New Proposals

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Our Mandate

This journal represents an attempt to explore issues, ideas, and problems that lie at the intersection between the academic disciplines of social science and the body of thought and political practice that has constituted Marxism over the last 150 years. New Proposals is a journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry that is dedicated to the radical transformation of the contemporary world order. We see our role as providing a platform for research, commentary, and debate of the highest scholarly quality that contributes to the struggle to create a more just and humane world, in which the systematic and continuous exploitation, oppression, and fratricidal struggles that characterize the contemporary sociopolitical order no longer exist.

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Cover: Artefacts on display at the National Museum and Art Gallery, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 2018. David Mastey photograph

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Introduction

Scott Timcke
New Proposals Editor

In the spirit of productive dialectics, the origins for this thematic issue come from a July 2022 symposium on Race, Class and Nationalism after Empire: The Fundamentals of the Caribbean Situation. In this issue of New Proposals, Antonia Mungal and Juan Vicente Iborra Mallent provide details on the presentations and how the contributors have been talking about the enduring consequences of colonial capitalism in the contemporary Caribbean. Many of those themes on Caribbean colonial capitalism can be found in the various papers in this issue, which includes ethnographic studies on care-economies, church relations, music scenes, an analysis of the 2020 election in Suriname, and papers on how the political thought of CLR James and Aimé Césaire have been adopted to expand the visions of emancipatory social change.

I wish to draw attention to some overlapping themes. The first paper by Nadia Whiteman-Charles is a study on the politics of taste, civic ascription and antagonisms in Jamacia. Tackling the idea of 'authentic nation music', Whiteman-Charles examines how race is deployed to protect hard fought for representations and how minor music genres have to negotiate 'authentic' blackness. Meghan Cleghorn tackles similar issues around becoming and belonging in Trinidadian church politics, discussing how fading syncretism means a hardening doctrine that makes it more difficult for queer people to be included as full members of Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadian congregations. Both papers allude to how different Caribbean classes deal with eurocentrism and its consequences.

The papers by Shelene Gomes and Antonia Mungal have several common themes about the materialist basis of care-labour and care economies. Drawing on Marxian political economy frameworks to contextualize women's labor and well-being within broader structures and ideologies, both papers examine the often undervalued and 'invisible' social reproductive labor performed by Anglo-Caribbean women. They examine the burdens faced by women caregivers as these obligations are shaped by class expectations.

Kirtie Algoe's paper speaks to some of these overarching themes as they are mobilised and contested during elections. Her case study of the 2020 Surinamese elections examines online campaigning. The election was shaped by the global coronavirus pandemic. The analysis of social media content helps clarify local issues, like the role of ethnicity in the formation of election pacts in this consociational society. Given the relative spareness of election analysis in Caribbean political scholarship, Algoe provides a

data point for understanding contemporary political dynamics in ethnically diverse Caribbean societies like Suriname. Algoe's work can help readers think about how politics will 'carry on' in times of disruption, a topic that will greatly matter as the Caribbean is shaped by the global climate emergency.

I am pleased to republish P.I. Gomes's 1978 working paper *The Marxian Populism of C.L.R James*, which was originally circulated in the Working Papers on Caribbean Society, a series produced by the Department of Sociology, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. In consultation with the author, minor changes have been made to modernize the text. Republication can make this paper available for people interested in the history of Caribbean intellectual thought, a theme that carries over to the paper on Aimé Césaire and his influence on Achille Mbembe. Both papers showcase productive dialectical encounters about key issues related to modernity and social transformation.

Later this year, *New Proposals* intends to publish a special issue on Class, Skill and Exploitation: Harry Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital after 50 Years, guest edited by Benjamin Anderson, Steff Hui Cui Ling, and Enda Brophy. Specia issues like theirs underscore the value of and continued relevance for interdisciplinary class analysis the world over.

With appreciation,
Scott Timcke

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The Postcolonial Complexities of Black Taste in Jamaican Rock Music

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ABSTRACT: Reggae and dancehall represent popular taste in Jamaica. Black nationalist discourses advocate that authentic Jamaican music be tied to the experiences of poor Blacks and local resistances to Western imperialism. Unfortunately, the local rock music scene's affinity for 'foreign' music styles kept the community on the fringes of the music industry. To secure distinction, rock musicians reimagined and imitated 'ideal' Black tropes in conceptualizing lyrics and their family tree, villainizing Whiteness and justifying their taste. This paper outlines the complexities of Black taste in Jamaica to highlight the barriers Black nationalism has engineered in the production of local music.

KEYWORDS: Jamaica, taste, rock music, Black nationalist discourses, distinction

Introduction

Aesthetic tastes in cultural products like art and music reflect a field of power and not abstract standards of value. For Bourdieu (1993), the habitus regulates choice and social dispositions along class lines. In the Caribbean, history greatly complicates the value of tastes. Music and art express the struggle between social distinctions in race, class and citizenship which are embodied in the reproduction or "mimicry" of local and foreign tastes.

Race and colour distinctions qualify as embodied capital. Embodied capital credits work on mind and body, which sees the personal cost of social improvement as investment, privation, and sacrifice. This is a process of achievement and cannot be transmitted instantaneously by gift, purchase or exchange (see Bourdieu 1986). Bhabha describes colonial policies as fashioning postcolonial dependence on mimicry of an embodied type – an "ideal" type (1994, 97). Mimicry is therefore a sign of difference but also acceptance in that it is a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which imagines the Other as a sign of power or its lack. Bhabha's ideas are of import to this paper as it attests the dizzying double articulation Jamaican rock musicians will display in subsequent sections.

The Jamaican music industry's national strategy and action plan stressed that "Jamaican music is a mature product with an established tour circuit and over 50 years of innovation behind the music, but which is constantly being renewed and re-invented with new compositions and genres" (Brown 2004, 3). These words suggest that Jamaican music is constantly being reconceptualised with new sounds and influences. Yet, on the ground, there are negative connotations attached to "new compositions and genres." The imagined lack of complexity in Jamaican music by locals safeguards perceptions of Black authenticity and dismisses non-African-based music as inauthentic and non-traditional (Lazarus 1999, 197).

From August 2013 to October 2015, I conducted ethnographic research into Jamaica's rock music scene, its physical and virtual domains. The members

of the rock scene were between the ages 19 and 51, lived in Kingston and were from various socio-economic brackets. The ethnic composition was highly varied, and the community also housed a large visible lesbian membership which was uncommon compared to other Jamaican scenes. Through participant observation at events and on WhatsApp as well as in-person interviews, I collected narratives on taste in "local" and "foreign" music. My analysis interrogated the visual, verbal and written discourses of the scene for issues related to taste, race, nationalism and the politics of difference. Consequently, this paper outlines the complexities in the production of Jamaican music. Definitions of Blackness pervades the production of local sounds and overshadows the realistic hybrid/creole processes which have been a part of Jamaican music since its inception. I argue that local musicians must contend with national ideas of the Black ideal type by reimagining and/or miming its tropes in their lyrics, taste, perception of Whiteness and family background to procure distinction.

A Brief History of Reggae and Dancehall

In the academy, Jamaican music is typically depicted as synonymous with dancehall and reggae. These two genres have been propelled by various features of the local music economy. The sounds' ability to motivate dance is said to be one of the guiding forces of Jamaican music (Chang and Chen 1998). Additionally, the birth of the sound system aided in cultivating an appreciation for local music with Jamaican audiences (Stolzoff 2000, Clarke 1981). Sound systems were "mobile discotheques" which played at fairs, nightclubs, dances, and house parties. They were like modern day disc jockeys which provided the blueprint for the latter's performances at dancehall and hip-hop events. The expression "Jamaican music" is synonymous with the reggae sound as "since its birth reggae has been the Jamaican nation's main emotional outlet" (Chang and Chen 1998, ix).

Another important feature of the Jamaican music economy is the Rastafarian movement, which began in the 1930s and was reggae's main influence by the 1950s (Nettleford 1970, Clarke 1981, Daynes 2010). Though persecuted for their Black-cantered philosophies and lifestyle by colonial authorities, Rastafarians' message of Black pride attracted sympathisers and followers, largely from Kingston's ghettos. Their songs of worship connected religious motifs with the social oppression of the Black poor, their economic hardships, and the colour prejudice they faced. In effect, against a series of economic crises, reggae became the economic and psychological escape of the uneducated and unemployed ghetto youth.

Reggae gained wider exposure in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though perhaps overly romantic, Hebdige saw reggae in Britain drawing upon oral traditions, adopting Bible verses and Jamaican creole to "question the neat articulations of common sense" (1980, 37). The disenfranchised rude boy of ska and rock steady was replaced by the Rasta. The Rastafarian movement "refract[ed] the system of black and white polarities, turning negritude into a positive sign" (Hebdige 1980, 37).

As a result of the popularity deejayed songs, dancehall emerged in 1980s – taking on the name of the initial physical site. Riddim makers were extremely important to the industry as riddims are the heart of dancehall. The potency of dancehall depends on repetition, rhythmic vibrancy and. crude analogies (Chang and Chen 1998). Like reggae, dancehall is said to reflect the identity of Black lower-class youth and their expressions of resistance considering poverty and racism (Stolzoff 2000, Stanley Niaah 2010). Moreover, dancehall lyrics defied the strict moral codes of Christianity and Rastafarianism and provided new ways to talk about sex and heterosexuality. The lyrics embody the "ideological conflicts between competing value systems in Jamaica" (Cooper 1993, 104). Carolyn Cooper (1993) typifies the music as promoting slackness which offered a "politics of subversion" which facilitated the confrontation of patriarchal ideologies and the antagonising of law and order.

In the 1990s, dancehall artists made strides in the global music market. Reportedly between 1992 and 1993 dancehall made approximately $300m in the US (Stolzoff 2000, 115). This is believable given the success of Shaggy's Boombastic/Summertime in 1993 and Ini Komoze's Here Comes The Hot Stepper the year thereafter. By the 21st century, dancehall acts

like Sean Paul, Movado, Lady Saw and Vybz Kartel were regular features in the US music industry.

Despite the policing of the mixing of "foreign" music with local styles within Caribbean borders, many foreign music groups are appropriating the Jamaican sound. No Doubt's alternative pop rock which mixes reggae beats made them highly successful in the U.S. market. Justin Bieber, Chris Brown, Nicki Minaj's and Rihanna's use of the dancehall and reggae aesthetic in hip hop and pop music have earned them international success. Chang and Chen (1998) see that these success stories do not deter local audiences who feel that their best artistes should concentrate on 'Jamaican music' and less on these international sounds. They do not want their artistes to succumb to over-commercialisation which dilutes the quality of the music.

In summary, at the beginning of both their histories reggae and dancehall were seen to have subverted dominant colonial ideologies which disenfranchised Black Jamaicans of the lower classes.[1] The changing status of reggae and dancehall underlines more than the sounds' development from the rich lineage of music stemming from enslavement and original sounds like mento, ska and rocksteady. It also highlights that the sounds were initially reserved for poor Blacks before being accepted by Jamaica's upper classes and then an international audience, much like the steelpan in Trinidad. Eventually, both sounds crossed into the mainstream with the hesitant acceptance of the government and upper classes (Nettleford 1970, Clarke 1981, Cooper 1993, Chang and Chen 1998; Stolzoff 2000).

Additionally, the symbolic marker of Blackness in reggae and dancehall underlined the sounds' opposition to American and European tastes (Moore and Johnson 2004). At the time of their conception, reggae and dancehall were positioned as antithetical to British civility, a preference for White and Brown bodies and an affinity for American popular sounds by the middle class (King 2002). European and American sounds were ostracized from local musicians' repertoire because they represented, for the Jamaican people, past oppression suffered under British rule as well as the conflicts the Jamaican government had with the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s. Resistance to "foreign" music was seen as an anti-imperialist action. But there are also local political dynamics. For example, the focus on Blackness in reggae was a deliberate tactic used by the Michael Manley government in the 1970s to supersede the divisions which colonialism instigated in ethnicity, race/colour and religion. The government sought to create a new vision of positive Black citizenship based on anti-colonial sentiments. Black nationalism is embedded in the imagination of the Jamaican population's racial majority (Nettleford 1989, King 2002, Brodber 2012). Therefore, in the contemporary, a taste for reggae and dancehall represented a recognition of the experiences of poor Black Jamaicans and the nation's liberty from the tools of Western oppression- American and European music. Hence the nation's music (dancehall and reggae) was esteemed while rock music was disparaged.

Of Mimicry and Rock Music

An act of memorialisation in the Caribbean is the repurposing and re-historicising of artforms such as literature, calypso, poetry and jazz which confronts the different ethnic heritages, class struggles of exploitation and explores "adamic renewal or return, and existentialist sense of void" (Rohlehr 1992, 15). Reimagination employs both myth and history and is synonymous with the conversion and reconversion between social, cultural and economic distinction in Bourdieu's class struggle.

However, some attribute revision to imitation which reveals a lack of social power to promote changes in the society. Bhabha (1994) and Taussig (1993) suggest that imitation of the "ideal type" was a sign of the imitator's lack of power, and acceptance of oppressive regulations. The effect of one's mimicry then is the constant reproduction of oppressive norms which Others their identity. One can never reproduce the original wholesale. This results in the double

1 While Chang and Chen (1998) see similar biographies of reggae and dancehall. As both move from working class insurgency to incorporation within national iconography, they suggest that dancehall can be perceived as an extension of reggae. That said, there are important differences between the two musical forms. For example, by opposing the moral codes of Christianity and Rastafarianism, Carolyn Cooper (2004) argues that dancehall decenters prevailing mores and decorum.

articulation of both local and foreign practices. This section outlines the various strategies of imitation and reimagination employed by rock musicians in their lyrics, performances, musicianship and family tree.

The Rhetoric of Oppression

The imitation of metaphors and motifs synonymous to reggae music, which Daynes (2010, 191) calls "the rhetoric of oppression," informed the content of Jamaican rock music. Sentiments surrounding resistance to social oppressions, gender roles and tributes to marijuana were mimicked. Daynes believes that these motifs are prominent Black tropes in Rastafarian culture that has been commercialized in reggae music. Skygrass was one of the most popular rock bands (if not the most) in Jamaica at the time of this study. However innovative Skygrass' reggae-pop rock sound, their lyrics were extremely banal and reused the rhetoric of oppression. Themes such as kingship, marijuana, immortality and resisting oppression were employed throughout the group's career:

Immortal Steppa (2015)
Chorus:
I am the Immortal Steppa
My footprint burn the ground
Fire never burn me down
That's why you never tear me down
Hope yuh have nothing to fear when you hear this song

I Am King (2014)
Intro:
I am King of my destiny
No change, Jah Jah set me fee
Set me free x4
It's my destiny

Verse:
You could have locked me in a dungeon or prison or cell
I would eat through all the walls like it is eating at your flesh
If you grab me by the collar, drag me into hell
I would climb up into heaven and be smiling on the steps
Never could you get me conquered
I will fight until my death
The fire in the lion is the fuel pon himself
Never could you get me conquered with every breath
Never quit x3
Chorus:
I am King of my destiny
No change, Jah jah set me fee
Set me free x4
It's my destiny

High Grade Love (2011)
Intro:
High grade love
The way that you move me baby is not normal
High grade love
Straight to my soul, my lady is so partial x2

Verse:
High grade is the loveliness
Give me 50 bags of this
You pretty like my mama kids
I'm flipping out like cannabis
Love you like kids love cakes and chocolates
Love you like the leaders of the world love politics
Need you like youths need schools and colleges
Need you like needy people always needing dollar bills
Miss you like the government missing the taxes
Miss you like bald head missing dreadlockses
Love you like the preachers in the church love Sunday
Just to take collection and they take it and runway

The lyrics show that the band drew on stereotypical motifs: the legalising of marijuana (High Grade Love), resistance to oppression (Immortal Steppa) and hyper masculinity (I am King). Simon, the primary songwriter and lead singer, described the group's mission to break into foreign markets as a driving force of their creativity. The logic of his lyrics was never described as an attempt to fix or change the social landscape. It appeared that the content and the inspiration for the direction of songs, not just by Skygrass, but many other local bands like Robot Taxi and Downstairs, followed the formula of traditional reggae songs to gain Black distinction with local and foreign audiences.

An understanding of the economic, cultural and social determinants of taste can be assessed through various experiences with products that reflect the temperaments derived from social positions. Bourdieu postulates that "taste classifies, and it classifies the

classifier" (1984, 6). Tastes represent for him "natural" and "right" preferences which are intolerant to the "unnatural." Consequently, in representing oneself as a Jamaican artiste, highlighting one's connection to the experiences of the Black lower classes and/or advocating resistance to oppressive groups classifies the musician as Black.

Reimagining the Rock Aesthetic

Live rock performances swayed between local familiarity found on reggae and dancehall stages and the stereotypical rock visuals in U.S. music videos. The forms of address used to capture the audience's attention from the stage moved from well-known creole expressions and flirtatious teasing of women to familiar rock sayings like "Rock on." Head-banging, protruding tongues and impromptu mosh-pits were not unknown audience responses during live performances. A fixture at these events was also the "groupie." This was the female audience member who showed her love of the music by excessively screaming, calling out the band's name and dancing with abandon directly in front of the stage. The label "groupie" did not extend to their sexual proclivities but rather highlighted that these local female fans embodied some of the behaviour identified with female groupies in the U.S. media.

As a participant observer, I sensed I was observing attempts to recreate the quintessential rock music video. The solo electric guitar performances, irreverent expressions of resistance, the feeling of community and the bar setting were markers for this visual performance. Local rock performances felt more like auditions for the foreign stage. In my discussions with musicians Brian, Vernon, Dominique and Kat C.H.R. each stated that they hitched their wagons to foreign sites of success and saw Jamaica as a means to that end. The volatile political climate which has left the average Jamaican subject robbed of their rights and freedoms has alienated rock musicians from the mainstream. Like many young Jamaicans, they championed their rights in everyday speech, but when asked how their music represented these sentiments, most were quick to describe their work as a project in self-expression.

The drive for success in Europe and the U.S., wariness of the oppressive local economy and the pursuit of individual choice outside the restrictions of the nation's tastes may have resulted in the absence of the next Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff or Barrington Levy. Ibo Cooper, Third World alum and past president of the Jamaica Reggae Industry Association (JaRIA), disclosed that young emerging reggae artistes were just as guilty of being ineffective agents of social change (Ibo Cooper, interview with author, September 15, 2013). Local musicians were inclined to focus on success in foreign markets instead of their present realities because the U.S. and Europe were successful markets for Jamaican music.

Brian, lead singer of Downstairs, seemed a bit offended when I asked him if the lyrics to any of his songs represented resistance against any social oppression which Jamaicans, his band or he faced. Brian stressed that his music was about the "ting" in rock. This "ting" was not further defined by him, and he retreated into the implied certainty of the musician's right to create music for music's sake (Brian Jones, interview with author, April 8, 2014). Omar, lead singer and guitarist of the Free Willies, Kat C.H.R. and Vernon, the lead guitarist of Robot Taxi, explained that they do not focus their attentions on the political realm but rather the artistry of their craft; word play, musical skills, and vocal techniques (Omar Francis, interview with author, February 24, 2015; Kat C.H.R., interview with author, October 17, 2013). Maybe Ibo Cooper has a right to fear Western imperialism of Jamaican music. The devaluation of Afro-Caribbean experiences, says Rohlehr (1992), were once visible in the colonial need to reinforce stereotypes through coercion and propaganda in laws, punishments and education during and after enslavement.

Ibo Cooper described the rock scene members' reluctance to deal with local issues as the result of their alienation from Jamaican culture because of their descent into the virtual worlds of U.S. media (interview with author, September 15, 2013). However, the rock audience did not regard themselves as imperialised puppets but as active consumers of media content with a right to individual choice. They did not think that this choice undermined their Black identity but exemplified an awareness of the shades of feeling and emotions different types of music can generate. Vernon Da Costa, a 20-year veteran of the alternative

scene describes why he is an avid and active rock fan and musician:

> When I came back to Jamaica I was actively seeking out music that moved me. Like Dave Matthews, Metallica, Sting… There is a way I feel when I listen to this [dancehall and reggae] music. There is a way I feel when I listen to rock music. There are some songs I can listen to over and over and over and over again. The first Metallica album I bought was the Metallica Black Album and when I bought that cassette it never left my Walkman for two weeks. Play, flip a side, play, flip a side, play, flip a side. I played that until I broke it. I did the same thing for a couple other albums... Meanwhile, reggae did nothing for me, nothing at all. And people would say things like "oh Yuh White!," "You is a roast breadfruit." What that did was make me feel like an outsider but I was fine with that. And what made me more fine was the fact that I was beginning to meet people who were like me. They were interested in the same things, the same sense of humour. (Vernon Da Costa, interview with author, September 27, 2013)

"Oh yuh white" signifies that the person who listens to rock music is pretending to be of Euro-American or European descent because it is believed that tastes in this genre are specific to this ethnic group. Relatedly, the Jamaican national identity is constructed around ideas of Blackness and the narratives of other ethnic groups are dissolved to consolidate all persons under one imagined community. Thus, Whiteness is mythologised as in opposition to the "Black" nation and subsequently rock music is in opposition to local music, experiences and identities. "You is a roast breadfruit" also coincides with an interpretation of rock music as "White music" as a roasted breadfruit is blackened on the outside but white on its inside. The expression communicates that the rock listener is confused and though his skin might appear Black (Afro-Jamaican), his insides, his internal logic is Westernised (White).

