

Keskidee Aroha: Translation on the Colonial Stage

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Abstract In 1979 a Black theatre group from London toured the north island of Aotearoa New Zealand, visiting community centres and *marae* (traditional Māori meeting places).¹ The troupe was named after a small Guyanese bird renowned for its resilience – the Keskidee – and consisted of Black British, African-Caribbean, African-American and African performers including a group of Rasta musicians, the Ras Messengers. The New Zealand organizers of the tour called their collective Keskidee Aroha, *aroha* being the Māori word for compassion and empathy. This article explores the colonial stage upon which Keskidee played and assesses the type of inter-cultural translations that are prompted when (post-)colonized subjects speak to each-other rather than address the colonizer.

Introduction

The meanings, significance and effects of inter-cultural, multicultural and cross-cultural performance have now been debated in some depth in theatre studies, and the assumption that cultural exchange occurs amongst equals has been roundly critiqued. To this end, some scholars have focused upon the historically colonial character of cultural circulation wherein the exoticised and primitivised aesthetics and narratives of non-Western worlds are unequally exchanged, appropriated, commodified, and assimilated by Western artists and institutions so as to give value-added to extant imperial art forms (see Bharucha 2000; Carlson 2008; Pavis 1992; Peters 1995). However, these debates over translation in the arts tend to assume that the colonial economy of cultural exchange is defined by a relation between two main protagonists: those positioned in the imperial centre and those in the colonial (or quasi-colonial) periphery (for example, Peters 1995; Fischer-Lichte 1990; Pavis 1992; Lo and Gilbert 2002). Arguments that owe much to Said's critique of Orientalism fit comfortably into this framework: the speaking, authoritative West constructs a multiplicity of mute exotic others for the purpose of valorising its own distinctiveness.² This article problematizes this influential framework of critique.

Using the following exploration of the Keskidee tour of Aotearoa NZ, I want to suggest that the standard usage of the Orientalist

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critique, because it frames the protagonists of the colonial drama as the colonizing self and colonized other, runs the risk of muting and pacifying cultural projects of self-determination that have been predicated upon inter-cultural relations that have exceeded the colonial binary of self/other. The weight of the colonial stage upon which such relations have taken place still rests upon foundations constructed by the imperial centres. But this does not mean that the dramas have to directly address the personifications of these foundations. *Keskidee Aroha* was a project of cultural self-determination that reached across the colonial stage from (post-)colonized Africa and the Black Americas via the imperial entrepôt of London to Aotearoa NZ. It was predicated upon a dialogue between (post-)colonized subjects over their conditions and, if about the imperial foundations, it was not addressed directly or primarily to the colonizers or their descendents.

Exploring such a type of cultural translation does not mean that we should jettison the concept of power hierarchies, indeed, dialogue between (post-)colonized peoples have usually been translated through subtle – often vicariously or virtually experienced – hierarchies defined in terms of geo-cultural closeness to the imperial centre. Nevertheless, I propose that we need to conceptualise cultural translations across the (post-)colonial world in ways that go beyond the simple master/servant dialectic common to most articulations of “cultural imperialism” (see Dunch 2002). For, when the drama does not bring the master to the fore as a key protagonist to speak and be spoken to, even the Orientalist critique loses a great deal of its efficacy. As is the case with theatre studies, so it is that historical and sociological analyses of a colonially inflected world order have yet to fully appreciate the epistemological significance of the translation of cultural self-determination between and among (post-)colonized subjects. The broad aim of this article is to address this lacuna. Specifically, the article will examine the attempt made by *Keskidee Aroha* to translate Black into Brown liberation on the colonial stage.³

Before beginning, it is necessary to provide some notes on the sources used in this article. I conducted interviews with members of *Keskidee Aroha* from May 2009 onward; my academic relationship with them is ongoing and strives to be at least partially reciprocal. To this end I helped to organize a workshop that brought together members of *Keskidee Aroha* in May 2010 for the purposes of a retrospect on the tour thirty years later. In December 2009 I visited some of the London members of *Keskidee*, including the Ras Messengers, and interviewed others by phone. Some of the written archive is held in the London Metropolitan Archive and the Alexander Turnbull Library (part of the National Library of New Zealand).

However, the bulk was sourced from the personal collections of various Keskidee members. At the time of the tour, a documentary film was initiated and arranged by the Keskidee Aroha collective. The co-directors were on the cutting-edge of the New Zealand arts scene: Merata Mita led the way in developing an indigenous documentary making tradition in Aotearoa NZ and further afield; Martyn Sanderson, director and actor, was a co-founder of the Downstage Theatre Company, which was seminal in cultivating a distinctly New Zealand theatre tradition. Rather than a set of detached observations, the documentary should be approached as a politically-committed piece of work that shared the broad intentions of the Keskidee Aroha collective. Finally, my own broad positionality in navigating these living histories should be made apparent to the reader for their consideration: I am neither Māori nor a New Zealander. Having in the UK researched the histories and ideas of the Black Atlantic world, especially Rastafari and Garveyism, I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2007 and was (naively) surprised to find that this world had long been incorporated into the imagination of peoples struggling to decolonize the Pacific.

Translating Black into Brown Liberation

Koroheke: . . . We come now to Te Morere, known to the Pakeha as Sentry Hill, on which the Pakeha had built a fort within the ancient Ati Awa land and thus in constant challenge did it stand, a taunt to Maori mana, pride and worth.

