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Keskidee Aroha: Walking Out of Egypt Land

Introduction

In 1972, Harry Dansey's play *Te Raukura* was performed at the Auckland festival. While the drama was historical, set in the wars over land expropriation in 1860s Taranaki, the play consciously spoke to the activist context of the early 1970s. At one point, the following dialogue occurs:

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

Tamatāne: (groans) Oh save us from Poetry!¹

The figure of Koroheke (translated literally as 'elderly man') can be said to embody the Te Aute Old Boy's model of tactful engagement with Pākehā governments, while Tamatāne (boy) represents the radicalization of this engagement. In fact, Tamatāne was originally played by Syd Jackson of Ngā Tamatoa.² 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.

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).³ But in the early 1970s young Māori who sought to dramatize anew

the anti-colonial struggle found it difficult to employ existing Māori cultural mediums, the infrastructure for which was often lacking in everyday urban life. Meanwhile, the mediums that urban Pākehā used were alien to Māori.⁴ And plays such as Dansey's were quite unusual. In this context some activists looked to the children of Legba for artistic inspiration and organized to bring over Keskidee, a London-based Black theatre troupe, and their associated RasTafari musical band, Ras Messengers.

The rationale for this project can be found in the combination of factors that impacted acutely on Māori and Pasifika communities in the latter 1970s, namely, increased institutional racism, economic cut-backs and job losses. On top of this, a decade of radical activism had reaped few substantive rewards. Like many activists, those who organized the tour of Keskidee and Ras Messengers looked towards a 'looming confrontation' after the 'moment of truth' (1969–72) had subsided.⁵ Dansey's play is important to remember in this respect because, while activism had heretofore primarily worked on the 'body', i.e. housing, employment and street-level organization, now was the time to work on the 'soul'.⁶ The organizers of Keskidee Aroha believed that confrontation required cultural renewal through a decolonial agenda. And for this purpose, identification with Blackness through an artistic register might serve as the 'catalyst'.⁷ We shall now witness how this catalyst was introduced and with what consequences.

Decolonizing theatre

By the mid-1970s, songs of distant island sufferers started to pervade the airwaves in Aotearoa NZ. The music was called roots reggae and one artist especially, Bob Marley, spoke in a language that was both radical and redemptive. The sufferers of Aotearoa NZ were paying attention. In 1977 Denis O'Reilly, an Irish Catholic member of the Black Power, a predominantly Māori gang, took note and obtained a

Commonwealth Youth Fellowship to travel to Jamaica charged with the mission to 'bring Bob back'.⁸ O'Reilly did not find Marley at home. Subsequently he travelled to London via Ottawa and, after visiting a number of organizations including the Ethiopian World Federation, was directed by the Interaction Centre to seek out Keskidee.

Keskidee is a small Guyanese bird renowned for its resilience in unforgiving environments. 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.'⁹ While the Keskidee Centre often acted as a forum for Third World liberation politics it also tackled a diverse array of local needs from education on legal rights to courses in cookery, painting etc.¹⁰ The Keskidee Centre was initially designed to help African-Caribbean youth connect to the cultural resources of their parents, resources that they had become at least partially alienated from in London.¹¹ This binding back across the ocean to island cultures of creative survival was intended to fortify the youth when living as a minority in a viscerally and institutionally racist society. The Keskidee mandate therefore spoke quite intimately to the inter-generational context that we have witnessed in Aotearoa NZ wherein disaffected and alienated youth came from the families of internal Māori and external Pacific 'migrants'.

By the time that O'Reilly visited, the Keskidee Centre had also become the central site for the development of professional Black theatre in the UK with a distinctly agitprop agenda of reflecting the gamut of Black Power struggles. The pursuit of social justice alongside the promotion of the arts was not always harmonious. Indeed, the professional aims of the theatre arm somewhat clashed with those of community service, and I shall return to this point later.¹² Nevertheless, O'Reilly was extremely impressed with the force and substance of Keskidee's theatrical productions and upon returning to Aotearoa NZ resolved to bring the troupe over on tour.

