

THE CULTURAL POLITICS
OF SUGAR

Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism

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CHAPTER I

Ligon: 'sweete negotiation'

In common with so many contemporary examples, the full title of Ligon's *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* intimates an ambitious project, both by virtue of the scope and the heterogeneity of the matters it promises to cover. In common with other texts sharing this specific identity (colonizing histories, travel, colonization and settlement narratives), Ligon's project signals its distinctive dialogism in the exposition of analyzed contents on its title page as well as in some of the early pages of narrative preceding the author's actual arrival in Barbados. Far away and exotic, the subject location was a natural draw to curious audiences. More compelling still, as we will see in the ensuing chapters, was the text's unusual admixture of the digestible (sugar) with the industrial (the ingenio, or sugar mill), its ordered catalogue of structures related to production (grinding-room, boiling-room, filling-room etc.) and the strategic placement of three allusions to the combined economies of profit and purity so germane to sugar culture. The full value of the desire implicit in that strategy will be more fully appreciated in the forthcoming treatment of the profit-purity relationship as a site on which the credibility of sugar culture (in both its senses) was persistently contested.

Though the voice of this book's organizing principle, 'sweete negotiation', does not appear until rather later on in the actual representation of early plantation life in Barbados, that voice is also prefigured and dialogized in an early part of the narrative where Ligon reveals certain details about the occasions that set him on his travels. Those occasions, too, encode some cunningly interwoven negotiations, mirroring at once motives personal, social (with specific reference to Creole class construction) and national (with specific reference to the larger political, economic and cultural context of contemporary British history).

The various functions of negotiation that will provide the impetus for inquiry in this chapter are to be found, then, in that aggregation of forces attending the text's production and the author's relation to its contents and context. First, the relationship between Ligon's immediate personal history and the larger cultural moment of his country is produced as a moment of crisis for whose resolution negotiation offers a serviceable metaphor of exchange. Insofar as the voice *negotium* is always already polarized, the second structural movement in this chapter will turn on the conflicted problematics of that voice, marked by dichotomy and antagonism. To the very definitive extent that Ligon's history inaugurates the apologetic discourse on the origins of Creole identity and the search for legitimacy mediated by its own anxiety and the denial of its detractors, negotiation will offer a key to tracing cultural foundations and recuperating the forces that subverted those foundations. And because all these intentions converge and seek resolution in the commercial and metaphysical economies of sugar, negotiation is produced in Ligon's work as a mode of symbolic action and as a rhetoric pressed into the service of representing material culture, aspiring to apprehend the aesthetics and metaphysics of that plant described by Ligon himself as 'noble' (202) and 'benign' (51) in its faculties and capable of supplying virtue, purity and health to this emergent cultural entity (87).

As a metaphor for the specific exchanges involved in the relation of Ligon's *History* to a moment of personal crisis and a larger evolving process of cultural change, Ligon manipulates negotiation as a device to re-establish control over his own threatened personal security and to mediate the publicity for a soon-to-emerge political entity (Creole interests) and the cultural exchange (creolization) they would make between the crises they left behind and those they would encounter in sustaining the sugar economies of the West Indies.

The biographical record on Ligon is spare, but this much we know. Like many who embraced the hazards of a sea voyage and the rigours of colonial settlement, Ligon's own report of the circumstances surrounding his visit to Barbados describes a familiar scene of crisis in the narrative of colonizing: having lost his livelihood and material possessions in a 'barbarous riot', Ligon pictured himself as 'stripped and rifled of all I had, left destitute of a substance, and brought to such an Exigent, as I must famish or fly . . . I found

myself a stranger in my own country'. A refugee from England's post-Civil War turmoil, he attached himself to Thomas Modyford, a Royalist exile, and sailed to Barbados in a ship called *Achilles* on 16 June 1647. The author arrived in Barbados in September to find that fledgling colony barely recovering from a recent plague (some bodies still remained unburied) and gripped in the throes of food shortages (Ligon 21). Notwithstanding these inauspicious conditions, he assisted his patron Modyford to build a highly profitable plantation holding in partnership with another early Barbados settler, William Hilliard. Ligon himself seemed to have reaped less brilliant personal success, for after three years in the colony he returned to England in 1650 to face arrest and imprisonment for debt.