The ability to choose one's music was not seen as a feature of the public domain by rock scene members. The limitations of belonging to the nation imposed an appreciation for all things reggae and dancehall, essentially all things Black. An openness to exploring different tastes outside the set regulations of nation music burgeoned free-thinking cosmopolitans rather than narrow–minded citizens in the rock scene. Unfortunately, it also deprived Jamaica of fresh blood in the reggae and dancehall scenes:

> They [rock members] just support. They don't come here and say no. In the rock scene people don't give a fuck about your opinions. So you could tell me that my hair should be tall and I should be a ras and I can tell you that my hair is going to stay natural and it's going to be this way- short. And I just don't give a fuck what you say and you don't give a fuck what I say…In the rock scene, people think that people have a right to their opinions. In the rock scene people are open minded. And in the rock scene, people have been everywhere, seen everything. So you don't limit yourself in the rock scene. If there is a limited mind person in the rock scene, give them three weeks to three months. You'll realise that all those shackles and chains are broken by everyone they come up upon. And if they are still limited, there are people who are lost causes. (Shauna Franklin, interview with author, October 30, 2013)

Authenticating Local and Foreign Tastes

Many conversations were held about the authenticity of American blues, rock and roll and Jamaican rock music. It seemed imperative to the group that local rock musicians acquire originality through adept musical skills in innovation and creativity by drawing on the past. In an exchange on WhatsApp amongst Brendon, Reece, Spyda and Wayne, the history of rock was understood as a timeline of creative innovation. Many in the chat took offense to Brendon suggesting that Spyda did not know the history of blues as the latter was seen as one of the most innovative and adept musicians in the scene. Spyda produced music as well as sang, played the bass guitar, rhythm guitar, piano and drums. From his informed position, Spyda explained that the blues birthed many musical forms like jazz and rock and roll but that did not mean that this limited the potential of these musical forms. Local musicians did not have to adhere to the initial formula of blues. Brendon acceded with the statement: "Don't copy the greats... seek what they sought." Spyda clarified that Brendon stretch himself,

to realise the possibilities of the music. Vernon corroborated this position by suggesting that playing in E only makes the musician seem limited. Brendon agreed, promising that he would not remain in this key for all his future compositions (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

This conversation also referenced a myriad of innovative musicians, bands and songs across genres: gospel artiste Kirk Franklyn, emo rock band My Chemical Romance, blues vocalist and guitarist Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?," Robert Johnson, alternative rock band Nickelback, rock and roll artiste Chuck Berry's "Maybellene," blues musician Willy Dixon's "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" and the classic rock band The Rolling Stones. This highlights the eclectic tastes of musicians within the rock scene. There was also a strong belief that the repurposing of tones and keys by a musician counted as an expression of originality. Few explained that their music was unoriginal as every sound was subject to a genealogy of other sounds, styles and compositions. Brendon quoted the Beatles' "All you need is love," to drive the point home. He typed – "There's nothing you can sing that can't be sung...nothing you can do that can't be done." Spyda responded with a rhetorical question "Yeah, but who else have ur feel?" Vernon summed up Spyda's perspective by interjecting that, "Innovation, despite owing to previous innovations, is no lesser for being so" (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

As the main opposition to the assumption that there is a lack of originality in Caribbean music, Wayne asked Brendon what was original about the latter's music. Brendon replied "Nothing." Wayne remarked, "ok. Well what I see as original is a Jamaican dude playing slide." The group concluded that Brendon and his supporters had a lot of growing to do. Every musician in their eyes questioned the innovation and originality of their products but to cross the threshold from novice to master, local musicians must accept and hone what is unique about their skill within the sea of history (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015). The effect of mimicry is felt in the embodiment of the Other's norms. This fixes the colonial subject as partial; limited, incomplete and virtual. For example, Stolzoff (2000) describes how enslaved Jamaicans' attempt to imitate the planter class assisted the social order on plantations. Miming European ways encouraged conformity to social rules. The enslaved were always outside the privilege of the whiter, browner positions, despite their expertise at miming.

Ibo Cooper suggested that members of the rock scene were subject to cultural imperialism by the U.S. (interview with author, September 15, 2013). But it can also be argued that the recreation of Jamaican experiences in rock music symbolically realigned the rock scene with concerns of the nation – preserving the local "Black" tropɛ considering global "White" hegemonic structures. The reconstruction of a tradition of rock music to house Black preoccupations epitomises the syncretic negotiation of various musical genres like the blues and r and b. Never in their discussions on music did rock musicians advocate for the imitation of foreign or local sounds. In fact, they usually urged other musicians to move beyond simple imitation to locate a sound that was uniquely Jamaican:

> **Vernon**: So what if we don't know our heritage we created our own. And in fact we keep recreating it.
>
> **Brendon**: Well, I'll accept that. No. that's the wrong attitude. If everyone brings something to the table u can't show up with sumn new with no past. That's like picking up a guitar and not knowing who Hendrix is.
>
> **Vernon**: Why not? Black people have been doing it for decades now.
>
> **Vernon**: And we keep going from strength to strength.
>
> **Brendon**: We worship everythin white.
>
> **Vernon**: No we don't. And for those that do is because they grew up in that system
>
> (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

The Myth of Race

In Jamaica, like most of the region, narratives of the past have been historicised from imperial centers. Critical Caribbean scholars have been engaged in the antithesis to colonialism by reconstructing imperialist views of the West Indian experience. Writing in the 1970s, Rex Nettleford describes the hierarchical binary of Whiteness and Blackness as structural and atti-

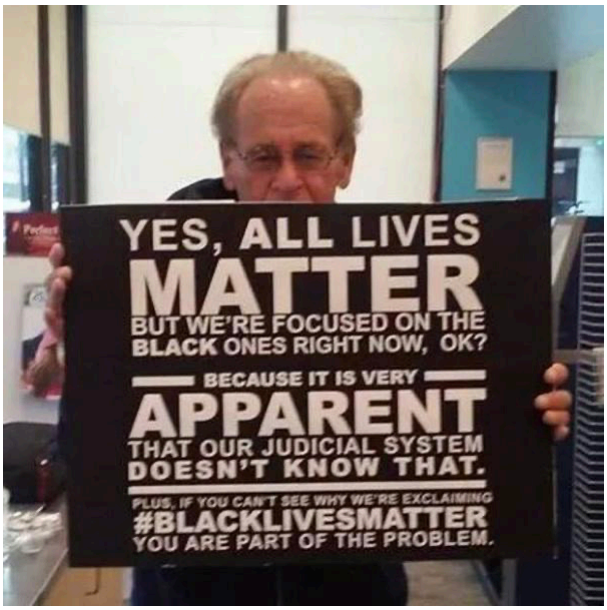
tudinal. Arguing for creative syncretism within creole subjectivity, Nettleford writes, the "in-betweenness and half-identification resulting from these attitudes is probably one of the positively distinctive features of Caribbean communities emerging from a plantation and colonial system" (1970, 21). This understanding is held by those in Jamaica who possess the colour of skin which connotes poverty, lower class stations, ignorance and manual labour. Shepherd clarifies that the colonial objective of shaping laws and scholarly work was to demonize Caribbean peoples and,

> project them as immoral, uncivilised and barbaric in order to justify their military and spiritual subjugation. In the aftermath of these conquests, these works exhibited a tendency to negate or minimize the role of the indigenous peoples in the advance of modernity, presenting both text and sub-text that projected perceptions of the indigenous Caribbeans as a 'problem' for colonial development and an obstacle of the European march to progress. (Shepherd, 2007, 4)

The act of reconstruction or (re)presentation is synonymous with the Caribbean's resistance to colonial imperialism. Much like most creole groups, the rock community resisted as well as substantiated colonial constructions of race. Furthermore, the postcolonial preoccupation with (re)presentation is linked here to Victor Turner's (1977) description of the communitas as either a facilitator of social change or subject to the widely held norms of society. Consequently, the dark play of race reflects both mainstream and rock scene agendas through the maintenance of the society's race/class/colour politics.

Race and racism were a consistent topic of conversation within the group. Racist remarks were exchanged as humor between group members who themselves were of mixed heritages. Their logic of race and race relations betrayed the syncretism of Jamaica's creolised past. However, the myth of the "enduring" and "blameless" qualities of Blackness and the "evil" and "imperialistic" qualities of Whiteness were present in many of the group's debates.

Many times the group denied partiality to any one race and rackled off the prejudices of the wider society. The members made comments like "Me a mongrel tuh. Nuhbaddy nuh pure" which articulated a creolised origin story. The group seemed to create an equitable stage where each member ensured that their race and the colour of their skin held no sway in the conversation. However racist humour was not used to depict Blackness. Sarcasm, irony and wry humour through memes and word play were often used to articulate the oppressive nature of "White ideologies" on Black people and culture. These strategies tried to persuade members of the marginalization of the Afro-race considering Euro-American imperialism:



Despite the pro-Black stance of the group, the responses to Bobby's statement "We [Black people] can be prejudice as fuck but not racist" ranged from disbelief, anger, uncertainty to denial. Many strongly held that the statement was untrue. Yet Bobby thought that the Black 'race' did not possess the political and social power to be racist. Against all arguments that racism was prejudice against any race, even one's own, Bobby suggested that racism was a strategy of White supremacy. He stressed that the Black identity was not conceived around groups who forwarded Black supremacy. To him this was evidence that the blame lay at the "white man's" door. Vernon countered quite succinctly "My main thing is I don't believe that just because you don't have world power doesn't mean you can't be racist" (WhatsApp group chat with author, September 2, 2015).

Embodied capital reproduced from colonial scripts mandated that the colour of one's skin ori-

ented one into a racial group and class. This is the "economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognised thereby recognised, hence legitimate" and secures distinction (Bourdieu 1994, 75). Thus, class in Jamaica, regardless of its economic and educational determinants, was also embodied in the objectification of the local body. Musical taste connected to racialized bodies suggested "[w]ho was free to imitate whom and how it was interpreted, had everything to do with one's position and power in the hierarchy" (Stolzoff 2000, 32).

Moreover, to certify their membership in Black culture, rock scene members creolised their family trees. Wyatt and Bobby located their cultural heritages in Obeah. Wyatt referred to seeing his "Granny tell the future with a glass of water, an egg white and a church door key" with Bobby sharing his "great granny was called "Mother Kai." Obeah is regarded as an African tradition. This knowledge became a sign of Black authenticity in their conversation as they proclaimed they descended from Obeah practitioners. To verify their descent they also described Obeah rituals in a bid to outdo the other by claiming they possessed grandparents who were adept practitioners: "Mek mi guh kill one chicken right now" Wyatt said, referring to ritualized animal sacrifice (WhatsApp group chat with author, July 2, 2015).

Reece and Jennifer imagined a syncretic history of East Indian heritages and rock music. Reece used lyrics from Journey's rock song "Don't Stop Believing" to insert his origin story as in search of the American dream while Jennifer positioned herself as descending from "Indian royalty, gypsies and the "Columbians and Aztec Indians." Bobby and Wyatt exclaimed that she represented "Bollywood" (the Indian film industry) as well as confirmed her 'gypsy' heritage by locating her as a descendant of the Magyar culture. These humorous origin stories served to locate Caribbean history as a part of nothing and everything; to represent the Jamaican nation's mantra, "Out of many, One people" as well as the rock scene's preoccupation of making all welcome. However, regardless of the creolised history imagined, the enduring Jamaican middle-class values on Blackness concluded Bobby's story – "I'm just Black" (WhatsApp group chat with author, July 2, 2015).

Conclusion

Black nationalist discourses have dissolved the historical complexity in Jamaican reggae and dancehall. What results are musical styles derived from hybrid or creolised processes, like local rock music, being assessed as Western clichés that abandon a rich African tradition. Pessimistic opinions about changes to "authentic" local music generally envisage a future where the sound's Black genus is left bankrupt (Lazarus 1999, Sadre-Orafai 2005). My ethnographic fieldwork revealed the Jamaican community as having musical tastes tied to Black expectations. The Jamaican rock music scene's efforts to secure Black distinction were contradictory to the Black nationalist agenda. The scene's production of music encompassed resisting mainstream norms; the production of reggae and dancehall. Yet a drive to imitate Black conventions by rooting their rock lyrics in the rhetoric of oppression was also pursued. Furthermore, the group vigilantly creolised their family trees and policed group conversations to ensure the hero of history was the Black protagonist and the "bad guy" was Western states (the "white man"). Embodying Blackness was no simple feat for Jamaican musicians.

Dancehall and reggae served as the antithesis to rock music for most of the Jamaican politic. Subsequently, rock music was deemed a contemporary form of imperialism, tasked at reinserting a system of oppression. Many traditionalists like Ibo Cooper were concerned that the influence of American music might lead to the death of "authentic" Jamaican sounds – local music which represented the experiences of the poor Black and resisted White oppression.

In truth, rock music embodied anti-Black principles in complex ways which did not allow the sound's entry into the popular domain. Its life on the fringes is clear evidence that reconstruction and imitation can birth new stereotypes or various types of Othering – "Roast Breadfruit." Notwithstanding the critique of the scene's "imitation" of foreign practices, rock musicians drew on foreign traditions to influence their music as well as the tenets under Black nationalism. Rock scene musicians like Vernon and Wayne felt that their creativity in merging both foreign and local music highlighted innovation and experimentation

which all great musicians must undergo to be truly skilled at their craft.

Bhabha (1994) states that social ambivalence is a hegemonic tool used to rigidly confine the post-colonial character to sentiments on race and maintain dominant/subordinate positions. The ambiguity which clouds the character of rock music and its audience's tastes may project a threatening force to traditionalists like Ibo Cooper. However, the indistinct nature of producing Jamaican rock music can be viewed as an act of rebellion, an act of postcolonial rebellion against any ideal type, White or Black.

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The Marxian Populism of C. L. R. James

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ABSTRACT: This paper summarizes a critique of C.L.R. James' work which the author is in the process of developing. If it can provoke a response in the direction of greater clarification of James' writings as a whole and what significance they deserve in Caribbean Social Thought, then it would have come close to achieving one of its objectives.

KEYWORDS: Marxian dialectics, C. L. R. James, political culture, social transformation.

Introduction

This paper is meant to be a working document.[1] It summarizes a critique of C.L.R. James' work which the author is in the process of developing. If it can provoke a response in the direction of greater clarification of James' writings as a whole and what significance they deserve in Caribbean Social Thought, then it would have come close to achieving one of its objectives.

At the outset, a brief comment will be made on some assumptions and definitions which are used in the discussion. First, I assume that one can speak of a general accumulation of thoughts or insights on various aspects of human existence as comprising an 'intellectual tradition'. As much as one readily recognizes Western or European intellectual traditions with various philosophical currents with attempts to explain sources of knowledge or the relation between mind and matter or the nature of social relations, so too one can think of a Caribbean intellectual tradition. This implies a body of knowledge or an accumulated tradition of thoughts by persons from a geographical area, called the Caribbean, dealing with various aspects of human existence as lived out in that environment.

Second, an intellectual tradition is comprised, if even not systematically, of inputs of various writers who traffic in ideas. The formulation of their ideas can change over time in the sense that either the themes addressed, the core concepts of analysis, or vocabularies can be depicted as essentially distinct from one period to another. This implies it is possible to periodize the inputs of a writer and select out some central idea or set of ideas that can characterize the dominant concerns of their writing at a particular time.

Third, in my view, Marxism can be seen as a continuation of what is most forward-looking in the human intellectual tradition. Marxian social science is not to be associated merely with what came out

1 This paper was first circulated in the Working Papers on Caribbean Society, a series produced by the Department of Sociology, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

from Marx. It had inputs from German philosophy that culminates in Hegel; so too it benefited from emancipatory themes and democratic ideas of the Enlightenment which found expression in the French Revolution.

Next, a Marxian tradition is not the same as a party dogma nor is it to be transposed uncritically to situations fundamentally different from the merging industrial capitalist social order against which Marx and Engels directed their critique. The influence of central Marxian notions such as 'contradictions', 'alienation', 'class struggle' and 'social formations' on social science since the nineteenth century is a necessary pre-requisite for any comprehensive and scientific appraisal of social relations. An essential criterion of any intellectual input in the general area of social science explanations will then be its relation to the Marxian tradition and its uses of Marxian categories of analysis. Both the method and conceptions of the Marxian tradition are basic premises against which I will attempt to appraise the "development" of James' writings.

There are several methodological limitations in this appraisal. I rely principally on the works of James himself. While it may be satisfactory and telling us what he said or how he perceives a given situation, the extent to which 'thoughts' and 'ideas' were put into practice and the empirical conditions which fashioned what he says or why ideas were not successfully put into practice have not been sufficiently scrutinized. Methodologically, this appraisal relies on a conceptual analysis of his writings and to overcome this would require cross-checking with a variety of persons, collaborators, colleagues, and opponents which had to be deferred for the moment.

Objectives

The scope and breadth of James' writings as well as his ideological orientation and political praxis in the struggle for the advancement of human civilization defy a neat classification. Any attempt to be comprehensive in the short space of this paper will be a disservice to the richness of a prophetic literary career spanning nearly fifty years.

Given such a range of intellectual pursuits to which James' imaginative and original mind has been directed, I think that one can approach his work from the standpoint of a general question. This would entail something to the effect of asking what significance does his writing hold for human self-consciousness and social transformation? In this sense I am concerned with an attempt to characterize James' social thought as a whole. It is that type of general problem that we are addressing now.

This treatment therefore is of necessity selective but will hopefully speak to three specific questions. Broadly stated, these are the following:

A. What can one identify as a central notion that consistently typifies the structure of his thought?

B. In what sense is James to be understood as a Marxist?

C. What areas of social thought are opened that can lead to fruitful expansions in Caribbean social science?

Selected Literature on James

The evolution of James' thought had been previously described in the work of La Guerre (1968; 1972) and Benn (1973). To the former, central attention is paid to James as a representative of the "colonial intelligentsia" in the sense that the political program advanced was preoccupied with "the usual pleas on behalf of free debate and criticism of notions of responsibility of orderly change and the potential of the West Indian people" (La Guerre, 1972, 5). The stature of James as a creative Marxist scholar and a forceful instrument for the diffusion of Marxism in the Caribbean is highlighted in Benn's treatment. The issue of self-determination and its ramifications for the liberation of Africa were highlighted by Singham (1970).

In his commentary on James' *Black Jacobins* (1938, 1963), the capacity and obligation of West Indians to "wrest control of their own destiny" is for Singham (1970, 83) one of its major contemporary connotations. In addition, the theoretical significance of James was also to be found in his contribution to "one of the greatest debates taking place in the 1930s, the nature of the socialist state" (Singham, 1970, 83). Also of importance was "the problem of coming to terms theoretically with fascism." Seen in the manner that Singham approaches James' work, one might

sense immediately that these are not all problems of the 1930s but pressing issues of the 1980s. To these topics I shall return later; now it will be beneficial to describe the sociocultural and philosophical context in which James' thought developed.

Periodization of James's Thought

Helpful as the commentators are, James himself provides a simplified description of stages and bases for his thinking. Briefly put, he acknowledges a threefold transition from anti-colonial rebel to Trotskyist to independent Marxist. These in turn can be placed in relation to distinct periods in his writings. For instance, his initial literary pursuits and association with Albert Mendes in the founding of *The Beacon* (1931) gave expression to a sense of outrage against injustice that had been enkindled in the blatant racial oppression of the colonial society in which he was educated. He was particularly sensitive to the ways in which racial discrimination was evident in the sphere of sport.

Beyond sport, the structure of racism was evident to James in the political culture of the colonial West Indies. While great preoccupation was centered on giving lectures, writing short stories or commentaries on West Indian history and "on Wordsworth, English drama and poetry as criticism of life" (1963, 71), *The Beacon* radicals were building the foundations of Creole nationalism and launching an anti-colonial and nationalist struggle. Its basis was racial resentment rather than class conflict and one of its most articulate statements was to be James's *The Life of Captain Cipriani* (1932). Along with his *Minty Alley*, the manuscript of which was almost completed in late 1932 when he left Trinidad for England, these are, in my view, the two most important sociopolitical works of his pre-Marxist formulations.

They contain, however, several seminal notions that, with elaboration, would have become integral to James' Marxian synthesis and suggest that Marxism is not some lifeless ideology or foreign importation in analyzing Caribbean social structure. The point here is that without explicit systematization of his thoughts, several notions emerged in an embryonic form that held no antipathy to formal Marxian categories. To these he intentionally directed his mode of analysis in a subsequent period.

The Popular Leader: Charisma not Class

The political figure of Cipriani, veteran of World War One and a native Trinidadian of Corsican descent, attracted the attention of James on account of the appeal Cipriani had with the laboring masses. In a sense, the fact that Cipriani represented the "barefooted" man made him have, in James' view, a popular base, a grounding among masses of people and, for this reason, Cipriani was accorded political, i.e. popular, significance. As a representative and a leader of people, not on account of education primarily, or correctness and purity of ideology, James seems to say, one must place politically legitimation.

Quite clearly one can question whether such a conception is little more than a vague populism or at worst an endorsement of the demagogue as an ideal type of political personification. More pertinent in James' work is the resonance this conception will have as the embodiment of the popular will in several instances of political charisma. Many similarities reveal themselves in the way in which James so consistently identifies charisma and popular leadership for his political analyses. Cipriani on the West Indian self-government, Toussaint and the San Domingo revolution, Fidel and the Cuba revolution, and Nkrumah and Ghana are some examples of the pervasive interest given to personality and leadership as integral to the realization of the aspirations that a populace embodies.

