issues are dealt with in passing, in the context of broader social trends. Overall, the book is an ambitious and ultimately successful attempt to relate micro-level social processes to a broad interpretative model based on a political theory approach; as such, it needs to be read with care.

By contrast, John Rex's collection of essays, written between 1979 and 1986, addresses racism head-on, is awedly socialist in analysis and takes a much more grass-roots view.

In the 1960s, Rex argues, it seemed that the 'rediscovery of poverty' would achieve redistributive justice for the deprived, but by the 1970s clear evidence was emerging of the massive disadvantages experienced by ethnic minorities in Britain, which worsened as unemployment rose and inner-city areas decayed. Professor Rex has no reservations about using the term 'underclass' to describe those most deprived in the ethnic minorities; they need immediate economic help if they are not to degenerate into a group 'whose sole relation to the society turns on their confrontation with the police' (p. 13). But, interestingly, he sees differences between the American and the British experiences: in the USA, it has been possible to view a spatially-concentrated black ghetto underclass in sharp 'social pathology' terms because their failure seems more complete and self-inflicted in an openly competitive, individualistic society; by contrast, in Britain the ethnic minority underclass has suffered a systematic denial of rights to housing and jobs at the hands of local authorities (often Labour) and skilled trade unions. Rex thus sees Britain as a 'structurally racist society'; it is significant, he argues, that the 1960s and 1970s saw a plethora of social concerns – on transmitted deprivation, the inner city, community development and so on – yet racial disadvantage was only discovered late in the day.

Three chapters explore this theme, and then the book turns to issues such as the educational problems of ethnic minorities, urban redevelopment (including some personal recollections by Rex of his work in Birmingham), racial disadvantage and the law, and the 1981 riots. Though composed for different occasions, the essays fit together well and there is a minimum of repetition. (Indeed, the principal *caveat* about this book must be over its poor production quality in an age when technology has made such things inexcusable from a legitimate publisher.) There is much that will be of interest to those concerned with racial issues, such as Rex's discussions of multicultural education. Overall, the social conflicts of the 1980s, in their inner-city racial form, are seen as a desperate protest by the victims of deeply entrenched racism in Britain.

John MacNicol
Department of Social Policy
Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
University of London

Conor Cruise O'Brien, *GODLAND: REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION AND NATIONALISM*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988, £9.95 (paper).

The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization gave Conor Cruise O'Brien the opportunity to reflect on two of his favourite themes: religion and nationalism. He might seem blessed with appropriate qualifications to lecture on these topics, being both an agnostic and, to coin a term, an anatomist. (An anatomist, as opposed to an anti-nationalist, is somebody who does not believe in the doctrine of

nationalism but none the less believes that it is impossible to conceive of organized

modern society without nationalism.)

Whatever his current beliefs and enthusiasms, the 'Cruiser' has always been controversial, and he is true to form in this book. He rejects the thesis that nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, although he immediately concedes that the modern ideology of nationalism is a mere two centuries old. Rather, he asserts tendentiously that nationalism as a collective emotional force 'makes its first appearance, with explosive impact, in the Hebrew Bible . . . and . . . at this stage, is altogether indistinguishable from religion. . . God chose a particular people and promised them a particular land'. Selected quotations from Genesis and Exodus evoke this apparent fusion of religion and nationalism in early Judaism, whereas he contends that those passages in the Old Testament that admit of a universalistic or internationalist interpretation 'tend to be remote, vague and contingent'. One of the ideas which flows from this argument is the idea that modern nationalism is usually preceded by a return to Old Testament territoriality. Whereas Christianity took the promised land into the sky, nationalism like Old Testament Judaism has brought it back to earth. The description may be true but it hardly constitutes an explanation of modern nationalism, and moreover O'Brien's distinction between nationalism as an ideology and as a collective emotional force is papably false: nationalism must be based upon the idea of the nation, and for that reason it is an inherently doctrinal notion even if it is necessarily associated with collective emotion.

