

REVIEW ARTICLE

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Syl Cheney-Coker's Nova Scotia, or the Limits of Pan-Africanism

The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar. By Syl Cheney-Coker. 398 pages. London: Heinemann, 1990. \$19.95.

1

TO READ Syl Cheney-Coker's novel, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, a magic-realist account of the establishment and the decline of the West African nation of Sierra Leone, is to come face to face with a mythography that casts Black Nova Scotians—or Africadians—as defective people. Yet, the first black settlers of Nova Scotia and the second-wave black settlers of Sierra Leone originated in the 3,000 African Americans, known as Black Loyalists, transported by Britain, from New York City to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, England, and German states at the close of the American Revolutionary War in 1783. While most Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia, 1,200 of their number left the province in 1792 and voyaged to Sierra Leone. There, they became "Nova Scotians," while their African-American sistren and brethren who remained in Nova Scotia became 'caste-down' "Negroes" and "Coloureds." The Sierra Leone Nova Scotians formed eventually an essential elite in their new country, while, in Nova Scotia, blacks became underemployed, poorly educated wards of the state.

This arch distinction occurs in Cheney-Coker's novel, just as it has played out in the requisite historiography. For instance, Sierra Leone historian Christopher Fyfe, narrating the exodus of the Nova Scotian settlers, informs us—in a tone reminiscent of the cautionary words about those who refused to heed Noah—that

those who “feared to embark [from Nova Scotia] ... remained in a life of abject poverty and humiliation (where their descendants survive today).”¹ In contrast, the Sierra Leone Nova Scotians enacted, by their decision to settle there, “the first practical manifestation of Pan-Africanism” (2), thus backing a generally humanist philosophy based on the axioms that “no black person is free until all are free, and that the liberation and unification of Africa is essential to the dignity of African people everywhere,” and that racial unity is desirable.² In addition, the Sierra Leonean Nova Scotian leaders fleshed out an attractive, Romantic heroism. In choosing to escape to Sierra Leone, Fyfe concludes, “The settlers had found a new home, better than what they left in Nova Scotia ...” (19).³ There is nothing particularly egregious in Fyfe’s views, for one should expect a Sierra Leonean historian to wager that his nation was a superior locale for its foundational settlers than the narrow North Atlantic peninsula they had fled. What is surprising, though, is that Fyfe’s perspective has been the dominant reading of even non-Sierra Leonean historians.

For instance, introducing his *Black Loyalist Directory*, American historian Graham Russell Hodges upholds the credo that the Black Loyalist ‘exodusters’ were wiser than their stay-at-home counterparts. They were, he argues, “Black religious nationalists” who “regarded the inevitable assimilation into white Nova Scotian sects

¹ Christopher Fyfe, ed., *‘Our Children Free and Happy’: Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991) 1.

² Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (1978; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 18. In this excellent study, Moses finds that “Black nationalism differs from most other nationalisms in that its adherents are united neither by a common geography nor by a common language, but by the nebulous concept of racial unity” (17). Thus, it becomes “impossible to speak of black nationalism without simultaneously speaking of Pan-Africanism” (17). Both ideologies seek to “unify politically all [the dark brown-skinned peoples whose ancestors lived in sub-Saharan Africa before the age of European expansionism] (17)] whether they are residents of African territories or descendants of those Africans who were dispersed by the slave trade” (17). Moses concludes that “Pan-Africanism persists today as a movement of all African peoples throughout the world, who believe that all black people have interests in common” (18).

³ Fyfe concludes the sentence by pointing out that the settlers failed to secure “the kind of independence they had dreamed of, and had expressed their longing for in their letters and petitions” (19). Sierra Leone was “better than” Nova Scotia, but in neither locale did the settlers win an unquestioned liberty.

