

Savacou 11/12 (sept. 1975)

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CARIBBEAN MAN IN SPACE AND TIME ¹

archipelago: fragments: a geological plate being crushed by the pacific's curve, cracking open yucatan; the arctic/north american monolith: hence cuba, hispaniola, puerto rico: continental outriders and the dust of the bahamas. atlantic africa pushing up the beaches of our eastern seawards

the history reflects the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone, earthquake, crack, coral: their rise and fall of landscapes: destructions, lost memories: atlantis, atahualpa, ashanti: creations: fragments

it would be better to begin with caribbean man: crouched: legitimate bastard: against space: dwarf, clenched fist of time

the unity is submarine

breathing air, the societies were successively amerindian, european, creole. the amerindian several; the european various; the creole plural

subsistent plantation maroon

multilingual multi-ethnic many ancestored

fragments

the unity is submarine

breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments/whole

Part One

THE OUTER PLANTATION

I

Caribbean Studies

This is an exercise of enormous difficulty. Not because of the quantity of material involved (heavily financed directed research would take care of this), but because its success will be limited by the scholar's aboriginal concept and perception of wholes. Most people

in the post-mediaeval world deal almost instinctively with fragments/specializations. The historian, especially, will periodise his material. There will be general periods: pre-columbian, slavery etc; there will be century blocks; and more specific dates e.g. 1492-1500; 1838-1844 etc. There will also be limitations on territorial treatment (Henri Bangou, *La Guadeloupe*: 3 vols., Paris, 1962, 1963; Douglas Hall, *Five of the Leewards*; Carib. U. Press, Barbados, 1971), or enterprise (L. J. Ragatz, *The fall of the planter class*: NY 1928; W. Westergaard, *The Dutch West India Company*: NY 1917; C. H. Haring, *The buccaneers in the West Indies in the 17th century*: NY 1910).

The major thrust of Caribbean historiography has been in this mode and has been the predominant tendency since the beginning of written study of the area. (See Elsa Goveia, *A study on the historiography of the British West Indies to the end of the 19th century*: Mexico 1956; Lambros Comitas, *Caribbeana 1900-1965*, U. of Washington Press 1968). It reflects, basically, the European political subdivision of the region; the influence of European empirical scholarship, the role of the gentleman-scholar; the interest of North America since 1900 in individual Caribbean territories for specific strategic/economic reasons; and the absence, until 1937, of locally based university institutions primarily concerned with Caribbean studies.

But even before the work of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the U.W.I. and the Institute of Caribbean Studies at Puerto Rico (the ISER's journal, *Social and Economic Studies* began publication in 1953; the ICS's *Caribbean Studies* in 1960) important works of an inter-Caribbean orientation began to appear: Guerra y Sanchez, *Azucar y poblacion en las antillas* (Habana 1927); Noel Deerr, *History of sugar*, 2 vols (London 1949). In 1938, C. L. R. James' *Black Jacobins*, a study of the Haitian revolution under Toussaint, was published; and in 1944, Eric Williams' doctoral thesis, *Capitalism and slavery* (N. Carolina Press) appeared. What is interesting and significant about these four works is that they were concerned with the central aspect of the Caribbean experience up to that time: the presence of sugar as a prime factor of Caribbean (as opposed to island/fragment) industry, trade, international politics and socio-cultural formation. In a way, they were built upon the solid but more static empirical work of Ragatz, Debien,² Pares,³ among others; but their subject matter immediately resolved them from the 'pebble' or single territory complex, into remarkable essays in comparative synthesis which moved towards a definition of 'Caribbean' that had not been present before. Guerra y Sanchez, by comparing the production and attitude to sugar in British Protestant Barbados and Hispanic Catholic Cuba, not only provided us with suggestive illustration of the difference in British and Spanish mercantilism, seen from the local/staple end, but indicated the presence of differing psycho-social Caribbeans in the two islands. Deerr's comprehensive work outlined the presence of a comprehensive Caribbean, sharing certain essential conditions which made sugar (and itself) possible. James and Williams, coming at a period of acute political self-consciousness in the area, used their awareness of local reality as a basis for anti-colonial scholarship:

Williams illustrating that it was international economics, not paternalistic humanitarianism that made and unmade the slave system, while James made the case that the repression/control forces of this same international economic system could be (and had been) defeated and brought to the point of compromise by its international proletariat. The way had been cleared for the concept of 'plantation' in Caribbean scholarship.

