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The fate of ethnography : native social science in the English-speaking Caribbean

Reviews the research tradition in the social sciences in the post-War Anglophone Caribbean.

Painting a general picture of the intellectual climate in the social sciences divisions of the UWI,

Carnegie concludes that most studies have dealt with economic and macro-sociological topics.

Moreover, there has been a consistent emphasis on the larger nations of the British Caribbean.

In: *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 66 (1992), no: 1/2, Leiden, 5-25

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THE FATE OF ETHNOGRAPHY: NATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

This essay is as much concerned with the history and sociology of ideas – the practice, in the English-speaking Caribbean, of social science itself – as it is with nationalism, and the stultifying effect which that construction can have on thought.¹

The twenty-first anniversary celebrations of the University of the West Indies' Faculty of Social Sciences in 1983 yielded some important reflections on the nature of social science practice in the region, and at the Mona campus of the university in particular. In that self-reflective, celebratory ritual, the review by Professor George Beckford of the somewhat acrimonious transition to a more Caribbean-centered economics, and the recounting by Professor Carl Stone of his own personal struggle, within the scholarly fraternity and in the wider polity, to have opinion polls become accepted, both stand out for their frankness in portraying some of the pain involved in building a local social science tradition (Beckford 1984, Stone 1984). Other prominent local social scientists also took part and helped shed light on aspects of that evolutionary process. Their contributions can be found in two special issues of the journal, *Social and Economic Studies*, published in 1984. This useful process of self-scrutiny gained momentum with the establishment of the Consortium Graduate School of Social Sciences in 1985. The recently published collection of papers, *Rethinking development*, demonstrates the profitable directions that this self-reflection has taken within the Consortium. It is in this spirit that I would like to start to review the use of ethnography in British Caribbean social science practice over the past forty years or so.

First, a few words of clarification about the title. The essay pretends nei-

ther to encompass all of the English-speaking Caribbean, nor all of social science production, nor yet all of the many ethnographic accounts about the region. Rather, by selecting one institutional center of social science scholarship in one corner of the region and surveying the dominant currents of writing that have come out of it over four decades – omissions and commissions – the essay attempts to show with what restrictive narrowness the boundaries of appropriate subject matter and methodology have been drawn. By working with a “Caribbean” narrowly conceived in one scholarly tradition, the essay points the way, implicitly, to more embracing conceptions and to more venturesome patterns of thought.

By ethnography, I intend to signal that method of discovery characterized by extended periods of fieldwork that call for a sharing of activities and ideas between social scientist and informants, as well as intimate first-hand experience of community life – in short, participant-observation. While ethnography has developed largely within the discipline of social anthropology, part of my aim is to suggest that its use, and the use of research based on it, need not be restricted to anthropologists. For purposes of this discussion, I take native Caribbean social science to be the pursuit of research on Caribbean societies, in a variety of scholarly disciplines, by people born and residing in the British Caribbean and working largely through the University of the West Indies. The University’s Faculty of Social Sciences, with its research arm, the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), and journal, *Social and Economic Studies*, are used as a convenient point of focus.

The Institute of Social and Economic Research, and the University of the West Indies itself, like so many others of the region’s public institutions, was formed and nurtured in a colonial matrix. This mutual interdependence of scholarship on the one hand, and colonial policy and administration on the other, grows out of a robust tradition, one that, paradoxically, became more firmly rooted in those more recently settled colonies – in India and Africa, for instance – than in older ones.² With detached, post-colonial style, Saberwal (1982:37) writes of anthropology:

It was as part of the ‘external encounter’ of the British, with people over whom they established dominion, that systematic social enquiry, as an overtone routine to the framing and conduct of social policy, made its debut in India.

While less routine in the case of colonial administration in the British Caribbean, the beginnings of official sponsorship of social scientific research there owes in part to changing views about the methods of colonial rule being formulated in other parts of the Empire. Research on “native” social life (now that word in its other guise) took on greater interest insofar as it

might assist in the conduct of indirect rule. But it also was put into service to help understand the underlying causes of social unrest in different parts of the Empire, and to help formulate policies to address them, particularly in the years leading up to and during the Second World War when Britain became rather more sensitive to its international image.

The establishment of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia in 1937, then in 1940, of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act that funded the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC), formalized government support for social science research in the colonies. These were the immediate precursors of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Mona, set up in 1948 at the same time that the University College itself was established. Indeed, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute became the model, in some sense, for several social science research institutes in different parts of the Empire; while funding from the CSSRC provided budgetary support for these satellite institutions. At the Rhodes-Livingstone, the research staff was largely comprised of social anthropologists, part of a tight network that was closely tied in with teaching and research programs in anthropology at leading English universities.³ Anthropologists also played a significant role in the Colonial Social Science Research Council in its early years.

Reflecting the deepening relationship between imperial policy and intellectual pursuit, the teaching of anthropology was initiated at several colonial universities. In India, for example, teaching in sociology and anthropology at universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Lucknow, started late in the first quarter of this century, while in the Sudan (a country that provided rich fodder for anthropologists from the early part of the century) university teaching in the subject started in 1958 (e.g. Saberwal 1982, Abdel Ghaffar 1982).