Enfolded in the narrative economy of his account are both his story (replete with obvious classical and biblical resonances) and the history of countless other colonists. In addition, that same narrative economy encodes wider vibrations of political turmoil and radical economic change back at the metropole. In conjunction, they stand as metonyms for the socially constructed nature of Ligon's 'sweete negotiation.'

As the nation struggled in the aftermath of civil war to redefine its identity under a new constitutional dispensation (Cromwell's Commonwealth and Protectorate), social and economic thinkers increasingly reflected on the composition of the body politic, recognizing at once the value of the colonies not only as profitable economic investments but also as social escape valves for persons rendered expendable either by extremities similar to Ligon's or by transgressions that rendered them a risk to the public weal. The Lord Protector himself exploited the very favourable exchange value Barbados provided to the realm: he used that frontier land to expatriate all sorts and conditions of British felons – particularly Irish and Scots – ('to Barbadoes' them, was the euphemism) and in return extract from their planting and industry the produce and taxes so advantageous to the nation's imperial ambitions. One of the earliest instances of excess used for exchange can be found in Ligon's revelation that on board his ship was a consignment of prostitutes from Bridewell prison and Turnbull Street in London, also bound for Barbados.¹

This is a dramatic foreshadowing of those bodily exchanges that Ligon will detail further on in the *History*; but they are worth noticing here to foreground certain pretextual sources of cultural construc-

tion, in effect to mark and qualify the genesis of creolizing community in Barbados. War, exile, social and economic dislocation throw individuals together indiscriminately, disrupting the old rigid structures of class and race that once held them apart. Under such exigencies the givens of life, knowledge and culture are sharply defamiliarized.

The concatenation at this early juncture in the narrative of radical reversals in individual fortunes, of national crisis mediated by colonial opportunity, and colonial growth threatened by natural disaster preconditions the moralized modes in which Ligon couches parts of his narrative. It is out of just such contingencies that dissonance, diffraction and (at least potential) dissensus spring. These argue the necessity of a mediatory structure: in Ligon's *History* that structure is negotiation, which rationalizes and gives them form. From this source may be located the very seeds of nascent creolizing culture.²

The etymological and ideological history of the concept 'culture' in Western thought manifests an oscillation between disparate poles not dissimilar to the term 'negotiation'. For 'culture' Raymond Williams unearths both sacred and secular origins. The religious sense of the word derives from the Latin root *colere* (= to worship) which splits one way into *cultus*, to yield the sense of 'honour with worship,' and another into *colonus* (= colony, farmer) to yield the sense of inhabiting and cultivating. Williams synthesizes this disparate-ness in these words: 'Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals.'³ From this reference to 'tending of natural growth' culture extends to the process of human development, the dominant sense from the eighteenth century onward. What this linguistic archaeology discloses is the use-value:exchange-value economy immanent in the very genealogy of culture, an economy that reproduces itself in the cultural practices of Ligon's *History* (where history is exchanged for the new values of colonizing capitalism) and in Creole desire (where marginality is exchanged for political legitimacy).

The traditional tendency in historical studies has been to define cultural creolization in gradualist terms, predicating its emergence on the accommodations, adaptations and negotiations that colonists must necessarily make with their new environments *over time* before they call it home. Standard definitions also assume the maturation of a few native-born generations to invest the concept with a sense of

home- and group-consciousness. However, the presence in Ligon of certain actions (objective and symbolic), structures (concrete and aesthetic) and thematic preoccupations with direct relevance to identity and cultural consciousness in early colonial Barbados makes more compelling this book's premise of an earlier onset of Creole formations.

'Sweete negotiation' wears that identity and consciousness as a proud publicity slogan, imaging the sheer pleasure of individual experience extrapolated to the consumption ethos of a whole class. The consumption is advertised for its own sake but more importantly for its value as emulative consumption, for the value it rendered in raising the cultural stock of Creoles on a veritable frontier economy. In addition to the demographic categories discussed earlier, this display is to be witnessed in both the verbal and pictorial representation of life, in advertising the economies of nature and business. Ligon's first impression of Carlisle Bay, the main commercial shipping port, paints a scene of bustling purpose and enterprise, of boats 'so quick, stirring and numerous as I have seen it below the bridge at London' (21). The apparent intent of the comparison is to place the colonial harbour on a parity of prestige with its larger metropolitan counterpart. This assimilation of small to great encodes a significant gesture in staking Creole claims, placing the narrative fully within the text of relations McKeon calls the 'homogenization of use values' (215).⁴ The gesture is extended to this picture of the flourishing beauty and vegetative harmony of nature in Barbados producing an image of that 'wealth, beauty and all harmony in that Leviathan, a well govern'd commonwealth where the might, Men and rulers of the earth, by their prudent and careful protection, secure them from harms' (Ligon, pp. 20-1).

