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Introduction

In search of colonial identity in the Caribbean

The identity of any human can be specified by using, singly or in combination, many different universal criteria, e.g. sex, age, religion. However, in the modern, political world human beings are automatically identified with a country, and national identity is generally established by place of birth or place of residence. Very strongly tied to the feature *place* has been the feature *race*, so much so that race was once, without reflection, subsumed under place, as for example ‘white’ under European and ‘black’ under African. In fact, the traditional construction of ethnic identity (European, Chinese, Indian, African) is inalienably tied to a historicity of race that evolved in the Old World. Another major feature of identity is language. In a great many cases across the world, and especially in Europe, the name of the language (e.g. *le français*), the national designation (e.g. *les français*) and the name of the country (*la France*) are virtually the same, which suggests that place, people and language are closely allied in the formulation of national identity.

Political identity and the notion of ‘home’ overlap, but ‘home’ embodies a psychological factor of attachment, which probably issues from the basic animal instinct of territoriality, but is more an emotional bond created through experience of a place. Because the human being does not necessarily remain in one place throughout a lifetime, ‘home’ is variable and may be place of birth, place of residence or may be defined by the popular notion ‘where the heart is’. The factor of place, as it relates to ‘home’, may also be defined by using the term ‘habitat’, which speaks to a compatibility of human being and place as well as a formative influence of place on human being and the reverse. Race, for example, is perceived by many to be a factor of habitat, though there is no absolute proof that this is so. Even more complicating is the fact that race itself is a construct made up of several components, which also vary depending on genetic combination.

Language is in part a universal human factor and in part a factor of place: human language manifests itself primarily in speech as distinct languages, each of which is geographically determined. As a factor of place, language can sharply distinguish between insider and outsider through difference in accent, idiom, structure and word. Language

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therefore establishes bonds between all communities of human beings but at the same time sets up barriers between communities. Human beings, however, are not restricted to use of a single language and can cross barriers.

Cultural identity, then, as opposed to political identity and involving the features, place, race and language, results from a coalescence over time of highly variable factors. Moreover, the matter of coalescence over time and continuity is not easily resolved.

In the Caribbean throughout the colonial period, the three features – place, race and language – were quite separable elements subject to considerable variation. Neither ‘Caribbean’, ‘Antillean’, ‘American’ nor ‘West Indian’ was used as the name of a language in the way that French, English and other European national designations are. Place names in the New World could not be transferred to people or language because the ‘outsiders’ had only recently arrived, and for them there was no historical link between person and place. Moreover, whether Caribbean nations have identities that are typologically different from those of European nations is not just a matter of how they emerged, but also a matter of who authored the historical record in each case. For the Caribbean islands, there is no Homeric type of record in verse purporting to capture the people’s accumulated oral account of themselves. Neither is there any record equivalent to that of Garcilaso de la Vega, the Inca, giving an epic account from a personal point of view of the history of his own people. The available record of the evolution of colonial identity in the Caribbean is a written one, which is principally a third-party, European record. Even then, it is not a full and sufficient record, for societies in the Caribbean started off as economic ventures, which meant that social and cultural information in the records was incidental to economic information. Furthermore, when Europeans began to write about the New World, they already had an exotic vision of people, places, things and events elsewhere that had been formed by Greek mythology and beliefs about ‘the Indies’. It was a vision that was modified but never really disappeared from the imagination of Europeans, especially in the case of the islands. The economic view and the exotic view of the islands complemented each other throughout the colonial period, thereby maintaining an external viewpoint as the well-spring of their identity.

Colonial societies in the Caribbean were artificial, in the sense that they were imposed on the land and controlled from outside. In addition, the islands themselves seemed to have encouraged movement, nomadic and migratory, even before the advent of Columbus. Thereafter, though rigid systems remained in place, the rate of population

replacement was consistently high, especially where sugar and slavery thrived. In spite of the fact that names were given to every island, there was no early consciousness of them being new and separate ‘nations’ or of their inhabitants having new and separate identities. In terms of population genetics, it must have taken some time for the stage of genetic equilibrium to be reached when each island could be said to have a homogeneous population. Moreover, even if the people had had some consciousness of a new identity, there was no easily available way for them to record this consciousness.

In time, however, societies in the Caribbean evolved into familiar entities, each with its own sense of identity, each with its own peculiar population, but all using the word *creole* in some way to identify themselves or elements within their societies. Terms such as ‘mixed’, ‘hybrid’, ‘mutated’, ‘syncretic’, ‘blends’, ‘remodelling’, ‘corruptions’, ‘borrowings’, ‘imitations’, ‘fragmented’ and ‘plural’ have been applied to different Caribbean societies or features in them. They all in some way relate to theories on identity and theories of emergence of new identities, which provide a framework within which the development of colonial identity in the Caribbean can be examined.