Aspiring native-born West Indian anthropologists – like their colleagues in medicine, law and other fields – had no option but to journey to Britain for training in the field. But at least three of them who did so, Fernando Henriques, who studied with Meyer Fortes, Edith Clarke, who attended Malinowski's famous seminar in the 1940s, and Michael G. Smith, who studied with Daryll Forde, were beginning to establish solid reputations for themselves even as the University College of the West Indies was in its fledgling stages.

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE ISER

The Institute of Social and Economic Research provided an academic cen-

ter for thinking and research in the social sciences of the British Caribbean in the 1950s. Its core research staff included both native-born and non-native scholars. Dudley Huggins, the institute's first Director, was Guyanese-born; other native Caribbean research fellows of the period included Michael Smith, Lloyd Brathwaite, Ray Chang, Gloria Cumper, Clive Thomas, George Roberts, George Eaton, and Lloyd Best. Their colleagues, most of whom came originally either from Britain or the United States, included: George Cumper, Nora Siffleet, W.F. Maunder, David Edwards, K.H. Straw, and, for shorter stints, such scholars as Talcott Parsons, Kenneth Boulding, Dudley Seers, Sidney Mintz, and George Eaton Simpson.

The group had a healthy complement of people whose main discipline of training was either economics or social anthropology; but it also included in fewer numbers demographers, statisticians, political scientists, and social welfare specialists.

From all accounts, discussion at the ISER was lively, collegial and constant. The mid-morning coffee-hour was established as an institutional fixture, and there were regular seminars at which members of staff and visitors presented and had opportunities to discuss each other's work. One anthropologist recalls with affection his usual break-of-dawn intellectual sparring sessions with an economist colleague before they each would settle in to their habitual early morning work routines.

Anthropology, but more importantly, work grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, informed and enlivened these discussions both in conversation and in print. By the early to mid-1950s there was a growing body of published work based on primary ethnographic research compelling that Caribbean socio-cultural systems be taken seriously rather than be dismissed, as had been the case before, for their seemingly disjointed and impoverished character. Earlier folklore studies and the pioneering work of Melville and Frances Herskovits were being copiously supplemented by the research of Julian Steward's students in Puerto Rico, Fernando Henriques, Edith Clarke, and George Simpson in Jamaica, Raymond T. Smith, and later Chandra Jayawardena in Guyana, and Michael Smith in Jamaica, Carriacou, and Grenada.⁴

Many of these young scholars were based at or passed through the ISER for varying periods of time during the 1950s. And there were several other anthropologists-in-training for whom the Institute provided a base during their fieldwork: these included Lambros Comitas, Yehudi Cohen, William Davenport, and Edward Seaga. The Department of Anthropology at Yale sent several young graduate students to Jamaica for their early fieldwork experience during these years and they too formed part of the ISER's outer circle.

As part of its bid for international recognition, the Institute had constituted a formidable multidisciplinary panel of fourteen prominent social scientists to serve on the editorial advisory board of its journal, *Social and Economic Studies*. While members of the advisory board apparently were more ornamental than functional, it is, nevertheless, significant to note that the panel included three internationally prominent anthropologists: Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, and Max Gluckman, himself a former Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

In relation to the wider social milieu, however, it is important to recognize that the newly formed University, and its Institute of Social and Economic Research, were inserted into an already existing intellectual community – albeit one with minimal institutional support structures. To simplify what is in fact a far more complex story, there had developed in the 1930s and 1940s a lively intellectual discourse on the arts and in the broad area of political economy. In Jamaica, much of the thinking about issues of social development coalesced around Jamaica Welfare, a non-governmental organization founded by Norman Manley in the late 1930s, and funded by an export cess on bananas provided by the United Fruit Company. The organization brought together several of the country's finest young minds to grapple on both the theoretical and practical levels with issues of community development. The intense ferment, and the reflection through trial and error, led to the implementation, in selected villages and towns across the island, of a development strategy based largely on consultation within the village community. The Jamaica Welfare representative was expected to act merely as an intermediary and facilitator of these discussions, and the community itself was expected to provide many of the resources to carry out the programs they had agreed to. During this same period, the political and labor unrest of the late 1930s had prodded the British government into providing far greater resources for both the investigation of the causes of social discontent, and for welfare policies to ameliorate them.

These twin processes of study and administrative response that were taking place in Jamaica Welfare and in government, provided a few salaried positions from which some members of the local intelligentsia could indulge their concerns with the poor and with issues of development. Edith Clarke, for example, was Administrative Secretary of the Board of Supervision, the department responsible for dispensing poor relief benefits in the colony, before she went on to study for the diploma in anthropology at the London School of Economics. And she returned to her administrative post thereafter, writing up her influential *My mother who fathered me* from this less than dazzling academic base.