II

Plantation Studies

Historians of slavery have always been familiar with the plantation; it is their main unit of study; but the conceptualization of the Caribbean (or a significant part of it) as plantation, comes out of the work, first of social anthropologists, then of economists dealing with the Caribbean contribution and reaction to mercantilism. In 1957 the Research Institute for the Study of Man (Columbia University, NY), held a seminar on plantation systems in the western hemisphere, their contention being that there was by then enough work and interest in the field to warrant such an enterprise.⁴ Plantations were defined as tropical territorial units set up by colonizing Europeans for mineral or crop exploitation, and the nexus and network of production was designated a plantation system. There was a differentiation of these into island and mainland (where they were to be distinguished from haciendas), and between British and Spanish in the kind of economic attitude and emphasis outlined by Guerra y Sanchez in *Azucar y poblacion*. At the same time, the social anthropologists conceived of the tropical plantation as an area within which a cultural process was taking place, leading to what was designated a *mestizo culture* in the hispanic/hacienda area, based largely on Amerindians; and a *mulatto culture* in the plantation area, where large numbers of African ex-slaves were to be found.⁵

In 1966⁶ Lloyd Best began to articulate his 'Model of pure plantation economy'⁷ in which the plantation was posited as exploited hinterland to the industrial metropole, bound more or less permanently, structurally and functionally, to this relationship. In 1972 George Beckford published *Persistent poverty* (OUP/ISER) in which this model was applied to a wide-ranging discussion of under-development generally, but with specific reference to the Caribbean plantation. The only criticism that can (and has) been made of this formulation is the obvious one: that it does not include and account for non-plantation areas of the Caribbean/Third World. Would an island like Carriacou, for instance, fit the model? Or, as Mathews⁸ asks, would Puerto Rico in the 17th and Haiti in the 19th century? The answer of course is that we now need a study relating marginal economic areas of the Caribbean to the plantation. We can also point out that these marginal areas, although not 'plantation', fit into the wider model of underdevelopment as 'maroon economies.'⁹

Comment

Plantation system studies, therefore, tell us a great deal about how the Caribbean came to be exploited and why; and in a very real sense, define the region in these terms, even though this is not a conscious intention. The mainstream of cultural continuity in the Caribbean derives from the functional requirements of the plantation society, past and present, with an overlay of cultural particulars stemming from old and recent centres of cultural diffusion, adapted to local situations.¹⁰ The plantation model, in other words, is in itself a product of the plantation and runs the hazard of becoming as much tool as tomb of the system that it seeks to understand and transform.

Let me re-state the position. History in pursuing a continuous wall as its domain, in consolidating national or local political and economic self-interest, becomes the servant of a material vision of time. As such it has not realised criteria to assess the subtle discontinuities which point to the originality of man as a civilisation-making animal who can alter the architectural complex of an age. Such an alteration or dialectic of alteration would seem to me the cornerstone for a philosophy of history in the Third World of the Caribbean. It would bring into play the inspiration for new criteria within the dead-end of economic and political institutions. It would alert us to the duality that is characteristic of calendars of fate associated with dead time as the spectral irony and archaeology of the muse.¹¹

This commentary is necessary at this stage for several reasons, all connected with our joined endeavour to perceive/define Caribbean reality. The irony and ambiguity of all our action/thought must constantly be kept in mind. The plantation, as we observed earlier, does not contain all that is planted. Therefore it is essential that our concepts and models, when made and applied, should be applied not only to the outer field of reality, but to our inscapes equally; that not only academics but artists and other kinds of intellectuals should have access to them for test of sense. Second, we must remember that models appear at the abstract zone of our spectrum/continuum; that if they do not change, the reality they seek to 'explain' nevertheless changes around them (cf. the concept of 'plural society' in 1955 and now),¹² and that in the final analysis, the model/system must contain *or live with* people. Indeed we may fairly confidently assert that the conception of Caribbean societies in our literature reflects very much what we should expect from the criticisms levelled at the plantation in the literature: instability, plurality/ambivalence, dependence. What we have to keep in mind, as we proceed with our examination, is that this social reality may be as much figment as fragment: result of our apprehension of reality; that the pessimistic/plantation view of Caribbean society, to put it another way, may very well not be the last word on Caribbean society.