Tamatāne: (groans) Oh save us from Poetry!

Harry Dansey, *Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross* (1974, p.25)

Juju Mar: . . . But I going to burn down Babylon, get out me way I have wings . . .

Chorus: Armageddon. Call the tribes.

Juju Mar: . . . Walking you through Egypt land. The thirteenth hour. Give them music to walk.

Edgar White, *Lament for Rastafari* (1983, p.78)

In order to set out the context of the attempt by Keskidee Aroha to translate Black to Brown liberation, I shall use the two excerpts above from plays by Harry Dansey and Edgar White as a heuristic device. First, let us consider Dansey's *Te Raukura*, written for the Auckland festival in 1972 and one of the first examples of modern Māori-focused theatre (for overviews of the development of Māori theatre see Potiki 1991; Peterson 2006; Samasoni 1986; Balme 1989).

To understand the significance of Dansey's play it is first necessary to place it within a particular historical conjuncture in Aotearoa NZ defined by a) the acceleration of rural to urban migration amongst Māori (begun in earnest with the 1940s war economy), b) increased immigration of Pacific Islanders into the

same urban areas, and c) a set of external shocks to the economy, especially oil price hikes and the loss of a protected export market with the entry of the UK into the EEC. In this conjuncture, Māori and Pacific Islander youth were confronted with a) bleaker urban futures b) a sense of removal (if not necessarily a categorical separation) from the everyday life of their filial non-European cultures; and c) an increased racism amongst Pākehā,⁴ brought on by the immediate presence of “natives” in “civilized” areas and encouraged by a resurgence in government of assimilationist policies. Much of the discontent amongst urban youth was summed up in a common injunction: “we don’t want to be brown-skinned Pākehā” (Ilolahia and Bates 1973). This conjuncture prompted a resurgent quest for cultural self-determination by youth in Māori and Pacific communities, a quest that was in many ways radicalised by the contemporaneous global surge of liberation struggles, although always connecting back to ancestral examples of radical resistance, and one that covered a broad spectrum of political engagement from the immanent social justice demands of the Black Power gang to the community activism and political agitation of the Polynesian Panthers to the pre-eminent pressure group, Ngā Tamatoa.

With regards to Māori culture specifically, a number of commentators have drawn attention to the “theatrical” oratory and performances that have traditionally taken place on the *marae ātea* (the cleared space where visitors are encountered) (see Peterson 2001, pp. 16–17). However, young Māori who sought to dramatize the continued presence of colonial/assimilationist policy found it difficult to employ existent cultural mediums that were at least one step removed (while not entirely sundered) from their everyday urban life. In new suburbs such as Otara in South Auckland, there were, in the 1970s, no *marae* (except for one incorporated into the Catholic church complex) and little community infrastructure (Lindberg 2009). Meanwhile, the mediums that urban Pākehā used were alien to Māori (Potiki 1996, p. 173). Hence, for Māori, and similarly for Pacific Islander youth, the search for the cultural medium and voice of self-determination was neither an entirely conservative nor entirely modernist one: the ends of preserving *Māoritanga* (indigenous custom/culture) required innovative means, which in turn required a radicalization of the prevailing modality of tactful and usually incrementalist critique through which Māori made their presence felt in the public sphere of (post-)settler society. Inevitably, the new youthful initiatives to resist assimilation produced cleavages right across Māoridom even though there had always existed a radical strain of Māori struggle and even though the new activism was supported by some *kaumātua* (elders) (in general see McDowell 2007; Patete 2007).

While Dansey's drama is set historically in the prophet-led resistance movements against land expropriation in the 1860s, the play consciously speaks to the contentious context of the early 1970s. The figure of Koroheke (translated literally as "elderly man") represents the model of patient and tactful engagement with Pākehā governments while Tamatāne (boy) represents the radicalization of this engagement for the purposes of preserving the Māori world. In fact, Tamatāne was originally played in 1972 by Syd Jackson who was a central member of Ngā Tamatoa (Dansey 1974, p.xv). Tamatāne storms off stage before the end of the play leaving the comforting reconciliatory words of Koroheke to the Pākehā somewhat haunted by his absence. With this, the mono-vocal narrative of the coming to being of the New Zealand nation is revealed as a drama that silences, but in that silence a question is made audible: how might Māori address a history of irreparable loss of *whenua* (land) and *mana* (authority); how might a cultural liberation be forwarded even in the absence of *mana whenua*?

It is with this question hanging in the air that I want to move on to the excerpt from White's play, *Lament for Rastafari*, elements of which formed part of the repertoire of Keskidee during their tour of Aotearoa NZ. The moment when the spiritual liberator, Jujuman, "chants down Babylon" resonates across the African Diaspora in a way that makes it clear that although the specific intent of the calling is Pan-African it is heard upon a global colonial stage and not just in discrete national arena. Moreover, the chant is musical and performative; it resonates through and is amplified by embodied experiences that suggest solidarity due to a shared colonial fate of racial discrimination and exploitation.

