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THE PRODUCTION OF SPATIAL CONFIGURATIONS: A CARIBBEAN CASE

Atlas critique d'Haïti. GEORGES ANGLADE. Montreal: Etudes et Recherches Critiques d'Espace, Université du Québec à Montréal, and Centre de Recherches Caraïbes, Université de Montréal, 1982. 80 pp. 18 maps. (Paper Canadian \$24.75)

Espace et liberté en Haïti. GEORGES ANGLADE. Montreal: Etudes et Recherches Critiques d'Espace, Université du Québec à Montréal, and Centre de Recherches Caraïbes, Université de Montréal, 1982. 143 pp. (Paper Canadian \$12.50)

Hispaniola. G. ANGLADE, R. E. YUNÉN, & D. AUDETTE. Montreal and Santiago de los Caballeros: Etudes et Recherches Critiques d'Espace, Université du Québec à Montréal, and Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1982. 1 × 1.4 m. (Canadian \$7.50)

Le commerce du café en Haïti: habitants, spéculateurs et exportateurs. CHRISTIAN A. GIRAULT. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Mémoire du Centre de Géographie Tropicale, Bordeaux, 1982. 293 pp. (Paper n.p.)

Soon after Columbus' second voyage verified the viability of trans-Atlantic excursions, Europe created the Caribbean. To be sure, there had previously been an archipelago that spanned the ocean for more than 2,000 miles at the junction of two hemispheres. There had surely been a native consciousness of that arc and of the spatial configurations that Arawak and Carib cultures

had fashioned upon it. But the genocide occurred swiftly, and the Caribbean — as we know it — stands out, even in today's world, as a prime example of a fabricated area, the complex product of a long and continuous exercise in colonialism and neo-colonialism, and of the responses that this enterprise provoked among voluntary and coerced migrants from three continents. Many now-common features of the "natural" environment also came from all parts of the Old World: sugar cane and coffee, of course, but also coconuts, okra, rice, mangoes and breadfruit (Mintz 1983). The landscape itself carries the mark of the plantation system and bears witness to the rise and growth of the peasantries. One need only recall that, as early as the 1680s in Barbados and a decade later in Jamaica, planters thought themselves forced to sell lands that had become "worn out" for their practical purposes (Dunn 1972). In 1782, an independent observer noted that coffee production in the highlands overtopping the cane fields of Saint-Domingue had "totally changed the climate of the colony" (Girod de Chantrons 1981 [1785]).² But perhaps the strongest evidence of the Caribbean's existence as a socially produced environment comes from the unavoidable inclusion of large chunks of the continental land mass (Belize, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana) within its historically defined boundaries. Hence it is puzzling that students of the Caribbean have yet to show sustained interest in the recent trends in geographical (and other related) studies that emphasize the production of spatial configurations.

The break between Caribbean studies and geography can be traced as far back as those long decades of incubation and contest of the first half of the 19th century during which the discipline prepared its academic institutionalization.³ Previously, geography branched out of the philosophy of nature, without specialized practitioners; and the scholars who visited the Caribbean in the late 17th century and throughout the 18th conformed to, and at times prefigured, the major European trends in geographical thought.⁴ Diderot saw fit to include in the *Encyclopédie* plates probably copied from Labat and Du Tertre; and Moreau's masterful *Description de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1958 [1797-98]) anticipated by decades the establishment of geography as both a natural and a social science.

But geography's conquests were themselves sequential, and as the discipline gradually solidified in the 19th century, many practitioners strove toward legitimacy among the natural sciences at just about the time that all sorts of concerns attracted students of the Caribbean toward the social, the economic, and indeed, the immediately political. The Haitian Revolution, the abolition of the slave trade, Emancipation, the decline of cane sugar on the world market, and the massive and forceful migration of Asian laborers had pushed "Science", as the world knew it, into the hinterland of intellectual discourse on the Caribbean. Moreover, as physical geography favored, among colonial territories, the Old World's largest reservoirs of natural resources for the benefit of current conquerors and eventual investors, theory and practice in human geography favored metropolitan studies in regionalism attuned to the dominant nationalist debates of Europe. The Caribbean ill-fitted those modes, while those who wrote about it largely ignored geography. After Breen's *St. Lucia* (1844) and Schomburgk's *History of Barbados* (1848), writings with obvious geographical concerns stood as left-overs of a long gone era.⁵ In fact, as the century neared its end, the most active branch of Caribbean geography may well have been the cartography produced in the United States for strategic purposes, a feat by no means unique in the history of the discipline (Lacoste 1982).