O'Brien's explanation of the origins and diffusion of modern nationalism is idealist in two senses. First, he believes that as an ideology nationalism is a philosophically suspect set of ideas with potentially disastrous consequences (here he argues much in the vein of Elie Kedourie – whom O'Brien does not adequately acknowledge). Second, he (implicitly) believes that all societies are bound together by shared 'religious' (sacred/divine) values. It is 'impossible to conceive of organised society without nationalism, and even without holy nationalism, since any nationalism which failed to inspire reverence could not be an effective bonding force' (p. 40). This 'functional necessity' is executed by nationalism in the modern world. The Oriental dissonance between these rival idealist positions is not something which O'Brien seems to be concerned about. Moreover, he seems blithely unaware of the fact that the post-tribal and pre-industrial agrarian empires (which were surely 'organized societies' in his terms) were not nationalist. Finally, although he may be entitled to his so far unestablished and Voltaire-like belief that any society needs the functional equivalent of religious superstition to cement it together, he fails to explain why nationalism is *the* functional answer in modern times, and why inter- or non-nationalist ideologies might not be equally effective for this allegedly indispensable task.

There is no hint in his book of any materialist or structural explanation of the relations between nationalism, industrialization and modernization, of the kind made famous by Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism*. Indeed the major social scientific thinkers who have written on nationalism are for the most part ignored. It is as if the world statesman, diplomat, politician and Irish iconoclast believes his own experiences are more than sufficient for definitive theoretical declarations on nationalism and religion. O'Brien has been a scholar, a politician and a journalist amongst many other careers in his glittering *curriculum vitae*. In *Godland*, the latter careers seem to get the better of the former. The politician loathes (especially Irish) nationalism and Marxism. The journalist likes pity and tendentious simplification. Perhaps these traits explain why *Godland* begins with a howler: he tells us that 'Nationalism-as-ideology is altogether eclipsed, in its intellectual development, in its acknowledged influence over states, and in the number of adherents by an internationalist and anti-nationalist ideology: Marxism-Leninism' (p. 2). The minuscule plausibility of this statement must rest entirely on the phrase 'intellectual development', as the triumph of nationalism over Marxism-Leninism is one of the commonplace of our times. In any case, O'Brien the politician and journalist is not very consistent, since he subsequently, and correctly, tells his American

white Britons in the Balsall Heath area of Birmingham. Within the context of Birmingham this is an area known as a red light locale, with a multiracial population, although it is perhaps better known nationally as the home ground of the reggae band UB40. Jones uses this locale as the backdrop for his story of how a group of young white people see their relationship to black music and the life-styles associated with it. The author was himself part of the social and musical scene that he describes, and this comes through very clearly in his descriptions of both individuals and the music which drew them together. Much of the interview and participant observation material on which this part of the book is based draws on the group of friends who were involved in the same scene of sound-system dances, blues parties and gigs as he was. The interviews represent for me the most interesting part of this study, and the way Jones pulls them together to explore aspects of the interaction between black and white youth in Balsall Heath represents a useful addition to our knowledge of this field. There is much that will be of interest to students of contemporary racial relations and youth cultures in British society. It is well written and is accessible to both specialists and general readers. It would be too much to expect one book to produce a fully rounded picture of the experience of living in multiracial locales such as Balsall Heath, or the interactions between black and white youth through culture and music. Clearly, other studies of the experiences of black and white youth may highlight other phenomena, and the possibilities for conflict rather than inter-racial friendship networks. But this is a valuable study nevertheless, and one which helps to shed a different light on the experience of young whites growing up in multiracial areas.

John Solomos
Department of Politics and Sociology
Birkbeck College
University of London

Colin Holmes, **JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND: IMMIGRATION AND BRITISH SOCIETY, 1871-1971**, London: Macmillan, 1988, £33.00 & £10.95 (paper).