During the 1970s, reggae music, roots culture and the Rastafari faith started to reverberate around the poorer neighbourhoods of Aotearoa NZ. The original "indigenous" Jamaican film starring Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come*, promulgated the "rude boy" ethos; the roots bands Culture and Burning Spear broadcast a militant Pan-Africanism; and Bob Marley poetically articulated the righteousness of the urban sufferer in their pursuit of social justice.⁵ Unlike the cacophony of voices resounding within Aotearoa NZ, where younger activists often talked past older reformers and vice versa, these African diasporic critiques of colonial oppression (400 years), social justice for the urban "sufferers" (get up, stand up), and recoveries of a non-assimilated self in a concrete jungle (the roots man) resonated directly with Māori and Pacific Island youth and at a deeply affective level.⁶

One such person to take note of this resonance was Denis O'Reilly, an Irish Catholic member of the Black Power, a predominantly Māori gang. Identifying – and seeking to positively

mobilize – the perceived commonalities of the young island “sufferers” of the Caribbean and South Pacific, O’Reilly obtained a Commonwealth Youth Fellowship to travel in 1977 to the source of the redemption songs that were resonating amongst his Māori *whānau* (extended family) (O’Reilly and Tareha-O’Reilly 2009). Via Jamaica and Ottawa O’Reilly subsequently arrived in London, and after visiting a number of organizations, including the Ethiopian World Federation, was directed by the Interaction Centre to seek out the Keskidee troupe (O’Reilly and Tareha-O’Reilly 2009).

Oscar Abrams, one of the founders of the Keskidee centre, had articulated its purpose in the form of a motto: “a community discovering itself creates its own future” (The Keskidee Trust n.d.). While the Keskidee centre often acted as a forum for Third World liberation politics it also tackled local needs including education on tenants’ rights and legal rights as well as providing courses in cookery, painting etc. (Dein 2009) The Keskidee Centre was initially designed to help a segment of immigrant youth connect with the cultural resources of their parents to which they had become at least partially alienated from in London (The Keskidee Trust n.d., pp. 4–5). The Keskidee mandate therefore spoke to the situation in Aotearoa NZ wherein disaffected and alienated youth were composed primarily from the families of internal Māori and external Pacific migrants. Upon returning, O’Reilly initiated the Keskidee Aroha collective, composed of a national and multiple local groupings, which fund-raised and organized the Keskidee tour. Intended to “serve as a catalyst to our own cultural development” (O’Reilly 1980), the tour effectively sought to translate the cultural mediums and messages of Black Liberation into Brown Liberation – *mana motuhake* (self-determination) – and in a way that might spur on the transformation of (post-)settler New Zealand society.⁷

At this point I would like to return to a broader point raised in the introduction. When cultural translation of this sort is undertaken between (post-)colonized subjects the result is at the same time an acute intensification of resonance *and* dissonance. There are two inter-linked reasons for this intensity. First, communications between (post-)colonized subjects are not entirely absent of the hierarchies that structure the relationship with imperial centres, even if they are vicariously constructed as an imitation of colonial hierarchies rather than anchored in material conditions. But second, the ethical significance of translating cultural self-determination between (post-)colonized subjects lies in the enabling of a liberation from colonial rule, hence, no master can or should command the narrative of these dramas. Therefore the translation of particular struggles by particular protagonists cannot be guided by a grand narrative that pushes all acts of

synthesis towards a homogenous and singular endpoint. Dialogue is not undertaken due to the necessity to make the *herr* (master) recognize the *knecht* (servant) or vice versa; hence translation is a less triumphal, less world-historical, less dialectical (in the classic Hegelian sense), even less dialogical (in the sense of a conversation leading to an all round higher cognition), perhaps even non-“progressive” process. This subverts the hierarchical framework of translating concepts, values and programmes of actions, and paradoxically problematises the homogenous gloss of global anti-colonial solidarity. To paraphrase Oscar Abrams, a colonized community discovering itself on the colonial stage in this way acutely realizes that it must determine its own drama.

In what follows I make sense of the Kesکیدee Aroha tour through the heuristic device of reading the dialogue between the protagonists of Dansey and White’s plays in two directions: the call to arms of the spiritual liberator Jujuman saves the youth, Tamatāne, from the old man Koroheke’s ineffective prevarications over the colonial order (i.e. the global resonance of anti-colonial solidarity); but Tamatāne must necessarily clip Jujuman’s poetic wings in order to firmly walk out of his own Egypt (i.e. the specific dissonances produced in the pursuit of cultural self-determination). One final note: modern Māori activism, similar to most modern activism, has exhibited strands of male chauvinism that have always been robustly contested, primarily by diverse Māori women (for example, Te Awakeluku 1992). And while it would be difficult to speak of Māori feminism in the singular, Māori women have always been at the forefront of activism both intellectually and practically – as is also the case for Pacific women. Henceforth I shall talk of both Tamatāne (boy) and Tamāhine (girl).