as a dilution of their identity."⁴ In her essay, "A Genealogy of Resistance," M. Nourbese Philip celebrates "stories of returnees ... to Africa," noting the heroic "Loyalists of Nova Scotia who, fed up with the racism in Canada, decided to go back. Back to Africa."⁵ Likewise, in his majestic, magisterial account of the Black Loyalist odyssey in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, James Walker opines that "the conditions, prejudices and insecurities that drove their brethren to Sierra Leone drove the Nova Scotian blacks into their own isolated society during the nineteenth century." To this day, "the blacks in Nova Scotia have remained a peripheral society, economically marginal and socially distinct Their victory has been in their endurance." The Sierra Leone Nova Scotians celebrate, however, a distinctly positive fate: their descendants "have played a leadership role in Sierra Leone right up to the present time."⁶ Walker also records their sentiment that "the Black Loyalists who followed Thomas Peters and John Clarkson [to Sierra Leone] made the wiser choice in 1792."⁷ Even Africadian amateur historian Pearleen Oliver salutes the Sierra Leone exodus in her booklet, *A Root and a Name* (1977): "[Black Loyalist Baptist leader] David George and the more than twelve hundred 'flower of the Black people' took with them a bag of Nova Scotian soil which they ceremoniously planted in Sierra Leone."⁸ The Black Nova Scotians who elected not to go to Sierra Leone seem to have made an anti-romantic, if not foolish, choice, for they endured, subsequently, generations of poverty, powerlessness, and illiteracy.

Admittedly, this city-mouse-vs.-country-mouse historiography has served us well. It has illuminated the clear opportunities for 'Nova Scotian' agency and progress in the black majority state of Sierra Leone, while exposing the brutalities and inclemencies to which Africadians were historically subjected as a highly visible and stigmatized minority in Nova Scotia. Moreover, a multitude of anecdotes and examples bears out the negative consequences of

⁴ Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile After the American Revolution* (New York: Garland, 1996) xxxiii.

⁵ M. Nourbese Philip, *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1997) 14.

⁶ James W. St.G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (London, Longman, 1976) 396.

⁷ Walker, *Black Loyalists* 397.

⁸ In *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*, ed. George Elliott Clarke (Lawrencetown Beach, NS: Pottersfield Press, 1991) 1: 140.

their anti-exodus decision. Illustratively then, when Sierra Leone achieved its independence from Britain in 1961, it boasted an indigenous black leadership, from its prime minister through to its civil servants and its political and professional class. In contrast, in Nova Scotia in 1961, the black minority was just beginning to benefit from the cessation of legal school segregation in 1954, but it was also soon to lose one of its historic communities, Africville, to an obliterating urban renewal *cum* social engineering plan implemented by the City of Halifax. It would appear, then, that any objective comparison of Sierra Leone and Black Nova Scotia (Africadia) must conclude that the Black Loyalists who chose to remain in Nova Scotia in 1792 gambled badly.

Assuredly, then, it is time to examine the literary construction of Africadian inadequacy that Sierra Leone's premier poet, Cheney-Coker, enunciates vividly in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*. Valuably, Cheney-Coker's novel suggests that there are limits to Pan-Africanism, for the ideology of black internationalism cannot restrain the necessity for constructing the black national state (or being) as an approximation of paradise. An ineluctable poetic dialectic leads Cheney-Coker, thus, to degrade Africadia to exalt Sierra Leone.

2

Born Syl Cheney Coker in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1945, Coker conjoined, legally, his middle name and surname in 1970. A professor of English at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, Cheney-Coker took his first teaching position at the University of the Philippines, and he was a visiting writer in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa in 1988. Though his poems and fictions centre on his native land, Cheney-Coker has lived most of his adult life in exile from Sierra Leone. Perhaps because he is partly of Nova Scotian settler—that is to say, of Creole—descent, Cheney-Coker references Nova Scotia consistently, if obliquely, in his work. In his poetry, Nova Scotia is conflated with the epithet, *Creole*; in his novel, it is represented by the sign, *Canada*. In any event, Cheney-Coker dramatizes a reading of Nova Scotia intended to heighten the grandeur of the Sierra Leonean experiment and the tragedy of its apparent failure. In essence, Nova Scotia is, for him, a dystopia, while Sierra Leone is a proto-Utopia ruined by its political and ethnic elites.