The signs of emulation are even more richly encoded in the cataloguing of creature comforts, an unabashed publicity for the enviable style and standard of living available to immigrants: the following gastronomic display advertises all manner of beverages, familiar and exotic, and a sumptuous variety of food (reportedly only one course from a typical planter's feast [in this case, Colonel Drax's]):

A Rump boyl'd, a Chine roasted, a large piece of breast roasted, the cheeks baked, of which is a dish to either mess, the tongue and part of the tripes minc'd for Pyes, season'd with sweet Herbs finely minc'd, suet, spice, and currans; the legs, Pallets and other ingredients for an *olio Podrido* to either

mess, a dish of marrow bones, so here are fourteen dishes at the Table and all of Beef. (Ligon 38)

And as if this were not evidence enough of variety, he further lists these additional meats for the emulative public's consumption: pork, boar, bacon, turkeys, chicken, duck, fish, custards, cheese cakes, puffs. To secure the due and proper valorization of the Creole colony in the new liberal world ethic of trade and commerce, he takes pains to enumerate the diverse countries of origin for consumer staples imported into Barbados: beef from Holland, from Old and New England, Virginia and some from Russia, cod, mackerel, neat's tongue, pickled herrings from New England and pickled turtle from the Leeward Islands (37). And so the text deploys this negotiation to publicize the altogether flourishing prospects of this growing colony, while at the same time identifying the place with the larger interests and historical process of England's growing imperial power. This places negotiation squarely in the vanguard of that process of secularization which McKeon calls 'the cheerful challenge of the marketplace' (215).

The indisputable motives located in this rhetoric of the colonizing advertisement campaign underscore the continual appeal these texts make to the metropolitan audience: to stir the hunger of prospective settlers, and to awaken the envy and respect of metropolitan readers for the cultural project under construction. Catalogues like the above have a way of altering perceptions and expanding desire. Those that detailed the taste, uses and products of sugar itself not only stirred hunger and fomented consumer markets, transforming culinary habits and gustatory appetites, they also, as we shall see later, penetrated aesthetic space and raised imaginative possibilities. The striking self-consciousness about the rewards of bourgeois enterprise in the New World and the use of textual stimuli to excite consumptive responses have been remarked in Defoe's colonial narratives: Shinagel's critical comments in reference to Robinson Crusoe serve to place in clear historical context this reproduction of the marked pleasure of consumption, possession and security expressed in Ligon:

Defoe's prose betrays his [Crusoe's] self-consciousness about terming Crusoe's plantation an 'estate' but the idea of having a plantation worth thousands of pounds was a delicious concept to contemplate, particularly when the overseas plantation was the equivalent of an English estate worth 1000 pounds a year . . . Defoe employed the colonial theme as a way of

showing his middle and lower class readers how they could better their fortunes, regardless of their ancestry or birth, through industry. . .⁵

The authenticating practices Ligon uses to argue Barbados' value to England were transparent enough. His optimism for the colony's thriving and potential successful growth was a glowing one. In one of his common rhapsodic effusions he declares that by 1650 sugar had become the 'soul of Trade in this Island', attributing to its economic success the rise of property values in the island, and citing the particular example of Hilliard's plantation, which increased its 1647 value from £400 to £7,000, the value of half of the plantation in less than five years (87).

In hard economic terms, the most astute observers conceived the nexus of bodies constituting the colonies and maintaining the supply lines between them and the political centre as a single comprehensive economy. The anonymous author of *The Present State of the British Sugar Colonies Consider'd*,⁶ in a vigorous and reasoned admonition against excessive taxation on the trade, showed plainly that sugar produced mainly by slave labour in remote colonial locations provided work for ship-owners and their families, factors, ship-builders, ropemakers, sailmakers, and other shipping trades – besides many thousands of poor artificers and manufacturers in Britain (24). Jacques Bellin, naval engineer, cartographer and Inspector of the Royal Academy, prospecting the British islands for intelligence useful to the French imperialist information order, recorded the impressive contribution the small island of Barbados made to the national wealth of England (that colony's input grew sharply from 46 million pounds sterling between 1636 and 1656, to 138 million between 1676 and 1756, adding an overall total of 276 million pounds in that 120-year span): 'This trade gives employment to seamen, merchants, works of all kinds.' One English author affirmed the truth of Barbados' disproportionate value thus: 'This little island is for our nation an abundant mine of gold; it has fed endless mouths, kept busy great fleets, employed extraordinary numbers of seafaring men, expanded considerably the national wealth of England.'⁷