So that while the ISER provided a center for discussions in the social

sciences, and drew in for its seminars from time to time people thinking about the same issues but operating from elsewhere – people such as Edith Clarke, the historian H.P. Jacobs, or the social worker/economist, Mae Farquharson – it did not have a monopoly either on discourse or financial support for these intellectual energies. Nor was it solely responsible for initiating them. Interviews with ISER research staff of the period indicate that Clarke seldom visited or formed part of the ISER circle, and that her seminal work was not taken seriously in that inner circle until after her book was published in 1957.

In the formulation of social welfare policy, however, Clarke's work, and that of the social psychologist Madeline Kerr who did fieldwork along with her in the late 1940s, exerted significant influence. Jamaican Governor, Sir Hugh Foot, later Lord Caradon, wrote an appreciative preface to the first edition of Clarke's book, giving it the highest official stamp of approval of the liberal colonial administration. But appreciation alone, without benefit of the security of a kind that an academic institution might provide, is never enough to ensure that the research interests pioneered by a scholar like Clarke can continue in succeeding generations.

Anthropology, then, with its capacity for revealing local systems of thought and modes of organization, was initially seen as central to social science discourse in the 1950s, both within the nascent academic community and in the formulation and implementation of policy. In subsequent decades, however, the discipline's influence, and the importance attached to ethnographic research in the other social sciences, waned markedly, becoming marginalized, as attention turned to the panacea that development economics appeared to offer.

SHIFTING INTERESTS

Professor Eddie Greene's contribution to the twenty-first anniversary celebrations of the Faculty of Social Sciences acknowledges this widespread neglect of ethnography. Yet he is far more sanguine in his assessment of a budding interest in micro-level studies from the mid-1970s onwards, and more unwilling to acknowledge the part that mainstream social science in the region has played in marginalizing this kind of inquiry, than I am (Greene 1984:22-24).

One revealing measure of the reverse suffered by anthropology, and the neglect of ethnography as a tool in Caribbean social science practice, is the relative concentration of articles published in the Institute's main organ, *Social and Economic Studies*, broken down into disciplines of study. Tables

1 and 2 summarize the results of a content analysis of the articles published by the journal over a period of four decades.⁵ The disaggregation into disciplines is, admittedly, an unhappy contrivance in that it neither reflects the productive dialogue between social science disciplines that has characterized Caribbean social science practice (cf. Sankatsing 1989), nor does it represent the intent of my own concern to nudge that process of interpenetration further along by urging the more widespread use of ethnographic methodologies. Nevertheless, it does unmask the overbearing presence of one partner in what, from the journal's title (as well as from the seemingly egalitarian segmentation of departments in the Faculty it serves) might at first appear a happy marriage of social science specializations. The journal's first editor was the ISER's Director, H.D. Huggins, an economist by training. Articles on economic matters took on a position of dominance in its pages from the outset and have maintained that position ever since. As Table 1 shows, there was an almost threefold increase in the total number of articles published in the journal from the decade of the 1950s to that of the 1980s. The percentage of those articles that might generally be grouped under the rubric of economics not only held more or less constant but in the 1980s even increased, from 39.3% in the 1970s to 46.8%. By contrast, the percentage of articles on anthropology declined from 23.6% in the 1950s, to 13.1%, 3.5%, and 3.2% respectively in each succeeding decade. Given the expansion that the journal experienced, the absolute numbers are even more telling: while the total number of economics papers increased from 52 to 145 between the 1950s and the 1980s, the number of papers on anthropology decreased from 29 to 10. And within the field of anthropology, while some 18 of the published papers in the 1950s were based on primary ethnographic fieldwork, there were only 2 papers based on fieldwork published in the 1980s.

To some degree, the Euro-American disciplinary category "anthropology" here obscures the merger between sociology and anthropology that occurs in British Caribbean social science from the very beginning; the distinction is a colonial artefact and was recognized as such. The decline in publication of articles in the general area of sociology and anthropology is less precipitous if one adds these two rows in Table 1, but decline there still is. The combined totals for the two sub-fields decreases from 31.7% in the 1950s to 17.1% in the 1980s. Yet this merger, while accurately reflecting local categories, disguises the almost complete marginalization of ethnography as a tool of discovery in British Caribbean social science practice over the period. While it is not always possible to discern accurately the research methodology used merely from the title of an article, my guess is that very few if any of the papers grouped under the category "sociology" in Table 1 were based on primary ethnographic fieldwork.