One infers that it is charisma rather than class that James leans in his earliest politics. The centrality of the mass leader lays the foundations for the populist orientation in his thought. Furthermore, it obscures the significance of the structural ties in group and class relations at the expense of pre-eminence to psychological qualities. James later saw these errors:

> There is a serious misunderstanding in *The Life of Captain Cipriani*. I do not make it clear that the mulatto middle class was what it was because it had been deliberately created by the white plantation owners."

These remarks were made in 1977 (personal communication with author, February 15, 1977). They are of far-reaching significance not merely in identifying the transition of James' thinking but in providing a pedagogical contribution to social sciences in our

situation. James considers his presentation "a serious misunderstanding" in not making clear the nature and role of the then middle class of "a deliberate creation" of the ruling class in the plantation system. It is not necessary for us to ask today who the sociological and dialectical successors of that "mulatto class" are and the conditions of today's neocolonialism. The functions of a class in addition to the attributes of its representatives must be identified for an adequate grasp of group relations. This is an important and basic premise for the use of class theory in social analysis. To this James became clearly committed and so it was a development of his earlier perceptions. It is an explicit indication of Marxian influence on his thinking.

Even more important than referring to the nature and role of the middle class, James in *The Black Jacobins* discusses how the mulatto class in the plantation system was to be a bulwark against the black slave majority. In retrospect, the antagonist relations of classes are readily obvious to the James of 1977 but was far from so 40 years earlier. This is as reliable an indication of his movement from anti-colonial rebel to independent Marxist as one might find. The former was fertile ground for the latter and was evident in the notion of social estrangement that was instinctively a part of James' understanding of the division between the educated middle-class blacks and the black masses.

Alienation of Masses and the Petit Bourgeoisie

In his introduction to the second edition of *Minty Alley*, Ramchand was clearly aware of some of the aforementioned issues and made an explicit comment to that effect. "One of the novel's concerns is the mutually impoverishing alienation of the educated West Indian from the people" (Ramchand, 1971, 13). But it does not end there. In fact, a "growing involvement with and appreciation of" the urban proletariat affect the inner life and self-conception of the rising West Indian bourgeoisie as portrayed in a central character of the novel.

In James, the necessity of interaction between the young educated black man, Haynes, and the girl, Maisie, cannot be explained except in dialectical terms. He was not aware at that time, but this instinctive understanding and insight of group relations implied the notions both of separate/division and necessary interaction. This was in practice the use of the Hegelian dialectical method and would readily facilitate James' adoption of a Marxist worldview. The realization of this expressed itself in the now classic study he produced on the Haitian slave revolt and his interpretation of the Communist International from 1917 to 1936 under the title of *World Revolution* (1937).

Marxian Historian and Dialectician

These studies were a significant part of the extensive and perhaps his most creative writings. It is the period of *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (1936); *The Invading Socialist Society* (1947); *Notes on Dialectics* (1948); *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950 [1937]); *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953) along with numerous pamphlets, articles, lectures, debates and, most important, the active participation in the struggle of American workers and industry and the sharecropping farmers of Detroit and the Midwestern USA.

This is the period in which James' stature as a Marxist theoretician assumed its highest proportion and, while it in part coincided with the rise of his influence as a Pan-African advocate, it forced into the forefront of his thinking three problems of enormous importance for Marxian theory and practice. These are the natural evolution of state capitalism, spontaneity and class consciousness and the relation of the black American struggle to American socialism on the wider problems of international proletarianism. These were topics that covered intense debate and polemics which culminated in James's rejection of Trotskyism and laid the foundation for his present independent Marxism to which New Left thinking in the USA would be closely enamored.

Prior to examination of these issues, it will be beneficial to make a brief reference to some of the major highlights associated with *The Black Jacobins*. Caribbean readers are of course quite familiar with most of these but a reminder with a slightly different emphasis should do no harm. In my opinion, Singham (1970) has gone the furthest in extracting the theoretical and political significance of that book.

For instance, its appearance in 1938 was directly related to the upheavals in which "the former slaves of Saint Kitts, Jamaica, Trinidad and on the other islands were revolting against the plantation system continuing the struggle that their forefathers had begun in Haiti in 1789" (Singham 1970, 83).

Beyond this The Black Jacobins' thrust was directed against the colonial office propaganda that natives had to be "tutored" into self-government. James forcefully attacked this conception by showing that the slaves of Haiti, a century and a half before, not only waged a highly skillful military struggle but acquired and maintained power against formidable opposition. The failure of the revolution to lead to socioeconomic transformation was not "inadequate preparation for independence" but, as Singham (1970, 83) stated: "the continued dependence forced upon them by the international system and particularly economic dependence." Later he also identified the international factors which were so necessarily an essential component in maintaining the structures of dependency. For instance, Singham (1970) cited the complexity and "detailed matters of post-revolutionary reconstruction", the "enormous problem of working with the existing bureaucracy", an ideology and strategy to create new types of community relations. These of course are issues that not only emerge in the instance of Haiti but have a remarkable resemblance to us today in situations where independence was not won by armed struggle but granted by conference negotiation.

James in 1938 identified the underlying economic basis of neocolonial dependence and today we experience the full force of this exploitation in all Caribbean societies except Cuba, where both successful revolution and economic transformation have been won by a popular struggle. The Black Jacobins and Cipriani's constituency reveal continuity and differences. Both are equivocally on the capacity and readiness for West Indian self-determination. They are palpable evidence of James agitating for West Indian independence and furthering the cause of Caribbean nationhood long before any of today's petty rulers in the region had made their first electioneering speech.

One can also see in *The Black Jacobins* lucid analysis of the economic and political importance of the role that mulattoes occupied in plantation society. Here is a new departure over the earlier study of Cipriani. This perspective allows us to see the connection and persistence in the meditating economic and political function of mulattoes of that time, and today's comprador bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois bureaucrats who are conduits in the same structure of dependency on the development in Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados at the moment.

If, by 1938, James' perspective is explicitly Marxian, there are still pervasive strands of his former populist orientation. These features are evident in the way he attempted to include psychological factors, particularly those of the revolutionary leadership, into the historical and cultural aspects of Haiti's revolutionary mass movement. It is worthwhile to pursue James' treatment of this problem area since it is clear that some conceptual difficulties remain unsolved on these issues, and they continue to exercise an important part and of James' thought as a whole.

Leadership and Popular Democracy

What role was to be accorded individual leadership or the outstanding personality and the transformation of the "trembling slaves" into an organized revolutionary force was an underlying question being addressed in James' study. He claimed to have demonstrated the extent to which "this unique achievement was almost entirely the work of a single man Toussaint L'Ouverture" (James, 1989, ix). Hence *The Black Jacobins* subtitle was intentional and logical: *Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution*. In James's words:

> The history of the San Domingo revolution will therefore largely be a record of his achievements and his political personality… [and] the narrative will prove, that between 1789 and 1815, with the single exception of Bonaparte himself, no single figure appeared on the historical stage more greatly gifted than this negro, a slave until he was 45. Yet Toussaint did not make the revolution. It was a revolution that made Toussaint. And even that is not the whole truth (1989, x).

Analyzing Toussaint's political personality as a significant dimension of the revolutionary transformation, James showed himself sensitive to the in-

terplay of character on social structure and shaping events (and decisions) and their ultimate outcome. The material is presented to avoid a psychological reductionism, though delicately analyzing a wide range of psychological attributes: vacillation or reluctance to join the first uprising or declare war of independence, a conciliatory attitude to whites or mulattoes, a sudden rupture of intimate friendship, the depth of his loyalty to France, on integrity demanding the execution of his nephew or betraying the Spanish allies – all the many psychological factors are never unrelated to the forces in the social structure. His background occupation as a slave, his reading of French liberal thought, particularly Raynal, the social significance of his blackness on the wider intrigue and revelry of European missions for wealth and power provide the context for an explanation of Toussaint's personality and character. Leadership seems to be defined in relational terms and not as an autonomous or independent entity. Certainly, for James, to lead authentically implies organic ties with the "led."

The text could warrant a full-scale study on the social psychology of revolutionary leadership. Neither space nor present purposes would allow for even a brief outline here. But a particularly important hypothesis is treated by James and to this it will be worthwhile to attend. The decay of leadership on the part of Toussaint is noted by James and he attributes this to the limitations of his political conceptions. Such limitations on the part of the leader are however not shared by the masses. A particular important feature of James' general conception is that the masses of people are the repository of revolutionary consciousness and action.

Perception and Class

In Toussaint, James sees vacillation and a conciliatory weakness towards the local whites at the expense of the true source of his strength, the black masses. "Toussaint could not believe that the French ruling-class would be so depraved, so lost to all sense of decency, as to try to restore slavery" (James, 1989, 282). To perceive a ruling class in terms, other than it is, constituted an inaccurate perception on the part of the mulatto leader. Here, if anywhere, James' sociology of knowledge is dead on target, and is as perceptive a portrayal as Marx himself, or Mannheim or Berger or Stark could express. Reality is perceived in relation to class position. This is the basic contribution of Marx to the sociology of knowledge. James implicitly uses this and hence the 'false' conception of Toussaint. So based on this misconception, James could claim that

> it was in method, and not in principle, that Toussaint failed. The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental… the black laborers saw only the old slave owning whites. These would accept the new regime, but never to the extent of fighting for it against a French army. (1989, 283)

Then James in crypt, inimitable poignancy emphasized his point: "and the masses knew this" (1989, 283). The masses "see" or "know" without false conceptions become the critical implication of James' comment.

Projecting self-doubt among the base of his support, remaining hopeful that there would be no reason for fighting even after the expedition had set sail for Saint Domingo, leaving his generals in the dark, Toussaint's policy was self-defeating, his leadership therefore disadvantaged obtaining the mobilization of the masses without which the ultimate acquisition of independence and de facto transformation of the colony would have been impossible. The leadership of Toussaint had the key relation to the movement of the masses and it was from them, that the new leadership would arise in the person of Dessalines.

Toussaint's error sprung from the very qualities that made him what he was. It is easy to see today, as his generals saw after he was dead, where he had erred. It does not mean that they or any of us would have done better in his place. If Dessalines could see so clearly and simply, it was because the ties that bound us uneducated soldiers of French civilization were of the slenderest, he saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness. (James 1989, 288).

Although James' hypothesis on the relations between a leader and a movement remains an illu-

minating insight, its formulation is little more than suggestive. We hardly receive clear definitions of the conditions under which new leadership persists, even though dysfunctional to the originally defined goals of the movement. What specific factors, if any, can account for the collective awareness of the masses and under what conditions can such awareness successfully overcome bureaucratic and authoritarian leadership? Questions of this kind remain unanswered by James, thus indicating a merely preliminary formulation of his ideas. They, however, possess a distinct quality which in elaboration might be informative on questions about the decay of the nationalist leadership in third world societies. This was a critical issue at the Sixth Pan-African Congress in 1974. It continues to be our most pertinent element and perpetuates the dependency of the Caribbean. Decadent leadership is also now acutely responsible for the present recolonization in societies such as Trinidad under the aegis of 'joint-venturism' with multinational corporations such as Amoco, Texaco, and W. R. Grace.

State Bureaucracy and Mass Spontaneity

From Black Jacobins and Toussaint one can turn to Soviet Marxism and Stalin, which James addressed in his other major work of that period. *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937) as a study of the Third International, was very much a fierce attack on Stalin's policies in what James considered to be a betrayal of the 1917 Revolution. The doctrine of "socialism in one country" was rejected as chauvinistic and a contradiction of international proletarianism. James considered it paramount that the party bureaucracy in the Stalinist regime was a denial of popular participation in achieving an effective socialization of the means of production. What he directed his mind to was, and has remained, an area of Marxian theory that was insufficiently developed. It concerned the general problem of the State, its nature and role, in the transition to Socialism. James based his arguments on the Trotskyite notion of "permanent revolution." This implied that the transition from capitalism to socialism had to be seen, particularly in such a "backward" country as Russia, as nothing short of continuous socio-economic and political confrontation, which were stages in the establishment of an international classless and stateless society. He opposed the doctrine of "socialism in one country" and considered the stringent party control under Stalin as a bureaucratic and anti-working-class institution imposed from "above."

James' claim was that his critique was grounded on Leninist principles in which working-class control of the economy was seen to be the only objective basis on which true democracy in society was possible. Instead, he noted that in this period a "flight from the deepening of the revolutionary involvement of the populace accelerated" after the Civil War, and it marked "the birth of modern state capital ... that throttle the very notion of mass revolutionary initiative" (see *Radical America*, 5 Nov/Dec. 1971, 18).

A synthesis of several layers in James' thought appeared in this context. The fundamental populist character of his earlier years is carried over and expressed as the notion of "mass revolutionary initiative." Two dimensions of a definition of 'populism' as applicable to James are evident. One refers to it as an ideological feature around popular legitimacy for radical democracy. Then there is a dialectical aspect which is expressed in the notion of a revolutionary initiative. The key word being 'initiative'. It echoes the concept of 'spontaneity' as an inevitable, logical movement on the part of any oppressed individual or group.

This concept in James' work suggests a strong opposition or antithesis to the importance of revolutionary organization and is often a source of more confusion than clarity. But this need not be. Its usefulness is as a methodological device in the sense that one must consistently derive dialectical relations among social forces rather than impose fixed categories on the processes of social reality. Further, as James so fully grasped the Hegelian dialectic that Marx transformed, he was able to reject Trotskyism as being no longer Marxist in the Marxian and Leninist sense and come to his present position of "independent" Marxism. The arguments which James and his North American colleagues advanced as the "Johnson-Forest tendency" to reform the Trotskyist movement were published in various documents in the 1940s and early 1950s that testify to this transition.

Trotsky's Undialectical Approach and Black America

Already at the end of the 1937 study of *World Revolution*, James outlined a program for a "Fourth International" as the "only hope" against the likelihood of "imperialist war after imperialist war" (1937, 419, 421). To his mind, primacy was to be given to the working-class struggle on a world scale, and that of class struggle in Europe as a logical necessity for the survival and advancement of a socialist Russia. Uncritically he held to the view that the very nature of oppressed conditions established a consciousness and bond that transcended national boundaries. While arguing it convincingly in showing the "Paris masses" and then "black brothers in San Domingo" to be passionate allies, the outbreak of World War Two rather than national civil wars proved the questionable nature of this view.

These circumstances led James to look critically at the conditions of the black struggle in the USA. He argued that political autonomy should be granted the black movement on account of both theoretical and strategic reasons. Because of its "deep historical roots" and that it was in itself "a constituent part of the struggle for socialism", the real leadership of the black struggle was not to rest in the hands of organized labor or of the Marxist party.

In addition to the issues on the Black American struggle, James's ideological development and subsequent impact on New Left thinking in the USA were shaped by discussions on the nature of the Stalinist regime and the character of monopoly capitalism in America. The most important ideas of this period were influenced by James' participation in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and his final break with them, in 1951, resulted from dispute on the acute ideological issue of the relation between objective and subjective factors in organizing the international class struggle.

In *Notes on Dialectics*, James and colleagues identified the vital distinction between *forms* of revolutionary organization, which were transitional, and the *method* of dialectical reasoning. Based on this distinction and in light of the emergent state capital and what they considered to be the "tyranny" that the Communist Party had become under Stalin, it was argued that the vanguard party was not a central doctrine of Leninism but a concrete "aid" to the attainment of revolutionary power in the historical circumstances of a "backward" Russia.

The vanguard party as an instrument of liberation not being universally applicable constituted the new theoretical departure that James and his colleagues advanced. On this basis James had made himself a heretic to the world socialist revolutionary movement under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Rejecting the vanguard party notion, the concept of mass-spontaneity was endorsed as of universal applicability. It was also seen as the pertinent focus by which class struggle could be continued both in the situation of "state capitalism" and of "advanced monopoly capitalism." This formulation remained unsubstantiated and, while one might concede the formal reasoning behind it, the basis on which the argument rests was not supported by adequate evidence.

To James and colleagues, it was their conviction, rather than convincing proof, that the proletariat had "come of age" as part of a natural process of historical development and had therefore acquired the capacity to transform its environment unaided. The examination of the labor process in Russia had indicated that central planning and "the nationalization of industry alone" were not sufficient in establishing a workers' state. Similarly, James' tendency argued that the fundamental antagonism of society was the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the social relations of production. Therefore, the resolution of this contradiction rested in "the reorganisation of the productive process by labour itself."

Moreover, the proletariat remained the driving force of the abolition of capitalism either in the form of monopoly or state capitalism with its "thieving bureaucracy" as an administrative caste system. It was control of the productive process and not mere ownership that constituted the material basis for socialist construction. This view James held onto unequivocally some 25 years ago and its importance has been recently highlighted in the work of critical supporters of the 'non-capitalist' thesis. For us in the Caribbean one can readily recognize a connection between the earlier work of James and the present concerns of C. Y. Thomas.

To focus therefore on the nature of production relations, as James correctly did, enabled the recognition that qualitative changes of class rule were only possible by objective, structural and material factors and not subjectivist, psychological qualities or empty postures by those who exercise power. As a consequence of his critique of state capitalism, James saw the negation of direct workers' control as a driving force in the continuation of class struggle towards the realization of a proletarian democratic state. It was on this basis that he claimed to have predicted the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and was not surprised by the Soviet "imperialist" invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. A decade later at the inaugural T. U. Butler Memorial Lecture in 1978 at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago, James spoke commendably about strikes in Poland as further instances of the ongoing struggle for popular democracy within a socialist society. Helpful as James's critique was, it left too much that was vague and ambiguous to classify the continuation of class struggle in such divergent forms as the mass movement in Yugoslavia, uprisings in East Germany, a strike in Nantes, a general strike in Detroit, conflict of the Coventry workers (see his *Modern Politics*, 1960).

On the positive side, this period of his work was very insightful to the enlarged debate on "party democracy" in the transition and the nature of the state prior to its withering away. His limitations were much less narrowness of conception than a general underdevelopment of Marxist theory on the State and what were the kinds of institutional mechanisms for revolutionary struggle in conditions beyond those that Marx and Lenin had so painfully researched. Quite clearly, James hinted at, but did not elaborate, a consistent Marxist critique of bureaucratic relations, an area that is as important for Marxists in advanced capitalist societies as those under mixed or centrally planned economies.

The Independent Marxist and Caribbean Politics

By 1953 when he was deported from the USA during McCarthy's anti-communist purge, James' most important theoretical works had already been written, and the core concepts of his thought firmly established. Since then, it is difficult to find any major theoretical contribution or conceptual innovation that can be attributed to James' period as an "independent Marxist." Coming to the West Indies in 1958, he stayed for about two years and worked as editor of the People's National Movement's *The Nation*, which culminated in his renouncing the party's petit bourgeois nationalism as a betrayal of "the great movement for nationhood and democracy." Consistent to his "populist" orientation and advocating a non-aligned "Marxist" position, James rationalized his participation, one would suspect, on the grounds that the most significant force in the local situation was the fact that "the political temper of the West Indian masses" was at an extremely high pitch.

Looked at critically this was really a hasty conclusion and based on the evidence James found in the fact that "the masses assemble in numbers of 15-, 20-, 25-000 because they are aware of a profound change in their society and are looking for new foundations." If he was firmly grounded in the awareness that the logic of class struggle is an organic historical process, he would hardly have romanticized the situation at that time. Here, therefore, James was inconsistent to the dialectical method. The outcome of that episode and later, with the hastily constructed Workers and Farmers Party (WFP) of 1966, are substantial reasons why James's critics, both from the right and left dismiss his participation in Trinidad politics as burdened with ambivalent and problematic positions.

Aware of an ambiguity which was likely to follow from his rejection of the primary importance of a vanguard party in situations where the proletariat had "come of age", James held to the validity of a revolutionary party "adapted to local conditions...where industry and the proletariat" were not dominant (1960, 55). Here the contradiction between theory and practice in James is instructive. Convinced of the validity and critical significance of the revolutionary party for such situations as prevailed in the Caribbean, his efforts in building such a party were meagre. In neither of his two short-lived episodes, in 1958 – 1960 with the People's National Movement (PNM) or 1965 – 1966 with the WFP, were even the nucleus of such a party formed, nor did what exist consistently pursue a revolutionary Marxist position.

Neither with the PNM or WFP in which James participated, or now, more recently with the United Labour Front, have the consequences and demands of this position been consistently pursued. In this regard it seems reasonable to claim that here the importance of James remains pertinent and one major task will be to carry to their logical conclusions, insights, and issues to which he drew our attention. In this task discussion might fruitfully begin with clarification in at least four areas: 1. the dialectical method in social science; 2. a Marxian critique of bureaucratic theory and institutions; 3. the critical focal points of class struggle; and 4. a program for a revolutionary party based on Marxism-Leninism and with organic roots among the working people.

These issues need to be situated in the present Caribbean context as they are already part of the current struggle in every territory without exception. Our response and participation will hopefully help to emerge not merely a relevant political sociology for the region but critical social scientists. While, as I have attempted to show, several insights of James are pertinent to our struggle, the application and development of these remain unfulfilled. To pursue these tasks, deeper acquaintance with James, through direct contact with his writings, should prove more beneficial than this commentary.