For this aim the Keskidee Aroha collective was initiated (*aroha* can be glossed as love, sympathy, affection). The national collective included stalwarts of the decade's political struggles such as members

of the Polynesian Panthers and Pākehā community activists, while the regional collectives included members of Ngā Tamatoa and an array of more local community organizations. Funds were in the main provided by the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and – controversially – from the Department of Internal Affairs. (The project was supported by the Prime Minister of the time, Robert Muldoon, who enjoyed a working relationship with the Black Power gang but was much maligned by most activists.) We should note that funds were also raised by various gang members and other disadvantaged youth.

Marking a return to ‘social and cultural action’, the Keskidee Aroha national collective conceived of their project as a means to ‘nurture the soul’.¹³ The collective proposed that their ‘soul train’ had to be joined by workers, ‘womin’, gangs, Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā youth who were all willing to struggle for liberation as part of a global journey. While ‘soul’, at this point in time, had a particularly African-American provenance in popular culture, the national collective associated it with the deeply significant Māori word, *wairua*.¹⁴ In this respect they sought to dispel the ‘cultural cringe’ that accompanied much of the artistic products of Pākehā.¹⁵ Let us recall, at this point, the *Graphic’s* imperial world map and its division of peoples into active metropolitan cultivators of knowledge and passive producer/consumers of other peoples’ knowledge. The ‘cringe’ marked an acceptance of this creativity map, even by Pākehā. Alternatively, the national collective proposed that ‘the resources we need to build relevant human structures can be found in the many traditions of culture and human commitment that lie un-used in our present one value system’.¹⁶

At stake, then, was the formation of a new publically enunciated art that had heretofore been captured by both the paternalism of Pākehā culture and the Te Aute Old Boys’ sensibility of strategic accommodation. In these conditions, reasoned O’Reilly, an alternative catalytic force would have to be introduced in order to publically ‘decolonize’ art and cultural education in Aotearoa NZ.¹⁷ Writing to the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council for support, O’Reilly argued that the ‘West

Indian' was an extremely appropriate catalytic agent with which to bind creative souls back to the traditions outlawed by settler society.¹⁸ Similar to Māori and Pasifika youth, African-Caribbean peoples had been 'plucked from one environment and settled in a new land'. They, too, were 'conscious of their roots and aware of their present cultural nakedness'. Yet they had also been able to develop 'contemporary cultural forms' from the traditions that they had managed to 'hold onto'.¹⁹ In this respect, Keskidee seemed to exemplify a successful binding of the colonial present back to decolonial pasts in the pursuit of Black liberation, and one that might catalyse a similar process by the sufferers of Aotearoa NZ.

The vision of the proposed tour was in many ways exemplified in one of the plays that Keskidee had been performing in London – *Lament for RasTafari*, written by Edgar White. The play's main protagonist is Lindsay, a young Jamaican who, in his sojourn in London and subsequently New York, encounters racism and its destructive social, economic, psychical and spiritual effects. Lindsay eventually manifests as a RasTafari mystic and proclaims redemption by way of return to the Promised Land:

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

Chorus: Armageddon. Call the tribes.

Juju Man: ... Walking you through Egypt land. The thirteenth hour.
Give them music to walk.²⁰

Let us bring the protagonists of Dansey and White's plays together: Legba (*Juju Man*) is speaking to Tāne/Māui and emboldening the young sons and daughters of the latter (*Tamatāne/Tamāhine*) to cultivate a radical redemption that had not been managed so far by Koroheke (the old man).

In March 1979, Tigilau Ness, Polynesian Panther and member of the national collective, spent some time in London at the Keskidee Centre finding out about the artists' environment and preparing them for the tour. Before departing on this trip, Ness expressed in visual

form the grounding that the national collective hoped for (see Figure 5.1). Within a protective womb, Ness drew the figure of a coconut tree that 'relates to the peoples of the West Indies, Jamaica, and the South Pacific'. The fronds of the tree were drawn in the style of *kowhaiwhai*, a traditional pattern of Māori carving but which also symbolized 'the Dreadlocks of RasTafar-I relating to the ancient African roots of Keskidee'. Ness depicted the roots of the tree also in the style of *kowhaiwhai*, but here they symbolized 'the Māori roots in which Keskidee Aroha has grown up out of Roots to which I an' I in-a-New Zealand bilong [belong]'.²¹ Ness's motif expresses not just an aesthetic identification with Blackness, (although it does that too), but more so, an inhabitation of Blackness yet on indigenous grounds.