The larger corpus that flowed from Europe in the 20th century did not necessarily bridge the gap between Caribbean studies and the interests of geography as a discipline. At a time when larger numbers of geographers in the West started to see themselves as social scientists, the renewal in Caribbean studies was led by historians such as C. L. R. James and E. Williams, and anthropologists such as Melville J. Herskovits. Titles implying geographical interests of a kind sprung from England and the Netherlands, but up to at least the early 1970s, they rarely went beyond superficial descriptions of "the land and the people." Entries of uneven importance came rather from the Geographical Institute of McGill University in Montreal, the Department of Geography of the University of California at Berkeley (then dominated by the long and impressive presence of Carl O. Sauer), and the Centre d'Etudes de Géographie Tropicale of Bordeaux. French geo-

graphers Lasserre and Moral produced the two most detailed monographs of the time, with the published versions of their doctoral theses on Guadeloupe and Haiti (Lasserre 1961, Moral 1961).⁶ But on the archipelagic scale, Helmut Blume's comprehensive study remains the most incisive treatment of the Antilles' "cultural landscapes" (Blume 1974 [1968]).

Yet it was left to other social scientists, anthropologists (e.g. Steward *et. al.* 1956; Mintz 1959; Horowitz 1960), or economists (Demas 1965) to broach in unequal and unrelated terms the question of national space organization. Though the late 1960s and early 1970s saw an upsurge of interest in geography in the Caribbean itself — with specialized centers of teaching and research opening in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica — the results remain modest or, especially in the Cuban case, not readily available outside national borders. Meanwhile, the most widely diffused essays published in Europe or the United States (e.g. Clarke 1975; Cross 1979) rarely outreach the urban setting.⁷

The Caribbean case is by no means unique, and many students of "developing" societies have kept an undue distance from the geographical revival of the mid-1960s (Lacoste 1965; Soja 1968; Johnson 1970) which was to lead — after critical evaluation — to specific strategies in the analysis of "spatial inequalities" within the so-called "Third World" (De Souza & Porter 1974; Slater 1976, 1978; Smith 1979). Latin America, for instance, provided a fertile milieu for a "dependency theory" couched in terms of a spatial metaphor; yet the sub-continent as a whole — where indigenous geographical research remains largely confined to the most industrialized nations (Reboratti 1982) — does not seem to have benefited from the new trends any more than the Caribbean (Gilbert 1981). Thus the point is not so much the uniqueness of the Caribbean scholarship, but rather that, given the extent of the successive reorganizations that the Caribbean has gone through at the local, national and archipelagic levels, the general indifference to spatial aspects of social structures is perhaps more puzzling there. One wonders if the small size of the islands has not contributed — quite ironically, then — to conceal from geographers and non-geographers alike the range and significance of those overlapping spatial arrangements. One wonders, indeed, if

researchers have not unwillingly reduced the dimensions and complexity of the networks involved to the actual physical space into which they fitted.⁸

It is in that context that the recent work of geographers Georges Anglade and Christian Girault bear their full significance. In an Antillean continuum that may find Dominica at the other end, Haiti is the territory where physical degradation has reached such extreme proportions that the urgency of remediation compels attention to the social forces behind spatial distribution. Significantly, both authors not only note Haiti's material depletion, but convey the image of an organic or systemic collapse, and their descriptions often stand astride past and present.