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Political Power Struggles in Suriname: A Gramscian Analysis of the 2020 Elections

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ABSTRACT: The lead up to the May 2020 elections in Suriname, a Dutch-speaking country in the Caribbean with a culturally diverse population of 550,000 people, was beset with several difficulties including the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Although Suriname has had seventeen universal suffrage elections since 1949, this election cycle was notable for the integral role of social media in political campaigning. Political parties adapted and implemented online campaign strategies with extensive politicking through platforms on issues such as corruption, economic crisis and ethnic political mobilization. Online campaign strategy raises questions about whether changes in political communication change the shape and nature of political struggle in a country characterized by consociational democracy and electoral instability. This article addresses these questions, with the broader goal of understanding political power struggles from a new lens that draws on e-politics and Gramsci's classical approaches. Combined with social media analyses, this article highlights how the ruling political party, the NDP, seeks to maintain its power and how the main opposition party, the VHP, challenges it. It also examines whether social media influenced the nature of political party interaction, the construction of networks and allies, the political framing of ethnicity or the formation of online public opinion.

KEYWORDS: Suriname, elections 2020, social media, ethnicity

Introduction

The lead up to the May 2020 elections in Suriname, a Dutch-speaking country in the Caribbean with a population of 550,000 people, was beset with several difficulties including the local effects of the global coronavirus pandemic. While Suriname has had seventeen elections with universal suffrage since 1949, this election cycle was notable because of the integral role of social media in political campaigning. Political parties adapted and undertook online campaigning strategies that incorporated extensive politicking via platforms about topics like corruption, economic crisis, and ethnic political mobilization. Given that Suriname is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the Caribbean, this online campaigning strategy raises questions about whether changes in political communication alter the form and nature of political contest in a country that features consociational democracy as well as recent electoral instability (Menke 2016).

I draw upon Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counterhegemony to deepen the understanding of Surinamese politics in the digital era and to update the understanding of the sociopolitical patterns in this culturally diverse country. I apply the concept of hegemony to examine how ruling political parties attempt to exert ideological control over the masses to maintain power. I address their use of online politics – what is known as e-politics in Suriname – to influence public opinion, diminish critical or threatening agencies of civil society and opposition politi-

cal parties, and promote their own political leadership.[1] Counterhegemony, on the contrary, involves critical thinking about ruling parties. It provides a counter to the ideological control of ruling groups. E-politics is relevant here due to its impact on the thoughts and beliefs of users. Online platforms have serious shortcomings, such as the mass spread of one-sided, false information, which does not necessarily comply with democratic principles (Sundaram 2017). However, these spaces offer useful avenues to study the struggle for hegemony between political power blocs (Fujiwara, Muller, and Schwarz 2010).

Suriname traditionally shares political power among the elites of major ethnic groups. These groups are represented by mono-ethnic political parties (refer to Lijphart 1977, Algoe 2022). However, this arrangement leads to a certain degree of "electoral instability," influenced by the demographics and social characteristics of voters, and social policies (Menke 2015). Addressing the positioning of issues on platforms can enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by consociational democracy. From 2015 to 2020, the National Democratic Party (NDP) was the ruling party in Suriname. This study examines how the NDP attempted to retain its political power by leveraging government and social media to highlight its social and political (even populist) policies, with a focus on culture/ethnicity. It explores whether the NDP's addition of platform political work to its tactical repository altered the nature of interaction between political parties, the construction of networks and allies, the political framing of ethnicity, or the formation of online public opinion. Finally, this study reports on how political parties built networks with sponsors and activists to consolidate or expand their power base. In this examination of e-politics strategies, I considered ethnic mobilization, connections with activists, and the role of diasporic networks.

Regarding data collection, research assistants created a database cataloging public engagement with political parties and their candidates' social media posts from January 2020 to May 2020. As a complementary exercise, the research team coded and analyzed the beliefs, religious factors, and any ethnic undertones present in party leaders' public speeches. The focus was on how ruling groups attempted to forge alliances with critical groups, such as activists, nongovernmental organizations, cultural organizations, and opposition political parties. As this study discusses matters of comparative change, it is worthwhile to briefly review recent prior elections to establish a baseline. The few public studies of the 2010 election cycle showed that the reception of social policies and the demographic composition of voters greatly contributed to electoral instability (Menke, 2015). Understanding these issues is crucial to grasp the dynamics of the 2020 elections.

Hegemony, Counterhegemony and E-Politics

Gramsci argues that maintaining power in capitalist societies involves gaining ideological control of the population. Hegemony refers to how consent is attained from subordinate groups by rulers, a process at a relatively low cost for maintaining power. At different points within the process of gaining consent, alliances, bargains or pacts become useful tools to broaden the public's perception that the status quo is justifiable. Drawing upon, but innovating from, classical Marxism, Gramsci's writings direct attention towards the constitutive role of the belief in reproducing capitalist social relations. Put differently, beliefs or cultural practices are not simply the by-product of prior historical material conditions or political-economic relationships, but also a primary constitutive factor. For this reason, the concept helps explain how ideology can be a form of domination on par with coercive class repression (Fontana 2002; Gramsci 1999). Rulers aim to generate popular support in civil society to legitimate their exercise of power to maintain a repressive capitalist state (Scherrer 2001).

A key term in Gramsci's hegemony is "common sense." Rulers spread their beliefs and values in such a way that they become "common sense" in the public's opinion (Billings 1990). Common sense can be identified in popular culture as well as consent to policy directives. Gramsci states that "everything that

1 E-politics is a field of study that examines how digital political communication shapes the dynamic interactions between the political domain and the public realm (see Lillleker 2006).

directly or indirectly influences or could influence public opinion belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of streets and their names" (Gramsci, cited in Stoddart 2007, 202). Common sense points to the naturalization of prevailing beliefs, giving them an unearned status or regard (Gramsci 1999). This makes subordinate groups less able to imagine, entertain, or evaluate different forms of living; the result is that by following "the law of the least effort," hegemony makes ideas that support subordination to appear like common sense (Buttigieg 1995).

An important part of maintaining power, according to Gramsci, is leadership. He perceives leadership as the ability to win the support of a particular group by connecting with its perceived interests (Billings 1990). It includes the way leaders show concerns for the interests of groups and make efforts to realize these. They present themselves as well-wishers who try to solve the problems of the subordinate groups. But dominant groups are subtly trying to change the worldview of the masses. This is not a straightforward process. In Gramsci's view, dominance is maintained by people who directly and indirectly are related to the ruling groups. Some present themselves as autonomous but are not (Burke 2020). They must prevent rebellion against the power structures. Ruling groups try to include the interests of subordinate groups in their agenda, but not at the cost of their own interests. They create "allies" by partially inserting their needs in "hegemonic" institutions to increase their support for the power relations in society (Scherrer 2001).

Counterhegemony refers to the development of an awareness of one's own position as a basis to take actions against political control. Gramsci believes that hegemony could be countered by political and cultural struggles rather than socialist revolutions. In the concept of counterhegemony, the ideological stances and real actions to diminish power are interwoven. It includes both the creation of critical awareness and the establishment of counterhegemonic institutions to diminish hegemony and domination (Billings 1990). Critical awareness is key to rejecting the so-called superiority of ruling groups. This depends on three sociopolitical factors: autonomous organizations, leadership, and interaction within the responding groups (Billings 1990).

The first factor, autonomous organizations, provides a space for self-reflection in the face of dominance. These organizations are expected to be free from the ideological dominance of ruling groups. They are part of a civil society that operates independently of the state's administrative and juridical apparatuses (Buttigieg 1995, 14). Autonomous organizations serve as a foundation for fostering and disseminating critical thinking against ideological dominance. Gramsci posits that this critical thinking originates in civil society and evolves into a revolutionary culture capable of challenging the state's coercive powers. He believes that a revolutionary culture does not incite rebellion, but rather promotes a critical understanding of societal status quo. According to Gramsci, such activities can only transpire within autonomous bodies of civil society (Buttigieg 1995).

The second sociopolitical factor involves the leadership of intellectuals. These individuals are pivotal in developing alternative perspectives that "challenge the status quo" and educate the wider population (Billings 1990, 27). According to Gramsci, intellectuals are key figures who assign meaning to their social groups and facilitate their functioning (Burke 2020). Gramsci categorizes intellectuals into two types: organic and traditional. Organic intellectuals have strong ties to the state and ruling groups. They are "produced" by the dominant education system and serve as a vital instrument for the ruling groups to exercise hegemony, exemplified by roles such as managers, civil servants, and lawyers. Traditional intellectuals have subtle connections to the dominant group. They portray themselves as individuals working independently from the ruling groups and are perceived as such by many. However, they align with the dominant groups. Traditional intellectuals include philosophers, clerks, and professors (Burke 2020).

In counterhegemony, subordinate groups produce their own organic intellectuals. They can come from a community, such as the neighborhood, and are necessary since they know their local people. They may have similarities with the residents. And more importantly, they can develop strong relationships with the local people in such a way that they can raise critical commitments to the community. In Gramsci's view, leadership of intellectuals should be

aimed at developing an education and culture of critical consciousness. He suggests that the leadership of intellectuals is best exercised in civil society.

The third sociopolitical factor, social interaction within the responding group, refers to the strategies to spread critical views against the superiority of dominant groups among the masses. According to Gramsci, the best strategy is to repeat these views (Billings 1990). Of all institutions, Gramsci considers civil society the most important in developing a revolutionary strategy against the hegemony of ruling groups. This group should disable "the coercive apparatus of the state, gaining access to political power, and creating the conditions that could give rise to a consensual society wherein no individual or group is reduced to a subaltern status" (Buttigieg 1995, 7). It involves prioritized practices. Since the focus of this study was on the political elections, this factor cannot be used as non-ruling parties do not have access to political power.

Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and counterhegemony provide valuable analytical frameworks for examining the political power struggles during Suriname's 2020 elections, particularly in the context of e-politics. Although discussions about the social and political impacts of such platforms are well-established in other national academic communities, these topics have yet to receive sustained scholarly attention in Suriname. In the Caribbean social media is a growing tool for politics, but there are few systematic analyses based on nationally representative data (Adugu and Broome 2018). Some recent studies have focused on the role of social media in Trinidad and Tobago (Sinanan 2017, Bachan-Persad 2022). In Suriname Facebook is the most used platform. The Organization of American States (2021) commended Suriname for its political parties' utilization of social media platforms to facilitate continuous political campaigning under the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the question is how these digital tools, given their technical design and the national context, contributed to democratic principles? Media platforms have the benefits of educating/informing the public, encouraging public debates, and allowing scrutiny to elections, but the position of social media is not that straightforward. Included are challenges to interpret the relationship between online communities and the wide population (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017). For this reason, e-politics is a useful starting point for exploratory research.

As it applies to elections, studies show that platform-based political campaigning can have an influential, constitutive but not determinative impact on outcomes (Kobayashi and Ichifuji 2015; Fujiwara, Muller, and Schwarz 2010). Additionally, some analyses have documented the different grammars that politicians and audiences use on platforms compared to mass media (Stier, Bleier, Lietz, and Strohmaier 2018). Certainly, these differences arise from the sociotechnical affordances of platforms. At a less abstract level, parties use platforms in three main ways during elections. These are to convey messages about the position regarding issues; promote personality traits such as trustworthiness; and improve name recognition (Kobayashi and Ichifuji 2015). These three factors are engaged in both hegemonic and counterhegemonic processes. For instance, the position of issues can include the spreading of messages justifying policies in the case of hegemony, and emphasizing critical views on these policies in the case of counterhegemony.

To analyze the nature of political power struggles in the Surinamese 2020 elections, I integrate the concepts of hegemony, counterhegemony and e-politics. Hegemony is used to understand the way the ruling party, NDP, is trying to retain its political power by using social media. To this end, analyses are made of the influence of leadership, creation of allies with critics and other parties, as well as social and populist policies to create "common sense" on supporting the NDP with emphasis on portrayal of culture/ethnicity. At a more empirical level social media posts, newspaper articles, and speeches during political campaigning are examined to identify the hegemonic nature of the NDP in terms of leadership praises, justification of policies, use of cultural diversity, and responses to critics. The concept of counterhegemony is applied to understand how the political power of the NDP was opposed. More specifically the role of the United Reformist Party (VHP), the major opposition political party, in challenging the power of the NDP particularly through social media is examined. Analyses are

also made of how critical awareness against the NDP is created through or by civil society organizations that support VHP, leadership especially at grassroots level, and social interaction within the VHP and supporting agents.

As this study discusses matters of comparative change, it is worthwhile to briefly review recent prior elections to establish a baseline. The few public studies of the 2010 election cycle showed that the reception of social policies and the demographic composition of voters greatly contributed to electoral instability (Menke 2015). Understanding these issues is crucial to grasp the dynamics of the 2020 elections.

Surinamese Politics between 2000 and 2020

Formerly known as Dutch Guiana, Suriname was a plantation colony of the Netherlands. Settler-colonialism was established by British planters bringing enslaved people in 1651; in 1667 Suriname was seized by a Dutch fleet and remained in Dutch control until the country attained political independence in November 1975. The post-independence period was beset by political violence over the spoils of Dutch foreign aid. For example, in 1980 the government refused to sanction trade union activity within the armed forces, an event that precipitated a military coup. From 1980 to 1987 the country was governed by a succession of military regimes. A coup took place in 1990, but the country returned to civilian rule the following year. The last three decades have seen Suriname re-democratize, although progress has been difficult and uneven.

Between 2000 and 2020, four elections were held with a fluctuating influence of neoliberalism, and with political campaigning focused on face-to-face meetings. Political power-sharing practices were based on consociationalism, which in particularly applied to the traditional monoethnic political parties. For years the major political parties were the creole Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS), the East Indian VHP, the Javanese Pertjahah Luhur (PL), and the labour union-related Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid (SPA). They participated in the elections as a political combination called Nieuw Front (NF). The NDP has been the major opposition party by featuring cultural diversity, which gradually increased its popularity and support.

Political campaigning during the four elections between 2000 and 2020 focused on face-to-face meetings. In doing so, political parties adhered to forms of neoliberal and progressive approaches albeit with some modifications. The founding ideology of NPS, which led the NF coalition between 2000 and 2010, primarily followed principles of nationalism and neoliberalism. The party's emphasis on the importance of economic growth is described in their 1966 book, *Groei te midden van beroering* [Growth in the midst of turmoil] (Eersteling 2017). This was in contrast to the NDP, a social-democratic political party. During

Election	Coalition	Opposition
2000	Nieuw Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling (NPS, VHP, PL, SPA)	Millennium Combinatie (NDP, DA, KTPI)
2005	Nieuw Front (NPS, VHP, PL, SPA), BEP, ABOP, DA'91	NDP, VVV
2010	Megacombinatie (NDP, PALU, KTPI, DNP 2000, BVD, A-combinatie, PL)	NPS, VHP
2015	NDP	V7
2020	VHP, ABOP, PL, NPS	NDP, BEP

Table 1. *Overview of Suriname political parties in opposition and coalition, 2000–2020.*

Note: The NDP, for the 2010 elections, was to participate in a partnership with the PALU, KTPI, DNP 2000, and the BVD. This collaboration was called the Megacombinatie (Mega Combination) (twenty-three seats) and Bouterse became the chairman. The Mega Combination formed a coalition with the A-Combination (seven seats) and the Pertjajah Luhur (six seats).

2010 and 2015, the Megacombinatie coalitie, led by the NDP, implemented a range of social reforms. These include increasing pensions, the introduction of a minimum wage, the removal of school fees, and investment in infrastructure and affordable houses. The Nieuw Front bloc accused the NDP coalition of spending too much money (Milanovi 2015).

Let us now take a closer look at each election. At the turn of the twentieth century, the NDP-led coalition government under President Jules Wijdenbosch was embroiled in corruption and mismanagement scandals; scandals that were associated with ministers from two smaller parties, the Javanese party KTPI, and the BVD (Trouw 1999). By December 1999, Wijdenbosch's government resigned and early elections were scheduled for 2000. Owing to internal disagreement, Wijdenbosch's fraction broke away to form a new political party. With the NDP affected by diluted support, NPS was elected to power under the leadership of Ronald Venetiaan in 2000. André Telting was placed at the head of the Central Bank of Suriname and a monetary policy that placed reserve requirements on domestic currency liabilities. In 2004, the Surinamese dollar was introduced due to the increase of raw materials prices that strengthened the economy (Evers and Stam 2012).

In the realm of party politics, major political blocs began to form. Comprising both large and small political parties, the two most notable were the Millennium Combinatie (MC) and the Nieuw Front (NF). The parties that associated with the NF bloc were the NPS, the VHP, the PL, and the SPA. The MC block consisted of the NDP, DA, and KTPI. The NF's manifesto sought to control government spending, bring transparency to the policy formation process, create economic resiliency, strengthen anti-narcotic policy, and generally improving diplomatic relations with the Netherlands (NRC Handelsblad, 2000).

During the 2005 election cycle, the NF's campaign focused on its role in achieving economic and monetary stability, and the recovery of foreign relations during its five years' rule. By contrast, the NDP led by Desi Bouterse campaigned in 2005 on a left-leaning agenda that concentrated on the "Four Renewals of the Revolution of 1980," namely: political-administrative order, social order, economic order, and educational order. This agenda was appealing to the younger generation of voters. Due to populist messaging, the NDP grew support among the poor. Ultimately the NF bloc lost eight seats and were not able to form a majority government (Vander Weyden 2006). Venetiaan retained the presidency. Between 2000 and 2009, foreign debt fell from 54% to 13% of the country's gross domestic product (for an analysis of state fiscal policy between 2004 and 2007, see Fritz-Krockow, et al. 2009).

As the 2010 elections neared, there was an increasing fear from the burgeoning middle-class that the economy could suffer at the hands of a Wijdenbosch or Bouterse government (Buddingh 2009). Accordingly, the NF's strategy focused on their administrative track record which heralded economic stability for the previous decade. The NF government received a lot of criticism for their stability approach during their last years in office, such as being "blinded by the dogma of stability" (van Maele 2013). Venetiaan was depicted as a competent head of state who brought financial stability, but these technocratic tendencies made him an elitist who could not connect with the citizenry. Venetiaan was also accused of tacitly accepting corruption by coalition partners to preserve the government (van Maele 2013). In summary, the critique was that the NF lacked the courage necessary for making much-needed policy choices; in effect what appeared as good governance was not (Johannes 2017). Repeatedly one found the theme of calculation over compassion.

The dissatisfaction with performance of the NF during their 2005–2010 term in office, when combined with the strong populist backlash by the young and poor who favor the NDP, placed the MC bloc in a favorable position for the 2010 elections. The focus of the MC's election campaign was "the formation of one nation and stimulating Suriname's own development" (de Overheid van de Republiek Suriname 2019). The MC bloc won the general elections while the NF lost nine seats. After the general elections, the MC bloc approached the NF to form a coalition government, but the NF refused. To remain in power, the NF strategically formed a cooperation with the smaller parties – A-Combinatie and PL – that was named a "fourth NF coalition." Their plan, however, failed.

After the MC candidate, Jennifer Geerlings-Simons, won the presidency of the National Assembly (with twenty-six out of fifty parliamentary votes), it turned out that two members of the so-called "fourth New Front coalition" had not voted along party lines and were rumored to have been bribed (Starnieuws 2010). After this incident the ABOP and PL parties lost trust in the cooperation agreement with the NF and thereafter decided to join the MC in forming a coalition government.

At the time of the 2015 elections, the NF – led by the NPS – had transformed into V7, led by the VHP. The NF consisted mostly of monoethnic political parties. Within this transformed party bloc, however, all parties wanted to get rid of their ethnic stamp, and profiled themselves on themes such as security, the fight against corruption, and the economy. Their primary focus was to "get rid" of Bouterse. He was seen as a man of the people, who had helped the country economically and fought poverty. The NDP's multiethnic profiling had also contributed to its popularity. During this election campaign, the ABOP had formed a Maroon political block, named A-Combinatie, together with the Seeka party. The MC with the NDP as its leading party gained three seats in the National Assembly, and Desi Bouterse was re-elected in 2015. Both the V7 and A-Combination party blocs were dissolved shortly after the 2015 elections.

The general elections were won by the political block lead by Bouterse and the leadership of the Central Bank was placed in the hands of a former IMF official, Gillmore Hoefdraad. Due to a worldwide fall in commodity prices, the Surinamese economy once again entered a crisis. In 2011, the Surinamese dollar devalued by 20% and, between 2012 and 2016, the economy declined from a 5% growth to a 10.4% year-on-year contraction. In 2016 there was hyperinflation of 55%, which followed the general elections of 2015. The government was criticized before the 2015 elections for being "the most expensive government Suriname has ever had, with at the same time the lowest productivity" (Parbode Surinaams Magazine 2014). The incumbent cabinet was re-elected despite the criticism. With a spike in gold prices and a rise in gold production in combination with sound monetary policy, the new governor of the Central Bank, Glenn Gersie, promised that the Surinamese dollar would recover in 2017 and 2018 (Ramdharie 2013). Gersie was fired in February of 2019. A political appointee, Robert-Gray van Trikt, was placed at the head of the Surinamese Central (Reformatorisch dagblad, 2019). The last months of the Bouterse cabinet were characterized by a large increase in foreign debt. The exchange rate of the Surinamese dollar was again under pressure four months after his appointment. In November 2019, the credit ceiling of the government's debt increased from 60 to 95% (De Ware Tijd 2019). The exchange rate of the Surinamese dollar was again under pressure four months after his appointment and Suriname's credit rating was lowered (Starnieuws 2019).