At this juncture, a brief examination of the class and ethnic structure of Sierra Leone is advisable. When the nation became independent from Britain in 1961, it boasted a democratically elected parliament dominated by the Creoles, whose members—only two per cent of the population—“controlled most of the major civil service and professional positions” of the state.⁹ Originated in nineteenth-century intermarriages among Nova Scotians, Jamaican Maroons, and Africans liberated from slave ships by the British and landed in Sierra Leone, the Creoles—a group of “westernized black settlers”¹⁰—asserted their claim to be the natural, post-independence ruling class, repressing both the indigenous Temne and Mende peoples. But this situation could not endure. For one thing, while the indigenous peoples are mainly Muslim or Animist in faith, the Creole group is predominantly Christian. Furthermore, as historian John R. Cartwright states, “[the Creoles’] very westernization ... set them apart from the indigenous tribesmen.”¹¹ Then, “under the impetus of tribal rivalry [between the Mendes and the Temnes], military rule entered the political arena” in the late 1960s,¹² resulting in the formation of Dr. Siaka Probyn Stevens’s All People’s Congress (APC) one-party dictatorship and the decline of Creole power. Political scientist George O. Roberts notes that the APC grew, at first, with “the support of dissatisfied or disenchanting Creole politicians,” but later “managed to elevate tribal hostility to a high level,” helping “a new hierarchy of Temne and Limba to emerge, with a clear expression of animosity toward the Mende and, to some extent, the Creoles for having been their ‘oppressors’.”¹³ Still, the APC maintained its governance by striking an alliance among the Temne, Limba, minor tribes, and Creoles.¹⁴ It is this Creole complicity in dictatorship that Cheney-Coker assaults viciously in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*. The unifying theme is a belief that the Creoles have slid into decadence, interpreted as a fixation on European culture and Christianity.

⁹ George O. Roberts, *The Anguish of Third World Independence: The Sierra Leone Experience* (Washington, DC: UP of America, 1982) 25.

¹⁰ John R. Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone 1947–1967* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1970) 11.

¹¹ Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone* 15.

¹² Roberts, *Third World Independence* 250.

¹³ Roberts, *Third World Independence* 101, 182, 183.

¹⁴ Claude S. Phillips, “Political Instability in Independent States,” in *The African Political Dictionary* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1984) 211.

Cheney-Coker's concern is not just a matter of poetic licence, however, for historians and other writers have cited the Occidental orientation of the Creoles as a source of cultural conflict. According to Cartwright, the Creoles, as a dominant class, valued "literacy in English, Christianity, and a marked attachment to English social values and to England as a spiritual home." Too, they were "sufficiently 'westernized' to be set sharply apart from the [indigenous] people ... and to act as spearheads of the Western cultural advance."¹⁵ Supporting this reading, Sylvia Wynter, in her analysis of the work of Sierra Leonean poet, Lemuel Johnson, views the Sierra Leonean capital, Freetown, as a symbol of Creole obeisance to white imperial power and, thus, to racial confusion:

Freetown, Sierra Leone is a part of the continent of Africa. Yet, in part, it is also a Creole island, like an island in the Caribbean. The Creole experience is born out of the condition of exile; out of a Middle Passage of body and mind For Freetown was to be a monument to that great act of British/European philanthropy—by which the English, having enslaved the Africans for centuries, had accumulated enough wealth from their labor and sale to afford an exquisite frisson of conscience.

The Original Sin of the Creole was to accept an intolerably partial assimilation, not only in terms of a more-or-less phoney capital, Freetown, established by white guilt, but even in terms of their own souls, or so Wynter insists:

The Cross of Christ was made of wood. The Cross of the Freetown Christian was an arrangement of genes: black skin, lips, eyes that existed to negate, perversely, the white skin of Christ. They took up their Cross and walked. They endured their passion—"their hell in small places"—and proceeded to sweat in thick English flannels, to answer in Latin, to endure the incongruity of their passions, and to re-enact the Crucifixion not as tragedy but as farce.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone* 16.

¹⁶ Sylvia Wynter, "The Poetics and the Politics of a High Life for Caliban," Afterward to Lemuel Johnson, *Highlife for Caliban* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995) 86–87.

For Wynter and Johnson, the Creole allegiance to false gods and false ways rendered them false to themselves and false to Sierra Leone.

Thus, though Cheney-Coker descends from the Creole class, he attacks this group with unadulterated vitriol that does not spare himself. His rage pours forth in images of fire, garbage, putridity, volcanic eruptions, bloated corpses, storms, suicide—a repertoire of Blakean visions of hellish decay. But these apocalyptic metaphors mirror what he terms “my Nova Scotian madness my tree of agony,”¹⁷ and his protest against the betrayal of Sierra Leone by Europe-loving and lucre-besotted Creoles and complicitous Temne soldier-dictators is accorded rich expression in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*.