If the value of this young and thriving colony was not lost on him, Ligon wanted to be sure that his production of history would serve to impress that value on readers, policy-makers, would-be immigrants and would-be detractors.

The narrative selection of content reconfigures negotiation as a mode of symbolic action. The search for value is taken to another level, negotiated by a similar pattern of exchange mediation. In a very neat crystallizing of sugar's qualities in the manner and conditions of its production, Ligon apprehended the precise talisman he needed to invent the transcendent value he desired. Desirable in its sweetness and universal in its utility, sugar's natural body could be exchanged, at the level of rhetoric, into an object of mythic, essential purity. In Ligon this myth of purity is always structurally related to the erotic. As a structure for imagining Creole identity, sweete negotiation is already complexly eroticized, both at the level of figured language and at the level of literal objective reference. Ligon demonstrates that the negotiation could be sweetened from the widest selection of sources available in the immediate landscape of the exotic. David Richards in *Masks of Difference* recovers from related colonial narratives their use of conventional forms 'as a means of domesticating the erotic.'⁸ I find this insight remarkably apposite – and not only for its direct correspondence with my own theoretical proceedings. An exchange of this order is contained in one of those pre-textual scenes from the Cape Verdes; stricken with sexual desire for the bodies of pubescent African females, the white male subject transforms their presence into an almost fetishized fixation. The young 'Negro virgins' struck him as 'creatures, of such shapes, as would have puzzled Albrecht Dürer, the Great Master of Proportion, but to have imitated, and Titian or Andrea del Sarto, for softness of muscles, and curiositie of colouring'. He spends a further page and a half rapt in eroticized gazing at twin sisters

wanton as the soyle that bred them, sweet as the fruits they fed on . . . [such] young Beauties force, and so commit rapes upon our affections. In summe had not my heart been fixed fast in my breast, and dwelt there above sixty years, and therefore loath to leave his long kept habitation, I had undoubtedly left it between them for a Legacy. For so equal were there Beauties and my Love, as it was not nor could be, particular to either. (17)

This scene will reproduce itself as a subsequent revision later, as similar bodies are revalued for slave labour and aesthetic purposes. But Richards is suggestive too for the way in which Ligon inverts his reading of how colonial discourses '[transform]cultural and sexual difference into modes familiar and digestible'. In sugar and sugar culture Ligon transforms what is fast becoming familiar and digestible into the transcendent and the mythic.

Sugar offers Ligon a complex signifying system that assimilates both the imagery and material facts of the enterprise, novelty and plenitude of a creolizing locality into the corpus of European symbolic consciousness and imaginative economy. In this aspect, negotiation may be seen as a mode whose function is to infiltrate (to colonize) the familiar epistemologies of the metropole with those very features of novelty, exoticism and plenitude particular to the colony. By that act of reciprocal colonizing, the forms and usages of plantation life could be displayed and indefinitely reproduced textually both within individual consciousness and within the received discursive practices (by the numerous official, literary and ethnographic sources who typically exchanged these 'true and exact' accounts for wider imperial purposes). This negotiation enables those subsequent uses of its textual body one encounters in diverse disciplines: in economics, subserving imperialist desires and enhancing colonial aspirations,⁹ in a variety of texts reflecting on the potential of plantation infrastructures to serve as proving grounds for emergent ideas about social, economic and materialist formation,¹⁰ and generally for rhetoricizing modes of practice and belief which at Ligon's 'creolizing moment' were as yet un-incorporated into the mainstream of orthodox thought.¹¹

And this constant originary element that now so absorbs Ligon, as the first author in this study, will extend through and beyond the remaining five writers of our immediate interest into the work of Fernando Ortiz, whose *Contrapunteo del Tabaco y Azucar* (*Cuban Counterpoint*) certainly ranks as the most philosophically significant work to deepen and amplify the tradition.