Jujuman saves Tamatāne/Tamāhine: The Resonance of Anti-Colonial Solidarity

The repertoire that the Kesکیدee troupe brought to Aotearoa NZ expressed the interconnected issues of racism and sexism prevalent in the work, family and religious lives of the African Diaspora. Steve Carter’s *Eden* was the most popularly received play in the tour; the play focuses upon the internalized racism of two families living in 1920s New York, one Jamaican and run by an old Garveyite patriarch, the other African-American and composed of an aunt and nephew from the South. Steve Wilmer’s *Scenes from Soweto* often raised the tension of the Kesکیدee performance to its peak; the play follows an apolitical academic’s return from Oxford to his native Soweto where, during the student riots, he is finally forced to take a stand before being murdered by a white policeman. Excerpts

from Edgar White's *Lament for Rastafari* included the final callings of Jujuman for liberation from Babylon, but also the provocative scene wherein a clergyman is questioned about his inability to believe in a Black spirit, as well as Hilda's Soliloquy on the thankless labour relation between Black help and white families. The later sketch was especially remembered by audiences (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009). Derek Walcott's *Malcochon* dwells on the internalization of racism and sexism amongst ex-slaves in the absence of the old master but in the presence of white rum. Still other performances included the beginning scene of Alex Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*, wherein a young woman describes breaking the news of her pregnancy to her incarcerated boyfriend, a scene that was particularly poignant when performed at the Arohata Women's Prison (O'Reilly 1980). Finally, a sketch written by Wanjiku Kiarie of the raping of a black woman by a white prison guard had a notable impact upon young gang members in Whakatane some who had taken part in block rapes and for the first time were forced to intimately empathize with the woman's experience (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009; O'Reilly 2009).⁸

These performances resonated deeply amongst audiences, especially Māori, and all the more so because the "fiction" of the stage gave permission to air themes of racism and sexism that were usually not presented so starkly in the local public spheres wherein they were performed. Indeed, the performances tended to foster a conscientious awareness of these issues, especially in more geographically isolated communities. (Mita 2009; O'Reilly and Tareha-O'Reilly 2009) But above all, it was the underlying racial tension within Aotearoa NZ at the time that provided the atmosphere through which the radicalism of Keskidee's repertoire resonated. To flesh out this point I will now return to the framework I laid out above and consider this issue of racial tension by interpreting an episode of the tour through the lens of the relationship between Tamatāne/Tamāhine (youth), Koroheke (old man), and Jujuman (spiritual liberator), and the way in which the later provides what Koroheke cannot by himself: a direct and affective testifying to the project of anti-colonial liberation.

Upon arriving at Te Hapua, their first port of call, Keskidee were welcomed by a *kaumātua* (elder) who told them that "you have the Queen living amongst you, but here we have the spiritual departure place throughout the world." (Mita and Sanderson 1980) The greeting is significant on a number of levels. One core modality of Māori engagement with the British Empire had always been to appeal to their partner, the Crown, to honour in good faith the Treaty they had signed together, and to therefore control and discipline the illegal and immoral actions of the Crown's subjects, the British

settlers. However, while the *kaumātua* acknowledged the significance of Keskidee's immediate point of origin (the city of the Queen), he also reminded them of the different, but equal, significance of the place where they now stood: Cape Rēinga was close by, which in some versions of Māori cosmology is the departing point for spirits to journey back to the mythical homeland of Hawaiki. Unintentionally, Rufus Collins – director of the Keskidee troupe – subverted the tactful balance of the elder's greeting by responding that “we are here *despite* the Queen.” (Mita and Sanderson 1980)⁹ Of course, to the anti-colonial mindset of the African Diaspora this was a common-sense reply: the Queen had been no partner but rather the direct symbol of colonial oppression that had to be replaced. Then, following Rufus's comments, the Ras Messengers began the chant that displaced the royal connections of the visiting group from the halls of Buckingham Palace towards Ethiopia: “Rastaman come from Mount Zion.” (O'Reilly 1980) Later in the documentary, a seminal member of Ngā Tamatoa – Tame Iti – reflected: “well, what they showed on that stage is true . . . it happens here too . . . they made the older people see this happening to our young people . . . but they seem to be sitting on the fence.” (Mita and Sanderson 1980)

Crucially, despite differing registers of communication, the messages of Keskidee were usually listened to by old and young Māori alike, and even if they were fundamentally disturbing and broke with the normal modalities of public dialogue over race relations, they did not produce the same immediate “talking past” that had in the recent past been the prevailing practice between young and old. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the troupe was considered by their audiences, including Māori, to consist of professional performers from London, the cultural-imperial centre, and therefore to be authoritative speakers and commentators. Secondly, and more importantly, even if these actors were speaking in radical and confrontational terms of the ills of racism and colonialism, *kaumātua* had to accord Keskidee the hospitality and respect traditionally due to *manuhiri* (visitors) that had been welcomed on to the *marae* (Mita 2009). Put another way, in these inter-cultural interactions Jujuman usurps the balanced poetry of Koroheke and grants Tamatāne/Tamāhine poetic wings to radicalize the struggle against assimilationist society.

In this way, the Keskidee performances had the dramatic effect of symbolically uniting Māori – young, old, reformist revolutionary – as the colonially oppressed, against the oppressor, the Pākehā, in a public sphere of entertainment. As Keskidee performed their repertoire, Māori substituted for Blacks: i.e., Māori would work for Pākehā for nothing (not even gratitude); Māori as well as Pacific

Islander families would be internalizing colonial mentality and fighting amongst themselves; it would be indigenous spirituality that the Pākehā church could not comprehend; Māori couples would be speaking to each-other through prison windows; and it would be Māori and Pacific women that would receive the brunt of patriarchal and racist barbarism. But the most important effect of this public translation of Black to Brown liberation was the way in which it fundamentally disturbed the foundation of assimilationist policy in (post-)settler society, namely, the belief that despite the past “we are now one people, one nation”.