Identification of identity

Identity and name

The notion of ‘identity’ in human society is based on two fundamental factors – the perception of sameness/difference and the instinctiveness of man to be a social being. The perception of sameness logically implies the perception of difference, which in turn implies that those who are perceived as different are treated differently. In fulfilling the need to associate with others, humans, probably through the inevitable reality of birth and upbringing as well as through practical experience, come to associate with those who have a high measure of sameness and come to be separated from others who are different. Consequently, social organisation leads to conflict, which in itself causes sameness and difference to become even more important.

Sameness in a population has been regarded as a fact in population genetics and expressed in the concept of ‘genetic equilibrium’. Savage explains thus:

Each population is essentially a unit with a common body of genetic material ... the hereditary conservation of DNA and genes is a populational characteristic, and ... if all other factors remain constant the

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frequency of particular genes and genotypes will be constant in a population generation after generation. (1969: 39)

Wells, in his investigation of the history and development of human beings, seems to lend some support to this when he remarks:

We have used the Y-chromosome for most of our studies of human migration. This is because the Y shows greater differences in frequency between populations than most other genetic markers. (2002: 175)

However, Wells, in an interesting (Y-chromosome) genetic analysis (for a television audience) he did on four people living in London, England, showed that three (Irish/Scottish, Japanese, Pakistani) of the four men fitted the pattern of their fellow countrymen, but the fourth man, an 'Afro-Caribbean', 'turned out to have an M173 Y-chromosome, the canonical European lineage' (2002: 184), even though 'The other, non-Y markers we tested revealed him to be otherwise genetically African' (2002: 184–5). Wells goes on to explain:

The reason our Afro-Caribbean man had a European Y-chromosome was that ... one of his male ancestors must have had a European father ... it is likely that this occurred ... during the era of slavery. (2002: 185)

What is remarkable about Wells's analysis and conclusion is that even though 'science' showed the man to be genetically complex (which is not earth shattering in itself), the man is classified as *Afro-Caribbean* and *otherwise genetically African*, no doubt because of his colour and physiological features. This shows the importance of physical appearance as a measure of sameness in classification, even among scientists.

The constant association with and experience of sameness leads to a recognition of one's own features as normal and those of others as abnormal/strange/foreign. The best example of the recognition and identification of difference is with language. All human beings recognise speakers from outside their community by their speech, and all those who are different are said, in the case of English speakers, to have an 'accent', with the implication that the speaker himself/herself does not have one. Of course, all speakers have an 'accent' when judged from the standpoint of persons outside their community. Besides language, most other characteristics that are 'foreign/strange' usually have a negative valuation given to them as a result of normal, human bias. While intellectually the bias in valuation can be understood by human beings, it does not prevent people from automatically regarding their own as superior. To some extent this reaction may be a creature of the innate emotions of human beings. At the same time, when one group is seen to be or made to look clearly superior in some respect, the instinct for self-

preservation causes the ‘inferior’ group to concede superiority. This is typical in situations where one group dominates another.

Sameness among human beings is commonly judged under certain basic categories – how people look, how they sound, where they were born and bred and how they behave. The main features that dominate in the way people look are colour and race. How a person sounds is in essence what language or variety of language they speak; this immediately links them to a community and separates them from others. Most people in the world today have a national label assigned to them according to where they are born, e.g. Japanese, Italian, Brazilian, Kenyan, and every human being in the modern world must be a citizen of some place. Place of birth and residence of course govern other areas such as movement, dress, work routines and food. Behaviour is the biggest category in judgements of identity, one that covers a wide array, including supernatural practices, entertainment, sports and games, and educational practices. While behaviour may in some objective way be the best criterion for judging sameness, it is the senses of sight (colour/race) and sound (language) that provide the initial and usually most deep-seated conclusions about sameness and difference in identity.

The giving of a specific name to a group is preceded by the perception or assumption of sameness across a number of individuals and the perception or assumption of difference between them and others. Naming of a group, however, can be done by the group itself or by others, which means that a name may be a reflection of a shared experience of sameness across individuals, or, on the other hand, it may be a projection of beliefs, values and desires on to people without them having any prior consciousness of identity. Whether the one name prevails over the other is a matter of who controls the dissemination of information. Differences in names may also be resolved when ‘foreigners’ become more familiar with ‘natives’. The naming of identities may therefore be an evolving process when it is foreigners who are doing the naming, since initial crude generalisations and mistakes disappear as foreigners move beyond initially striking ‘primary’ features, and come to identify and distinguish ‘secondary’ or cultural features. Such knowledge is gained through direct contact with natives through some kind of language adjustment for purposes of communication.