Ortiz elaborated the first comprehensive critique of the semiotics and metaphysics of sugar and their relevance to social formation. Though grounded in the specific historical conditions that made sugar a seminal force in the development of Cuban society, Ortiz's work treats sugar and tobacco as complex signifying systems, 'visceral' forces in the historical formation of the Cuban economy. The *Contrapunteo* constructs sugar as a profoundly resonant signifying body within a universe of social, moral and political signs. Ortiz systematically and definitively interprets the production of sugar as a master signifier whose signs could be shown to permeate the entire body politic of producers and consumers.¹² It is precisely those semiotic values of the plant, of its productive processes and of its manufactured body that are

prefigured in Ligon's negotiations for a definitive Creole social form in early colonial Barbados.

The moralized modes referred to earlier find significant expression in Ligon's search for a myth of purity on which to found his cultural vision. Endued by the creator with the perfection of all sweets, 'this noble plant' is extolled for its efficacy as a source of virtue and purity. Sugar is credited with a 'virtue' of promoting and enhancing economic as well as physical well-being: 'As this plant has a faculty to *preserve* all fruits, that grow in the world, *from corruption and putrifaction*; so it has a *vertue*, being rightly applied, to preserve us men in our *healths and fortunes* too' (emphasis mine). The italicized words are typical of Ligon's rhapsodic claims for the plant; their oscillation between the *neg* of putrifaction and impurity and the *otium* of preserving 'healths and fortunes' situates sugar culture at that boundary between the old alchemical pursuit and the new secularizing exchange. Their conflation of anxieties about physical wholeness and personal economic integrity (financial solvency) suggests the invention of a new panacea. Inherent in the myth of purity is the issue of human agency. The myth of purity is by definition a highly constructed concept. Creolized structures are always already compromised by hybridity. Thus the question of human agency is highly contestable.

From among a category first eroticized in the Cape Verde Islands, and later in Barbados rejected as aesthetically undesirable, Ligon makes a paradoxically deliberate selection of the 'cleanliest of slave women' for work around the cane mill and in the processes that clarify the canejuice and crystallize the sugar. This appropriation is at once consistent with the historical roles women played as primary producers for the colonizing machine and also with certain well-defined anthropological functions in the production of culture. In mythicizing the meaning of women as producers, Ligon performs a ritual gesture that would appear to bear some symbolic relation to Mary Douglas' explanation of the way purity and impurity rituals create cultural order: this abstraction of the women from the category of contempt and defilement approximates what she calls 'a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience'.¹³ A similar gesture undertaken for similar purposes has been remarked in Aphra Behn's treatment of Imoinda in *Oroonoko*, another foundational text in the discourse of colonizing cultures of the West Indies. Richards writes, 'Behn softens the presence of

Imoinda's body. Her erotic strangeness, sensuous and patterned, is domesticated; her exotic and erotic threat is redefined as virginal purity . . . Behn's text transforms Imoinda's cultural and sexual difference into the model of European artistic production.¹⁴ In Ligon, the racializing of sugar's body exists in tandem with an emphatic gendering of the 'sweete negotiation'. In Ortiz 'sugar is *she*; tobacco is he . . . if tobacco is male, sugar is female'.¹⁵ One further parallel links this reproduction of sugar as superordinate myth with a larger colonialist myth in which precious commodities are ascribed metaphysical value in exchange for colonial respect. Just as sugar was used as specie (an exchange currency), and reconceived in the language of alchemy, a mystical rhetoric appropriated to serve an idea of cultural integrity, so, Anthony Pagden reminds us, the Spaniards and others between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries invented an 'eschatological association between gold and godliness'.¹⁶

This desire for an ideal of cultural purity in a manifestly hybrid environment carries with it the seeds of its own contestation. The foregrounding of slavery, labour and the processes of production in the narrative occasions anxieties similar to those intimated in the discussion of slave women. Nostalgia, guilt and moral compromise enmesh the very authorial self in the antithetical trammels (the *neg* pole) of the text's negotiations. Factors of landscape difference, heterogeneous human bodies and an authorial self indivisibly identified with Creole cultural aspirations bring even that self's presumptively purer objectives of imagining a revisionist aesthetic under hopeless subversive threat.