TABLE 1. ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN *SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES* BY TOPICAL FIELD AND DECADE⁶

Topical field	1950s		1960s		1970s		1980s	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Economics	52	42.3	97	41.1	90	39.3	145	46.8
Anthropology/ ethnography	29	23.6	31	13.1	8	3.5	10	3.2
Demography & statistics	11	8.9	24	10.2	17	7.4	6	1.9
Sociology	10	8.1	15	6.4	36	15.7	43	13.9
Political sciences & political economy	9	7.3	17	7.2	29	12.7	24	7.7
Public administration	0	0.0	2	0.8	19	8.3	16	5.2
History	3	2.4	7	3.0	8	3.5	15	4.8
Education	1	0.8	22	9.3	5	2.2	4	1.3
Other	8	6.5	21	8.9	17	7.4	47	15.2
Total	123	100.0	236	100.0	229	100.0	310	100.0

For a variety of reasons, the group of scholars that had assembled in the ISER in the 1950s dispersed by the early 1960s: some, initially, to newly formed social science departments within the University of the West Indies, others further afield. The late 1950s and early 1960s was a period of great expansion for the university, coinciding with the tenure of the late Sir Arthur Lewis, the noted development economist, first as Principal, then as Vice Chancellor (cf. Sherlock & Nettleford 1990). First Economics, and shortly afterwards Sociology and Government, were established as separate departments within a new Faculty of Social Sciences. Members of the research fraternity in the ISER eagerly accepted more secure teaching appointments in the newly formed Faculty. Of the anthropologists, both M.G. Smith and Raymond Smith had left the Department of Sociology and the university by the mid-1960s. Moreover, the steady stream of visiting anthropology graduate students from Yale and elsewhere fell off significantly, depriving the ISER and the new departments of the stimulus of dialogue that would normally be expected from ethnographers mulling over the messy detail of fresh fieldwork.

Even as anthropology and ethnography began to face a crisis of reproduction within the university, economics was poised for yet further expansion. The cadre of young, native-born scholars trained in economics was growing in the ISER and the faculty of social sciences in the late 1950s and 1960s at

around the same time as the anthropologists were moving to senior professional appointments overseas. Moreover, economics, government, and sociology were all given departmental status with assured complements of faculty positions and the wherewithal to recruit and train undergraduate and graduate students, while anthropology – grouped as it was with sociology – had no guaranteed slate of positions or courses in the organization of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Apart from the gross assertion of a disciplinary dominance in the case of economics, however, one detects a clear shift even within that discipline from a relatively greater concern with microeconomic questions amenable to being pursued ethnographically, to a more exclusive interest in the structure of the national and international economy. Articles representative of this fine-grained socio-economic tradition like those by Cumper on such varied issues as households *qua* economic units, labor productivity and the organization of sugar estates, or by David Edwards on Jamaican small farming, are rarely found in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷ The young social scientists and their students had breathed deeply the heady air of Caribbean nationalism of the 1960s and had become both intoxicated and entrapped.

There was, correspondingly, greater reliance on published official statistical data, and less on going out to collect it in the field. For one thing, as one economist informant suggested, they could rely on a greater volume of material from the expanding data-gathering agencies of the national bureaucracy. But besides this, as another informant countered, the boom years of the 1960s, with increases in revenue from tourism and bauxite in Jamaica, for instance, encouraged a certain complacency that “everything was coming out all right.”

Interest in an approach to development from the local community upwards, an interest exemplified by Jamaica Welfare, shifted, by the 1960s – as native-born politicians assumed full control of government – to a near preoccupation with the manipulation of economic forces from the center. The waning interest in a social science methodology particularly revealing of local-level processes was almost inevitable, given the promise of more centralized approaches and the prospect of continuous economic expansion.

WHO IS BEING REPRESENTED?

The earliest issues of *Social and Economic Studies*, briefly set out the ISER's charter, inscribing by name each of the British colonies of the West Indies, and promising, in the tradition of grand exploration not unfamiliar

to this region, that these would be the “communities of primary concern for study.” Table 2 begins to tell a story of benign neglect all too reminiscent of the colonial condition itself.

For all its fearsome radicalism in the mind of the local middle class, native British Caribbean social science has rarely strayed from imperial example in its delineation of appropriate research terrain. While there have been a smattering of articles in the journal over the years on Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and neighboring Latin America, most have focused on the English-speaking Caribbean. Not even ideological infatuation – as in the case of the Jamaican regard for Cuba in the 1970s – has been sufficient to overcome the provincialism of language. In four decades, by my count, the journal published only six articles on Cuba, the region’s most populated country.

TABLE 2. ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN *SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES* BY GEOGRAPHICAL SPECIFICATION OF TITLE AND BY DECADE⁸

Geographical area	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Jamaica	31	43	51	72
Trinidad & Tobago	2	13	19	21
Barbados	6	5	10	15
Guyana	10	15	15	13
Antigua & Barbuda	1	2	0	0
Bahamas	1	4	2	5
Belize	0	1	0	4
Dominica	0	0	0	0
Grenada	1	2	0	3
Montserrat	1	0	0	0
St. Kitts & Nevis	1	0	2	0
St. Lucia	1	2	0	0
St. Vincent & Grenadines	0	1	0	1
Cuba	0	1	1	4
Haiti	2	3	2	2
Puerto Rico	3	8	7	2
Suriname	0	1	2	0
Other Caribbean	0	3	5	5
Indigenous & Maroon peoples	2	1	1	2
Other geographic regions	11	22	26	29
No geographic specification	25	68	50	56
Comparative	25	41	36	76
Total	123	236	229	310