Throughout the twentieth century New Zealand settler society was ordered through a paternalist assumption that issues overseas could not break the putatively harmonious governing relationship of Pākehā to Māori. And it was this very assumption that, on the *Keskidee* stage, was being seriously undermined (Mita 2009). Indeed, the *Keskidee Aroha* documentary is full of symbolic allusions to this replacement of national unity based on racial paternalism with a global anti-colonial, anti-racist solidarity. For example, at one point, the film cuts to images and sounds of Tuhoe country with Tame Iti describing his return home from the city. The (Zimbabwean but) unofficial anti-apartheid song, *Tshotsholoza*, sung by Keskidee, is then dubbed over the scene. (Tuhoe, it should be further noted, are an *iwi* (tribe) that never signed up to the Waitangi Treaty). It was, for Pākehā society in general, an unpalatable resonance. Eventually the documentary was broadcast on a channel that had poor coverage nationwide *and* on the evening of pay-day (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009). Even so, complaints from the public concerning mention of the tour on the evening news were forthcoming. One letter written to the Minister of Internal Affairs provides a snapshot of the felt need by the majority of Pākehā to protect their sacred paternalism in the public sphere:

. . . viewers were shown scenes depicting the most evil of degenerate incitement to racial disharmony . . . The violent hate-ridden, crime infested environment of the London West Indian ghetto has no place or parallel whatever to the New Zealand context, either in the European or Maori cultures. (Anon 1979)

Other examples of this disturbing of racial paternalism abound. Over the course of one day in the rural town of Masterton a school group heard the South African consul general giving a pro-Apartheid speech to a town function *and* experienced Rufus Collins espousing Black Liberation (O'Reilly 1980). However, reporting on the evening's *Keskidee* performance, the local newspaper chose to pass judgement in a technical language that refused to engage with

the political challenge laid down to local race relations: “it is possible people walked out because it was overacted and the actor’s overstated performance detracted from the dialogue” (Wairarapa Times-Age 1979). Likewise, at the Kohitere Training Centre for Delinquent Boys some staff walked out of the show, uneasy with the dramas enacted in an institutional space defined by white adults controlling and disciplining brown boys (O’Reilly 1980). O’Reilly explained these evasions thus:

The effect of a predominantly Black group willing to confront this tension met either resistance with people employing all manner of devious plays to avoid issues that applied to them, or it triggered an immediate venting of frustration, fear and despair from people affected by it . . . Unlike violence, the medium does not cloud the message (O’Reilly 1980).

At one point, the documentary shows a group of school boys performing a *haka* to the Keskidee troupe. One of the troupe, Yvette Harris, then stands up to introduce herself and proclaims “. . . as far as I’m concerned, this is New Zealand! Nothing else!” (Mita and Sanderson 1980) This affirmation prompts us to also consider the resonances that fed back into the Keskidee troupe itself. Kirk Service, of Ras Messengers, reminisces that he found many resemblances between his Afrocentric cosmologies and mythologies and those of Māori (Service 2009). And another Ras Messengers, Glasford James Hunter, remembers that, in acknowledgement to him, Māori elders would sometimes trace their genealogy back to Africa (G. J. Hunter 2009). At the root of it all was the troupe’s status as *manuhiri* (visitors) and the Māori custom of *manaaki* (hospitality, support). Wanjiku Kiarie remembers how the generosity of these communities impacted upon her colleagues, especially – and in contrast to their British experiences – regarding the basic appreciation of their talents as a professional theatre group (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009). As Rufus Collins put it:

I have not been to almost any *marae* . . . where I did not feel that the entire energy of those group of people in their own particular style went towards making us welcome, comfortable and trying to find out what they could about our experience in life [and] at the same time trying to open up to us a kind of ritualistic living that the *marae* proposes (Mita and Sanderson 1980).

It seems that this welcoming was especially appreciated by the Ras Messengers. Thirty years later Kirk Service (2009) positively remembers the welcoming onto *marae*, and for Glasford Hunter (2009) the welcome “made you feel like someone”. While at the time, Chauncy Huntley reasoned that:

When you just go and shake a man’s hand, it’s over. But when you bring him to a place where all your fathers rest and sing him a song for get on the same vibrations

as him, and him sing you back a song, you know? Yes! That's what I call a greeting! (Keskidee Aroha Promotion Material 1979)

**Tamatāne/Tamāhine Clips Jujuman's Wings:
The Dissonances Produced in the Pursuit of
Cultural Self-Determination**

Nevertheless, O'Reilly suggests that these inter-cultural experiences also "touched something in some of [the Keskidee troupe] that really became quite disturbing to them" (O'Reilly and Tareha-O'Reilly 2009). After all, the tour immersed a group of people, heretofore having mostly lived relatively individualistic urban lives, into a sometimes rural and always intensely communal form of living (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009).¹⁰ The troupe usually had to mingle with the audience before performing, often without the protective border of a proper stage, and afterwards would eat and sometimes sleep collectively near to the same audiences part of whom were hosts (D. Hunter 2009). Wanjiku Kiarie remembers that, with the possible exception of Edgar White, none of her fellow Keskidee artists had worked and lived so intimately with their putative audiences back in London (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009). It is reasonable to think that these experiences therefore fed into a deeper dissonance between the "urban Blacks" and "indigenous Browns".