Girault's *Le commerce du café en Haïti* is the first comprehensive study in any language of the marketing of a crop that has been, for nearly two centuries, Haiti's most important commodity.⁹ Coffee production and/or commercialization involves at least one out of every five Haitians. Coffee export taxes remain the most important source of government revenues. As a major agricultural commodity, bound, on the one hand, by the immobility of the land on which it is produced, but driven, on the other, by necessities of a market that inherently implies physical movement, coffee lends itself particularly well to a spatial analysis. Indeed, Girault sees his marketing as a "total geographical phenomenon" that offers to the researcher a cross-section of the nation through which he can study social articulations. Says Girault: "in the spatial organization of underdeveloped countries, there exist points of the territory that seem to be privileged relays of the *dependency chain*, and the identification of those points, and of the social and economic mediations they translate, can turn into interesting and fruitful investigative trails" (p. 32).

The idea is not entirely new, but Girault distances himself from the pioneering work of Mintz (1959; 1960a; 1960b) which, he believes, overemphasizes the marketing of locally-consumed commodities. To be sure, Mintz's work has led to inferences about perfect competition in all aspects of the Haitian economy.¹⁰ But Mintz himself, citing the very example of coffee, did stress "the neat separation of the internal market system from the channels by which agricultural commodities reach the export house" (1971: 262; 1959).

Girault's tracking of the crop along those channels, from the peasant gardens to the export houses, richly documents mechanisms of exploitation that had been only sketched in previous writings (e.g. Luc 1976). Though the book barely succeeds in fleshing out the Haitian peasants, it offers the best treatment in print of the oligopsonistic control exerted by coffee exporters. Likewise, it penetrates more deeply than ever before the world of the *spéculateurs en denrées*, those licensed middlemen whose subordination to the exporters on the one hand, yet tight control over the peasantry on the other, link the city docks to the most remote hinterlands.

The rich analysis of the interchange between *spéculateurs* and peasants brings out the most important discovery of Girault's journey: the Haitian *bourgs* (rural towns most often defined by law as "centers of *spéculation*") emerge as nodal points of the Haitian social, political and economic structure. Of course, the word *bourg* (and especially its Creole equivalent, *buk*) has long been used in Haiti; but the notion received little attention in the literature (even though Moral [1961: 251–258] was intrigued enough to inventory the places so labeled). But Girault's search for spatial specificity emphasizes morphology over size and, building on the local notion, conceptualizes the *bourg* as a territory of exchange, the internal relay point between the actual rural zones and the coastal towns, at which the peasant loses physical and social control over his production.¹¹ Marked by this spatial and functional specificity, the *bourg* also maintains the political tendencies distinctive of intermediate strata (*spéculateurs* are most often rich peasants), a point no doubt neglected in analyses of contemporary Haiti.

This "discovery" leads Girault to a tripartite division of Haitian spatial structure (rural zones, *bourgs*, coastal towns) that strongly qualifies the rural-urban continuum, but also nuances Anglade's presentation. Anglade identifies three "dominant" spatial structures in Haitian history. Within the "partitioned" structure of colonial times (1664–1803), atomized plantations directly reached out to the metropolis. The "regionalized" structure of the 19th century (1804–1918) regrouped different sub-areas into "financial districts" under the tutelage of the eleven

export-oriented coastal towns. Today's "centralized" structure reflects the overwhelming centripetal power of the capital city, Port-au-Prince (*Espace et liberté*, pp. 86–92).

That historically oriented geography is certainly stimulating, and relevant, I believe, to a few Caribbean cases. But because such analysis could easily fossilize into a "model", one needs to rectify some of its current excesses. Underlying Anglade's "structures" are particular organizations of "geographical forms" which themselves express the economic control and political management of the society. The ongoing construction of a national market and the equally continuous reproduction of the mechanisms of state control are the national processes behind those "forms." The dangers of structuralism inherent in that position are obvious (Thompson 1978: 83), and indeed, Anglade — not inevitably, I believe — builds a spatial dynamics that cannot outgrow its structures. Part of the problem, of course, is empirical. The extreme partition of the colonial structure suggested by the text and its graphic representation (*Espace et liberté*, pp. 87–88) neglects the breach opened in the plantation system by the slaves' control of their provision grounds and their subsequent participation in local markets (Lepkowski 1968–69; Mintz 1979). Likewise, metropolitan merchant houses often developed spatial specialization in the colony (Thésée 1972), while the dynamics of coffee production generated space-specific conflicts (Trouillot 1981; 1982).