But even more revealing has been the neglect of the smaller countries and dependencies of the region, including many of those that fall within the ISER’s “communities of primary concern.” In four decades the Institute’s

journal has published very few articles on the islands of the Eastern Caribbean: Antigua, Dominica, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Montserrat and others. The smallest social units like Anguilla, Barbuda, Bequia, and Nevis have fared even worse. By contrast, 22 %, or some 197 of the 898 articles in the four-decade survey of the journal, explicitly listed Jamaica (or some region thereof) in their titles. Admittedly, of the articles published, nearly 20 % are comparative in focus, and another 22 % are non-specific geographically. However, most of the comparisons are between the larger national units of the English-speaking Caribbean. Of the 76 articles classified as comparative in the 1980s, for instance, I could identify seven that made reference in their titles to territories other than the "big four." The neglect of the region's Maroon communities and remaining indigenous populations noted in the table, also indicates this tendency to further dispossess, in scholarly terms, the marginal components of Caribbean society.⁹

Diversity – of scale, of economic adaptation, of historical process – is one of the primary and most interesting features of the Caribbean. It seems fair to say, on the strength of this survey, that the myriad manifestations of diversity, and their implications, have largely been ignored in native British Caribbean social science practice. The social science community has tended to neglect people and places on the fringes of Caribbean society, and to privilege larger territorial units and its own disciplinary models.

In general, development economics as a discipline tends to be insouciant, even contemptuous, of variation at the local level.¹⁰ For the Caribbean, Girvan (1991:2) admits as much, writing about the "'conventional radicalism' of the Caribbean left intelligentsia," when he points to the contradiction between:

...the immanent need to present a single, all-embracing paradigmatic view of the society – 'Plantation Society', 'The Poor and the Powerless', 'Corporate Imperialism' – and the increasingly complex, fluid, and differentiated reality that is the Caribbean.

Development economics having assumed a position of preeminence within the local social science community; the nation-state having gained almost unquestioned acceptance as the basic unit of analysis in the field of economics, as of course in political science; and the ISER being located in Jamaica – the pattern of increasing marginalization of peripheral people and places was almost inevitable. For the discipline of economics, it would appear that the people of Bequia or Barbuda neither engage in meaningful economic activity, nor can the study of such communities contribute to the formulation of social science theory or innovative development policy.¹¹

Training in the social sciences at the University of the West Indies reinforces, and serves to reproduce in succeeding generations of scholars a nar-

rowness of vision that pictures the region in terms of its more powerful English-speaking units. The separation of disciplines by faculty, following the colonial model, remains a basic structural feature of the university. There is no “foreign” language requirement (in reality Papiamentu, Spanish, and French Creole are not foreign but native) for either undergraduate or graduate students in the social sciences, and there is little contact with the work of the Department of Linguistics, located administratively in the Faculty of Arts. So that while there has been fruitful dialogue across disciplines, through informal discourse in the early years of the ISER and in the New World Group of the 1960s, the necessity of this cross-fertilization has not been worked sufficiently into institutional structures.¹²

MARGINALIZATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The nationalist preoccupation that gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s carried local social science along in its swell unprotesting.¹³ Already inclined towards viewing their “world” from the vantage point of the center (Kingston, instead of either rural Hanover or more distant Anguilla), key practitioners were further persuaded by Marxism from any inclination to have theory informed by the close study of ordinary people living on their own “periphery.” One countervailing Caribbean intellectual concern to explore (if even in somewhat romanticized fashion) the intricacies of “folk” life – a concern found in the novels of writers like C.L.R. James, Roger Mais, and Orlando Patterson, and that motivated to some degree the New World Group – ran into disfavor. Instead, the new wisdom emphasized the inevitability and the imperative of class struggle. Social engagement with life and people on the margins was to be applauded only insofar as it served to advance that “struggle” – whether by providing greater understanding of the process, by helping to instigate popular agitation, or by providing relevant Marxist education.

Paradoxically, anthropology itself, even if unwittingly, helped contribute to ethnography’s eclipse. Discussions about the nature of Caribbean society initially prompted by ethnographic fieldwork and centered on formulations of the plural society model, and on kinship and family studies, were by the late 1960s generating more heat than light. Kinship studies, based as most were on the increasing accumulation of quantitative data using culturally inappropriate categories of investigation, had, as R.T. Smith argues in his more recent work, deteriorated into a greater and greater “refinement of error” (R.T. Smith 1988). To local scholars – perhaps somewhat impatient of the careful but extended period of ethnographic research that is now

yielding an understanding of kinship more grounded in local ideas – the debate on West Indian kinship in the early 1960s must have appeared, as one informant expressed it to me, an indulgence in “overseas controversies.” The plural society model, on the other hand, after having provoked important work by, and interest among, historians and other social scientists, proved unserviceable in capturing the dynamic quality of post-independence society or in advancing the nation-building process. And during this period of declining interest, anthropology was slow to generate other models or branches of investigation to take the place, or lead to a fruitful reconceptualization, of these older concerns.¹⁴

In part, this slowness to respond might be explained, in the case of anthropologists based outside of the Caribbean, by the more long-term process of sifting that ethnographic research entails. In terms of a locally-based practice, one might point to the precipitous decline in either interest or training in this area of inquiry at the University of the West Indies to account for the sluggishness of response.