Opening with the imminent execution of the heroic leader of a failed *coup d'état*, General Tamba Masimiara, the novel recounts the establishment and decline of Malagueta—a palimpsest for Sierra Leone—from its first aspirations to glory as a province of freedom for repatriated Africans (Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, and Liberated Africans) to its APC-status as the bankrupt fiefdom of a Creole-backed, Temne *duce*, his mercenaries, his military, and his foreign and transplanted business allies. The recurring reason for Malagueta's *dégringolade* is the elite pursuit of fanciful, European values that deny the needs of the majority of the citizens:

Modes of behaviour long since abandoned in the factories and gutters of England were still being copied with diligence by the despicable lot who made up the middle and upper classes. They were men whose other passion was to drink tea in the afternoon in the ovens of their drawing rooms and parlours modelled on the antediluvian style of pre-abolition America while worrying about the cost of taking holidays in England. (xiii)

Cheney-Coker's fictional analysis of the prevailing plight of Creole Sierra Leone accords with the socio-political and poetic analyses advanced by Cartwright, Roberts, Johnson, and Wynter. Certainly, Cheney-Coker's representation of a backward Europhilia amongst

¹⁷ Cheney-Coker, “Concerto for an Exile,” in *The Graveyard Also Has Teeth, with Concerto for an Exile: Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1980) 20.

the Creoles is affirmed by Roberts's insight that their "Westernism is one that is conducive to the minimizing of communal adherence, and ... the dimunition [sic] of ethnic identity."¹⁸ Hence, in his novel, Cheney-Coker blames the "new philosophy called Individualism," in part, for the degradation of Malagueta. It creates "fratricidal worms" (377).

To condemn the falling away of Stevens's regime from a progressive communalism, the author aligns its fictional *alter ego*—contemporary Malagueta—with the historical American and British North American oppression that the founding Nova Scotian settlers had fled. Thus, a sharp divide is drawn between the brute conditions that Black Loyalists suffered in Nova Scotia and their reasonable expectations of establishing a free and more-or-less paradisaical life in Malagueta (Sierra Leone). Hence, a Black Loyalist character, Phillis, recalls that in "Canada ... de people same as white folks in America, but dey don't have no slaves, but ain't kind either 'cause dey done give us land ain't fit to grow nothing: marshland and swamp, and when de winter come, oh lawd, it sure is cold!" (125). Another character, Thomas Bookerman, a type of the historical Black Loyalist leader Thomas Peters (c.1738–1792), remembers having been "Inspired by the irrefutable evidence of the exploitation of his people, now eking [sic] out a threadbare existence in the marshlands of Canada after the colonial war," and is able to "dream anew of an exodus, of a country with an even more fearsome and turbulent mountain, where they could settle" (102). He persuades his fellow and sister Black Loyalists to abandon Canada, that is, Nova Scotia, with this speech:

But what you 'fraid of, what is freedom, if you ain't willing to test it, wipe away de humiliation, dem tears from your eyes? You ain't never gon be men and women in dis place fit only for dead folk. All free men gotta go to a new place to become new people (103)

Bookerman is a spiritual leader, a Baconian *philosophe*, believing that "the universe was orderly, and man would cease to oppress man once he was free of his own fear" (104). He plans to found, in Malagueta, a society that is "free, just and humane" (104). He sets out to create a black paradise, parcelling out the land and directing

¹⁸ Roberts, *Third World Independence* 132.

the construction of housing for a model Black Loyalist-Nova Scotian capital:

The town which they conceived was a beautiful one. It rose from the sea with its breath of moist and humid air, towards the rolling green hills and golden plateaux, overshadowed by the great forested mountains (112)

But the town idealizes more than physical beauty: “What they had to uphold was not so much a vision but a present, the pillars, the structure of an organic world in which they had established some sort of order, with their own nameplates, and where they hoped to die in peace” (158). In defence of this freedom, Bookerman reminds his followers, “You all know how we came here, why we here. Dis place ain’t anything till we opened up dem roads and cleared de jungle, built schools and let de Christian folks build their church; so we ain’t going to be lettin no one mess up wid us, least of all, no white men ...” (157). When Europeans arrive to colonize Malagueta for their own interests, Bookerman recounts the epic of the Nova Scotian exodus to stiffen the resistance of his settlers to the incursion of “white men in flannels” (130):

[They left ‘Canada’] ‘cause de king [George III] done lie to us; tell us to fight for him and he gon give us land, gon give us respect and we gon be safe. And we done believe him, but he gives us land ain’t fit for man or animal. People dying there ‘cause ain’t nothin you can do wid dat land: marshes, swamps, thorns, thistles and it’s cold. So we come here and make dis place real nice, and we got a little happiness, and our women ain’t afraid no more people gon be taking their chillum. (159)

Later, Bookerman and his nationalist compatriots destroy a European garrison—or “slavehouse,” in Bookerman’s lexicon (170)—“out of love for all men and women who had rejected tyranny and had been born free, and were determined to die free” (170). Here Bookerman plays Toussaint L’Ouverture.