In any case, the motif certainly presents a counter-aesthetic to the *Graphic's* imperial world map. This being said, it should be remembered that the peripheral characters of that map were composed of

Figure 5.1: Tigilau Ness's symbol of Keskidee Aroha

both settlers and colonized peoples. And within the national collective there were Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā members. These relationships required constant efforts at decolonization similar, we might say, to those that were pursued through the Programme to Combat Racism. In fact, at one point in the organizing of the tour, Pākehā members were briefly ejected from the national collective. Nevertheless, it seems that the geo-political hierarchy of core/periphery lay on top of this contentious intra-peripheral dynamic, not beside it. Writing to Abrams once more, O'Reilly gently rebuked his idea of including a researcher in the troupe so that Keskidee might be given the data to produce a performance of a 'New Zealand nature'. To O'Reilly, this suggestion had 'all the overtones of colonial anthropology'.²² After all, the point of the tour was to be *with* a community rather than perform *for* one. For this purpose, the relationship that the national collective proposed was not so much a formally separate one between employee/employer, but more an intimate co-habitation along the lines of a *whānau* (extended family).

Jujuman's biblical injunction to walk out of Egypt was by no means alien to the sentiments expressed at the time by Māori and Pasifika activists. In the 1975 Land March to parliament, the impression that Māori activist Saana Murray received, upon catching sight of the white flag that led the way, was 'almost like ... when Moses led the slaves out of bondage'.²³ The Land March itself had started in Murray's home area, Te Hāpua, where she had been part of an important legal battle that challenged the establishment by government agencies of a scientific reserve on tribal land.²⁴ The national collective planned to start the Keskidee tour at the same place, mapping a political history of *mana motuhake* (self determination) onto the artistic proceedings. For her part, Murray was keen for the Keskidee tour to begin at her home.²⁵ Indeed, her understanding of the land struggle had comfortably pre-empted the global vision of Keskidee Aroha. Writing to Tom Poata of the Māori Organization on Human Rights in 1972, Murray had hoped that 'perhaps your great endeavour will be supported by all the coloured races of the world against the minority white man's laws of

defying the natural order of god's creation for the human race, with their superhuman legislations to change the Māori into a Pākehā race.²⁶ So in May 1979, Ngāti Whatua, the people of the land whose *mana whenua* (authority of the land) covered Auckland airport, enthusiastically welcomed Keskidee upon their arrival.²⁷ The troupe was quickly driven up to Te Hāpua, and there the ancestors met.

The repertoire that Keskidee brought with them expressed the interconnected issues of racism, sexism and classism 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, which focused on the internalized racism of two families living in 1920s New York, one Jamaican and ruled over by a firm patriarch (a Marcus Garvey supporter), the other an African-American aunt and nephew from the South. Steve Wilmer's *Scenes from Soweto* often raised the tension of the Keskidee 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 performed from *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 theological 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Furthermore, 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 of whom had taken part in "block" (group) rapes and for the first time were forced to intimately empathize with the woman's experience.³⁰

These performances resonated deeply among audiences, 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 different public spheres wherein they were performed, whether in local halls or in *marae*. Indeed, the performances tended to foster a conscientious awareness of these issues, especially in more geographically isolated communities that might not have been directly privy to the urban insurrections of Ngā Tamatoa et al.³¹ Young and elder Māori listened side by side to the messages of the children of Legba, and somehow their performances did not produce quite the inter-generational ‘talking past’ that had been the complaint voiced in the recent Young Māori Leaders Conferences against elders of the Te Aute Old Boys tradition.

Merata Mita, participant and documenter of the tour, suggests two reasons as to why this was the case.³² First, with respect to the ‘cultural cringe’, the Keskidee troupe was considered by their audiences, including Māori, to consist of professional performers from London, the imperial centre, and, along the lines of the *Graphic*’s imperial world map, were therefore considered to be authoritative cultural speakers and commentators. Second, even if these actors were performing in the confrontational register of Black Power as they addressed issues of racism and colonialism, *kaumātua* (the eldership) had to accord Keskidee the hospitality and respect traditionally due to *manuhiri* (visitors) that had been welcomed onto the *marae*.