But this very positing of cultural foundations in close identification with the slave body and with emergent modes of industrial production brings the *History* into violent collision with sources of division and conflictedness inherent in its very object. In Ligon's most fulsome enthusiasm may be located the very seeds of social self-doubt, the nascent fears about cultural contamination which were to intensify in succeeding authors.

Some of the most profound anxieties that divided Creole consciousness originated in the sources of corruption and degeneration the Creole classes feared would dissolve their culture and its pretensions. From those very female slave bodies abstracted for the pursuit of cultural purity would spring anxieties about their proximity to Creole perceptual consciousness. While, judged by Dürer's standards, the male slave physique earned Ligon's approval, the

African female (slave) form, on the contrary, drew a critique markedly less flattering. The size of their hips, their young women's breasts ('which stand strutting out so hard and firm') and the breasts of mature women who had borne so many children 'their breasts hang down below their navels so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost down to the ground, that at a distance, you would think they had six legs . . .' (51) – all these drew mixed reviews of lust and loathing. What would at least by Grainger's time become the subject of anti-saccharite polemic (anti-slavery political agitation against sugar consumption based on sugar's pollution by human wastes) is in Ligon refigured as an anxiety about the proximity of the sweating odoriferous female slave body to Creole aesthetic sensibility, associated in his mind with the potential for producing authentic culture.

There [in Barbados] the bodies of women are so sweaty and clammy as the hand cannot pass over, without being glued and cemented in the passage or motion; and by that means little pleasure is given to, or received by the agent or patient: and therefore if this sense be neither pleased in doing nor suffering, we may decline it as useless in a country, where down of swans or wool of beaver is wanting. (107)

But lest this might be thought a prejudice the historian held exclusively against African slave women, it must be observed that Ligon found colonial West Indian climates especially harsh on all female bodies: in his refined sensory estimation those bodies diminished in value to the degree that intense tropical heat rendered them less attractive as objects of male desire and hence of broad social respect. This part of Ligon's *History* is marked by an explicit ambivalence about the relative capacity of different natural sources in England and Barbados to heighten physical sensation and nurture aesthetic sensibility. Ligon's compulsion to enumerate and categorize differentially the values implicit in these sources reflects the colonist's deeply ingrained anxieties over the nature of colonial identity and its cultural legitimacy.

Those grotesque images of misshapen female slave bodies bring Ligon's aesthetic close to phantasmagoria. At the same time, it must be noted that the physical attributes so negotiated placed these constituents of Creole culture decidedly beyond the pale of Dürer's ideal feminine forms: the aesthetic anxiety could be normalized within common racial attitudes. Since a critical objective of the male gaze in such colonial contexts is to secure hegemony (and here

clearly the desire is to cement Creole cultural integrity), this production of failed desire profoundly disrupts the notion of a civil polity founded on an economy of the 'desire for sweete things'.¹⁷

Here the anxiety is displayed as a desire to separate the cultural ideal from one of its constitutive elements. This disgust for the slave body can be viewed in the wider terms of bourgeois capitalist ideology. Francis Barker shows this behaviour to be common in the textual practices of bourgeois formation, where the writing self endeavours to separate the material self 'silently but efficiently from the spectacle, covering its own traces, the bourgeois subject substitutes for its corporeal body, the rarefied body of the text' (62).¹⁸ This behaviour also has its mirror image in the absentee Creole landlords' dissociation of themselves from the physical space of the slavocracy and the corrupt body of sugar. Back home in Europe the Creoles recuperate all these by reconstituting them for their own exaggerated status as fetishized signs and codings on the body of the slave.¹⁹

At the colonial scene of production, the deployment of slave and indentured servant bodies in direct juxtaposition to the machinery of production further problematizes Creole cultural pretensions. The labour-intensive nature of sugar production argued its value and respect, but also laid the ground for the subterranean forms of 'agonising conflict' and dissensus.²⁰ This passage from Thomas Tryon stages the scene as one of conflict between persistent human labour and insatiable mechanistic appetite: 'the servants night and day stand in the great boiling houses, where there are six or seven large coppers or furnaces kept perpetually boiling and from which with heavy ladles and skimmers, they skim off the excrementitious parts of the canes till it comes to its perfection and cleanness, which others as Stoakers, Broil, as it were, in managing the fires; and one part is constantly at the mill, to supply it with canes, night and day, during the whole Season of making sugar; which is about six months in the year'.²¹ Tryon's pictorialization captures in one place all those disparate and dissonant energies contributive to culturing sugar. Virtuous industry produced capitalist value but that value was earned only in ironic juxtaposition to violence. The pure body of sugar is achieved only by abstraction from its 'excrementitious particles', but some of those impurities are inseparable from lower grades of sugar and rum. Purity and impurity coexist equally in the production of economic value. Purity and impurity equally engender Creole anxious desire for culture.