Anthropology (and ethnography along with it) has also undoubtedly been handicapped by its colonial associations. Quite explicitly, and with an apparent degree of consensus between native-born and English scholars, it was decided from the early years of the ISER that the colonial separation of social anthropology and sociology was inappropriate in the Caribbean context. In studying Caribbean societies, they rejected the tendency that prevailed at the time to cordon off as the preserve of anthropology the social life of peoples deemed more exotic, if only because they were unfamiliar. But just as cows do not have to be grown in pastures to yield milk, so too the discourse and methodology of anthropology need not have gone into disuse because of the process of their emergence.

Anthropology has, moreover, both in the Caribbean and elsewhere, not always been forthright in making the relevance of its own fine-grained research explicit to economists and to policy makers. In spite of this, and even though tarred by its alliance with colonialism (an interdependence born of the philosophical stimulus that encounters with non-European others gave to European thought, and further nurtured by way of the discipline’s associations with colonial administrations in the early twentieth century) anthropology has survived and flourished internationally.¹⁵

Important ethnographic research on the Caribbean itself, has continued to come from scholars (some of them Caribbean-born) based at centers elsewhere. Even to cite an arbitrary selection of examples from this extensive body of work, serves to draw out the contrast that has been implied between anthropology and development economics in relation to choice of subject and unit of analysis. Between the late 1960s and the late 1980s an-

thropologists have done important work on the Virgin Islands (e.g. Olwig 1985), Providencia (e.g. Wilson 1973), Maroon communities of Suriname (e.g. Richard Price 1975; Sally Price 1984), West Indians who live along the Costa Rican coast (e.g. Purcell 1987), and inter-island trade by women in the Eastern Caribbean (Carnegie 1986).

The thrust of much of this work has been to specify and to articulate Caribbean ideas and values that make more logical and more understandable behavior that was and continues to be dismissed as disorganized, disruptive, or mere departures from Western models. Many of these research projects have been intensive and long-term. Raymond Smith and several of his students have attempted to specify the cultural ideas that govern kinship behavior in the British Caribbean, building on genealogical research carried out in Jamaica and Guyana over the period of several decades (for a fully developed statement of this body of work see R.T. Smith 1988). Sally and Richard Price have explored the development and structure both of aesthetic ideas and of historical consciousness among the Maroons of Suriname (e.g. Price & Price 1980, and Price 1983). Jean Besson has pursued the complex ideas relating to the use and handing down of "family land" (e.g. Besson 1979 and 1984; also Carnegie 1987a). But significant contributions have also come from other research projects, some of which have been of lesser time depth (e.g. Wilson 1973, Drummond 1980, Carnegie 1987b).

Anthropologists have also been making important contributions towards the explication of the relationships between the labor and lives of Caribbean peoples, and the international system (e.g. Mintz 1985, Trouillot 1988).

The cumulative effect of such work is not only to make clear, in some abstract sense, cultural systems of thought, but to make possible – even if the anthropologists themselves do not always draw out the connections – the initiation of policy options that are at once more informed and more creative for having been grounded in a richer understanding of the historical and cultural processes of the people for whom they are designed. Caribbean economists have now begun to acknowledge the determining and obscuring effect that conceptualizations such as "national product" have on one's ability to see, measure, and understand aspects of economic activity that transcend national boundaries and that are routine for the people engaged in them (Girvan 1991). While the mechanisms of economic support for a large number of Caribbean households, the social networks that sustain them, and the cultural ideas that guide them are all transnational (Carnegie 1982, 1987b), policy makers and social scientists have uncritically worked on the premise that the nation-state ought to be the operative unit for measuring economic activity and for effecting policy. Government and

social science thinking became more centralized, more closely wedded to concepts and tools posited on the center, while economic activity of phenomenal proportion, but little understood, grew in the so-called informal sector at the margins.¹⁶

Impervious to the formulations of the new nationalist technocrats, people of all classes at the local level redoubled efforts to "develop" themselves: building and extending their social networks overseas and using these networks to provide a wide range of economic and social support to each other across national frontiers. As the erstwhile dependency theorist Girvan (1991:4), in his recent contribution to a rethinking of traditional models puts it:

From a more holistic point of view, we could consider informal activities, higglering, itinerant travel, short term overseas employment and more permanent migration as all part of a network of linked activities utilizing family, personal and purely commercial relationships. The geo-economic frame of reference of participants in these activities may have little to do with the concept of 'Jamaica' or 'CARICOM' as a unit of analysis or of development.