For these reasons the Keskidee performances provided the public stage on which young, old, reformist and radical Māori could symbolically unite as the colonially oppressed against the oppressor. Hence, as Keskidee performed their repertoire, Māori shared the same fate as Black peoples: i.e. young Māori interlopers in the Pākehā world would have to radicalize themselves to the plight of their peoples; Māori would work for Pākehā for nothing (not even gratitude); Māori and Pasifika families would internalize a colonial mentality and fight among themselves; Māori couples would speak to each other through prison windows; Māori and Pasifika women would receive the brunt of patriarchal and racist barbarism; and indigenous spirituality, including its prophetic traditions, would be dismissed by the Pākehā as uncivilized.

Thus, unlike political activism, art affected a direct inhabitation of Blackness; through this medium Black Power required no comparative analysis or theological translation into *mana motuhake*.

For Pākehā society, to witness this catalysing of indigenous soul power at the hands of Black artists made for unpalatable theatre. Public complaints were forthcoming after mention of the tour on the evening news. One letter written to the Minister of Internal Affairs provides a snapshot of the felt need by the majority of Pākehā to protect their narrative of exceptionalist paternalism that justified their control of public spaces: '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 Māori cultures.'³³

Other examples of Pākehā 'backlash' abound. 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 later the same day experienced Rufus Collins, artistic director of Keskidee and greeter of the ancestors at Te Hāpua, espousing Black liberation.³⁴ But reporting on the evening's performance, the local newspaper chose to pass judgement in a technical language that refused to engage with the political challenge that Keskidee had laid down to local race relations: 'it is possible people walked out because it was overacted and the actors' overstated performance detracted from the dialogue.'³⁵

The groundings with Keskidee Aroha

Tigilau Ness's motif, pre-empting the groundings with Keskidee, was an intimate one: *kowhaiwhai* and dreadlocks rooting together. But how did the actual grounding compare to the image?

In many ways, the groundings were extremely positive. The Māori custom of *manaaki* (hospitality, support) greatly affected the Keskidee

manuhiri (guests), especially, and in contrast to, their racist British experiences, when it came to the basic appreciation of their talents as a professional arts group.³⁶ Rufus Collins reflected on these experiences:

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.³⁷

The RasTafari musicians remember similar experiences. Kirk Service found many resemblances between his Africentric cosmologies and those of Māori.³⁸ Glasford James Hunter remembers that, in acknowledgement to him and his ancestral point of departure, Māori elders would sometimes personally *whakapapa* back to Africa.³⁹ To the Ras, this must have been remarkable considering that many of the diasporic children of Legba would not dare to journey in that direction. At the time, Chauncey Huntley expressed his appreciation – and understanding – of the relating skills of his hosts thus: ‘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 fe get on the same vibrations as him, and him sing you back a song, you know? Yes! That’s what I call a greeting!’⁴⁰

In effect, grounding with Māori had the same affect upon Keskidee and the Ras Messengers as it had had upon Spivey and the African-American churchmen. Nevertheless, O’Reilly suggests that these experiences also ‘touched something in some of [the Keskidee troupe] that really became quite disturbing to them.’⁴¹ After all, the tour immersed a group of people, heretofore living relatively individualistic urban lives, into a sometimes rural and always intensely communal form of living.⁴² Furthermore, on tour in Aotearoa NZ the troupe usually had to mingle with the audience before performing, and afterwards they would eat and sometimes sleep collectively near to the same audience, some of whom were hosts.⁴³ Kiarie remembers that, with the

partial exception of Edgar White, none of her fellow Keskidee artists had worked and lived so intimately with their putative audiences back in London.⁴⁴

How to make sense of this unease brought about by the groundings? First and foremost, we must remember that different intensities and modalities of relating to land exist between the diasporic children of Legba and those of Tāne/Māui. Consider the *whakatauki* (proverb), *ka kotia te taitapu ki hawaiki* – ‘the sacred path to Hawaiki is cut off’. The quotidian meaning of this proverb can be glossed as ‘there’s no going back now’. The deeper meaning, though, expresses a process of intentional and self-directed inhabitation of the new lands of Aotearoa NZ whereby the previous land of the ancestors, Hawaiki, recedes into Te Pō (the dark realms of potential). Now contrast this meaning with that of the RasTafari chant inspired by Psalm 137:

For the wicked dem carried us away in captivity,
required from us a song.
But how can we sing RasTafari song in a strange land?