One Māori *whakataukī* (proverb) states: *ka kotia te taitapu ki Hawaiki* (the sacred sea to Hawaiki is cut off). The everyday use of this phrase refers to a kind of "no turning back now" situation. However, the proverb is rooted in a call to "indigenise" the lands of Aotearoa so that the Pacific islands, where the journeyers originated from, must now be rendered an ancestral home – Hawaiki (see Tau 2008). There is, of course, a similar sense of journeying across a vast ocean in the cultural memories of the African Diaspora of the Atlantic world, yet here, the journey is made in slave ships and the ancestral homelands are dislocated in far more violent and disturbing ways. While scholarship has now refuted the assumption that slave populations were fully deculturated of their African roots (Thornton 1998) it is nevertheless the case that the mode of African integration into settler societies of the Americas disallowed a process similar to the self-indigenization of Māori. Hence, African Diasporic cultures necessarily speak to a forced uprooting (for which Rastafari is an eminent resolution). In this respect, the possibilities of self-determining a post-colonial cultural space for the African Diaspora back in such an unforgiving place as London must have seemed thin indeed to the majority of the Keskidee troupe in comparison to the marginalized, oppressed yet nevertheless rooted, directly transmitted, and still living cultures and spaces of their Māori hosts.

Some of Rufus Collin's comments betray the impact of this experiential comparison; in reading them it should be remembered that he had participated in the American civil rights movement:

There is a greater strength in the [Māori] people because they haven't gone under a kind of demoralization where you feel you have nothing and therefore the land has totally been robbed from you . . . This society mixture is different than any other country that I have been to . . . There is a possibility here that I have not recognized in any other country which has a colonial background as this one. And somehow there should be another way of working out how a society can learn to live with each-other (Mita and Sanderson 1980).

Another trace of this effect is when David Haynes, a Keskidee actor who played Jujuman, expressed to the local collective of South Auckland, at Ngati Otara Marae, that "he felt that here at this marae he had at last come to understand what a multi-cultural community could be"(Manukau Arts Collective 1979). One should not flippantly make causal inferences as to external determinants of psychological well being; but on the plane heading back to Europe, Haynes suddenly pulled out of Keskidee's next high profile engagement at a Berlin Festival and subsequently largely disappeared from the Black arts scene in London (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009). Alternatively, after the tour, Wanjiku Kiarie, one of the few members of Keskidee to be able to claim a firm rooting in the Motherland by virtue of being Kenyan, started to write poetry about her relationship with her land (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009).

However, the dissonances felt by the hosts, especially the local collectives of Keskidee Aroha, were of a different order and impacted first and foremost upon the implicit assumption that all (post-)colonized subjects shared an empathic racial solidarity. Indeed, assumptions of automatic Black/Brown solidarity were shaken from the very start. On the eve of the troupe's departure, the Pākehā members were temporarily ejected from the Keskidee Aroha national collective. Yet at the same time, Rufus Collins was seeking to extract more insurance out of the organizers in the form of an additional *per diem*, most probably because he did not understand that the tradition of looking after *manuhiri* made this form of insurance a moot point (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009; O'Reilly and Tareha-O'Reilly 2009). One organizer from Gisborne was to later unkindly quip: "I think the folksy brotherhood of Keskidee Aroha got the run-around from the Chelsea Blacks" (McCormick 1979).

As I have noted above, a vicarious imperial hierarchy often informs cultural translation amongst (post-)colonized subjects and is structured according to those that are (rightly or wrongly) perceived to be closer to the imperial cultural centre. In this respect, the real and perceived proximity of the Keskidee troupe to the

cultural heart of empire in many ways complicated the assumption that Black liberation could be directly translated into Brown liberation absent of an intervening imperial lexicon. Specifically, the strong association (right or wrong) of the professional artistry of Keskidee to the troupe's location within the British arts played into long-standing self-doubts not only with regards to the strength and sources of modern Māori cultural self-determination, but also regarding the general ability of peripheral societies to be "creative" or "inventive" and not simply imitative of the core (Lindberg 2009).

With this in mind it is instructive to note that when visiting poor communities and encountering gangs with names such as the Stormtroopers, Headhunters and the Black Power, Rufus Collins would often point out that they were not social workers but there in their professional capacity as performers (Kiarie and Sanderson 2009; Mita 2009).¹¹ This led on occasion to Keskidee effectively taking on the persona of Koroheke when the efforts of gang members to make a positive working contribution to the proceedings – and the significance of these efforts to reconcile and reconnect to filial communities – went largely unappreciated and unacknowledged by the visitors. These, of course, were the same visitors who themselves had felt the powerful effect of appreciation and acknowledgement by their hosts. Aside from Rufus Collin's principled professionalism, much of these dissonances were due to a simple unawareness on the part of the Keskidee troupe of the social and political currents that the organizers had thrown them into. Nevertheless, such episodes serve to remind that the impetus to re-congeal fractured Māori and Pacific communities did not, fundamentally, depend upon the *recognition* of the Keskidee troupe which, by and large, was the relatively socially-advantaged group in Aotearoa NZ *even though* many of them had benefited from no formal training back in London and were "just ordinary kids" (McLeod 2010). In fine, Keskidee, the professional troupe – Black but emerging from the imperial *entrepôt* of colonial culture – is rightly or wrongly interpolated as a vicarious master of the peripheral Brown.