Naming nations and civilisations

Nation in its etymological sense highlights place of birth as the most important factor in ‘national’ identity, and the concept ‘native’ links a person to a place. The concept of ‘nation’ flourished among sedentary

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peoples who only left home to migrate or to go to war, when they were adult. It therefore also embraces the notion of 'home', which apparently does not have the same degree of importance in the case of most nomadic people. Yet, 'sedentary' and 'nomadic' are relative and not absolute in their contrast since migration is an integral part of human development and history.

Nationality, or the notion of belonging to a specific political entity or state, is a more modern concept, which can be regarded as the least absolute factor of 'nation' and thus may be deemed 'tertiary' in a hierarchy of criteria. In fact, the nation state may be viewed as an economic necessity and is often made up of 'nations' in a more fundamental sense. The 'primary' criteria used in naming peoples and civilisations have been visible (racial) differences between human beings – similarities in colour of skin, hair and eyes, in height and physique. Cultural features, including language, can be termed 'secondary', that is not as absolute as physical features that are beyond the control of the individual and cannot in themselves be tempered by will, personality or psychology.

That race is a primary criterion for establishing identity is seen in the fact that it moves beyond 'nation' to establish 'civilisations'. For instance, Elliott justifies the concept 'Europe/ European' thus:

First, we mean that Europe is a distinctive historical entity, in the sense that, although it is a composite of peoples of very different origin, it has developed a civilization which can be clearly differentiated from the civilizations, say, of China or Islam. Secondly, its component parts, although differing widely in character, have enough shared experiences and features in common for the elements of unity to outweigh the elements of diversity. (1998: 20)

What he does not point out, however, is that the starting point for the classification is race, and in fact he could easily have said that Europeans are white, as opposed to Chinese, who are not, with Islam being essentially associated in the minds of people with those who look like the Prophet Mohammed.

The primacy of race in establishing national identity can also be expressed in a negative way, as seen in the comment of Davy:

This admixture of races, this state of society, moreover, has no wise been favorable to the formation of a representative form of government, or of any kind of self government or independent local rule; – the absence of which in turn has tended to cramp the faculties and feelings and to check patriotism and public spirit. ([1854] 1971: 306–7)

The obvious implication here is that mixture or co-existence of races is inimical to the notion of identity in a nation.

A variation of the same idea of genetic relatedness is the notion of 'family' as the basis for the 'nation'. This approach is adopted by the missionary pastor, M. B. Bird: 'a nation is whatever its families are; the domestic circle well formed, so also will be the nation, hence it will naturally follow, that untrained families will form an untrained nation' (1869: 317). In this argument, grouping by genetic sameness/blood relationships at the first level or base (i.e. the nuclear or extended family) is seen as indispensable for meaningful and successful groupings at higher levels. The 'nation' is seen as a collection of families, and it is presumably the interweaving of families by 'marriage' that would lead to cooperation and not conflict. This structuralist approach therefore preserves genetic relatedness, even if not racial identity, as the basis for the 'nation'.

Another characteristic of this view of the family-based nation is that it accords the mother a central position:

The mothers of a nation give it form
 And shape. (Bird 1869: 349)

This is a traditional Christian position, which sees the role of the mother as domestic and home-based: 'a large family, fully and minutely cared for, by an entire and assiduous attention to all the endless wants of domestic life, would quite absorb every moment of a mother's care' (Bird 1869: 349). In this formulation all females are regarded as potential mothers. It fits into the Christian view of marriage as the base for the family and fidelity as the basis for a good marriage. It seems at first to be a position in which happiness is at the core, but this is a view that sees social responsibility (what Bird called *training*) as more important than individual choice. Marriage was often used strategically for political purposes to strengthen nations. The Christian nation was essentially European in its conception and was one that in practice, because choice was controlled by strict social and racial factors, created strength but also allowed for distinctions between families, classes and races.

Wells in his discussion of 'nation' and 'nationality' is extremely cynical about what he interprets to be deliberate nineteenth-century attempts to create 'nations' out of disparate groups. He argues that what determines the coming into being of the modern nation state is a political intent to dominate others:

We may suggest that a nation is in effect any assembly, mixture, or confusion of people which is either afflicted by or wishes to be afflicted by a foreign office of its own, in order that it should behave collectively as if

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its needs, desires, and vanities were beyond comparison more important than the general welfare of humanity. ([1920] 1951: 982)

Implicit in Wells' hostility to the formation of modern nations is the idea that they are violating some natural principle of grouping according to sameness in race and other clearly observable human features. He makes this point even more clearly when he says:

Oriental peoples, who had never heard of nationality before, took to it as they took to the cigarettes and bowler hats of the West. India, a galaxy of contrasted races, religions and cultures, Dravidian, Mongolian, and Aryan, became a 'nation'. (1951: 983)

Wells' point is that such political creations are not spontaneous as they are not based on racial and cultural identities among the people who are so brought together. Wells sees a difference between 'natural' nations and 'artificial' nations, and his obvious hostility to 'artificial' nations means that he believes that groupings should be natural.