For a number of years past Colin Holmes has served notice in a number of important articles of his long-term project. In those pieces, we were provided with a series of tasty *hors d'oeuvres*; now the main meal is served. What is on offer here is a feast for other historians to savour at their leisure. There are likely to be few readers of this journal who need persuading of the importance of the history of immigration into Britain. There have in recent years been a series of excellent monographs on specific areas of the history of immigration, though much of the work has remained in the hands of social scientists concerned with more recent patterns of migration to and from Britain. Historians have tended to be much more *pointilliste*; concerned with the fine details of a specific and often minute era or phase. Few have ventured to offer a more sweeping assessment of immigration as a historical force. The strength of Holmes's important book is that it has both the sweep and the fine detail. *John Bull's Other Island* is a major study, tackling a broad and important topic but never losing sight of the fine detail. The broad outline of the story is familiar enough (though not fully appreciated by many people). Beginning with a general survey of the problems posed by the history of immigration, Holmes launches into his main study with a detailed account of Europeans. His is extremely interesting on the reactions to the settlers in the years before World War I. Moving on to the impact of World War I, Holmes tells the remarkable story of the polyglot society slowly accumulating as the empire was called to arms and as Europeans drifted to Britain. This was a process continued in the inter-war

audience that revolutionaries in the third world are nationalists first, and Marxists

The triumph of the politician and journalist over the scholar is evident in the following respects. First, O'Brien bypasses much of the important sociological and political science writing on nationalism and religion. Second, he generalizes about the relations between religion and nationalism, while disarmingly conceding that he knows nothing of the relations between non-Judaean-Christian-Islamic religions and nationalist movements. Third, he assumes, strangely, that Soviet nationalism has been successful, a view which was scarcely persuasive when these lectures were composed, but today seems wildly off the mark as the ethnic slaughter rate in the Soviet Union seems to escalate *part passus* with *glasnost*. Fourth, he casually asserts that Protestantism was the driving force of the American revolution, and therefore gets involved in a pseudo-problem: explaining revolutionary America's alliance with Catholic France. Finally, he gets some obvious contemporary points of detail badly wrong. To take one example: he tells us that Somali nationalism has irredentist claims on the Sudan. I spent some of my adolescence in the Sudan and know that O'Brien's claim is absurd, and without foundation. He also suggests that Somali nationalism is motivated by tribalism, whereas to my knowledge much as religion became the marker and badge for ethnic identity, what makes Somali nationalism is that Islam is its marker and badge for ethnic identity. Most academic reviewers of this book will fall into camps. First, there will be those who know nothing of Ireland, and will therefore generously assume that O'Brien has generalized too much about the relations between religion and nationalism from the Irish cases (about which he will be generously assumed to be correct). Second, there will be those Irish specialists who will contend that O'Brien is wrong about Ireland, but has interesting general things to say about the relations between religion and nationalism. I believe that O'Brien is wrong both about the particular case which animates his theoretical reflections, and in his more general theoretical reflections. First, Irish nationalism is not to be decoded as merely 'Irish Catholic holy nationalism' (p. 39). Contrary to O'Brien's reading of Irish history, Irish nationalism - in all its varieties, from the republican terrorism of the Provisional IRA to the confederal pluralism of Fine Gael's Garret FitzGerald or the SDLP's John Hume - increasingly is less under the influence of Roman and Irish Catholicism, and the relations between Irish nationalism and Catholicism have been much more multi-faceted than O'Brien's readers will be led to believe. Second, explaining the complex general relations between religion and nationalism have not been advanced by this well-written but otherwise deficient book.

Brendan O'Leary
Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

Simon Jones, **BLACK CULTURE, WHITE YOUTH: THE REGGAE TRADITION FROM JA TO THE UK**, London: Macmillan, 251 pp., £33.00 and £9.50 (paper).

The bulk of the research for this book was conducted during the early 1980s within the intellectual ambience of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham, and the musical and social scene of Balsall Heath and its environs. It is perhaps the only example of a book produced within the CCCS which combines the Centre's theorizations of youth cultures and of racial relations in British society. It is a study in two parts. The first part is primarily a social history of the development of Jamaican reggae music in Britain and elsewhere and its impact on white youth cultures. There is a useful overview in this part of the book of the origins of reggae culture in Jamaica, its marketing within the international music market and of its impact in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. The second, and perhaps most original, part of the book is an account of the contact established through music between young black and