Yet as I have argued above, with no actual master protagonist to direct assimilation, the translation produces new meanings by way of an overriding imperative: colonized communities must discover themselves on the colonial stage by determining their own drama. Such a discovery can be gleaned from the encounter of Keskidee with the local organizing collective at Otara, made up in the main of an existing youth group called Whakahou (to renew, rebuild). The members of Whakahou were trying to find a way to navigate the urban corridor of newly developed Otara and, in this context, to assess what of their inherited cultures they wanted to hold onto

and what they needed to change (Lindberg 2009; Tamanui 2010). The question they pursued – “what is our culture, and how is it expressed?” – was in a sense the South Auckland articulation of Oscar Abram’s motto: a community discovering itself creates its own future. In the pursuit of these aims Whakahou organized a week long workshop at Ngāti Otara Marae that would examine the themes of racism and sexism and develop skills to express feelings about the local community. In the middle of the week they hosted Kesکیدee for a number of days.

Whakahou expected Kesکیدee to be a catalyst for cultural self-determination, and on the one hand, the encounter was quite simply positive: Kesکیدee’s professionalism, discipline, and technical know-how were instructive; they work-shopped with Maranga Mai, the first agit-prop Māori theatre group; and at least amongst the musicians a “warm relationship” developed (Manukau Arts Collective 1979). In relation to this last point, George McLeod (2010) remembers that the Ras Messengers seemed to have more in common with their Māori hosts than the majority of the actors most (but not all) of whom tended to bring with them a “hybrid” sensibility, “not quite European yet nothing to do with our African heritage”. I would suggest that this commonality was made possible due to the reverence for African “roots” within Rastafari worldviews, a reverence that acted as the common thread affectively tying together Black, Māori and Pacific yearnings for self-determination. The importance of this point is that the use of “roots” instruments and song forms heavily influenced by Rastafari, but practiced in a professional and public setting, inspired a resolve in Whakahou to henceforth publicly promote art forms indigenous to Aotearoa NZ and the South Pacific at the Manakau Arts Collective (Tamanui 2010).

Yet on the other hand, many of the Whakahou participants felt intimidated by the Kesکیدee actors. Zena Tamanui, for instance, felt that she was manipulated by Rufus into cancelling important social activities on the weekend for the sake of providing leisure and rest time for Kesکیدee (Manukau Arts Collective 1979). Moreover, the majority of the troupe did not stay on the *marae* and, no doubt mentally and physically exhausted, sought solace instead in non-communal personal space (Manukau Arts Collective 1979). Only with those few who stayed on the *marae* did Whakahou develop a real sense of solidarity (Tamanui 2010). And despite the fact that a number of Whakahou members had during their high-school days imbibed an internationalist anti-colonial education from some of their teachers (Lindberg 2009), rather than now gelling in the flesh as comrades-in-arms, a distance fed by implications of “professionalism” grew between the groups.

This distance, however, had perhaps the greatest galvanizing effect on Whakahou. In an evaluation of the encounter with Keskidee, previously shy and self-doubting teenagers confidently articulated their experiences of the week, their renewed interest in embracing Polynesian art forms, and their new commitment to the *marae* and its patterns of communal living and learning (Manukau Arts Collective 1979). Warren Lindberg, who at the time was manager of Te Puke Otago Community Centre Community (Whakahou's base), recalls that the episode confirmed to Whakahou that, romanticism of liberation struggles aside, it was only they who could plot a transformative path through their own cultures (Lindberg 2009); or in the words of the members of Whakahou, "the effect of [Keskidee's] participation was to show Otago people that people from overseas are not gods, and that what they have to offer may not be very relevant here" (Manukau Arts Collective 1979). And yet, it was not as if Keskidee had simply talked past the members of Whakahou; dissonance is, after all, a meeting of forces that is itself transformative. Jujuman's wings are clipped so that Tamatāne/Tamāhine can determine their own path out of Egypt land: "Keskidee's greatest contribution was to give us confidence in ourselves", and "[i]n terms of the vision that Keskidee Aroha had for the tour it was for us an unqualified success. For the first time the overseas budget of the Arts Council was spent on a tour that had meaning for our community"(Manukau Arts Collective 1979).¹²

Conclusion

In this article I have framed the effect of translation between (post-)colonized subjects on the colonial stage in the following terms: Jujuman's call to arms saves Tamatāne/Tamāhine from Koroheke's ineffective prevarications; but Tamatāne/Tamāhine must necessarily clip Jujuman's poetic wings in order to firmly walk out of their own Egypt. Placed within this framework, the Keskidee Aroha tour provides a clear example of the diversity and richness of thought and action that has sometimes inhered amongst and between (post-)colonized subjects and all those whom are committed to forging a post-colonial future. On the stage of Keskidee Aroha, Rastafari, Black Consciousness, Black Power, civil rights and Soweto joined and tangled with Māori and Pacific pasts, experiences, beliefs and intentions. In sum, the Keskidee tour of Aotearoa NZ is an example of how inter-cultural translation, mobilized under the sign of anti-colonial solidarity for the pursuit of cultural self-determination, creates catalytic resonances and dissonances that do not emerge out of a direct relationship between colonizer and colonized.