In summary, during the period between 2000 and 2020, the major traditional mono-ethnic parties gradually lost their influence, with the NPS experiencing a more significant decline than the VHP. Concurrently, the NDP's popularity surged. Simultaneously, the political power of Maroon communities grew, leading to the establishment of their own political parties. Ethnicity and religion remained strong mobilization instruments, albeit with diminishing influence among the younger generation. While the traditional parties prioritized economic stability and bilateral relations with the Netherlands, and maintained a more elitist character, the NDP concentrated on populist measures, addressing the needs of impoverished communities, exhibiting little to no interest in bilateral relations with the Dutch, and being more accessible to lower socioeconomic groups.

As the 2020 elections approached, Suriname grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, curfews, and full lockdowns. Numerous corruption scandals, including allegations of involvement by the Central Bank governor and the Minister of Finance, were exposed, while the economic crisis had worsened. The inflation rate skyrocketed under the NDP's rule between 2010–2020, with further increases highly likely. The Association of Economists frequently voiced their concerns about governmental mismanagement in the media. Concurrently, many government employees did not receive their salaries on time, while contractors remained unpaid. The list of creditors continued to grow. Bilateral relations

with the Netherlands, the former colonizer, had deteriorated. At one point, Suriname had no Dutch ambassador, a consequence of the NDP's outspoken "anti-colonial policy."

The 2020 Elections: Creating Hegemony Through E-politics

To understand the role of hegemony and counterhegemony in e-politics during the 2020 election, particularly the utilization of social media, it is necessary to outline the resources of political parties. The ruling party, the NDP, had access to government communication channels, including the Parliament TV station, GOV TV, and another channel called Purple TV. The government media chief, openly aligned with the NDP, designed programs for TV and oversaw the government radio station, SRS. On SRS, he hosted an immensely popular program called *Bakana Tori*, meaning "afternoon chat," where he discussed daily and current issues in a common and simple language. The NDP maintained various social media pages.

The major opposition party, the VHP, had a TV station called Orange TV. It also had airtime on other television and radio stations. The same applies for the PL party. Other political parties bought airtime on the TV stations. All major opposition parties had Facebook pages, although I shall focus on the VHP in this paper. By June 2020, my research team identified 38 Facebook pages related to the NDP and another 34 for the VHP, although there were fewer active pages (at 24 and 28 respectively).

The NDP's growing challenge to retain power was influencing the public opinion in its own favor amidst the increasing number of corruption scandals and the worsened economic crisis. The NDP's campaign responded in kind, although it maintained focus on the themes of political leadership, ethnic diversity, decolonization, and populist measures. Its hegemonic institutions – both government and private resources, particularly the media – were the target of public scrutiny. Nevertheless, I noticed a pattern in political campaigning that corresponds with hegemonic strategies to influence public opinion. The first and foremost was the promotion of the NDP's leadership.

Leadership

The promotion of NDP leader, Bouterse, is central in the political campaigns, both in-person as well as online. Prior to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic the NDP had held several large political meetings where speakers from different ethnicity and ages, male and female, spoke in favor of its leader. Typically, the NDP's in-person political campaigning events had sought to emphasize Bouterse's charisma and affiliation with working people.[2] But during the pandemic most events shifted online.

A critical influence on the NDP's hegemonic strategies came from, what Gramsci called, organic and traditional leaders; in empirical terms the former being openly aligned to the NDP while the latter in a subtle way. One of the openly NDP-aligned, thus organic leaders, was media chief Clifton Limburg. He hosted Bakana Tori, a popular program on the government radio station, SRS, regularly praising Bouterse for his skills in addressing people's needs and concerns. Arguably some of these messages eroded the boundaries between state and party. Limburg frequently interviewed NDP members and adopted an uncritical pro-government and pro-NDP framing perspective, exercises that were not extended to other parties. At the same time, Bouterse was often absent in the parliament and so was not present to answer questions from the opposition. However, he would go to SRS to broadcast his messages, portions of which were then circulated via platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. With little opportunity to exercise critique, the NDP's messaging took the form of common sense.

Illustrative for the working of a traditional leader in hegemony, thus subtly aligned to the NDP, was the role of a Christian leader called Kenneth Donk. He was a Christian religious figure who praised Bouterse openly. Invoking from the Christian Bible, Donk paralleled the sacrifice of one man who died for humankind with the need for, in Suriname, for the people to die for one man to thrive, referring to Bouterse. Donk's

2 See for instance, recording of the meeting on 7 December 2019. "NDP wil 34 zetels halen," published by Starnieuws on Youtube video at 8:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjNDzdzqzik.

strained imaginary was applauded and cheered by the attendant audience.

From the perspective of e-politics, one could argue that the features of social media platforms aligned well with the NDP's hegemonic trajectory by enabling the avoidance of public discussion and criticism, a typical strategy in the creation of common sense. To elaborate, the portrayal of Bouterse as a charismatic and caring leader was crafted for dissemination on these platforms, as their affordances allowed partisans to overshadow critical discussions. For instance, the NDP's Facebook page regularly posted political messages propagating the leader, such as a picture of Limburg and Bouterse in the studio. While the post received both positive and negative comments, the positive ones included praises for the leader and his leadership, while negative comments criticized Bouterse for addressing issues on Bakana Tori instead of answering questions in parliament. This type of engagement meant that the platform boosted the visibility of posts where intense exercises of political identification took place, but at the expense of clarifying issues, policy agendas, or dialogues about the merits or trade-offs between different policy agendas. Again, elements of hegemony were present – supporters regarded their party's policy agenda as natural common sense, while there was little incentive to reason with those who failed to appreciate this perceived obvious fact.

Whenever corruption scandals were reported, the NDP propaganda machine made sure that its leader's character was not questioned. Critics would call this an "*a no mi*" syndrome, which in the lingua franca Sranan Tongo means "it is not my fault." This reference builds on the talking point where Bouterse repeatedly blames imperialists and foreigners for local economic problems (De West 2017). In 2020, virtual platforms were a core instrument in protecting the image of Bouterse. For example, party supporters frequently distributed WhatsApp images and audio that sought to "wall off" and otherwise disconnect evident corruption scandals from Bouterse. More generally, corruption was individuated and attributed to morally flawed persons or to conspiratorial courtiers whose goals were adjacent to Bouterse's agenda. These tropes sought to grant indemnity to the NDP leadership ranks.

These messaging strategies that I have described here broadly conform to Gramsci's approach to common sense. Popular beliefs are propagated in such a way to gain support for the status quo, while critical thinking is paralyzed. In the case of Suriname, the common sense is that the public is to view leaders as fighting corruption rather than being the source thereof. The disempowering effect of these processes are also reflected in the politics of ethnic diversity.

Cultural diversity, including ethnicity, was not only a central theme in traditional politicking and consociationalism. It was also a core element in the NDP's political campaigning. For several years now, the NDP has successfully presented itself as a multiethnic party, challenging traditional monoethnic parties. Its multiethnic outlook has been appealing to younger voters who are more ambivalent about traditional parties, which in practice exist to promote narrow ethnic identity. The same trends continued during the 2020 election. At both online and face-to-face meetings, the NDP's political propaganda was ethnically diverse. For example, social media posts intentionally included pictures of the major ethnic groups, while propaganda songs were sung by artists of various ethnicities. This diversity was also propagated in a positivity of the party's motto "*soso lobi*" which means "only love." It meant to illustrate the warmth, down-to-earth, and all-embracing nature of the political party. This slogan was used in many Facebook posts and political speeches. "*Soso lobi*" was repeated at various platforms, which is essential for creating an order to be considered "natural." Combined with the harmonious representation of various ethnic groups, narratives about colonization, praiseworthy leadership of the political party, and populist policies, the NDP followed a communication strategy on social media to justify its status quo and to prevent being overthrown politically.

One striking aspect of the 2020 elections was the political framing of ethnicity on social media. While ethnic diversity was positively portrayed by the NDP on their Facebook page, the same diversity was ridiculed by individuals identifying themselves as NDP supporters on social media by using outdated, preju-

dicial stereotypes. Anti-colonialism, another theme of the NDP's political campaigning, was reflected in fierce opposition to those who created links with the Dutch. In general, government critics were considered state enemies. This was the case for years, not only during the political campaigning (Starnieuws 2012). But opposition parties like the VHP were accused of being a traitor and favoring Dutch rule over Suriname again. On Facebook, this image of the VHP was constantly reinforced. In 2020 prior to the elections, a person replied to a post of a picture of Bouterse and Limburg that East Indians were responsible for creating a mess in the country. It was implied they would enrich themselves, create links with the Dutch to take over Suriname again, and keep Black people subordinated.

Policies

Policy directives can be used for maintaining political power. The ruling party followed various populist measures during political campaigning, such as distribution of packages to the poor people. There were also special community shops where locals could purchase items for a lower price. These measures were aimed at gaining popular support from the poor communities who were hit hard by the economic crisis. At the same time, the NDP usually openly blamed imperialists and foreigners for local economic problems. Frequently, opposition parties, including the VHP, were accused of being their allies. Some major infrastructural projects were also implemented (or at least scheduled) to win approval from the masses. The NDP announced projects like a railway from the capital city to Onverwacht, district Para, and building flyovers.

Creating Allies

To retain the political power, the NDP tried to develop ties with people who were increasingly popular and hence advantageous for getting votes. Among these persons were also activists who criticized the NDP's rule, such as Maisha Neus, who later founded her own political party STREI! Prior to the establishment of her party, she and other young people organized large protests. A popular one was called "*We zijn Moe*," which in Dutch means "we are tired." The protests started small with lots of criticism by both common people as well as the government. The president called the leader of the *We zijn Moe* protests, Curtis Hofwijks, to talk about issues. But this did not change the strategy of activists. In the course of time the leaders of the protests decided to establish a political party, and this made people frown. Acquiring political power in public opinion was perceived as a naïve and even opportunistic move. We can say that the protesting people were part of civil society who were not able to join forces. And this in the Gramscian approach is critical for challenging power relations.

The political strategy of the NDP to ask Neus to join the party can be interpreted as hegemonic; for it is trying to build partnership with those who rebel against the system and can have benefits as allies for the existing power relations. The NDP also approached exponents of the VHP and NPS (Fatehmahomed 2018). Not all were successful. But the NDP's allies also consisted of influential churches and private sector agencies. The main church supporting the NDP was God's Bazuin, led by Steve Meye, who was also the spiritual advisor of the president for ten years. Among the private companies that the NDP had strong links with, were Combe Markt and Chotelal Supermarket, which are popular for their cheaper products for grassroot groups. In this way the NDP attempted to keep the support of grassroot groups. In the Gramscian register, hegemonic allies ensure that rebellion against ruling powers is prevented. This was largely the case. A few months before the elections, polls showed that the NDP was losing seats in Parliament; however, it remained influential while the number of undecided voters was growing (Suriname Herald, May 23, 2020, May 23).

Counterhegemony and E-politics

How did the opposition parties, particularly the VHP, contest the NDP's strategy to exert ideological control over the public? From a Gramscian perspective, counterhegemonic initiatives necessitate their own organic leaders, rooted in the community and independent from the ruling ones. Moreover, autonomous organizations are required to reflect on the hegemonic powers, develop critical awareness, and ultimately reinforce this awareness among the counterhegemonic parties. Let us examine how these con-

cepts manifested in the VHP's role during the power struggles of the elections.

Leadership

A strict Gramscian interpretation of organic leaders for counterhegemonic actions cannot be used in the case of the Suriname elections 2020, as this political organization had exponents who used to be linked to the NDP (Dagblad Suriname 2019). This is not unique. The swinging of candidates from one political party to another is a familiar phenomenon in the historical political landscape of Suriname. However, VHP leadership did set an agenda for developing critical awareness about the NDP. The main themes the VHP campaigned on were: 1. Change; 2. zero corruption; 3. getting the economy back on the right track through honest, decisive and professional management; 4. the improvement of the living standard of the Surinamese people, especially the youth; and, lastly, 5. making Suriname globally respected again as a real democracy were the rule of law stands central (Starnieuws 2020. The motto of the VHP was "*W'o set' en*," in the lingua franca meaning "we will make it better, we will solve it."

The VHP was the largest opposition party to enter the 2020 elections. Their political strategy was diversifying the gender, age, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their candidates. The VHP campaigned in two ways, focusing firstly on national issues and, secondly, on local campaigns. A strategy calculated down to the street level. Its leader, Chandrikapersad Santokhi, further indicated that several things have been included in the work plan, such as the transformation of the party (Suriname Herald 2020a). According to Santokhi, the VHP had to enter national elections and had to ensure that it was given government responsibility after the 2020 elections. The party's target was twenty-eight seats. "We need a campaign to get those 28 seats. In all districts we have all the addresses of everyone. With 'Meet the People' we take people's problems to the streets" (Awana, 2019).

Social Interaction

Social media was an important tool, used by the VHP, to enhance the critical awareness about the NDP. The VHP regularly emphasized the NDP's corruption scandals and its responsibility for causing the national economic crisis. In doing so, the social media "war" between coalition and opposition was evident. Various pages affiliated to the VHP, such as *San we Ley So*, *Weg met Bouta*, and *Red Suriname* regularly published anti-NDP posts. In addition to these pages, there were individual accounts of persons with many followers who were hired to just post anti-government or anti-NDP messages. There were breaking news items, revealing corruption cases which caused lots of irritation among the public. It was challenging for the government to explain these Facebook "reports" which at times were fake or taken out of context. I often had discussions about the socioeconomic situation and political campaigning themes with a small entrepreneur, who had links with influential persons in both the NDP and the VHP. This entrepreneur regularly underlined that it was critical to save the country from the NDP's rule or the economy would be doomed for generations. He admitted that it was hardly impossible to campaign against the appealing multiethnic profile of the NDP, and therefore various entrepreneurs spontaneously sponsored the VHP's social media campaigning on corruption.

At the same time, the VHP strived to present itself as a multiethnic party. This image was cultivated through various measures, including the promotion of candidates from diverse ethnic backgrounds to high-profile positions. The media widely publicized their membership and candidate list. The party also employed strategies such as creating videos and images that represented different ethnic groups. In the run-up to the election, VHP supporters frequently shared political messages, often daily, to the point of appearing populist, which made unbiased discussions nearly unattainable. Election debates gradually became polarized along ethnic lines. From the NDP's perspective, they accused the VHP through Facebook posts of being a counterfeit multiethnic party, branding it as a racist and elitist East Indian party that considers other ethnic groups as inferior. Creoles who aligned with this party were labeled as traitors and opportunists. The intense campaign debates between the NDP and the VHP also impacted professional circles.

Autonomous Organizations

In Gramscian terms, autonomous organizations provide the space for developing critical awareness, ideally rooted in civil society. As with leadership, autonomous organizations cannot be applied in strict Gramscian sense to this paper as the VHP cannot be perceived as civil society agent. However, its links with civil society and other stakeholders should be considered in developing counterhegemonic power. The VHP had allies including sponsors, civil society groups, business circles, cultural groups, diaspora communities. But among them one group, which was related to civil society, was highly influential in convincing the undecided voters to vote: the Next Generation. This group promoted the motto "*Stem Slim*," literally meaning vote smart in Dutch. "*Stem Slim*" was meant to encourage citizens to vote on the largest opposition party in the own district, with the sole purpose of keeping the NDP out of political office. It was openly an anti-NDP movement that used social and mainstream media to encourage voting for large opposition political parties. One of the strengths of this group was its communication through social media. On Facebook, for instance, the administrator replied to comments of individuals. The *Stem Slim* movement contributed to convincing people, who were disillusioned about the economic situation in the country, to vote. However, it discouraged smaller political parties, including those who were established by the activists.

Concluding Remarks

E-politics, in particular social media campaigning, has changed the nature of power struggles during the Suriname elections of 2020. Political parties, but the largest competing ones in particular – the NDP and the VHP – had to shift from traditional campaigning to virtual campaigning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counterhegemony and e-politics, this paper analyzed how ideological control was exercised and contested during political power struggles. To recap, the NDP tried to secure its power by focusing on the following themes in the political campaigning: political leadership, ethnic diversity, decolonization, populist measures. The propaganda mechanisms worked in such a way to prevent questioning the leadership of NDP and accept his rule, which can be interpreted as a strategy to ideologically control the masses.

Another strategy to retain political control was to create allies in particular civil society groups that challenged the government. The major opposition party, the VHP, contested the political strategies of the NDP by focusing on anti-corruption, including rule of law and ethnic diversity. It was supported by various groups, but significant support was from a civil society group that promoted smart voting. In the entire political competition, the most remarkable was the polarized interethnic discussions online. While ethnic diversity was promoted in a positive way by both parties, the engagements on social media emphasized stereotypes, which was not common on such a wide scale during previous elections. Virtual campaigning was characterized by one-sided and even fake news.

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Mission and Submission: Presbyterianism in Indo-Trinidadian Communities, 1968-2012

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the impacts of Presbyterianism on Indo-Trinidadian communities in Trinidad. Through interviews with notable figures in the Church's history, surveys within Presbyterian congregations, and in-depth research into Presbyterianism's history in Trinidad, an analysis was conducted on how this history has shaped the Church from the twentieth to twenty-first century. General observations were also made in Presbyterian Church settings. The findings suggest that many contemporary Presbyterian practices mirror those of colonial times, albeit in a neocolonial context. Historical evidence supports the hypothesis that ideologies of Eurocentrism and elitism existed within the Presbyterian Church in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Trinidad, and aspects of these ideologies persist today. Additionally, both youth and adults within the Church express a need to address prevalent societal issues such as homosexuality, traditionally a taboo topic. Consequently, this research paper examines the concepts of "mission" and "submission," aiming to understand the Church's past reality, present state, and future implications within the Trinidadian Presbyterian context.

KEYWORDS: Presbyterianism; Indo-Trinidadian communities; Trinidad; Eurocentrism; homosexuality

Introduction

Like other Christian denominations of the Caribbean, the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad has its roots in the European evangelization mission of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The pushes and pulls of the various eras of political domination within the Caribbean have had significant impacts on the Presbyterian Church itself. Written material produced by prominent Presbyterians depict all aspects of the colonial history of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad; Brinsley Samaroo, Idris Hamid, Kenneth Kalloo, and Jerome Teelucksingh are among the most well-known in this self-critical project. In conversation with this literature, I aim to extend this project of self-critical church historiography into the realm of gender and queer politics. In 1968, the first female Presbyterian minister was ordained in the United States, in the state of Georgia.

This event marks a time of change within the post-war Presbyterian Church which I argue represents the beginning of a gradual transition from the powers of colonial authority that still govern the Church to an extent today. The step towards gender inclusiveness was one that would go on to affect other types of inclusions, such as the ordaining of the first openly homosexual minister in the Presbyterian Church of Madison, Wisconsin, in 2011, which set the precedent for more widespread inclusiveness. All these changes would then spark conversation and debate within the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad. That said, despite good efforts, elements of colonialism remain encoded into the Church as an institution and are reproduced by authorities and the congregation. It is the intention of this body of work to demonstrate the effects of the history of a European mission within a Caribbean setting, show which traditional practices are still lingering within the Presbyterian Church, and which ones are changing in the twenty-first century.

The first section provides a historical overview of the links between the practices of the Christian mission of Europe within India to the Canadian Presbyterian mission in Trinidad. It outlines how these practices contributed to the loss of culture and identity experienced by the East Indians in India as well as the East Indian indentured laborers of Trinidad. The section illustrates how this loss of culture and identity has impacted and continues to impact the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church of the twentieth to twenty-first century.

The second section deals with the controversial impact of racial and religious divide caused by certain aspects of the political agenda of the Presbyterian missionaries as well as by certain ideologies that arose from the Eurocentric viewpoint brought with the missionaries to Trinidad. It goes on to examine the extent to which this divide still impacts the Church today and how it reflects neo-colonialism within the Presbyterian Church. The final section focuses on legacies within the contemporary Church: the practices and beliefs of the congregation. It addresses contentious issues faced by the Church and outlines what institutional and extra-institutional steps are being taken and have been taken to address issues like elitism and the taboo subject of homosexuality.

Given that the Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterian Community is small, at roughly 40,000 members, I interviewed key role-players like Presbyterian ministers and senior church members. Given the largely negative view of homosexuality and same-sex marriages within Trinidad and the Presbyterian Church, few Church members were willing to have on-the-record interviews. To supplement this data, I conducted a targeted survey of youth groups of the Presbyterian Church. Finally, I used archival visits to review the monthly magazine publications by the Presbyterian Church, church periodicals, as well as other similar material.

To situate myself, I come from a family of Presbyterians and have attended Presbyterian church services since birth up until the age of twenty-five. I was also a long-standing member of the Presbyterian Church's Youth Movement in Trinidad, in which I held the roles of secretary, treasurer, and president, as well as assistant youth coordinator at various times. I no longer attend church services, but most of the collected information and analysis on the church come from my internal relations with the Church during my formative years and young adulthood. There is much silencing surrounding taboo issues in the Presbyterian Church. Yet, in its own way, the Presbyterian Church is adapting to changing social values. Moreover, Presbyterians are willing to voice open, positive opinions about homosexuality. While social life is indeterminate, presently, the conservative tradition of the Presbyterian Church is on the wane. This paper is an attempt to document and theorize the change of beliefs in Trinidad and Tobago.