Keith Ellis lists three categories of images sugar generates in Caribbean literature: the pragmatic, the idealist and the dialectical. Associating sugar's figured body with 'several levels of ambivalence' and with 'pervasive oxymoron,' Ellis hints at something of the anxiety it engendered in the principal parties to its production: 'Sugar also irritates by the intensive labour it demands and by its occupation of the best lands.'²² Tryon's vision, then, dramatizes a 'dialectical' struggle between the dissonant energies situated at either pole of the *negotium* and mediated by Ligon's aesthetic preoccupations.

The picture of servants standing 'night and day in the great boiling houses' tending huge coppers (cauldrons), and of 'stoakers' being broiled 'as it were alive, in managing the fires' transmutes the scene of sugar manufacture into an enshrining allegory of violence and sacrifice. Here the categorical function of negotiation is to exchange the sacred for the secular, and to accommodate oscillation between the two: a solid demonstration of René Girard's contention that the notion of sacrifice '[applies] to even larger arenas of human activity' than literally construed.²³

In the reflective parts of Ligon's *History*, the discourse normalizes oppression and violence as the linchpins of Creole plantation culture. The author's distaste for the pains and disfigurements slaves suffered at the hands of overseers arises less from any sense of moral outrage than from his anxiety for the survival of sensibility itself in what he calls an ethos of 'coercive feeling' (107). Girard writes: 'Cultural artifacts are structured so as to hide the mechanisms of violence, and the mechanisms are designed so as to conceal themselves' (7).

Normalization, then, works together with sundry other coded evasions to produce another mode of negotiation in Ligon's text. We shall return to it, deployed under changed circumstances, but for essentially congruent purposes, in Rochefort's ethnographic discourse.

Massy and powerful, the great mill rollers stand as the incarnate signs of an implacable god, to whom slaves feed ritual stalks of sugar cane. The great boiling houses are temples of sacrifice, the cauldrons sacred vessels, the stokers vestals and votaries, some standing in ceaseless offering and adoration, others destined to become the unwilling human victims of this all-consuming capitalist engine. All of these signs and ceremonies embody disciplinary regimes in which the body itself is the controlling intelligence, harnessed to yield of

itself and to extract from other bodies economic value, to offer its limbs and, if need be, its very life in the ultimate sacrifice. Both Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* and H. Orlando Patterson in his magisterial work *Slavery and Social Death* have defined the meanings the body yields under major forms of coercion and duress. By the light of Foucauldian analysis, slavery may be seen as a ‘machinery of power’, one of those ‘strict powers’ which impose upon the body ‘constraints, prohibitions or obligations’.²⁴ Patterson’s comparative method elucidates the widespread use of the slave body to imprint the signs of the unfree while increasing the value of its inverse.²⁵ The totalizing power of the slave-master and his symbolic extension in the proto-industrial technologies of sugar production were constant reminders to the slave of the absolute alienation of his body; the common sight of maimed or dismembered slaves was a graphic reminder, to all who would take heed, of the power of these sources to inflict bodily punishments, to leave the imprint of power on their object, to encode the body with meaning.

We have seen how Creole planters used that body and those imprints to publicize and obfuscate their cultural aspirations. Ligon indelibly encodes both the publicity and the obfuscation in his facetious coinage ‘saccharocracy’ (105) to signify sugar plantation society. The label bespeaks that deep-seated scepticism (and not a little contempt) which persisted in the minds of older, well-established elites and reactionary mandarins for the notion of establishing and sustaining a viable, authentic civilization in the sugar colonies. Their voices are dialogized in the political manoeuvring of the text between secular and sacred poles. Their antagonistic consciousness mediates the workings of the machine just described, efficiently interrupting its putative unitary flow. Creole desire for cultural authenticity and greater political autonomy is exposed as fantasy (witness the images used to represent the labour force: idealized male physiques, degraded female bodies). Instead of a machine serving the narrow special interests of a Creole planter class, the means of production are exposed as ‘a desiring machine,’ one merely subservient to the desire of the larger capitalist–imperialist machine, thus only ‘a machine of a machine’ functioning as ‘a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time to the machine connected to it. This is the law of production of production.’²⁶