It is fitting, finally, to recall Jean-Paul Sartre's caution to Europeans entering into Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*: "[t]hey will see you perhaps, but they will continue to talk among themselves without even lowering their voices" (Sartre 2001, p.141). The colonial stage is broad and deep, and its space is not filled only by the drama of the colonized speaking to the colonizer and vice-versa. Sartre's caution is therefore also an epistemological provocation that in many ways remains unmatched and unanswered by many in the Western Academy who write sincerely about post-colonial futures. In the case of Keskidee Aroha, translation between (post-)colonized subjects – including their supporters – drove the meaningful pursuit of cultural self-determination in ways that did not require or wait for the recognition of the colonizer. This case suggests that the lens of Orientalist critiques cannot quite glean some of the most important relational processes of knowledge production at play in the colonial world order. Beyond the self/other framework lies the challenge of understanding how (post-)colonized communities discovering their related selves on the colonial stage determine their own dramas.

Notes

¹ My thanks to Michelle Bartlett for her help with *te Reo*; thanks to Dave Robinson for commenting on a draft; thanks to Jessica and Eric Huntley for organising a meeting with Keskidee members and Ras Messengers in London; thanks to Alan Dein for sharing his research on the Keskidee; sincere thanks to Martyn Sanderson, Merata Mita, Denis O'Reilly, Taape Tareha-O'Reilly, Tigilau Ness, Miriama Rauhihi-Ness, the Ras Messengers, George Mcleod, Wanjiku Kiarie, Zena Tamanui, Chris McBride, Ross France, Will Ilolahia, Warren Lindberg, Tim Dyce, Dale Hunter and all the Keskidee peoples. This article is dedicated to the memory of Merata Mita, Martyn Sanderson and Rufus Collins. Nei au te tuku atu i ngā mihi maioha ki ngā puna kōrero i tākoha mai rā i ō rātau mātauranga hei hāpai ake i tēnei tuhinga, nei anō te mihi. Otirā, ka rere ngā mihi ki ngā tōtara haemata i hinga atu rā i te wao nui a Tānemāhuta. Moe mai rā i te āhurutanga o Papatūānuku, e moe, oki atu.

² The critical approaches to cross-cultural theatrical translation cannot be reduced en masse to the framework that I am isolating here. For example, work has been done to show how this relation has been frictionally implicated in the production of national art traditions (Gilbert and Lo 2007), and others have considered how the "other" has actively negotiated their own entry and performance within these cross-cultural currents (for example, Balme 2007). However, for the purposes of this article my focus is on the common practice of defining the cross-cultural relation in terms, primarily, of the colonizing self and the colonized other(s).

³ By this phrasing I do not mean to refer to the dissipation of the united front against racism in 1980s Great Britain and the general trend of various ethnic groups to distance themselves from those of African descent. Rather I am referring, stylistically, to the relation between the

struggles of peoples of African descent and the struggles of peoples of the Pacific in Aotearoa. I thank George McLeod for pointing this potential confusion out to me.

⁴ Pākehā is a Māori word that is commonly used to refer to New Zealanders of European descent.

⁵ There were many other carriers of this influence into Aotearoa NZ, however, in my broader fieldwork these seem to be the commonly experienced vessels.

⁶ Miriama Rauhihi-Ness, a member of Keskidee Aroha, and later one of the founders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel house in New Zealand, attributes some of the felt affinities between Jamaicans and Māori to the shared practices of articulating struggle through music (2010).

⁷ All key members of Keskidee Aroha that were not Māori held by the principle that their struggle for social justice in Aotearoa NZ hinged upon the success of the Māori struggle for *mana motuhake*.

⁸ For the story of how women involved in gangs challenged the practice of rape see (Desmond 2009).

⁹ Unintentional because the encounter was so fresh. It is interesting to note that before his coming, Rufus Collins had believed the Māori to be an extinct race! (Sage and Collins 1979).

¹⁰ Glasford Hunter (2009), for example, remembers being somewhat disturbed by the “wide open spaces”. Kirk Service’s abiding memory of Aotearoa NZ is of how “green” it was (2009). Even the urban corridors of Porirua and Otara are much more low-density and far less concretely built up than e.g. Islington, Brixton, Streatham. Interestingly, Tigilau Ness, a member of the Keskidee Aroha national collective, had shared accommodation with members of Keskidee in London on a fact-finding mission prior to the tour. While he bought food expecting it to be consumed communally according to his own Niuean upbringing, his flat-mates were somewhat confused because they tended to cater individually (Ness 2009).

¹¹ Although during a prison visit Rufus Collins gave a first hand account of his involvement in the civil rights struggles in 1960s Americas and on another occasion severely chastised a white employee of a borstal for his demeaning treatment of the young, predominantly Māori children. (O’Reilly 1980). While Rufus Collins refused to see his own theatre as social work he had a highly developed sense of the politics of theatre and education. See his interview in (Sage and Collins 1979).

¹² At the May 2010 workshop members of Keskidee Aroha offered to Wanjiku Kiarie (who was in attendance) their sincere gratitude to the whole Keskidee troupe for their works in Aotearoa NZ.

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