Importantly too, Bookerman’s model *coup* against imperialism inspires, some seven or eight generations later, General Tamba Masimiara’s plotted *coup* against the tyrannous President Sanku Maru:

he saw with the clarity of hindsight that Thomas Bookerman had not come all the way from Canada, with the invincible marks of his chains ... simply to get away from the bitter despair of broken promises; that if the one-eyed man [Bookerman] had attacked the garrison ... he had done so not to have Malagueta fall into the hands of a black president more despicable than the English pirate, but to add a few pages to the remarkable history of its people. (393–94)

Bookerman is the prototype of Masimiara. When he charges the British garrison, Bookerman regards his action not “as war ... but as a legitimate act of expelling a pest” (217). Similarly, Masimiara acts *contra* an immoral black president, *contra* “the most despicable government that the world had ever known” (396). Heading the military government that has driven out a crooked civilian administration, Masimiara tells his aides, “we can either screw up everything or try to save some of the good that this country was famous for” (384). Failing in his *Putsch* against Maru, Masimiara dies, “proud that as a soldier he had not sought fame or glory, but had been prepared to die so that Malagueta could go on shining like a star ...” (396). Like Bookerman, Masimiara sacrifices himself in vain; he cannot create an enduring republic. Yet, because he is the spiritual reincarnation of Bookerman, his death unleashes supernatural forces that execute the literal downfall of Sanka Maru:

[who] felt himself lifted out of the grandiloquent illusion of power, borne into space as if he were a dwarf, by a force too terrible to contemplate ... as he came crashing down in the middle of a street so that when the dust had been cleared, his countrymen and women would see not the eyes of a dead general [Masimiara], but the paralysed wreck of Sanku [sic] Maru. (397)

The relationship between Bookerman and Masimiara even possesses an allegorical dimension, for Masimiara is the fictional representation of Brigadier-General John Ahmadu Bangura (1930–1971), and the president he confronts, Sanka Maru, represents the real-life dictator-president Stevens (1905–1988).¹⁹ Thus, Masimiara’s actions

¹⁹ Indeed, the novel identifies Maru as a former “trade union leader” (387), just as Stevens was an ex-labour union official.

reprise Bookerman's courageous struggle for liberty as well as Bangura's leadership of a *coup* that had allowed Stevens to take office. However, on the orders of Maru, Masimiara is arrested and "hanged in the national prison" (68), just as—in real history—Bangura was charged with "attempted assassination of ... Stevens and other senior members of his cabinet" in 1971,²⁰ convicted of treason, and hanged that same year.²¹ Cheney-Coker means for us to read the martyrdom of Masimiara-Bangura at the hands of the autocrat Maru-Stevens as a defeat of the lustrous, state-founding dreams of Bookerman-Peters.

Refuting the efforts of Bookerman—and, later, Masimiara—to build a free and prosperous state, Malagueta is doomed to implode because of an original betrayal by those who should have known better, namely, the Nova Scotian settlers. It is their obsequious surrender to white flesh and white ideologies that engenders the two-century-long disintegration of Malagueta into appalling dictatorship. Cheney-Coker's omniscient narrator predicts, early on, that "the Black people who would come from America ... would hate one another in their parsimonious hearts" (30). They would already "bear the signs of the adulteration of the blood ..." (69). They would be, like the exiled children of Israel in the Desert, riotous followers of golden calves. Once they arrive in Malagueta, they act like "a heterogeneous lot whose only semblance of common interest was their wish to get out of that land of unbearable cold [Canada]" (112). Heterogeneity sparks religious strife: "A great divide ... opened up between those who came to escape the intolerable loneliness and hardship of life in the New World and those who came to impose a most severe form of Christian rigidity and morality" (129). These differences widen when new arrivals—Africans liberated from slave ships and landed in Malagueta—bring "a most heterogeneous note into the town" (167). Thus, the "the idea of one family in Malagueta" (138), the dream of communal unity ("we all like one family and we gon grow togeder, die here and we want to stick together" [138]), gives way to a division between those blacks "who would be insurrectionists and patriots, and those who would place their destiny in the hands of the white men" (130). Given these depictions, Cheney-Coker seems to follow

²⁰ Roberts, *Third World Independence* 137.