The English Book and the Loss of Identity

Within the well-trodden topic of the evangelization of Caribbean people by European missionaries is the theme of the loss of identity, culture, and original religion, meaning the religion of their ancestors, which indisputably took place as a direct result of this "fortuitous discovery of the English book," as Homi Bhabha sarcastically puts it. In a stimulating and somewhat satirical essay, he delves into "the wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa [and] the Caribbean" (Bhabha 1985, 144). Bhabha examines the phenomenon of the Bible being adapted into Eastern cultures and the de-culturalization that followed. He refers to the Bible as "the English book," effectively stripping it of the awe and reverence which is typically associated with its mention. Bhabha describes an interaction in 1817 between an Indian catechist, Anund Messeh, and some Indian men and women who were reading the Bible and attempting to adopt its practices. He effectively illustrates the mystic awe which the "white man" held in the Indians' eyes when Messeh asks the people where they obtained the Bible, they easily respond "Angel from heaven gave it us, at Hurdwar fair" (Bhabha 1985,145). When Messeh questions this statement, again they respond with certainty, "Yes, to us he was God's Angel; but he was a man, a learned Pundit" (Bhabha 1985,145).

This mystical and revered view of the "white man" as an angelic being has been taken by some to

demonstrate the "childlike innocence" of the eastern people. The question that can be presented here, as to whether this depiction of ultimate innocence is accurate or not, is not as significant as the clear, documented evidence that the white missionaries of the Caribbean had a quite antonymous view of the Indo-Trinidadian people they converted to Presbyterianism, and of African-Trinidadian inhabitants of Trinidad. In *John Morton of Trinidad*, a unique collection of the memoirs of Rev. John Morton, the Canadian missionary who is credited with the most evangelical work in Presbyterianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his wife Sarah E. Morton recounts many telling instances which depict Morton's attitude towards the indentured laborers and slaves. The following extracted passage from the memoir (Morton 1916, 23) is a good example of that attitude:

> Feb 6th, 1868. – Saw a place where the Hindus sacrifice. There was a pole with a small flag flying, a small alter of mud, and near it two stakes a few inches apart driven firmly into the ground. Two small bars passed through these stakes, one near the ground, the other a few inches up, forming a sort of yoke into which the neck of the goat to be sacrificed is placed and its head severed with one blow. The blood is burned on the altar and the body made a feast of. On the altar lay a little heap of ashes. The sight awoke very peculiar feelings. There is meaning in all this; there is a man's conscious sinfulness; the idea of propitiation by sacrifice – by blood – and the blood consumed; also, a feast of joy on the victims' flesh. Right ideas but blindly expressed.

Although neglecting to note whether this was an account of a Hindu or Islamic ritual, it obviously awoke a sense of spirituality and meaning within Morton. Nevertheless, the account ends with an unabashed criticism of the East Indian's belief system. Morton condescendingly brushes off any idea that the East Indians' faith could have some basis in truth or validity, or even that there is any spiritual intelligence in its expression. This type of dismissal of the Indian as animalistic or uncivilized and needing saving and spiritual cleansing is a continuous theme in missionary writing but is skillfully hidden beneath feelings of affection for the "coolie." Morton goes on to lament, further down in another passage taken from his journal, that it is a shame the "coolie," which chooses to return to his motherland, India, after the five years of indentureship will be lost to the fires of hell as he would not have converted to Christianity and saved his soul.

A major trademark of the Presbyterian tradition is its impact on education in Trinidad. Scholarly reviews on the immense contribution to the education of the original East Indian converts to Presbyterianism in many ways show that the education drive of the Presbyterian Church has contributed to the de-culturalization of the East Indians. Historian Jerome Teelucksingh writes, "Despite the perceived benefits of offering education to East Indian children, it was given at a price. Islam and Hinduism, and their accompanying beliefs, rites and customs, were often denigrated to win converts to Christianity" (Teelucksingh 2007, 132). Teelucksingh goes on to describe the incidence of East Indians having to change their names to have any hope of upward social mobility. He recounts, "Niamat Khan, a mullah (Muslim priest) from India was baptized and converted to Presbyterianism … and upon conversion, had his name changed to Paul Niamat" (Teelucksingh 2007,133). The evangelization of the East Indians meant a total renouncement of their previous "heathen" culture and ways, inclusive of their most basic form of identity, their names.

This type of phenomenon is the basis for Bhabha's theory on the "hybridization" caused by the European mission of conversion. Bhabha's reference to hybridism is not biological but refers to a type of schizophrenia caused by the splitting of two cultures. In fact, the ripping away of one culture and the immediate joining of a next, of which so many colonial workers were victims. Kenneth K. Kalloo (1970, 43) elucidates this point in his research:

> In order to secure jobs many had to accept baptism, and too often a schizophrenic personality was the end result. An outer pose of Christianity to escape the cane fields, but an inner barrenness that could not express Christianity as taught by the Church.

Teelucksingh quotes Brinsley Samaroo in his article as saying, "Morton condemned East Indians as worshippers of false gods in that Brahma was a liar,

Vishnu an adulterer and Shiva a drunkard" (quoted in 2007, 133). The history of the Caribbean has always and will always inspire questions, among the newer generations, of "Who are we?," "How do we define ourselves?" Amongst twentieth to twenty-first century Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadians these questions may always be the cause of some distress due to the social order established by the European missionaries of the past. Third- and fourth-generation Hindu Trinidadians no longer neither have substantial knowledge of Hindi nor of original, traditional Hindu practices. For the Presbyterian, this ordeal is far worse, for they are twice removed from their spiritual origins; removed once from India in the nineteenth century, and now almost completely removed from Hinduism through time and Presbyterian tradition.

The impacts of the aforementioned loss of culture and identity continue to affect the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church of the twenty-first century. Whereas from the beginning of the evangelization mission, the churches were named in Hindustani and retained these names to today, they are no longer used to identify the church, especially by the newer generations of Presbyterians. Additionally, whereas *bhajans*[1] have been a staple hymn type in the Presbyterian churches and schools since the beginning of the evangelization mission to the late nineteenth century, this tradition has gradually diminished in the twenty-first century. From the inception of Indian Arrival Day in 1945, the members of the Presbyterian Church have celebrated this holiday by wearing traditional wear for the Sunday morning service in the week of this holiday. There would also be a topical sermon, surmising the influence of the Hindu heritage on the Presbyterian Church. In recent years, this tradition has noticeably faded within the Church, suggesting that as time passes, Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterians are beginning to experience a form of "amnesia" of the cultures, traditions, languages, and religions of their motherland. These are all signs of the fading of schizophrenia referred to by Bhabha and Kalloo.

However, as with all things, with change comes challenge. As Presbyterians begin to define themselves as wholly Presbyterian, forgetting their Hindu backgrounds and the trauma of identity faced by their forefathers due to the Presbyterian mission, a generation of more rigid and unaccepting Presbyterians has emerged. This generation has created rules of use for the Presbyterian Church, which were not in existence during the days of Morton. This theme will be developed more in the coming sections.

Racial and Religious Divides

Evidence supporting the interlocking of cultures between Africans and Indians in colonial Trinidad can be found in the collective memory around the Jahagee Massacre of 1884 (Teelucksingh 2007).[2] Informed by popular historical accounts of the event in the 1950's, Teelucksingh's article details the circumstances of the massacre along with reports of European rulers' attempts to counteract racial unity. As described by Teelucksingh, the Indian Muslims and Hindus, Africans and even Chinese and Portuguese all came together during this historical occasion in the streets of Trinidad for a celebratory procession for the Muslim festival of Hosay. Teelucksingh expounds that Hosay, being from inception a Muslim tradition, was interestingly celebrated by most Hindus in Trinidad. The reason for this is not explicitly stated in the article; however, one can infer that the melding of cultures was due to the concept of brotherhood which formed from mutual suffering on the plantations. Teelucksingh states, "Hindus constituted the majority of the jahaajees, perhaps because it was plantation-based, and the majority of estate workers were Hindus … The concept of brotherhood was clearly growing around these Hosay processions" (Teelucksingh 2007, 3).

The East Indians who celebrated Hosay were joined by "free Indians who had completed their indentured contracts," and "working class Africans" (Teelucksingh 2007, 3). He continues, "Other smaller groups connected to the plantations – Chinese and Portuguese … would have also been witnesses

1 Hymns in Hindi.

2 According to Teelucksingh, although the event has been named "The Coolie Massacre" and "the Hosein Calamity," he prefers the "Jahaajee Massacre" as it is the better-known name. "Jahaajee" essentially means "brotherhood" in Hindi.

to the Hosay preparations" (Teelucksingh 2007, 5). Each would contribute something to the celebrations in the festive spirit that would have pervaded the atmosphere of that time. Whilst the Hindus assisted in the construction of the *tazias*[3], the Africans helped to carry them during the procession. The Chinese and Portuguese provided food from their shops. Teelucksingh states, "Indeed, Hosay was attracting a wide cross-section of the population" (5). Not only was Hosay a melting pot of races but also, Teelucksingh notes, of religions. He states

> this occasion was a crucible for religious and working class unity. Hindus of all castes including Brahmins and untouchables were present. There were some Indo-Christians, including Presbyterians, Anglicans and Romans Catholics … [The] Africans who assisted … belonged to various Christian denominations – Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists and Roman Catholics. Ironically, a festival which was symbolic of a schism in Islam … exerted a unifying influence defying religious boundaries. (2009, 5)

This festival was a great display of Caribbean unity, and Teelucksingh even notes that "gender and age barriers were also transcended" (2009, 5).

Yet, the colonial authorities began to feel threatened by this public display of unity amongst the races. According to Teelucksingh, "Any form of solidarity among the working class at that time, created fear among colonial government officials in Trinidad" (Teelucksingh 2007, 4). Thus, when their unwritten policy of "divide and conquer" was disobeyed, the colonial officials implemented official laws prohibiting the procession of Hosay in certain areas of Trinidad, areas which had been the traditional routes for many years. The laws also prohibited any free citizens, those who did not reside on plantations and were no longer contracted to work on the plantations, from participating in Hosay. Yet, in a display of undaunted unity, the celebrators of Hosay all marched united in the streets towards the city of San Fernando, although it was against the law. Sixteen people were ruthlessly murdered by colonial police on that day; many more were injured.

What is even more shocking about this attempt to keep the races separate were the remarks by Christian missionary, Rev. John Morton. Teelucksingh records that while testifying before the Norman Commission, Morton said, "Nothing would have stopped the procession but actual force, and firing was absolutely necessary. I think the government was quite right in issuing the orders concerning the regulation of the Hosay procession" (Teelucksingh 2007, 8). Thus, in his quite un-Christian-like support of the brutal murder of innocent people, Rev. John Morton contributed to the racial, political, and religious divide of Trinidad. As one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad, his example would have necessarily impacted upon the Church and its newly recruited followers. Teelucksingh (2009, 9) ascribes reasons for Rev. Morton's words. "It may well be," he writes,

> that Morton saw the need to play along with the farce of the Commission, because the government provided financial assistance to Presbyterian churches and Canadian Mission Indian (CMI) schools and – more importantly – allowed Canadian missionaries to enter the colony. Also, the planters allowed the missionaries to visit the barracks and preach to the Indians. Morton's view may have well been a self-interested and self-serving view.

Whilst these reasons might be true, they do not seem enough to justify the public support of murder that was displayed by Morton. It is a decidedly un-Christian-like trait to participate in political corruption for personal gain. Teelucksingh affirms, "It is true that Morton would have felt some revulsion to know that recent Presbyterian converts were participating in this non-Christian festival" (9). In research on the topic, Kenneth Kalloo (1970, 43) notes

> the conversion of Hindus and Moslems led to a certain amount of disintegration in what was a fairly stable and traditional society. The efforts of the Canadian Mission can also be seen as a factor in perpetuating the rift between the Negro and the Indian. With separate schools for the children it is almost inevitable that there would appear suspicion and jealousy. Too often Presbyterian schools are wholly staffed and populated by East Indians.

3 Or creolized *tadjahs* – multi-colored mausoleums which were paraded, then ritually offered up to the sea, or any body of water.

The Presbyterian Church in Trinidad still maintains many of these features in the twenty-first century. It is still populated mainly by the descendants of the East Indians. It still carries a great focus on education and is indeed biased towards those who are educated, elevating them to positions of admiration and praise within the congregations.

Another passage taken from John Morton's journal is notable for the linguistic level of interpretation it adds to this discourse. The following is the excerpt (Morton 1916, 22–23):

> *First Recorded Visits to Sugar Estates*
>
> Jan. 20th. – Visited *Union Hall* and *Les Efforts* with Mr. Lambert. At *Les Efforts* fell in with two Babujees, one a fine looking Brahman about twenty years of age and only nine months in the Island. Men of all castes crowded around us. One boasted that he ate beef and pork and everything, on the principle that God made all – beef and rice and rum. My teetotal friend playfully told him: "No – Devil make 'em rum." His ready answer was: "Then, I devil's man." One of the Babujees argued against eating beef in this style: "When I little picknie mumma give me milk; no kill and eat mumma; no kill and eat cow." I replied: "No[t] all cow give milk." And my friend: "Why no eat bull-calf?" He replied: "He come from cow. Milk come from cow." He then proceeded by a subtle process of reasoning to show that the animals were of the same nature and that it would never do.

What is remarkable about this extract is that the racial divide concerns of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are packed neatly into one simple paragraph of dialogue in the nineteenth century. Firstly, we see a mixture of all different types of Hindu castes coming together in one setting. Secondly, the linguistic sharing and code mixing is significant as the white missionaries, Brahmin Hindu, and lower caste Hindus all share the same linguistic code in this one exchange to mutually understand one other. Even more interesting, though, is the use of the word "picknie." This word is typically known in the twenty-first century as a Jamaican word used to represent children. It has even become a sort of trademark of the Jamaican language and culture. Therefore, to stumble across the word being used in nineteenth-century text and in a context which suggests it was an ordinarily used word by the East Indians of the Caribbean is indeed significant. A twenty-first century reader is left to wonder whether the word was borrowed from the African population of the Caribbean or was a mutually shared innovation of the Caribbean people. That the *babujee* who used the word had only been on the Island for a period of nine months may suggest that the word had an Indian origin.

Regardless, this revelation makes it clear that East Indians and Africans partook in a common linguistic culture on the island. The fact that "picknie has been extinct from the lexicon of Trinidad for at least a century is further testament to the racial divide not only in Trinidad, but within the Caribbean islands, which resulted from colonial presence and influence. As we have seen, the Canadian missionaries were culpable in the perpetuation of this racial divide as they existed in mutual partnership with the colonial government.

The Penal Presbyterian Youth Movement is a group of young people of varied religions and races. These youths participate equally in all the activities of the group, except on "Youth Sunday" – a common occurrence within Presbyterian churches. On these specific Sundays, the youth group conducts the Sunday morning service. Each youth is allocated a task, and only Presbyterian youths are allowed to use the pulpit, while the Hindu members of the group must use the secondary podium. The irony of this practice is seen as a parallel of the superior behavior of the white missionaries which is mirrored in the superior behavior of the Presbyterian Indians over Hindu Indians. The mainly East Indian Church has now begun to divide and categorize one group of East Indians from the next, labeling the group from which they originated as not suitable for the use of their Christian altar. This manifest discrimination in the twenty-first century, almost two-hundred years into the Presbyterian tradition, is a classic sign of neo-colonialism within the Church. The acceptance of this practice by both the members of the youth group and the members of the congregation leads one to question whether Trinidadian society has become so immune to discrimination and segregation that such unconcealed prejudice goes unnoticed and unchallenged as the Presbyterian Church continues to contribute to a cul-

tural and religious divide, much like other Christian denominations within Trinidad.

The Presbyterian Church of the Twenty-First Century

Race, Worth, and Selective Inclusion

This section explores how the Presbyterian Church may be considered to exhibit elitist traits, such as selective inclusion based on the belief in superiority of certain races, and how the traditional practices of exclusivity which originated with the missionary evangelists have remained within the Church throughout the centuries and are still in existence in the twenty-first century. The Presbyterian Church has its roots in elitism and superiority as can be seen throughout history in the reasons given by the missionaries for their evangelization mission. According to Christopher Hutton, the Indians of East India were part of the Aryan race. In his paper *The Concept 'Aryan Race'*, Hutton states "Aryanism became the key to a powerful justification for the British colonial presence in India" (Hutton, 2012). Hutton points out the elitist trait of selective inclusion that informed the British evangelization of Indians when he states that the reason for the widespread intent to evangelize Indians came from a deeply ingrained view that the Indians were indeed a branch of the "superior white gene pool." He states:

> a former Aryan dominion was now being restored to its former glory. A younger, more vigorous branch of the Aryan family had returned to restore and reanimate the older. But the exact nature of the hypothetical Aryan kinship was unclear, and the rise of racial understanding of identity suggested that the modern Indians were at best the racially-fallen remnants of a lost superior race.

Drawing from this view, one can infer links of a similar line of thought between British missionaries and Canadian ones. A logical conclusion can be drawn that the Canadian missionaries came to the West Indies to evangelize the Indians in the Caribbean based on their (the Indians) "superiority of race" or "closeness to the white Caucasian gene pool." Sarah Morton writes in *John Morton of Trinidad*, "The people to whom the Canadian Mission was to be directed were natives of India" (1916, 19). This direct statement of exclusivity of race may seem unorthodox because the Christian mission is renowned for its intent to evangelize the world and not a select few members of it.

However, it is important to note that this type of Eurocentric view was not uncommon in the nineteenth century, the era of which Canadian white missionaries were a part. As Herbert Spencer's ideas of Social Darwinism illustrate, this era had contenting views around the desirability of eugenics, mono-culturalism, and racial superiority, all of which sought to justify existing social hierarchies. This is not to say that Christian missionaries were themselves strict Social Darwinists; rather it is that they were shaped by these ideas.

Although Rev. John Morton stated many times in his records of his time in Trinidad that his main reason for choosing to evangelize the East Indians of Trinidad was that he saw their plights on the island, including lack of education and indignity suffered, there is evidence to support the concept of Aryanism in the Canadian mission. In a letter to a friend in 1868, Morton wrote, "The Indians are small in figure, but graceful. Their features are much like those of Europeans. For they belong to the same race" (Morton 1916, 50).

Idris Hamid in his book *A History of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad 1868-1968: The struggles of a Church in Colonial Captivity*, captures this same line of thought in the Canadian mission when he writes (1989, 197):

> Morton's original reason for working among the East Indians was that they were not reached by other churches and that the returning ones presented a new opportunity to evangelize India. But more than once he and Grant mentioned the similarities between the Europeans and the Indians.

The "Grant" referred to in the above passage is Kenneth James Grant, another Presbyterian Canadian missionary credited with great success in the evangelization of the East Indian people in Trinidad. In Grant's record of his time in Trinidad, entitled *My Missionary Memories*, he states of the East Indian Hindus, "The humblest knows the story of the Ramayana, which

depicts the piety, endurance and devotion of Rama their Aryan king" (71). Here is seen a direct reference to the Aryan descent of the East Indians.

Presbyterian churches have names in English and Hindi. Despite these naming conventions, there is a notable social divide between Hindus and Presbyterians. Exclusions continue to exist in the Presbyterian Church today. Postcolonial theorists have pointed to the reproduction of inequality despite new leadership following political decolonization. Regarding the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad, in the previous church hierarchy, Indians were considered inferior to Whites. The current Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterians church leadership now consider themselves superior to Hindu Indo-Trinidadians. In an interview in 2012 with the late Rev. Rawle Sukhu, then minister to the Penal/Siparia Pastoral region of the Presbyterian Church, he confirmed that there is an unofficial policy in the Presbyterian Church that Hindus are not allowed to occupy the minister's pulpit. In an interview I conducted with the chairman of the Local Board of the Penal Presbyterian Church, he confirmed this practice. It is in accepted practices like these, whether official or unofficial, that we see the exclusion and assumed superiority continuing within the contemporary Presbyterian Church of Trinidad. As Rev. Elahie, former moderator of the synod of the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church put it in the September 2008 issue of the *Trinidad Presbyterian* magazine, "There is the exclusivist position that justifies Christian absolutism and treats everything outside Christ or the Church as that which is in need of Salvation" (2008, 2).

Elitism in Education

Since the inception of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad, there has been an emphasis on education. The original emphasis on education and academia within the Presbyterian Church has not only remained intact throughout the centuries but has taken a step further in the twenty-first century. The contemporary Trinidadian Presbyterian Church holds an attendance register at the back of each church which is intended solely for use by Presbyterian school teachers. As with many other denominational schools, scope for promotion is only available to teachers who are active participants of their respective faiths. However, the Presbyterian Church is the only Church noted to have taken the extra step to *ensure* a record of teachers' attendance at Sunday morning services. This recent development is a demonstration of the new and radical steps taken by the Presbyterian Church in the department of education, which safeguards Presbyterian schools from the inclusion of any "outside" religious influence.

Emulating the values of the white mission, Indo-Trinidadians have repeated the elitist attitude of the missionaries, which has always been associated with education in the Presbyterian setting. Whereas East Indians in missionary times had to convert to Christianity as well as change their names to Christian names to attain teaching jobs, the descendants of these Indians who are already Presbyterian and carry Christian names must now make a further commitment to the Church through closely monitored attendance to attain promotions. However, there is a limitation to the purpose of the teachers' attendance register, which is to be proof that the teacher is a practicing Presbyterian. In the same way East Indians of the past would have pretended to accept the Christian faith to attain upward social mobility, the newer generation of Presbyterian educators may use the attendance register to attain career advancement without fully committing to the prescribed Presbyterian lifestyle. There are instances where practices occur that undermine the purpose of the attendance register, such as teachers showing up before the Sunday morning service, signing the register and not staying for the remainder of the service, as well as teachers joining the last five minutes of the service to sign the register. There are Presbyterians who view practices like the signing of the teachers' attendance register as not necessarily assisting in promoting stronger faith amongst attendees. According to Rev. Rawle Sukhu, "Attendance at church is simply not enough to judge a practicing Presbyterian by [sic]. Other factors such as interpersonal relationships should be more important than church attendance in the educational forum." (Rawle Sukhu, telephonic interview with the author, April 3, 2012)

Therefore, there are differing views within the contemporary Presbyterian Church on new practices which have been adopted. Whereas some may choose to adhere to neo-colonial practices, others may rally

for transformation and revolution. As with all new ontological phenomena, religious or otherwise, there are those who will accept and those who will reject or oppose certain practices, and this is necessary for change and improvement.