Here lies testimony of an altogether more violent and non-consensual uprooting from homelands: to be put to work on stolen lands turned into plantations, to be dehumanized and de-sanctified via a legal status of chattel commodity, and to be systematically denied land access and meaningful inhabitation upon emancipation.⁴⁵

The Keskidee Centre was initially set up to attend precisely to the effects of these violent and unjust uprootings of peoples from their homelands and from their kith and kin. And we should remember too that from their new residences in the Caribbean many would, through the dull compulsion of economic logic, have to take a further oceanic voyage to the concrete jungles of Britain – the ‘second Babylon’, as Cosmo from the Ras Messengers put it.⁴⁶ Certainly, the sacred thread to ‘Guinea’ held tenaciously throughout all these sojourns, yet by the 1970s it had been thoroughly hacked. Gleaned through this context, the possibilities of self-determining a postcolonial cultural space back in such an unforgiving place as London must have seemed thin

indeed in comparison to the marginalized, oppressed, yet in relative terms, much more inhabited and directly transmitted Māori cultures. Witness, for example, Rufus Collins:

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 ... There is a possibility here that I have not recognized in any other country which has a colonial background as this one.⁴⁷

Grounding is a skill of knowledge cultivation, a knowing of oneself again through knowing other selves in relation. We have witnessed previously how grounding can be a contentious affair. RasTafari would characterize the contentious nature of grounding experienced by some of the Keskidee troupe as 'dread', meaning, the awe of consciously inhabiting both the *agape* (sanctified communal love) of Blackness but also coming to terms with the deep wounds that Blackness bears. This is the meaning of 'dread love', and perhaps these groundings with the *tāngata whenua* intensified it. After all, it is a significant burden, carried inter-generationally, to have been excised from natal lands, placed on new lands solely for the extraction of the life energies of blood and earth, and subsequently to reside in hostile territories. And let us remember as well that inhabitation is an enactment of creation, so to be denied inhabitation is to be denied sanctity. In sum, when identification gives way to inhabitation, the stakes are raised on all sides.

But what of the Aotearoa collectives? In order to make sense of their experiences let us recall, once more, the *Graphic's* world map. Paradoxically, the same metropolitan status that facilitated the dissemination of radical modes of cultural self-determination on stage created difficulties off stage in terms of the felt hierarchy of metropolitan/periphery. Visiting poor communities and encountering gangs with names such as the Stormtroopers and Headhunters, Rufus Collins, as director, would often point out that Keskidee were not social workers but professional artists.⁴⁸ Such a tension between art and social justice had already manifested back in London, as I noted above. In fairness

we should acknowledge that Collins had been a participant in the American civil rights struggles and was not afraid of political confrontation. On one occasion during the tour he severely chastised a white employee of a borstal for his demeaning treatment of the young, predominantly Māori children.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, a principled professionalism gradually combined with an under-developed capacity for communal life as well as sheer tiredness to re-create a distance, if not quite segregation, between the guests and the hosts. The unkindly quip of one regional organizer from Gisborne reflects this distance: 'I think the folksy brotherhood of Keswidee Aroha got the run-around from the Chelsea Blacks.'⁵⁰ All this came to a head when Keswidee visited Ōtara in South Auckland.