Stalin, writing around the same time as Wells, rejected a common race as an essential feature of a nation and was very clear in what he thought to be the essential features:

A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture. ([1935] 2003: 8)

Probably in reaction to Stalin's use of *language* as one of the primary features of a nation, Hobsbawm argues:

National languages are therefore almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. (1990: 54)

Recognising the difficulty of defining a nation, Hobsbawm assumes the position that it is more profitable to begin with 'nationalism' than with 'nation' because 'Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round' (1990: 10).

Smith, in the following definition, sets out his view of the fundamental features of national identity:

A nation can therefore be defined as a **named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.** (1991: 14)

Smith, while identifying the formative core of nations as *ethnie*, goes on to differentiate between a nation and an *ethnie* or ethnic community by saying that the latter has the following six main attributes:

- 1 A collective proper name
- 2 A myth of common ancestry
- 3 Shared historical memories
- 4 One or more differentiating elements of common culture
- 5 An association with a specific 'homeland'
- 6 A sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. (1991: 21)

In arguing for the critical importance of *ethnie*, Smith says:

so *ethnie*, once formed, tend to be exceptionally durable under 'normal' vicissitudes and to persist over many generations, even centuries, forming 'moulds' within which all kinds of social and cultural processes can unfold. (1986: 16)

In his earlier and underlying thesis, Smith argued that:

the 'core' of ethnicity, as it has been transmitted in the historical record and as it shapes individual experience resides in this quartet of 'myths, memories, values and symbols' and in the characteristic forms or styles and genres of certain historical configurations of populations. (1986: 15)

The fact is, however, that a virtually inescapable element in the formation of *ethnie* is race, even though *ethnie* is seen as extending beyond race.

In the structural hierarchy – nation > *ethnie* > myths – which is implicit in Smith's thesis, the time factor is critical not only because of the durability of myths but also in the formation of these common myths. Smith speaks of the durability of *ethnie* under '*normal*' *vicissitudes*, but in the case of development of identity in the Caribbean, it would be difficult to sustain an argument that normalcy prevailed fundamentally. So, unless one is saying that identity in the Caribbean is only marginal, myths cannot be the starting point for a discussion of the development of identity there.

In a later work, Smith identified the key institutional and cultural dimensions of nations and nationalism, which should form the basis for discussion of identity, as 'the state; territory; language; religion; history; rites and ceremonies' (1998: 226–7). The present work, recognising the pitfalls in and disagreements about the starting points for discussion of the highly variable concept of 'identity', nevertheless uses the features 'place/ecology' (territory), 'language' and ethnicity more as 'race' than

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as religion, rites and ceremonies. While one may disagree about the relative importance of these features historically or synchronically in a matrix of features, there is hardly any work that has not found it necessary to discuss them.

Theories about the emergence of new identities

Human societies are not static – not only are identities constantly being modified but new ones also come into being. The two fundamental processes through which new identities come into being are genetic change and ecological change. This is so because one of the most common human realities is that social and economic pressures in a population often result in migration, which in turn leads to contact across ethnic groups. In such cases there is both change of environment and infusion of new genetic material into a population. Since genetic and ecological factors can be modified and combined in several ways and are weighed against each other, the result is that a variety of theories have been put forward to explain the coming into being of new identities. Such theories also concern themselves with the psychological effects of contact, in terms of tendencies towards hostility or refusal to mix as opposed to tendencies towards accommodation.

Transmission theory

Transmission theory, which operates within the framework of creation or procreation, is substantially genetic in nature. Transmission theory is essentially a matter of creating another identity in one's own image either by transfer of characteristics, by edict or by model. This is a theory that has a long history, seeing that it is part of a theological explanation of man in which man is created in the image of God. In this explanation what is created is not identical to the parent and, in religious terms, is seen as flawed to some extent or at least is not as perfect as the original. One of the entrenched views of New World, for example, is that Europeans created 'America':

It was the Europeans, too, as Edmundo O'Gorman took pleasure in reminding us many years ago, who 'invented' America. They invented it as a name, they invented it as a concept, and finally they invented it as a historical entity. (Elliott 1998: 20–1)

Elliott expands on this idea by saying:

These European settlers were creating America, an America which can be regarded historically as an extension of Europe, in a way that Asia and