The project of Creolizing autonomy is thus dethroned from the

univocal presence it commanded in those parts of the narrative suffused with idealism for the promise of colonization, and with glowing plaudits for the Barbadian planters' impulses toward building social virtue and political harmony. Conflicted by issues of its own identity and contaminated by association, the project is efficiently co-opted by colonization's detractors. Cheyfitz identifies the origin of this anxiety as cognate with colonial culture, positioning it in a specific historical relationship: 'with the intensification of the transition to capitalism as a mode of production, [when] status as a function of wealth rather than family made the class structure practically and potentially volatile.'²⁷

As an economic refugee, an emigrant fallen on hard times, Ligon knew personally the forces that occasioned that destabilization. As a Royalist exile in Barbados, he would become the enthusiastic historian of an emergent polity where the partisan labels of 'Roundhead' and 'Cavalier' would be studiously avoided, where the old factional occasions would be ritualized and domesticated within a new Creole consensus:

Loving, friendly and hospitable one to another; and though they are of several Perswasions, yet, their discretions ordered everything so well, as some of them of the better sort, made a Law amongst themselves, that whosoever nam'd the word *Roundhead* or *Cavalier*, should give to all those that heard him, a Shot and a Turkey, to be eaten at his house that made the forfeiture; which sometimes was done purposely, that they might enjoy the company of one another; and somtimes this shot and this Turkey would draw a dozen dishes more, if company were accordingly. So frank, so loving, and so good natur'd were these Gentlemen one to another; and to express their affections yet higher, they had particular names one to another, as, Neighbour, Friend, Brother, Sister . . . (57)

Still, as we have seen in the exposition of historical contexts, the seeds of diffraction and dissensus were present from quite early in the establishment of the young colony, though Ligon's publicist apologetics tend to diminish their significance. Once again, Tryon provides us with the best cautionary counterpoint. His formulation of the problems systemic in slavocratic economy and his proposals for reforming it were at once mindful of the slavocrats' vested interests and cognizant of the slaves' well-being. He does not call for the abandonment of the plantations, only for the removal of women and children from sugar cane field labour: 'I must tell you that nothing hath more hurt and injured the Plantations, than the hard

labour and unkind usage towards your Black women, for the whole preservation of mankind as to Encrease, Health and Strength, resides in the prudent conduct of women.’ Remarkable for its appearance so early (1701) in the development of plantation societies (just a brief four decades after the commencement of sugar production in Barbados), such reformist ideology imagined a veritable alternative social system, thus disrupting the unanimity of colonialist apologetics. Developing an argument based on moral and religious objections and informed by a distinctive critique of retributive justice, Tryon pointed to the signs of economic decline already apparent in the plantations: ‘for the groaning of him that suffereth Pain is the beginning of trouble and misery for him that caused it; and it is not to be doubted, but under this black Character of Oppression and Violence, the Sugar Plantations do now lye under; is not this manifest by many, and some of the chiefeft note?’²⁸ Tryon drew an ominous picture of that ‘black character of oppression and violence’ to caution his audience against the inevitable influence of unreformed plantation culture on the mores of English youth and, hence, on the quality of England’s future leadership both in politics and culture.

The ‘sweete negotiation’ of Ligon’s *History* publicizes an optimistic frontier myth, and within that myth furnishes a discursive space for the Creole desire of cultural legitimacy. However, Tryon’s reformist vision stands as a sharp reminder of the internal conflictedness that lay at the root of both the creolizing impulse and the formal *negotium* which framed and mediated it. Tryon’s contrarian polemic dialogically disrupts Ligon’s idealism, accommodating the discursive space to further literary invention and ideological formations. The legacy for a revisionist Creole myth in the British sugar colonies is therefore passed directly to Grainger. His negotiations for building culture from georgic appropriations and his mythic creation of the idealized Junio and Theana imagine a new Creole order hardly plausible in Ligon’s historical scheme.²⁹ The *History*’s impulse to know the land, appropriate its contents, and envision the profit-motivated exchange of peoples for productive functions upon it, is a desire to comprehend all negotiations, but that impulse is itself comprehended and subsumed beneath the very constructed nature of all this negotiating.