Gender Inequalities in the Presbyterian Church

Typically, gender inequality within a religious organization reflects the period and society within which that organization is located. The gender inequality within the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad has not been very different to the other denominational organizations of the island. Yet, there is evidence that the Presbyterian Church has taken further steps than some of the other Christian denominations in Trinidad to combat gender inequality. These steps will be explored against the gender inequality of the past in this section.

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church has made no attempt, internationally or locally, to install female priests, archbishops, or other heads of authority positions which are traditionally filled by males, the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad ordained its first female minister, Mary Naimool, a Canadian, in 1968. Since this inauguration, many more women have been inducted into the stewardship of the Presbyterian Church. Rev. Joy Abdul was the first local woman to achieve this title in 1989 and subsequently became the principal of the St. Andrew's Theological College (SATC – the only Presbyterian theological college on the island) in 2002. Many more female Presbyterian ministers followed throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Presently, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad is the Right Rev. Brenda Bullock, the first local woman to hold this position in the history of the Presbyterian Church. In 1966, Rev. Geraldine Reid, a Canadian woman, held this position. Although the number of ordained male ministers still outweighs the number of female ordained ministers, there still has been significant progress, and women who wish to join the clergy of the Presbyterian Church can now feel confident that the opportunity exists for them.

The liberty enjoyed by women today to become leaders of the Church if they so choose has, of course, come with the progression of society when it comes to women's rights, and is a recent development. Historian Idris Hamid is of the view that women suffered a "double indentureship" in his analysis of the female East Indian indentured laborer. He writes, "the East Indian woman in Trinidad … laboured on the plantation but was paid lower wages than her male counterpart. She shared his indignities and suffered some additional ones as well" (1980, 213). The plight of the East Indian woman continued, if even to less physical suffering, in a different setting when she was converted to Presbyterianism. This disregard for women's rights traveled with the European missionaries to Trinidad as we can see when Hamid (1980, 218) notes

> the Canadian women workers suffered discouragements and discrimination. Their salaries were lower than those of male single missionaries. They did not have voting rights at Mission Council. Morton was quick to remind them that they were first teachers.

Of the twentieth century Hamid comments, "there was not enough effort to pass on leadership to the local women. If some attempt was made, it involved too few and consequently a group of national women trained for such work did not emerge" (226).

Although the Presbyterian Church has taken steps to rectify gender inequality, there remain patriarchal views that persist from the tradition of patriarchy, which preceded the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These views affect different sub-sections of the Presbyterian Church. For instance, in the "National Youth Policy of the PCTT"[4], under the section "Dress Code," is explicitly stated:

> Our female youths are the ones who should be most aware of their manner of dress … We want to cultivate a Church environment that does not add any extra pressure on the youths, especially pressure of a sexual nature, which may be increased based on the body parts highlighted by certain types of clothing. As such, young ladies should observe and choose the appropriate types of clothing to wear within the Church. (National Youth Policy of the PCTT, n.d. 19)

This overt prescribed feminine dress is followed by a quote from the Bible in bold italics, "You do

4 PCTT – Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago

not want to be the cause of anyone's fall away from Christ! (Romans 14:13)" (National Youth Policy of the PCTT, n.d. 19). We see here in play Idris Hamid's "double-indentureship": the woman's body not only being "owned" by the Presbyterian Church by way of belonging to their system of belief, but brazenly policed from as early an age as possible. Through the "National Youth Policy of the PCTT" an attempt is made to condition the young women of the Presbyterian Church into a system of neo-colonial patriarchy. The notion of neo-colonialism amongst Presbyterian youths will be further explored in section three of this chapter.

Given the evidence of female leadership in the Presbyterian Church, it is evident that the Presbyterian Church has taken considerable progressive steps to remain relevant within twenty-first century Trinidadian society. It is noteworthy that Hamid's study of the Presbyterian Church covered up until 1968, the year in which the first female Presbyterian minister was ordained and two years after the first female moderator of the synod was inducted. As both women were Canadian, it should be noted that the local female ministry began with Joy Abdul in 1989, with others joining her since.

Presbyterian Youth and Neo-Colonialism

Each Presbyterian church in Trinidad allocates time and space for a functioning Youth Group as a necessary arm of the Church. The "National Youth Policy of the PCTT" defines the youth group as "a gathering of youth within the Presbyterian Churches at an appointed date and time" (5). It defines the function of a youth group as "to have activities such as fun sports, praise and worship, games, Bible studies, discussions on pertinent topics and so on" (5). There are currently seventy-one functioning youth groups out of one hundred and seven Presbyterian churches. This section seeks to discuss how a neo-colonial attitude has been adopted within the youth groups of the Presbyterian Church.

As mentioned in an early section, the youth groups hold members of different religions within them. The youth policy explicitly states, however, that all executive members of the group must be Presbyterians and communicant members. Many of the Hindu members of these groups, apart from not being allowed the same privileges of the Presbyterian members of the group, do gain certain socially mobilizing benefits from their participation in the groups. Amongst these are social and oratory skills as well as letters of recommendation from the youth coordinator to append to their resumes. Some of these youths have chosen to convert to Presbyterianism and as such have gained even more benefits. One previously Hindu youth who has converted in the recent past qualified almost immediately for an educational scholarship awarded by the Presbyterian Church. In this way the Presbyterian Church still carries its tradition of introduction into the Presbyterian Church by means of the educational benefits which can be gained through conversion.

This type of scenario can be viewed in two ways: mission and submission. The mission to evangelize Hindus seems to still be a neo-colonial practice within the Presbyterian Church. The above-described scenario is evidence that the Presbyterian Church is enacting methods of evangelization, previously used by the initial missionary assembly. Coincidentally, a subsection of Hindus is submitting to the Presbyterian Church in the same way, and for the same reasons, as colonial Hindus did. Hamid posits, "the Presbyterian Church … allowed itself to become a tool of colonialism to such an extent that it must be asked whether it was more a servant to colonialism than it was to its Lord" (244). Hamid (1989, 244–245) goes on to express what some might consider a controversial view of the exchange of educational benefits for conversion to Christianity. He states:

The Church by its identification with colonialism and by lending its teaching and institutions to it, became an accomplice in creating a colonial society, a colonial church and worse of all a colonial man and mentality. Those who did not join the church nor become enmeshed in its institutions, however illiterate they might have been, often demonstrated greater freedom of mind and spirit, greater initiative in struggling against the forces of exploitation and depersonalization.

Hamid's view reflects the discussion in an earlier section of this article based on Homi Bhabha's study of colonial mimicry and hybridization. Bhabha explains:

> the discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism … do not simply or singly refer to a "person," or to a dialectal power struggle between the self and Other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures. Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid. (1985, 153)

The neo-colonial practices that have been adopted within and adapted to the systems of the youth groups of the Church emulate Bhabha's hybridism. The youths of the Presbyterian Church are repeating the historic practices which lead to the schizophrenia of cultures of which Bhabha speaks. The neo-colonialism practiced by the youth groups of the Presbyterian Church has not stemmed from the youths themselves, but from a pre-established colonial order that remains within the Church up to today.

Homosexuality and the Presbyterian Church

Although the topic of homosexuality has remained taboo within the Church for a very long time and is still so today, there have been noteworthy steps taken to address the topic in twenty-first century Trinidad. Whereas other Christian denominations have published clear views on the topic, which remain traditionally in the negative, the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad has not yet taken any definitive position on the matter. The Canadian Presbyterian Church has demonstrated an affirmative view of the homosexual community by inaugurating gay and lesbian ministers, as well as homosexual deacons, deaconesses, and elders. Within the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church, however, forums which address the subject have been few and far between.

In 2011, following the new allowance of gays into leadership roles within the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, the then moderator in Trinidad, Rev. Elvis Elahie, published an article in *The Trinidad Presbyterian*, a monthly magazine published by the St. Andrew's Theological College, that addressed this new development. He quite simply stated that due to the changing times and progression of society, whether for or against, it is time that the discussion on homosexuality and same-sex marriages began within the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad. Earlier, in August 2010, a guest editorial by Felix Rampersad in *The Trinidad Presbyterian* was one of the first to address the churchgoers' perspective on homosexuality. Entitled "Same-sex relationships?" the article effectively tackled the changing times of the twenty-first century, the fact that many countries are now legalizing same-sex marriages and that the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church is behind the times on the issue. "There is no clear theological position on the issue," states Rampersad, "There are many persons, who are of the opinion that we should accept people who are in these relationships and that these people should be respected although they have different psychological persuasions" (3). Rampersad's article conveys the mixed feelings and conceptions and/or misconceptions that many twenty-first century Presbyterians have about homosexuality. It conveys the Presbyterian's need for clarification on the matter. He continues:

> The purpose of this article is simply to raise the issue and not "sweep it under the carpet." It is an issue which our Church must deal with – sooner or later! There are many persons, here and now in Trinidad and Tobago who have preferences for same-sex marriages. Should we accept them? How do we deal with them? Do we look at these individuals with prejudicial eyes and minds? (Rampersad, 2010, 3)

Rev. Rawle Sukhu reiterated in his interview for this project (April 3, 2012) that the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad still has not taken an official view on the matter of homosexuality. When asked to render his opinion, however, he stated, "The Church will eventually have to take a position on the matter. The Church ought to be ready to deal with the issue. Society is changing and the Church must address what society calls for in order to stay relevant." The minister went on to recommend that an open forum be held with the members of the congregations of the churches of his current pastoral region, the Penal/Siparia region, where the subject of homosexuality be introduced for discussion. He also suggested that the

youth arm of the Church begin a debate on the topic, encouraging education and awareness on the matter.

When interviewed, Rev. Elahie expressed progressive views on homosexuality that can prove to be revolutionary for the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago if implemented. When asked why in his opinion the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church has not yet taken an official stance on homosexuality, Rev. Elahie answered that a "deep psycho-social fear of the topic" is prominent within Trinidadian society. He defined different types of fears that may affect the objective discussion of this topic, including the Church having a "fear to confront reality" and a "fear to become unpopular in any way." He continued by saying that, for a long time, the Church has suffered from an "inability or refusal to look at what might be critical and necessary issues to consider" and that the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad comes from a "culture which prefers to keep certain things secret" (Elvis Elahie, personal interview with the author, April 10, 2012).

In an anonymous survey conducted by this researcher in the Penal Youth Movement, asking the youths to state concerns that they wanted addressed by the Church, fifteen out of thirty youths proffered questions on the topic of homosexuality. This is evidence that the more open social atmosphere of the twenty-first century with respect to issues of sexuality, which has its beginnings in the sexual liberation movement, also known as the sexual revolution of the 1960's, has impacted Presbyterian youths in Trinidad. In addition to this, the mass media, social media, and other readily available technological sources have educated youths on matters that the Church has failed to satisfactorily address. Therefore, the beginning steps that are about to be taken by the Church to address homosexuality will be welcomed by its youths. Although it would be inaccurate to say that all youths are in consensus on their views of homosexuality, this researcher has found that the majority are willing to discuss it. In the words of Rev. Elahie, "This is the beginning of creating an honest generation. What is wrong if we understand our humanity and deal with it in an honest way?" (Elvis Elahie, personal interview with the author, April 10, 2012).

Additionally, some older members of the Church have expressed positive views on opening a discussion on homosexuality in the Presbyterian Church. In a personal interview with the late Rudolph Sitahal, an 84-year-old musician and organist within the Presbyterian Church at the time, he stated, "There are many homosexuals within our society, and they have existed since Biblical times. The time has come for the Church to address this matter. The Presbyterian Church must be a place where all are welcome, regardless of sexual orientation" (March 29, 2012). These remarks are suggestive that the Trinidad Presbyterian Church of the twenty-first century, though remaining submissive to the pre-established colonial order in many ways, may be open to mild reforms.

Conclusion

As is the case with most Christian denominational organizations of Trinidad, the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad is a product of its evangelical and colonial history. The impacts of this history on the Trinidadian Presbyterian Church of today have been examined and discussed through this study. From the concept of Aryanism to the educational practices and elitist attitudes of the Presbyterian Church, the relevant and most controversial issues have been covered. It has been found that certain colonial ideologies remain within the twenty-first century Presbyterian Church, but also that contemporary and innovative ideologies are being formed within the modern-day Church, yet, these are severely inhibited by neocolonial attitudes and political persuasions The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad, whilst maintaining certain neo-colonial practices such as patriarchy and exclusivity, is simultaneously taking baby steps towards inclusiveness as can be seen with the move toward discussions on homosexuality.

Scholarly writings by Presbyterians and postcolonial critics have been studied. Of these writings, some critique the means of evangelization used by the Canadian missionaries, others attempt to point out the flawed ambiguity of the missionary plan, whilst yet others discuss the racism and Euro-centricity which came with Presbyterianism. This critical study of the impact of Presbyterianism on East Indian descendants in Trinidad has sought to address these writings and analyze them with a fresh perspective in a contemporary world. I hope that studies like this

one will be used by the new and future generations of Presbyterians to create a more inclusive and anti-colonial Trinidadian Presbyterian Church.

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Returning Home to Care: Social Reproduction at Work

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ABSTRACT: Caribbean women have historically done productive and reproductive work that has been rendered less than visible and undervalued economically and socially for the state, family, and community. Emigration from the Caribbean to economically wealthier states across the Global North and South remains an important route to individual and familial improvement. Migrant women continue to fulfil "family responsibilities" transnationally, even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, there are women who return to countries of birth to care for aging parents. With an aging population in Trinidad and Tobago, elder care becomes important not only to the state and how it allocates resources for this population, but also for children and families. But why do "highly skilled" women return to do this proximate care work? With Marxian feminist analyses in mind, I detail the shared pressures and expectations on women that cross-cut class and income. From unstructured and semi-structured interviews with eight voluntary women returnees in Trinidad, I describe the reciprocal obligations at work to undervalue this reproductive labor. If privileged women are strained within present day conditions of austerity, even more socially and economically vulnerable women are further strained. The capitalist logics of work globally and Caribbean cultural particularities provide cover for this persistent undervaluing of reproductive labor, continuing systemic inequalities.

KEYWORDS: Caribbean, class, care economy, feminism, migration

The Sandwich Generation in Trinidad and Tobago

When explaining why she returned home to the small island of Trinidad in the southern Caribbean, Flora starts by saying that her mother was "getting on" in age and needed her.[1] As Flora explains,

> from 2012 I started to come home regularly. Every visit I would try to stay longer … [My mother] was herself but she started to go down [become weaker] and need[ed] more companionship [after my father died]. It started off with loneliness. Her siblings started dying. She's from a big family, you see? And her friends were less able to come [visit] and interact. (Flora, interviewed by Maria Gomes, September 12, 2019.)

Sixty-year-old Flora had lived in Florida and Georgia in the USA for twenty years, working in occupational therapy. Flora visited Trinidad regularly to see her aging parents, relatives, and friends. Typically, these visits occurred every two years. But following her father's death, Flora returned annually for her mother. "I was uncomfortable that she would pass and I wouldn't be there," Flora relates, "I was also coming back for the sake of my grandchildren, you know? So I would have a relationship with them. If not, they will grow up without me being around." For these reasons she explored local work opportunities to enable returning to live in Trinidad full time. Eventually Flora secured work in the insurance sector and returned to do the care work duties.

1 To protect the privacy of interlocutors/project participants, all names in this paper are pseudonyms. Antonia Mungal and Maria Gomes are research team members.

Flora's return to Trinidad involved a desire to be a formative influence in her grandchildren's lives, participating in the joy of family life. But it also points to the labour necessary for the reproduction of life as family members age. Dorothy Miller's 1981 discussion of the "sandwich generation" captures Flora' position wherein there is an intertwining of material and affective support for aging parents, children and other relatives. Forty years on, the sandwich generation conceptualization remains relevant because it points to the reciprocal obligations between older and younger kin as well as women's less-than-visible-labours required to keep societies and economies functioning (see Gomes, Mungal & Gomes, forthcoming).

In discussing Flora's experiences, my aim is not to disregard or conflate structural differences such as culture, class, geography, nationality, or the implications these factors have on caregivers' experiences. Rather, I intend to examine the persistent undervaluing of women's labour and the financial, professional, and emotional costs associated with undertaking such work. I am mindful of the context of Caribbean kinship and the cross-cultural shared organization of labour, particularly considering the implementation and continuation of austerity measures that reduce social protections (for my treatment of structural issues of Caribbean kinship see chapter six in Gomes 2021). These are matters upon which I will expand in this concise paper.

A Microlevel Study of Caribbean Gendered Care Work

Between 2019–2021, my research collaborators and I undertook semi- and un-structured interviews with eight women who had returned to Trinidad: Ashley, Flora, Janet, Kristina, Lisa, Maya, Severine, and Zoe.[2] These voluntary participants had common characteristics and interests, like having completed tertiary programs or post-secondary certifications.[3] Most were over the age of 55 at the time of our interviews. They earned higher than average incomes when working, whether in the USA, UK, or Jamaica, as well as in Trinidad on their return. And they lived in urban or peri-urban locations in north and south Trinidad. They worked in event planning, interior design, insurance sales, medicine, and health care – one doctor, one hospital administrator, and Flora was trained in occupational therapy. In International Labor Organization classifications (2014) they were "highly skilled" workers or "professionals." Following the pandemic-related lockdowns and the downgrading of coronavirus from a pandemic to an epidemic, we have since completed additional interviews. In this short paper I refer primarily to Flora's experience.

Although these women could be regarded as relatively economically privileged and successful, they faced considerable gendered expectations about duties of care work – a gendered bind that modern women face (see Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Engels 2010 [1884]; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Mies 1982; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999; Parreñas 2021). A significant concern is the shared pressures on and expectations of women that transcend class and income levels. If women of privilege, such as our interlocutors, are strained under contemporary conditions of austerity, women in even more socially and economically vulnerable positions are likely to experience further strain.

There is a capitalist political economic context to gendered labour in Trinidad and Tobago. To briefly expand, surpluses from oil revenues following the 1970s oil boom led to public spending and social welfare measures (Hosein 2007). Following the most recent commodity downturn, the state has increasingly withdrawn social protections in favor of prioritizing market solutions and austerity (see Timcke, forth-

2 To a degree, the members of the team shared similar experiences and/or expectations around informal caregiving. We were Caribbean women who had lived, studied, and worked in locales in the "Global North" and "Global South," voluntarily returning to Trinidad and Tobago for a myriad of personal reasons. We occupied similar class and gender classifications as our interlocutors. We likewise were categorized as highly skilled workers who experienced similar expectations of migrating for socioeconomic betterment as well as providing proximate care for younger and elderly relatives, primarily children and parents. To aid with data collection, we convened closed workshops with informal caregivers as well as health care workers (doctors, nurses, technicians, waged care workers) and colleagues in adjacent academic disciplines of social work and sociology.

3 Less than 10% of the Trinidad and Tobago population (Central Statistical Office Trinidad & Tobago 2011).

coming). The reduction of the cost-of-living allowance, decreased state funding for public healthcare, and concurrent trade liberalization favoring multinational corporations, coupled with the emigration of educated medical personnel like nurses and doctors, resulted in a diminished quality of healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago (Phillips 1996). Currently, there are debates about the government's proposition to extend the retirement age of public sector workers from 60 to 65 (Trinidad Guardian, 2023). Given their relative class privilege, the participants' families could afford better quality private healthcare, opting to go to public hospitals selectively for treatments such as radiation therapy for their parents. Nonetheless, their experiences suggest that the privatization of care means more less-than-visible work for women. While I do not elaborate on this idea in a short paper such as this one, I conceptualize this wider process as women providing subsidies to the state and market.

In the following sections I analyze Flora's experience through questions involving social reproduction. Referring to the "valorization of housework" (Federici 2012, 1) and the "valorization of reproductive work" (Federici 2012, 123), I aim to demonstrate the violence of capitalism at work while pointing to kinship and cultural norms that deserve attention in the idea of reciprocal obligation. There is a related reason to continue writing about the dismantling of labour hierarchies (à la Federici 2012) in institutions. If one group of people are subordinated to capital, the gains of feminism do not signal full emancipation or the dismantling of patriarchy.

Reciprocal Obligation and "Labour Hierarchies"

Using different words but conveying a similar sentiment, Ashley, Flora, Janet, Kristina, Lisa, Maya, Severine, and Zoe expressed a feeling that their parents "needed" them. In almost each woman's life, there was an accident or a medical diagnosis that precipitated their return to Trinidad, such as the parent falling and injuring themselves or an illness that resulted in a hospital stay. For Severine and Ashley, whose aging parents were in good health, it was primarily their parents' post-retirement return to Trinidad from London, England, and New York, USA, that influenced their move to Trinidad. Severine was concerned her sister and extended family would not have the time and energy to devote to caring for her parents as they had children, spouses, and full-time jobs. As neither Severine nor Ashley had children or a spouse at the time, they decided to move to Trinidad when their parents returned.