At this point Ōtara was still considered to be a 'raw community'.⁵¹ Created as a dormitory town in the early 1960s, Ōtara not only possessed few urban facilities but was also surrounded by paddocks and creeks to the extent that many of the resident youth did not consider the district to be part of a city.⁵² Initially, the children of Ōtara enjoyed a good sense of *tikanga* (custom, correct way), but at the same time, the community suffered from a lack of inherited leadership structures.⁵³ In fact, by 1976, 57 per cent of Ōtara residents were under the age of 20 (62 per cent of residents being Māori or Pasifika).⁵⁴ Some of the older children even considered themselves to be the first elders of Ōtara.⁵⁵ The local school, Hilary College, which we have briefly encountered before, became an especially important institution in this respect when the Ōtara youth used its Polynesian Club to develop their leadership skills.⁵⁶ However, by the second half of the 1970s the nearby factories had closed down and families in Ōtara were put under severe pressure. Meanwhile, encouraged by such policies as the dawn raids, police persecution of the youth had intensified. Discrimination based on colour and a homogenized categorization of 'Polynesian' made affiliation to the Stormtroopers gang or Polynesian Club a moot point in the eyes of the police.⁵⁷

For all these reasons Ōtara was an unusual urban area in 1979. It had never been consolidated as Pākehā territory. Its youth were trying

to meaningfully inhabit the town. Yet at the same time they were at the sharp end of the settler-colonial logic of segregation and discrimination. And perhaps it is this project of intentional inhabitation that encouraged in them a focus on cultural renewal more pronounced than many other contemporary activists.

After having formed a short-lived 'junior' Polynesian Panther group, some members of the Hilary College Polynesian Club determined to create a youth drop-in centre.⁵⁸ Key to their philosophy was the principle of retaining the positive aspects of their varied Māori and Pasifika heritages. For this reason they called their organization Whakahou (to make new).⁵⁹ Like many political activist groups, Whakahou refused to accept the fate of being 'brown skinned Pākehā'.⁶⁰ However, they addressed this challenge through a focus on art and music as a means to encourage *whanaungatanga* (family-like relationships).⁶¹ Along these lines, Whakahou pursued a question: 'What is our culture, and how is it expressed?'⁶² This, effectively, was the South Auckland version of Keskidee's motto: 'a community discovering itself creates its own future'. By 1979 Whakahou were busy contributing to the organization of a festival for 'multiculturalism and the youth' through the Manukau Arts Collective.⁶³ As part of this work Whakahou organized a week-long workshop at Ngāti Ōtara marae that would examine themes of racism and sexism and develop skills to express accompanying sentiments. Tigilau Ness and Ross France, both members of the Keskidee Aroha national collective, had also been contributing to these activities.⁶⁴ In the middle of the week Whakahou hosted Keskidee for a number of days.

In some respects, Keskidee's impact on Whakahou was straightforwardly positive: the troupe's professionalism, discipline and technical know-how were instructive, especially to Maranga Mai, the first agitprop Māori theatre group with whom Keskidee workshopped. And at least with the Ras Messengers a 'warm relationship' developed.⁶⁵ Crucially, Ōtara participants noted the centrality of an African-rooted aesthetic in the RasTafari musicians and their public and professional embrace of 'roots' instruments, especially drums. In a previous

chapter I explained that drums are a crucial instrument of grounation in the RasTafari faith: 'when a skill man play 'pon de peta [repeater], de drums bring forth de spirits of all de Ancients ... de drum is de ancient Ethiopian form of communication'.⁶⁶ The use of drums by Ras Messengers therefore inspired a resolve in Whakahou to publicly promote art forms indigenous to Aotearoa NZ and Oceania through the Manukau Arts Collective.⁶⁷ Here, the children of Tāne/Māui and Legba were positively grounding, assisting each other to artistically bind their colonized presents back to their decolonial pasts in the pursuit of restitutive justice.

Nevertheless, many of the Whakahou participants became intimidated by the Keskidee actors. Zena Tamanui, for instance, felt that she was manipulated by Rufus Collins into cancelling important social activities on the weekend for the sake of providing (much needed) leisure and rest time for Keskidee.⁶⁸ Additionally, the majority of the theatre troupe did not stay on the *marae* and, no doubt mentally and physically exhausted, sought solace instead in non-communal personal spaces.⁶⁹ A distance fed by implications of 'professionalism' grew between the groups. But Whakahou refused to be mere subalterns, consuming the performance of metropolitan agents. In the space between, a question arose similar to that faced by the Programme to Combat Racism earlier in the decade: was soul power – theological or artistic – to be an exercise in grounding, or was it to be an exercise in uprooting indigenous *wairua* (soul)?