The process of arriving at such a recognition is urged and facilitated by an essentially ethnographic concern with the seemingly inconsequential day-to-day activities of ordinary people. In my own case, standing around for hours in broiling sunshine or sometimes rain, and watching as fruit were picked, crated, shipped to a neighboring island, and sold by energetic middle-aged women or their agents in St. Lucia and Barbados, helped me begin to recognize the trans-national, archipelagic conception that people in the Eastern Caribbean have of their region (Carnegie 1982, 1986). In Girvan's case, he tells us how his own enlightenment was inspired by seeing the scores of "Jamaican" groups that sprouted overnight in the New York, New Jersey area to collect money and relief supplies to send to Jamaica immediately after hurricane Gilbert. The overpowering amplitude of this spontaneous, grass-roots movement proved no less shocking for him than to see, on his return to Jamaica, how this effort: "...was completely eclipsed in the Jamaican media by the publicity given to the aid from the U.S. government" (Girvan 1991:6-7). Politicians, then, having foisted the imaginative construct of the nation-state upon their world, the media and the social sciences become its willing flag-bearers.

Of course, the adoption of anthropology and ethnographic methods of inquiry offers no assurance, in and of themselves, that ideas and processes at the local level will necessarily be any more clearly perceived and understood. The ability to perceive the familiar depends, at least to some degree, on the shock of having to come to terms with the unfamiliar. Ethnographic discovery is somehow nurtured by a dialectical, back-and-forth movement

of distance and closeness. But if one were to take as examples the experiences of India and Brazil – two countries where anthropological traditions adopted originally from Europe have taken root in the academic establishment – one sees an unmistakable if understandable trend towards doing ethnography in familiar rather than more distant places (e.g. Saberwal 1982, Guilherme Velho 1982). In part, no doubt, the unavailability of resources restricts the capacity to venture further afield. But resource availability, just as the timbre of sentiment, are politically induced conditions. Nationalism becomes a double curse: even as it urges its observer-scholars to survey all from the deck of the capital's centralized promontory, it also draws with narrow sharpness the boundaries within which they might focus. The imagined national community, given form by geography, constrains the native ethnographer as tenaciously as the geography of the former empire determined the varieties of exotic others that their own anthropologists could sample.

A native ethnographic practice must ultimately seek to disentangle those "habits of thought," embedded in local cultural experience, that both constrain and might contribute to the building of a sturdy local intellectual tradition. But as Saberwal (1982:47) suggests for the Indian case, to do so requires that we:

...approach that Western tradition seriously – not with apprehension, for it is more than merely a source of our historic difficulties, but as a foil, a particular historical experience, which we may hold to ourselves as mirror much as Max Weber, Louis Dumont, and others have tried to recognize the West for themselves in the Indian mirror.

This venturing outward to better see innard, requires, then, not only that Kingston acknowledge Marie Galante, but that other regions of the world, indeed the Western tradition itself, be explored intensively and without rancor. As C.L.R. James (1986) so grandly expresses it: "To establish his own identity, Caliban, after three centuries must himself pioneer into regions Caesar never knew." The thrust of this essay has been to suggest that the native British Caribbean social sciences and the institutions they have built have conspired, deluded by the hollow promise of nationalism, to shackle Caliban's wandering feet, and mind.

NOTES

1. The thoughts expressed here are very much the result of a series of dialogues between myself and others, no doubt started long ago, but which have been most intense recently. I wish to thank my interlocutors who (besides those whose published works are acknowledged in

the text) have willingly, patiently, and generously shared with me – in interviews or through correspondence, in conversation or in the classroom – their views on various aspects of the ideas and the period about which I write. I would especially like to express appreciation to George and Gloria Cumper, Raymond Smith, George Roberts, Sidney Mintz, Norman Girvan, Don Robotham, Richard Price, Ella Ray, Steven Kemper, David Scott, and students of the Consortium Graduate School of Social Sciences who responded positively to the initial, tentative formulation of these ideas.

2. One example of the mutually supportive exchanges that were nurtured in the womb of Empire is the fascinating story of the relationships between the founding of colonial botanic gardens, the growth of professional scientific bodies in Britain, and the expansion of economically viable and other necessary crops in newly settled colonies (Brockway 1979).

3. Here, I draw most heavily on Feuchtwang (1975) and Brown (1975). While this is not the place for extended discussion of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, the CSSRC, or the interdependence between anthropology and colonial administration, it should be pointed out that the relationship was not a simple one of unquestioned complicity on the part of the anthropologists, or of unqualified embrace on the part of the Colonial Office and its local agents. The authors cited above, as well as other contributors to that important collection (Asad 1975) give a fuller picture of this contested history.

4. This impressive body of work – all coming out in a concentrated period of about ten years and far exceeding the comparable number of book-length manuscripts on the Caribbean in any of the other social sciences of the same period – includes: Clarke (1957), Henriques (1953), Jayawardena (1963), Mintz (1960), M.G. Smith (1962a, 1962b, 1963), R.T. Smith (1956), and Steward et al. (1956). Many of the books and monographs, were, of course, preceded and followed by a large number of articles published in the pages of *Social and Economic Studies* and elsewhere by these and other anthropologists.