²¹ Arthur Abraham, "Bangura, J. A.," *Dictionary of African Biography*.

Roberts, who points out that, in Sierra Leone, due to the strength of “Westernism,” “In place of homogeneity and its related affinity, there came into prominence heterogeneity and pluralism.”²² Exploiting division, the British impose, violently, their government upon Malagueta, but with the acquiescence of well-off blacks. This fact marks the primary Creole betrayal or treason. Soon, Bookerman deplores the appearance of “newly minted black English men” (305):

He viewed with contempt the beginnings of the rise of an oligarchy: men who only yesterday were shopkeepers with bad teeth and could barely read now ordered evening jackets in black Venetians and hopsacks; women who only yesterday were content to wear hand-me-downs and keep clean houses had taken to buying gold and parading in silk and brocade at church services. (213)

This initial mimicking of the luxurious and nation-divisive habits of the white bourgeoisie is carried to fresh extremes by the grandchildren of the settlers:

The children of the nouveau riche mixed with the few sons of the colonial administration in the grammar schools. Their expensive jackets and ties marked them out as belonging to a specail [sic] breed; they stood out like precious bulls: proud, stubborn, and opinionated If life had been an enigma for the children of the old families, the new ones regarded it as a dinner to be eaten at one go. (350)

While the Creole adoption of European clothing and arrogance is irritating, their adoption of European mates corrodes the nation, for they reject ‘purer’ black, or ‘organic’ African, values, aesthetics, and practices:

Some of the grandchildren of the original founders of the town were indeed drawn into all kinds of marriages with the new rulers. They were so fascinated with the prospect of being accepted into the houses of the Eng-

²² Roberts, *Third World Independence* 132.

lish that they went to the Notary Public and changed their names from African to 'Christian' ones so that the pronunciation would not break the jaws of the English when they met at parties To the strings of music played by a black band that had been trained to play 'classical music' they [black bourgeois youths] forced their unclassical bodies to respond to the torturous strains of the baptism from 'native' to 'civilised', while the oestrogen in their immature bodies multiplied with a vigorous sexuality. (325)

This self-oppressive situation stems from the original settlers' lack of pride in their venture. The anonymous narrator insists that "they were ashamed in their hearts of hearts of being men and women without the fine graces, refined speeches and manners which not so long ago they had laughed at when practised by their spurious masters" (214). Yearning for European validation, they evolve a Eurocentrism that leaves them vulnerable to the plans of the first English governor, Captain David Hammerstone—the fictional image of the historical Lieutenant John Clarkson (1763–1828)—to stamp Malagueta with "the permanence of English laws" so that its blacks would become "the messengers of the metaphysical transition—darkness to light, neo-paganism to classicism" and admire "the encyclopedic mind of the English" (259). The Creole fascination with whiteness abolishes any opportunity for black self-discovery and self-rule.

Cheney-Coker's fictional excavation of Sierra Leone's history unearths a tragedy. The heroic flight from Canada/Nova Scotia and the establishment of a free state ends in dictatorship, greed, a Western orientation, and a sell-out elite. Yet, this decline-and-fall of a noble ideal is related to an original canker imported into Sierra Leone by the Nova Scotians *cum* Creoles. Even so, the Black Loyalists who stayed in Nova Scotia represent, as far as the novel is concerned, no better alternative.

In the end, then, the work of Cheney-Coker suggests that no convincing Pan-Africanism can be articulated that disregards the cogency of local black adaptations to local black conditions. Indeed, the Black Loyalists in Sierra Leone lost control of a state; the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia lost wealth, land, and population. Black Loyalism ended in despotism in Sierra Leone, in segregated inequality in Nova Scotia. Neither destiny was ordained by some

defect in the people themselves; rather, both were trapped in disenfranchising power arrangements that severely limited their political opportunities. In mythologizing this history for his people, Cheney-Coker has painted Nova Scotia as a hell and its Black Loyalist emigrés as apostles of paradise. So be it: such are the necessities of nationalist mythopoesis. *Négritude*, as it turns out, may never be sufficient for building international black unity. Yet, the Black Loyalists on both sides of the Atlantic were similar enough that perhaps the only real difference between them was that the Africadians had no state to call their own, while the Sierra Leonean Nova Scotians, even as minority Creoles, were able to dominate (under white supervision) the power structure of Sierra Leone. To acquire a more precise understanding of this difference, and its cultural meaning, we must undertake a far more exacting study of Black Loyalism and black nationalism than we have thus far been able to produce.