And yet this tension had perhaps the greatest galvanizing effect on Whakahou. In an evaluation of their 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.⁷⁰ Most importantly, the Keskidee tour provided Whakahou with an epiphany: 'people from overseas are not gods, and ... what they have to offer may not be very relevant here'.⁷¹ With this realization, the grounding, although bitter-sweet, had a positive outcome: '[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.'⁷² Warren Lindberg, who at the time was manager of Te Puke Ōtara Community Centre Community, recalls how the episode confirmed to Whakahou that, romantic identifications with Black Power and global liberation struggles aside, it was only they who could plot a path out of Egypt land through the creative cultivation of their inherited resources.⁷³ By grounding with Keskidee and Ras Messengers, Whakahou managed to dispense with their subaltern status at home and abroad.

Thirty years later, Tamanui argues that Keskidee and Ras Messengers provided tools for defeating 'cultural genocide' in two respects. First, their work validated the importance of politicizing art and culture on the *marae*. Second, the experience confirmed Whakahou's principled position that struggles over *mana motuhake* must be based on an articulation of the 'heart':⁷⁴ a 'dread love', RasTafari would say. These validations are shared more widely among the national collective. Taape O'Reilly reminisces that the Keskidee experience built within her the determination to support her *whānau* (extended family) back in Hawke's Bay.⁷⁵ The message of 'know your roots' was not lost on another contributor to Keskidee Aroha, Will 'Ilolahia, who had spent years struggling in Aotearoa NZ with the Polynesian Panthers with little thought for his own homeland, Tonga.⁷⁶ 'Ilolahia subsequently returned for some years, albeit not before the drama of the Springboks protest.⁷⁷ Indeed, back in 1979 the tour sometimes encouraged a broader process of binding the urban youth back to their *tūrangawaewae* (places of belonging). For example, at one *marae*, a cultural group was reformed for the visit after 25 years of inaction, and local Black Power gang members returned to their *marae* to help with preparing the *hāngī* (earth oven).⁷⁸

I have noted in previous chapters that only after the Springboks tour was it common for Pākehā to seek atonement for consistent breaches to Te Tiriti (The Treaty). Nonetheless, it was still uncommon both

before and after the tour for Pākehā to invest in a decolonial and restitutive relationship to the *tāngata whenua* (peoples of the land). Chris McBride, an Irish Pākehā member of the Keskidee national collective, remembers that Pākehā organizations in the 1980s often approached Te Tiriti issues through a liberal guilt that sought to safeguard a comfortable distance between Māori and Pākehā rather than cultivate a deep relation. After Keskidee Aroha, McBride and Denis O'Reilly refused to join at least one such organization. They had no need or time to feel guilty; they had already been pursuing their redemption through the arts.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Subalterns do not possess soul power, neither can they cultivate it. They look towards Britannica to be animated by her judgements. In the manifest domain, (post)colonial peoples have to navigate through and around the hierarchical and segregational topographies carved out by colonial science. In the process they sometimes (irreverently) meet, find out how they are already related, and thereby find the deeper meaning of their own names. There can be no Britannica in this relationship – not even a Black Britannica. Jujuman, the child of Legba, commands the sufferers, 'walk out of Egypt land; give them music fe walk!' Tamatāne and Tamāhine, the children of Tāne/Māui, reply, 'Yes, we hear you! So we must find our own path back to the Promised Land with our own music. And our redemption songs will resonate along the way.' In the 1970s vernacular, the national collective called this process 'sussing out the soul'.⁸⁰ We can call it grounding.

In the last couple of chapters we have worked through the various arenas of the manifest domain, examining the cultivation of a soul power that could act as a compass and energy store for a long-term project of *mana motuhake*. We have engaged with Blackness through theological and artistic registers. In this chapter we have witnessed

how contentious identifications with Blackness impelled a recovery of indigenous soul power. But we have also witnessed a subtle shift from identifying with Blackness to inhabiting Blackness on indigenous grounds, symbolized by the rooting of *kowhaiwhai* and dreadlocks in Ness's motif of Keskidee Aroha. Now we take a deeper step in this direction. In the next chapter we will examine how some sufferers in Aotearoa NZ have inhabited a faith of the diasporic children of Legba on indigenous grounds, by proclaiming RasTafari – Haile Selassie I – to be their Jah and king.