Societies within the system: main characteristics

1. Instability

- i loss/absence of aboriginal base
- ii heavy and long-run in-migration (xvi-xix centuries) followed by significant
- iii inter- and out-migration, resulting in
- iv heterogeneous populations (ethnic and nationally aligned)
- v largely 'unorthodox' (i.e. un-metropolitan) family structures, under pressure from (i) and (iii) and
- vi massive inequalities in land/man, man/resource and political arrangements, leading to
- vii rigid stratification of (in)equalities resulting in
- viii drop-out, samfie or bongo strategies, which in a more significantly general way, lead to

2. Pluralism

The rigid classificatory orders (culture, class, colour, money, status) set up as the result of colonialism and slavery, developed into caste-like structures mainly because of the massive importation of African slaves and Asiatic labour between the xvii and xix centuries. These peoples brought with them into the region a non-European culture which under the extensive and multifarious conditions of the plantation, developed into a kind of negative pole to the white European orientated patterns of the elite, reacting with these to create a *creole* personality. But this 'creole', as a result, no doubt, of its origin and manner/circumstances of evolution, did not become a single/whole norm; but itself a product of the fragmentation syndrome of the entire region, divided itself into multi-variate orientations, reflecting its complex ancestry. Caribbean creole society may therefore be seen as reacting to an electro/magnetic norm, producing euro-creole, afro-creole, indo-creole or sino-creole characteristics, so that it is truly possible to produce, in our parts, a white *or* black mulatto. This is the phenomenon of cultural pluralism: an interculturative process still faced with the ultimate possibilities of (1) *homogeneity* (when all orientations at last accept a solid and functional core of norms), (2) *federation* (when some or all of the various groups agree to live separately under the flags of their separate cultural grandfathers, but within a mutually agreed-on polity) or (3) *plural equilibrium* (a norm-troika situation).

The literature on this subject is now quite extensive.¹³ The notion of cultural orientation and of creolization/pluralism as process rather than discovered structure is treated in Hoetink, and my own *The development of creole society in Jamaica 1770-1820*¹⁴ as well as *Contradictory Omens*.¹⁵ There is an interesting difference between this 'process' approach and M. G. Smith's original formulation (1955/61)¹⁶ in which a situation was outlined where competing/alternative

institutions/attitudes exist side by side, related to a 'whole' only through the superordinate control of the economic and governmental ruling system,¹⁷ and taking little account of historical change.

3. Dependency syndrome

The structural/functional instability of the society, the ambiguities introduced into it through its plural framework, and the persistent poverty and low status of the overwhelming majority of its numbers, led/leads, according to most of those who have written on this, to social and individual disnomia: dependence, imitation, aggression, lack of initiative, the quashie complex; inhibiting growth, change and the realization of identity. It is, as I observed earlier, what one would expect, given the inherited concept of exploitation and destitution.

Part Two

THE INNER PLANTATION

But it is in the area of cultural life and expression that the scholarship of the Caribbean has so far been most wanting. This deficiency is a product and result of our outer plantation emphasis, the concern with our constitutional and economic relationship with the metropolises, and our reaction for/against the norms and styles of the (former) masters. We have therefore, most of us, been involved with little more than 'creole' versions of the imposed plantation. Hence the burden of (historiographic) scholarship has been with constitutional and political history; with war, trade, the plantation (aspects of mercantilism); race relations, social forms and problems (hacienda, plantation, urban). At the same time, there has been very little study of the institutions which support our political, commercial and social activity; measures of adaptation (if imported); transformations due to time and circumstance; effectiveness in terms of 'efficiency' and in terms of how far/how much the various social groups are/were able to express themselves through them. Even the family, too intimate, I should have thought, for this kind of thing, has been conceived as an 'institution,' given an abstract/functional treatment and reduced to statistics, or (at least in the anglophone Caribbean) 'investigated' (impetus Simey) because of the utilitarian needs of Social Development and Welfare, or fertility concern agencies; and it is only recently that education (perhaps the key to the entire developmental process, and perhaps only because of Commonwealth Caribbean pessimism over the outcome of the first years of constitutional independence) has come under close academic scrutiny; and this still largely confined to institutional/statistical effects rather than with content/curriculum research and its relationship to the embodying culture.¹⁸

It is therefore to the body of work connected with what I call here, 'The inner plantation,' that I wish to address myself during the remainder of this paper. Here we are concerned with cores and kernels; resistant local forms; roots, stumps, survival rhythms; growing points...