But a deeper search in *Espace et liberté en Haïti*, the collection of essays and interviews that serves as the theoretical and political arm of Anglade's triptych, fails to reveal the analytical tools necessary to follow the passage from one structure to another. Indeed, in his final text which accompanies the maps of the *Atlas critique d'Haïti*, Anglade is forced to retreat to the unhelpful suggestion that the "regionalized" structure might be thought of as the transition from partition to centralization (p. 23). Those structuralist impediments, in turn, facilitate careless jumps into "space fetishism", of the kind that has marred "spatial analyses" (Smith 1981; Harvey 1982). Too often, indeed, the "Motor of space" (*Atlas*, p. 49) is made to determine social relations (pp. 19, 23, 40).

But such impediments do not invalidate Anglade's most telling

achievement: the 18 maps of the *Atlas* and the mural map of *Hispaniola*. First, most of the maps and inserts visually organize a mass of information hitherto neglected or unprocessed — for example, the map of Saint-Domingue, which corroborates the spatial preeminence of coffee, a thesis recently advanced by this writer (Trouillot 1982). Second, because of the efficiency of that organization, and because of the very nature of the medium, the author's inability to transcend the structures matters less than it does in the written text.¹²

But the best "reading" may be that which the *Atlas* provides through six maps that counterpoise the networks of economic and political power (maps 9, 13, 14) and the "nuclei of [popular] resistance," notably the rural agglomerations (*les bourgs-jardins*, map 7) and the markets (map 8). Some of those findings are encapsulated in the map of the "centralized space" (map 3) and the mural map of *Hispaniola* (produced jointly with R. E. Yunén and D. Audette). Besides being a nice example of cross-national Caribbean collaboration, *Hispaniola* expands "the space of conceptualization" (Lacoste) not only by including the whole island, but also with insets of Santo Domingo, Santiago, Port-au-Prince, the Haitian Diaspora and the Caribbean Context. Anglade also tests different scales with three maps of the Northwest province, and three maps that richly evidence the differential spatiality of the Port-au-Prince area (maps 4, 5, 6). On the large scale (1/8,400), downtown Port-au-Prince is a tightly structured commercial, political and cultural metropolis of a few square kilometers.¹³ As we perceive the extent of its immediate social impact, the city proper seems to encompass suburbs and ghettos of various densities: the scale is now 1/50,000. On a much smaller scale (1/285,000) we fully discover a metropolitan area, a "republic within", which extends for hundreds of kilometers to subordinate to its center the plains and hillsides that have become its granaries, the towns and villages that have been turned into its touristic appendages.

These are stimulating propositions for all Caribbeanists. We needed to be reminded that the units we so often take for granted are rarely given by Nature, and are too often products of imagination. Our cities not only expand beyond their administra-

tive boundaries, but draw within the metropolitan spheres rural areas far beyond the last shanty town. Likewise, while the plantation may serve as an analytical microcosm of slavery, and while parishes and districts open quite large windows on the post-slavery period, the spatial reorganization that followed the continental Pax Americana, the growth of the cities, and the consolidation of the nation-state may have impaired the appropriateness of small geo-social units jealously guarded by anthropologists in the name of academic security, or by "development economists" in hope of a still uncertain future. The visual representation of the Haitian national territory as a country of "projects", cut up in unrelated morsels by international "aid" (*Atlas*, map 15), effectively questions the ultimate consequences of such arbitrary segmentations. And Girault's analysis of the *spéculateurs* reminds us that economic and political control often passes through the power of a class to effectively delineate a "territory".