5. The tabulations were compiled by going through all the single issues of the journal that were available to me from the start of publication in 1953 to 1989, at libraries of the University of the West Indies and at Rutgers University. All lead articles and major review articles were included, but book reviews and research notes were, in general, omitted. A small number of issues of the journal could not be located and so the total number of articles reported may be slightly fewer than were actually published. As in any system of classification, it was sometimes difficult to decide where to place particular pieces of work; the final decisions were based on my own considered judgement and might well have been classified differently by others. Nevertheless, I do feel that the gross patterns highlighted by the tabulations will stand close scrutiny by others. It should be noted, in the journal's favor, that there is some expansion in the diversity of its interests over time as witnessed by the increase in the category "other" in Table 1, and of the non-Caribbean world areas on which articles periodically appear.

6. The category "other" in the table includes a smattering of articles on law, technology, agriculture, and psychology (a field, regrettably, even more under-represented in the institutional social sciences of the region than is anthropology/ethnography). In the 1980s, for the first time, there were 16 articles on women included among the journal's slightly more diverse fare. The increased attention to the field of public administration over the years reflects its incorporation into the teaching and degree options offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences. This lends support to the argument that teaching and research interests of the faculty serve to channel and to guide the research and theoretical frames of reference of students, and ultimately to determine what gets published.

7. See, for instance, Cumper (1954, 1958) and Edwards (1954).

8. In some respects, this tabulation is not as fine-grained as it might be in the sense that articles

that list several countries by name are assigned to the "comparative" category only, while articles that refer both to an indigenous group and to the island in which they live (Caribs in Dominica, for instance) are assigned to the "indigenous" category – in both instances as a way of avoiding double counting. Even if one were to correct for distortions such as these, however, the gross patterns the table highlights, i.e. the relative neglect of the smaller territories of the region and of marginal groups, would still hold true. To simplify the table, countries that have undergone a change of name during the period covered by the survey are listed only by one name: for example, articles on British Guiana and Guyana are all grouped as Guyana in the table.

9. Branches of the ISER were established at the Cave Hill (Barbados) and St. Augustine (Trinidad) campuses of the university in the 1960s, no doubt in an effort to meet the need for the countries of the Eastern Caribbean to be treated more seriously in the Institute's research agenda. Nevertheless, this diversification in plant and positions is hardly reflected in the pages of the main publication organ of the Institute, *Social and Economic Studies*, in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the decentralization and devolution of power to the other two campuses of the university, reflected in this and many other aspects of the university's administration, has served to decrease the movement of students and seasoned researchers between the different countries of the region, and to increase the numbing sense of parochialism that prevails. The only agents of the university who consistently move around are the senior administrators. And while many of them were once productive scholars, their now brief visits to other countries of the region are fully occupied by interminable meetings, and largely preclude new research. More importantly – as in the case of the political system – the Western model of bureaucracy in which these administrators operate is so inherently centralizing and so disdainful of diversity, that they gradually become deadened to the potentialities that lie outside the sphere of the organization's grand design.

10. See, for instance, the wide ranging critique by Polly Hill (1986), based largely on her research, over three decades, in West Africa and South India.

11. By the time that the local social science community began to show mild interest once more in the islands of the Lesser Antilles, their primary motivating concerns reflect fully their conversion to the patronizing, even imperial stance of Euro-American economics and political science. Prompted by the achievement of or discussions towards political independence in several of the islands in the Eastern Caribbean, the region's social scientists took up the question of the viability of these units (Lewis 1976). Their paternalistic apprehensions about the question of scale, may almost be seen to parallel James Anthony Froude's misgivings of a hundred years earlier about the possibility for black independence of any sort in the Caribbean.

12. It is noteworthy that Caribbean social scientists have largely ignored the many collections of folklore done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and have not seen fit to pursue this fruitful point of entry to native thought.

13. Throughout the paper, but in this section in particular, I draw on Benedict Anderson's magisterial analysis of the construction of the nation-state as *Imagined communities* (Anderson 1991).

14. To some degree, work congenial to an ethnographic perspective and which builds on both the earlier folklore studies of the region and on the anthropological writing of the 1950s, has been done in the Faculty of Arts and General Studies at the University of the West Indies at Mona. One recent example of the insightful formulations to which such work might lead, is Mervyn Alleyne's *Roots of Jamaican culture* (1988), and, in particular, the concluding chapter of that book which begins to outline a distinctive Jamaican worldview.

15. There has been healthy discussion since the late 1960s about the complex relationship

between anthropology and colonialism. Certainly, it was both part creator of, and contributor to, a European philosophical tradition that transforms the "other" into object for both domination and study. On the other hand, however, it is important to recognize that anthropology, at the same time, "...constituted a source of potential radical criticism of the colonial order itself..." compelled by a methodology and bent of mind "...which by definition reaches out geographically, linguistically and philosophically beyond the bounds of received western civilization in search of alternative modes of understanding and living" (James 1975:42).

16. Indeed, so close has been the relationship between the emergence of the social sciences and the growth of the nation-state, with its increasingly interventionist models of development, that social scientists might well be seen to have a vested interest in their continuation.

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