Areas of Research

1. Creolization

I have already, in Part One of this paper, pointed to the intercultural process we call creolization and noted the possibility of describing it in terms not of a 1:1 give and take act of gift or exchange, resulting in a new or altered product, but as a process, resulting in subtle and multiform orientations from or *towards* ancestral originals. In this way, Caribbean culture can be seen in terms of a dialectic of development taking place within a seamless guise or continuum of space and time; a model which allows for blood flow, fluctuations, the half-look, the look both/several ways; which allows for and contains the ambiguous, and rounds the sharp edges off the dichotomy. What we need now are specific histories of the process. European settlement, for instance, instead of being seen in terms of static political description as in, say, C. S. S. Higham's *The development of the Leeward Islands under the Restoration* (Cambridge U. P. 1921), would now provide a (clear) picture of the ancestral culture, and indicate how this in persons, families and institutions, was adapted to the Caribbean environment of land, ideology and other people. In this way we would be able to test Hoetink's hypothesis¹⁹ that it is at the point of impact/origin that plural society sets up its characteristic dominant/subdominant segmented pattern and proceeds from there on a fairly predictable course, to a point of crisis/termination: eventual homogeneity or permanent plurality. All the ethnic groups which make up Caribbean society could be studied in this manner, moving through the period of settlement, through slavery and the post-emancipation period and the arrival of new ethnic immigrants, into the more recent phenomenon of vicarious culture contact through tourist, book, magazine, film, television: a process which is particularly interesting since here we find an increasing reaction to external stimulus from the segmented orders as a whole.

2. Creole institutions

These may be divided into two main groups: those derived from the European or initiating segment of the society (legislatures, courts of law, police systems, the 'established' christian churches, press/mass media, banks, commercial organizations), and those peculiar to the inner plantation: friendly societies and co-ops that reveal themselves in *susu*, *gyap*, *landship* (Barbados), *la rose* (St. Lucia) and the spectrum of religious organizations from pentecostal and revival, right through to *shango*, *vodun* and *cumfa*.

Once again we observe that it is the outer plantation that has received most attention from scholars, especially those elements of it that have been most successful in the mercantilist sense, or have been found most useful in the area of control. Hence there has been a great deal written on the Navigation laws, on the legislatures of the various territories and their role in conflict or agreement with the metropolises.²⁰ But legislatures and law courts as local institutions

have received little or no attention.²¹ Similarly there have been church histories recording, essentially, the missionary or administrative success of the various denominations of the area; but no study of a particular church in a particular community like, say, Malcolm J. Calley's descriptive analysis of West Indian Pentecostal sects in England.²² On the commercial and finance management aspect of mercantilism, there has been surprisingly little historical treatment: Lillian Penson on the Colonial Agents,²³ Douglas Hall on the West India Committee,²⁴ Girod's studies of the Hecquet family in St. Domingue,²⁵ Pares' *A West India fortune*,²⁶ the Craton/Walvin study of Worthy Park.²⁷ Similarly I know of no work on the press since Cundall's brief survey of Jamaican printers prior to 1820²⁸ and a contribution to the history of journalism in Guadeloupe by Lenis Blanche.²⁹

For the inner plantation, the more dramatic aspects of cultural expression have caught eye and ear, especially in the religious area of most intense culture focus, and there have been a number of quite impressive studies on Afro-Caribbean religious expression and belief.³⁰ What we still need is a history of the progress (or not) from an ancestral base (African, E. Indian), to the present position in the creole continuum of these religious and connected systems, and an account of the *secularization* of sub-dominant religious forms generally in the Caribbean.