Further understanding of the space-specific aspects of Caribbean social life may require explorations in three related directions. Solid empirical fieldwork of the kind produced by Girault will eventually verify the applicability of more general concepts drawn from Caribbean or other Third World cases. Second, for this accumulation to bear full relevance, the question of the spatial specificity of *the Caribbean itself* will need to be integrated in a vision of a world-economy typified by the mobility of commodities and capital and the relative immobility of labor. The third area of inquiry — analyses of the role of *individual territories* within the Caribbean, a pre-requisite to any "regional" project — necessitates that larger framework. For instance, the sequential rise and demise of light industries or tourism in different Caribbean territories — a pattern perhaps analogous to Eric Williams' image of a relay race in sugar history, each Caribbean territory, exhausted, passing the baton to its successor — verifies the need for a new awareness of differential spatialities. Obviously, Anglade's "centralization" is at work in any particular territory. But one cannot dismiss the spatial specificity of *the Caribbean*: its proximity to the United States, its opposition to "industrialized" territories of South East Asia, and the very fact that an archipelagic distribution may eventually facilitate "island hopping" by investors but

inherently limits the movement of labor. To be sure, all these factors — mentioned here only as examples — may well turn out to be irrelevant. But no one can rightly dismiss them until Caribbeanists, in general, pay more attention to the recent trends of a discipline which, though declining, may not yet have said its last word.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price for their comments on this paper.
2. All translations from French sources are my own.
3. My admittedly sketchy periodization of geography as a discipline draws from Clavel 1982, Lacoste 1982, Sack 1980, Granö 1981, and Capel 1981.
4. Among the numerous works dealing with the "natural history" of Caribbean colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, one notes Ligon's *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), Rochefort's *Histoire naturelle et morale des Antilles* (1658), Du Tertre's *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* (1667), Labat's *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amérique* (1722), Smith's *Natural History of Barbados* (1750), Brown's *Civil Natural History of Jamaica* (1756), Abbad y Lasierra's *Historia geographica, civil y natural de la Isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico* (1788). These works are treated in diverse degrees in the bibliographies of Goveia (1980 [1955]), Pressoir *et al.* (1953), Price (1976), and Williams (1970). For the later periods, in addition to the above, I have also relied on Aubourg 1976, Blume 1974, and Comitas 1977.
5. Both Martin (1851–57) and Lucas (1887–1920) did excellent geographical work on the Caribbean, but it occurred in the course of a general assessment of the British Empire.
6. Interestingly, the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (which published historiographies by both Goveia and Pressoir *et al.*) did not stimulate much of an increase in geographical studies of the Caribbean, although Sidney Mintz has pointed out to me the distinctiveness of Harris (1958). I also thank Mintz for making me aware of the work of Merrill (1965).
7. The Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer, in France, has recently published an impressive set of atlases of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana. Also, Longman Jamaica Ltd. has announced the forthcoming publication of a specialized journal, *Caribbean Geography*.
8. The relatively high numbers of titles suggesting geographical concerns in Price's survey of the literature on the Guiana Maroons (1976) may be due to that author's bibliographical skills (see also Price 1980). Nevertheless, the almost

obvious necessity on the part of planters and rulers to battle, on the coast, with an environment quite unfit to plantation agriculture, and to circumvent, in the interior, the maroons' and peasants' access to land, may have induced past and present writers to recognize more easily the spatial and environmental aspects of social life (see Rodney 1981 and Price 1983).

9. Since 1972, products of the light industries have replaced coffee at the top of Haitian export statistics. While the change is significant in light of the long preeminence of the crop (1801–1971), it must be noted that the new leading category in fact groups many more than one product.

10. See Lundahl 1979; but see also Trouillot 1980 for a critique.

11. Trying also to build from a native notion, Anglade calls the hinterland areas that enclose peasant house and gardens "*bourgs-jardins*", and he rightly challenges the alleged chaos of the spatial distribution (*Espace et liberté*, pp. 103–114; *Atlas* pp. 38–41). Unfortunately, the expression does not have the wide recognition of *buk* or *bourg* and may provoke confusion.

12. Though certainly a neophyte in matters of geography, I am not totally convinced that the map, as a medium, implies structural inertia. Explorations in the genre continue (Muehrcke 1978), and Anglade's work certainly suggests parallel reading of many maps. But even the tension produced by graphic distortion of familiar contours (as in Kidron and Segal 1981) does not seem to equate the *potential* dynamism of a written text. Thus the neatness of the presentation (and Anglade's maps *are* neat) may mask to author and public the pitfalls of structuralism.

13. In cartography, the *smaller* the scale, the *larger* the area the map represents.

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