3. Creole/oral archives

With this, we reach the heart of research into the life/meaning of the inner plantation. Our weakness/failing as scholars is that we have been, on the whole, too (and surprisingly) concerned with abstractions rather than with people: putting the cart before the horse. This, I suppose, is another inheritance from the metropole, where the 'people' spade work has already been done as part of the steady evolution towards national identities, and where colonies, except for those visitors who bothered, were little more than abstractions/producers anyway. But this is only a fragment of this reality. If we penetrate to the inner metropole we find wonder, we find Labat, Mocquet, the indefatigable Raleigh, Defoe, Shakespeare, and the myth of El Dorado: exploitation converted to dream and image. For us, on the plantation, there should have been a similar atomic beginning: ourselves, the networks of us: relation to landscape, accumulation of language and experience. The novelists have written and there is a long history of song. But scholarship has given us little since the Herskovitses, Ortiz, Price-Mars, Bascom and Simpson. We have had Oscar Lewis' *La vida*,³¹ Sidney Mintz' *Worker in the cane*,³² M. G. Smith's *Dark Puritan*,³³ V. S. Naipaul's *The loss of El Dorado*.³⁴ These are important contributions to Caribbean sociocultural history but are not themselves — nor were they intended to be — systematic social histories. These are still painfully absent. Cundall³⁵ in Jamaica between 1900 and 1920 made a start but there has been no line of succession: constitutional and now political and economic studies supervening. We have had no one of the vision of say, Gilberto Freyre to boast of. The books in English have sometimes made concessions by including a

chapter of social history, especially for the slave period; and recent wide-ranging surveys by Gordon Lewis,³⁶ David Lowenthal,³⁷ Crassweller³⁸ among others, have brought us, in a way, up to date. But there has been no full-scale follow-up, for instance, to Pares' *West India fortune*, on the one hand, or to Margaret Katzin's 'The Jamaican country higgler'³⁹ on the other; although the work of Handler⁴⁰ on Barbados and Girod for Haiti, in their different ways looks promising; and the recent interest in the study of carnival/calypso/steelband in Trinidad is for me a most welcome sign.⁴¹

But as a *central concern*, we can state that there has really been no systematic study of Caribbean culture and cultural expression, outside the period of slavery,⁴² and certainly no history of it in terms of 'plantation' or the multiform creolization outlined above. This is because our culture history (essentially of the inner plantation) has had no 'archive' to work from. The archive of course is there, all around us: in the speech and actions of us. But until a major oral recording project can be undertaken; and until we begin to give thought to the techniques of collecting information from 'live' informants⁴³ (and these, I think, should be our major research priority for the 1970s), we will get nowhere with our attempts to connect, establish links, test for continuities within our plural framework. This is why we must develop a discipline of social arts to work along with (and sometimes run counter to) the social sciences. This is why our concept of scholarship must include the creative arts; why there must be more collaboration than there is at present between historians and social scientists; and between these and socio-linguists, ethnomusicologists and ethnobotanists; why we must continue to study the religion(s) of the interplantation. In this connection, it might be useful for Caribbean scholars to take a look at the work going on in Africa converting oral ambience into book: for example, G. S. Vere, *A history of the Abaluya of Western Kenya*; B. A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo*.⁴⁴

4. The Word

a' remember, one day a' find some lilies an' a' plant de lilies-dem in a row an' one Sunday mornin' when a' wake all de lilies blow. Seven lilies an' is seven a dem blow... An' a' leave an' go down in de gully bottom to go an' pick up some coconut an' when a' go a' see a cotton tree an' a' jus fell right down at de cotton tree root. An' is dere a' take now. Well a' don't heat anything. Twentyone days a' dont heat anything. Twentyone days a' dont heat. In de nights in de cotton tree comin' like it hollow an' I hinside there. An' you have some Africans you understan'? Well dose tombs aroun' de tree light up wid cyandles an' I resting now put my hand dis way an' sleepin' an' a' honly hear a little voice come to me an' dem talkin' to me but dose tings is spirit talkin' to me an' dem speakin' to me now an' say 'Now is a little nice little chil' an' you gwine get you right up now in de African worl' because you' brains — you will take something. So derefore we gwine to teach you something...' A man name Man Parker 'ave a dance in Dalvey a Hafrican dance an' a' went there — leave mi' mudder in de night to look on de dance an' when a' go dere a' see

everybody was dancin' an' a stan' up an' fol' mi' han' like dis an' a feel mi' whole body like it is growin' growin' an' a see a girl jump from away an' jus hol' mi' in mi' neck an' a drop an' after a drop now a' fain' a' jus' gone an' a started to dance...⁴⁵

5. *Autobiography of the family*

R. T. Smith comes close to the point and orientation of this paper when he notes in *The Negro family in British Guiana*:

Much confusion about the nature of lower-class family life in the West Indies has arisen as a result of taking verbal statements from members of the middle-class, or even of the lower-class, too much at their face value, and regarding them as statements of fact rather than as symbolic statements of a state of inter-group relationship.

It is a part of the mythology of the West Indies that the lower-class Negro is immoral and promiscuous, and that his family life is 'loose' and 'disorganized', and unless it is clearly recognized that such myths are an integral part of the system of relationships between various groups, reflecting value judgements inherent in their status rankings, then serious bias may be introduced into objective study.⁴⁶

Despite Smith's caveat, no study — at least in the anglophone Caribbean — has been undertaken and published, which attempts to examine the autonomous reality of the West Indian family, be it upper, middle or lower class; white, brown or black, chinese or amer/indian. There have, of course, been generalizations about families: mainly lower class black⁴⁷ and (east) indian;⁴⁸ and within this, there have been statistical/census studies⁴⁹ and mating pattern/fertility studies⁵⁰ basically concerned with, or the off-shoots of the 1930s colonial concern with the Caribbean 'crisis' of poverty/dismia/overpopulation.⁵¹ Even when as in Smith, for example, or Edith Clarke,⁵² the centre and concern of the study has been local, the scholars involved have not been able to perceive the qualitative difference between inner and outer plantation. Clarke, for instance, for all her native sympathy, never allows her subjects to speak for themselves; so that, like Smith, she unwittingly makes an (educated) distinction between 'statements of fact' and 'symbolic statement' — thus vitiating the very spirit of creole language/experience.⁵³

This is why I have juxtaposed the quotation from Smith (above) with the tape-transcript from a Jamaican Kumina Queen. This authentic inner plantation statement, it will be observed, attains the quality of poetry. It is my contention that it *is* poetry. But it is at the same time a statement of fact — as St. Paul's account of the road to Damascus is a fact. Among the folk, life was and is lived in accordance with this kind of symbolic vision/expression.⁵⁴ And not the life of Saul/Queenie only, but the accretions around that life/experience: Queenie's husband, her children, her family, her kin, her dependents, her followers. In West Kingston, for instance, this reality and language

represents a truly creole cultural unit, interacting with other groups and through them, with the society as a whole. And it is my understanding that the kind of familial and interpersonal units we find there do not always or necessarily conform to our inherited expectations, and that if this is so, we shall have to restructure our models.

II

Caribbean Models

I do not propose, however, model making at this point. But it should at least be clear that a great deal of our primary work in the 70s will be towards re-examining our two main working ideographs: the plural society and the plantation model. To do this we shall have to add oral archival resources to our inherited scribal ones. With regard to the plural model, we shall have to introduce *process* as well as structure, and open ourselves to the inputs of race, creolization and americanization, in ways that we have not attempted before. We shall also have to bear in mind the possibility that the resolution of this process may, but will not necessarily, be socio-cultural homogeneity.⁵⁵ Our new models should leave us open to the possibility of permanent co-existent plurality.⁵⁶

With regard to the plantation model, we shall have to allow for interaction of unit structures: plantation/hinterland vs. metropole; but we shall also have to introduce the concept of inter-structure; that is, the interaction between inner and outer plantation, inner and outer metropole, and the lateral and diagonal relationships between these. With this kind of multi-dimensional model, our assumptions about 'traditional' and 'modern', and certainly the usual dialectical assumption that there is a natural progression from 'traditional' to 'modern'⁵⁷ may well have to be modified.

Finally, in the seventies, our research will have to equip us to more precisely observe, account for, and assess *agents of change*: the changes (material, spiritual and electronic) in the inner and outer metropolises; and the processes of change within and between the inner and outer plantation. And we shall have to try to describe these specifically/totally: as socio/national phenomena, as regional phenomena, and as hemispheric occurrences.

Towards this, there are several procedures. My own inclination is to establish a base in the inner plantation and proceed outwards: connection with the inner metropole, with the ancestors, with the outer plantation, and with the neglected maroons.

III

The unit is submarine.