Continuing to describe the tolls of these labours, Flora's remarks reflect a collective effort of caregiving for her mother between herself and her siblings, especially her sister, and less so with her brother. They regularly speak about their mother's well-being including medical diagnoses, mental and emotional state, and general well-being. All project participants remarked on these frequent conversations and messages. It was common to discuss the comparative costs of medicine between Trinidad, the USA and Canada with a sibling or to ask relatives and family friends to bring medicine when traveling.

A closer look at Flora's activities reveals she does much of the routine care work. This care entails cooking, buying ingredients for meals, alternating between the upscale and less expensive supermarkets, helping her mother to church or medical appointments or to walk in the garden. Up to 2021, Flora's mother was able to do the routine self-care, of bathing and eating for instance. Unexpectedly for Flora, a couple years after returning to live full time in Trinidad, the family hired an informal care worker to stay with Flora's mother three days each week. (By informal care worker I mean someone who was not trained in elderly care, but who was familiar with the family, whom Flora's mother trusted to a degree and was waged).

This worker enabled Flora to have a bit more flexibility and time for herself: "We're able to leave her [my mother] and go but we have to come back before 5 [o'clock in the evening]. So if nobody's going to be here, if somebody has to go beyond that time, we'll talk with each other [and make the arrangements] to make sure that someone is always with my mother," Flora explains. Hiring an informal care worker for Flora means that she also has time to spend with her grandchildren and to care for them, returning to the idea of the sandwich generation.

When Flora considered moving back to Trinidad full time after her father's death, she sought to work

in occupational therapy. But there were limited opportunities. Without sizeable savings, Flora had to continue working in Georgia, USA, until she could return to Trinidad without the security of a consistent income and health insurance to treat her sciatica condition. This situation exemplifies the point about the relative privilege of this group of highly skilled women. Almost all the women in this project returned to Trinidad without a job and negotiated their health insurance coverage – especially important as they were also aging – until they were able to find suitable employment. The relative cushioning of their class position, which meant families had houses with space into which they initially moved, facilities like wi-fi, vehicles they borrowed to drive, as well as their own professional training and education eased their re-entry into the community and society.

While not intending to negate these feelings, minimize these perspectives, or critique these personal decisions, it is crucial to recognize that socially reproductive labour is essential for sustaining life itself. This often invisible or undervalued labour – preparing meals, maintaining a clean household, tending to children's needs, and ensuring families are ready to engage in daily activities – enables workers to sell their labour for productive purposes. Economies continue to rely heavily on this undervalued and frequently low-waged labour, if it is even compensated at all.

As liberal and Marxist feminists have emphasized over decades, the political economy of care underscores how industrialization and evolving forms of capitalism have rendered these less-than-visible labours integral to the functioning of societies and economies across cultures and geographies. While the professionalization of women, a gain of feminism, has led to significant positive developments toward gender parity, parity does not equate to equality. I therefore turn to the concept of social reproduction "as the complex of activities and relations by which our life and labor are daily reconstituted" (Federici 2012, 5).

Our interlocutors described caregiving as a "labor of love." In response to questions of whether Flora thinks of "caring for her family as work" she was adamant that it was not work. This response echoed that of other interlocutors. Quite pointedly, Flora related her response when a close friend in the USA asked: "when they going to pay you for all you doing?" (caring for her mother), to which Flora replied, "I don't think of looking after mummy as work; I don't expect that kind of money." This was a common thread in women's responses and narratives, pointing to the difficulty of thinking of and speaking about these labours as work and the physical and emotional tolls of doing this voluntary caregiving. What was nonetheless striking in these women's descriptions of their caregiving was a silence on the physical and emotional toll of this unwaged work. The difficulties and hardships of caregiving for aging relatives emerged largely obliquely, and rarely directly (see Gomes et al., forthcoming).

Ashley, Flora, Janet, Kristina, Lisa, Maya, Severine, and Zoe spoke of caring for parents and aging relatives as "duty," "obligation" and "responsibility" – their parents cared for them, and it is now their turn to undertake this care. This responsibility extended to aunts, uncles, and close family friends. When Flora returned to Trinidad, she also "looked in" on her mother's family: "And I've done it beyond my mom, I have done it for my mother's family." From Flora's point of view:

> My cousins were away – are living away – and their father got very sick. They knew I was here and they called me and asked me if I would check on their father. And I stuck with their father until this day. I say [to my siblings] "look, so and so is not well and they're living alone. Their children are away and they need help." In a case like that, if my sister or brother are displeased at my sharing myself, once I tell them they will have to deal with that. You know, I feel that we have a responsibility to our other family, who are aging (Flora, interviewed by Maria Gomes, September 12, 2019).[4]

The reciprocal obligation for adult children to care for aging parents is also situated within histories of labour exploitation within the plantation economies of the West Indies, as I discuss in the following section.

4 In these middle-income families, the caregiving is done by "blood" relatives who live in nuclear families but there are also communities of "fictive kin" inclusive of religious community members and neighbors who contribute to the labour of care.

The Historical Development of Kinship

Historical conditions remain relevant to understanding the features, organization, and obligations at present. Affect theory is insufficient to theorize this phenomenon of professional women's return to care for elderly parents and relatives. While the history of the West Indies does not begin with European conquest of multicultural indigenous populations and colonization, a history of colonial immigration of enslaved and indentured Africans and Asians for labour in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries especially, and postcolonial emigration from the Caribbean in search of work and opportunities for improvement, have had enduring effects on social reproduction and values (for more on this history see Mintz 1974; Smith 1961, Solien Gonzalez 1969).

Within Trinidad's plantation system, family and kinship patterns transcended racial boundaries among the poor and subordinated. Both enslaved and indentured women worked in the fields alongside men, performing productive and reproductive labour in contrast to wealthy women. However, a closer examination of the gendered division of labour on the plantation reveals that during slavery and after the abolition of the British slave trade and emancipation/indentureship in 1807 and 1834 respectively, men typically occupied skilled roles, for instance in the boiler houses for processing sugarcane. The devaluation of women's labour and the idealization of their roles as mothers and wives meant that few women could fulfil these roles, although they remained idealized.

Additionally, in the post-emancipation Caribbean economic landscape, household production emerged to cushion against seasonal work, inadequate wages, and starvation. This multiplicity of household production combined waged employment, subsistence agriculture, and small-scale animal husbandry. Children's contributions to domestic chores and farming provided a crucial supplementation within the broader context of underpaid plantation wage labour. Daughters were valued, as they replenished the labour force and also offered reliable assistance in households where male presence was limited with labour emigration.

Reproducing the family unit became a strategic endeavor to secure livelihoods in the colonial-capitalist as well as postcolonial-capitalist society. The historical forces that shaped labour dynamics, identities, and roles continue to underscore the relationship between Caribbean women and labour, in this case intertwined with an ethic of care for elderly relatives (see Gomes et al., 2024 for further development of this point). The participants in our study share these obligations out of a complex history.

The Social Costs of Care under Capitalism

Although there are meaningful differences between colonial and contemporary Trinidad, unpaid gendered caregiving remains integral to social reproduction. From the perspectives and experiences of a small group of professional women returnee caregivers who speak of love, duty, obligation, and responsibility, I draw upon Silvia Federici's idea of the valorization of housework (2012) inclusive of care work, to demonstrate how the naturalization of this labour exploitation is fundamental to the functioning of transnational families and states. The institutionalization of "gender labor hierarchies" (Federici 2012, 109) from the industrial era has meant that women willingly take on this work as natural roles but the discursive and symbolic valorization of this role does not extend to material valuing. Formalized care work too is undervalued and underpaid.

As Federici writes, "unpaid labor is not extracted by the capitalist class only from the waged workday, but … it is also extracted from the workday of millions of unwaged house-workers as well as many other unpaid and un-free laborers" (2019, 55). In referring to the importance of the 1970s Wages for Housework Campaign in many locales of the Global North, Federici continues (2019, 55):

> It was redefining the capitalist function of the wage as a creator of labor hierarchies, and an instrument serving to naturalise exploitative social relations and to delegate to wage-workers power over the unwaged. It was unmasking the socio-economic function of the creation of a fictional private sphere, and thereby re-politicising family life, sexuality, procreation.

"I have brought a kind of business approach to caregiving. I'm very organized," Flora explains. But

that statement belies the costs of these labours. There are immediate physical tolls such as lack of sleep and hypervigilance. In addition to Flora, some interlocutors – especially Janet, Lisa, Severine, Maya and Zoe – all spoke of waking at night when they lived with their aging parents, to help their parent to the commode for example. And they spoke of sleeping lightly, constantly listening for a parent's voice or the ringing bell to signal that their parent needed help in the very late or early hours.

"Unshared stresses" (Miller 1981, 419) in the lives of people caring for the elderly and the young signaled a social silence that I suggest is also cultural, making informal caregiving difficult or unusual subject matter to raise with bosses at work, especially for professional women given the gains of liberal feminism. The economic costs of care are at times also shared among the elderly and their informal caregivers. "We don't depend on each other financially. Okay. Everybody have their sources of income, but we merge," Flora clarifies. But the cost of returning for these highly skilled women meant de-prioritizing careers by changing jobs, declining promotions, reducing hours at work, and drawing upon savings or retirement funds. Ultimately, there are considerable personal and professional opportunity costs to this kind of care work that arise in part because the state is withdrawing social protections.

Concluding Remarks

To return to the question which animated this enquiry, "why do professional women return to countries of origin to provide the proximate care for aging relatives?," all our interlocutors spoke of feeling a responsibility to care for aging parents and relatives at the end-of-life stage. Most, including Flora, also spoke of a desire to "be there" in person with grandchildren and parents, demonstrating the "labors of love" that they were prepared to take on for both the young and elderly. In doing so, women de-prioritized careers and jobs as well as their own healthcare.

With demographic changes and the reduction of social protections that accompany austerity measures, the state transfers elderly care to individuals, families, and communities. As one case within a global context of the feminization of care work and increasing economic inequalities, this concern is not new but one that has occupied liberal and Marxist feminists alike since the "second wave" of feminist activism. This case demonstrates the cross-cultural and relatable value of returning to Marxist-feminist inspired analyses of social reproduction to understand how capitalism and accumulation continue to pivot on the exploitation of labour, and in this instance women's labour.

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Embodied Hegemonies: Women, Well-Being and Social Reproduction in the Trinidadian-Present

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ABSTRACT: Hegemonic ideologies both frame and limit the prevailing conception of the Trinidadian present. We can see this acutely at play with the struggles surrounding identity construction of Trinidadian women in the twenty-first century. In understanding the experience of women in Trinidadian society, health can be understood as an indicator of the class-status matrix, particularly when considering the non-communicable disease epidemic in the Caribbean. By directing our attention to both the body and the conditions under which the body exists, we can examine a history of exploitation and varied responses to exploitation. Drawing upon intersectionality, feminist, materialist and decolonizing frameworks, this research paper points at locations of ongoing gendered class formations, highlighting the dialectical relationship between identity categories that influence the mode of self-understanding of women in Trinidad and Tobago, their health outcomes, and well-being. Historical and cultural factors become important in understanding the value systems created for women and reproduced by society pertaining to wellness and health behaviours.

KEYWORDS: alienation, Caribbean, ideology, non-communicable diseases, political economy, social reproduction

Introduction

Thinking about women and women's condition gives a sense of how society is faring. Arguably the idea of well-being, as it relates to the non-communicable disease (NCD) epidemic in the Caribbean, is a clear indicator of women's circumstances and conditions, as well as pointing to locations of ongoing class (re)formation and its gendered components. By directing attention to both the body and the conditions under which the body exists, one can examine a history of exploitation as well as varied and nuanced responses to exploitation.

This project is guided by the premise that the colonial foundations within Caribbean neoliberalism and the capitalist mode of production have significant implications for the well-being of women in the region. By addressing these topics, I hope to contribute something meaningful about identity and ideology in the Caribbean, pinpointing the mechanisms that perpetuate these forces, making visible certain expressions of these forces. I am drawing on decolonizing, feminist, intersectional and material frameworks while also referring to local and regional data, with a specific focus on the case of Trinidad and Tobago and synthesized in conversation with the frameworks. For evidence, I present the voices of five Indo-Trinidadian women who agreed to our interviews, using semi-structured and conversational techniques along with a purposive snowball sampling.

I consider women's ill-health an expression of what Karl Marx (2007) termed "alienation" – that radical disharmony between ourselves and others; ourselves, and nature; ourselves and the products we create. An expression of alienation that is framed in a specific way is often naturalized due to the rhetoric

associated with medical research and reasoning which dominate the narrative of women's health. Although Marx's concept of alienation does have a subjective component, this argument also considers alienation as "the objective structure of experience and activity in a capitalist society" (Horowitz n.d.). In this paper I take the position that women's health is multidimensional. It can be understood as the embodiment of social, biological, political, historical, and economic conditions, which makes it important to examine the dominant traditions and discourses used to explain women's well-being. This understanding is especially important as it relates to NCDs, which are typically understood as lifestyle diseases.

The Burden of NCDs in the Caribbean

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines NCDs as chronic diseases, which tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of behavioural, genetic, environmental, and physiological factors. An NCD is a disease that has a prolonged course, that does not resolve spontaneously, and for which a complete cure is rarely achieved. The four main types of noncommunicable diseases include cardiovascular, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes, with mental illness also listed under NCDs (WHO 2022).

What is significant and equally alarming is that, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), NCDs account for 75 percent of all deaths in the region of the Americas, with the Caribbean having the highest proportional NCD mortality (Razzaghi et al. 2019). In the Caribbean region, NCDs are the leading cause of death and disability, with 76.8 percent of the total deaths in 2016 (which refers only to the "non-Latin Caribbean, excluding Haiti," meaning the English-speaking Caribbean) attributed to NCDs (Caribbean Public Health Agency n.d.).

According to the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Caribbean women are 60 percent more likely to have diabetes than men and twice as likely to be obese. Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, and Jamaica are among the top 14 countries in global female obesity and physical inactivity is significantly higher in women than men. For instance, in Barbados, nine out of ten women do not meet the World Health Organization activity recommendation. For most Caribbean countries, cancer is the second leading cause of mortality, after cardiovascular and related diseases, and among women, breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related deaths (Healthy Caribbean Coalition 2017).

With these figures, I contend that the Caribbean NCD epidemic presents a site from which the working of power can be made visible. This is a site which becomes a sort of physical manifestation of the alienation experienced by Caribbean women that emphasizes the physicality of oppression, arguing that some of the central contradictions of global capitalism and neoliberalism are in fact embodied in postcolonial realities. Hence, I join in the dialogue that calls for a shift in focus from symptoms to systems.

This dialogue includes the work of Paul Farmer (1999) on structural violence, understood as "pathologies of power" or bodily manifestations of disease and distress. His work considers historically embedded hierarchies of relative privilege and disadvantage, in both material and symbolic forms, which can be understood as violent in that they leave those who are most disadvantaged to bear the brunt of systemic harm.

The concept of structural violence extends Achille Mbembe's (2019) ideas about necropolitics, especially when one considers how it relates to Caribbean women's well-being. It helps us connect the broader social dynamics present in modern democratic societies with the tangible expressions of suffering experienced by individuals, including those in the Caribbean. Structural violence understood in this way highlights how systemic processes of social reproduction in contemporary Caribbean society can lead to concrete, physical consequences for individuals or perhaps even provide the structural preconditions for death. In the context of Caribbean women, this means understanding how social and structural factors put them at an increased risk of health and bodily distress.

This shift from symptoms to systems is also echoed by the work of Caribbean feminist scholars such as Patricia Mohammed (2021) and Rhoda Redock (2014) who interrogate the deeply personal impact of social, economic, historical, and political forces on the lives of Caribbean women. They con-

sider not only observable vectors of human existence, but their nuanced lived experiences due to the conditions under which these women and their bodies exist.

Beyond the glaring reality of the NCD epidemic in the Caribbean, the incidence of disease across the region highlights threads of sameness which can be observed among the health experiences of Caribbean persons (in this case I focus on Caribbean women). This incidence emphasizes why we must turn our attention to the conditions under which the body exists. Applying a decolonizing lens to understanding how Caribbean people, but more specifically women, experience life in the Caribbean-present can shed light on the relationship between structure and agency as these women, in their collective physical expressions of health, are both subsumed and conflicted by the legacies of colonialism and challenges of neoliberalism, amidst negotiating nuanced forms of resistance and liberation.

Historicizing Social Determinants in Postcolonial Contexts

Discussions surrounding NCDs and women's well-being that both privilege and are dominated by biomedical framing do not adequately historicize the Caribbean-present. Gill and Benatar (2016) write

> neoliberal capitalism is not just a set of economic processes but also a system of power. This system does not involve the accumulation of goods to improve livelihood and social well-being, but is driven by the accumulation of monetary values (exchange values) for profit.

They go on to argue that ignoring the agenda of hegemonic forces results in an understanding and analysis that contradict health equity goals, further exacerbated by narrowly understanding ill-health as an "individual biological problem with a technical solution" (Gill and Benatar 2016). As such, broadening the scope or applying a more nuanced lens can allow us to re-frame and by extension better understand the experiences of Caribbean women. This is especially so as the biomedical model of diseases cannot interrogate the "political ideologies and power structures that shape health policy-making, or identify how they have evolved from legacies of imperialism and colonialism" (Gill and Benatar 2016).

Sidney Mintz (1996) situates my argument and thought process by examining the Caribbean's relationship to imperialism. In "Enduring Substances, Trying Theories" he looks at the Caribbean region as "oikoumene" (a socio-cultural area), as history provides a focus for the Caribbean's relationship with colonialism relating to power, violence, movement, expression, interaction, and survival. Mintz refers to the Caribbean as a historic unit for which the conditions of slavery, the plantation system, colonialism and indentureship particularly in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries have laid the foundation for interaction, resistance and inequality experienced by Caribbean people, which in turn have achieved "unique results." As Mintz (1996, 65) writes,

> The transplanted peoples of the Caribbean had to be homogenized in some ways to meet the economic demands imposed upon them, at the same time that they were being individualized by the erasure of the institutional underpinnings of their pasts … These were among the achievements – if we choose to call them that – of Caribbean colonialism.

Mintz makes a clear distinction between culture and social structure for which the social structure is the umbrella under which various cultures are formed. In this model of culture contact, it is the social structure that is replicated across the Caribbean territories because of a historical colonial experience.

This model is helpful in my research to understand the Caribbean's NCD epidemic and the similar expression of well-being as it relates to NCDs across the Caribbean. Notably, Mintz looks at the responses of the colonized, not as passive receivers but as actively engaged in creating their realities although they were unable to alter the structures under which their reality operated. The relationship between structure and agency therefore becomes important.

The work of Chandra Mohanty (2003) in *Feminism Without Borders* echoes some of the same sentiments as Mintz. She also examines the relationship between experience and structure, calling for a materialist approach in analyzing issues of identity and deconstructing Western feminism, lobbying for the experience of women in the developing world to be placed at the forefront of understanding the expe-

riences of the vulnerable. She asserts that lines of solidarity can be drawn between the experiences of third world women as it relates to their shared history of colonial domination and racism, in this case the collective expression of ill-health (NCDs) of Caribbean women.

Moreover, I recognize the similarity of conditions in terms of gender subordination. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Patricia Mohammed (2021, 239) argues, there were three patriarchal systems functioning at the same time in the British colony of Trinidad

> all competing with each other. These were: the dominant white patriarchy which controlled state power as it existed then; the "creole" patriarchy of the Africans and the mixed group, functioning with and emerging from the dominant white group; and an Indian patriarchy found among the Indian population.

With intersectionality and post-colonial sensibilities in mind, both Mohanty and Mohammed contend that third world feminism cannot be addressed without thinking about anti-imperialism.

Mohanty's focus on globalization becomes important for my argument, as it allows for understanding the Caribbean's sustained relationship to the metropole and, by extension, how Caribbean women are positioned in relation to global trends as power and meaning continue to be produced and reproduced because of interconnectedness, which in turn compromise their well-being. Mainstream medical practices and logics that arise from transnational interaction can mediate constructions of risk and responsibility, which in turn shape the cadence of national and regional health agendas. This does not mean that well-being can be reduced to a matter of power relations but, rather, we can consider patterns of mortality and illness to point at ongoing locations of class formation.

The concept of well-being also offers the opportunity to analyze labour history. Caribbean women have always been constructed in relation to labour, whether it be productive, reproductive, formal, or informal labour. As such, labour becomes important in understanding the identities of Caribbean women and their expressions of well-being because of performing such identities and labours. This is especially the case as social reproductive activities, traditionally and disproportionately performed by women, are an integral condition for economic possibilities under capitalism, paradoxically obscured in value and structurally subordinate to waged work.

According to Rhoda Reddock (1986), Indian (South Asian) and African women, at their point of entry to Trinidad and Tobago society, were workers not wives. Immediately, this point dispels certain misconceptions about the colonial political economy, and acknowledges Caribbean women are producing and have been producing and acting in material relations; however the value of their labour is downplayed, made invisible, or naturalized.

Therefore, women are materially productive, but ideologically their products and productivity are not valued. And although women are valued on how much they produce, value is still mediated. With this point, I would also like to recognize difference in terms of the different ways that women were positioned on the plantation and continue to be positioned in contemporary society. Gender, race, class, and capital are the lines under which society has been stratified, although one category may take precedence over another depending on the context and agenda of the ruling class. Race is also a construct that was used to maintain subordination on the plantation. Reddock states that Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women have been "othered" in relation to each other as narratives framed Afro-Caribbean women as "loose, immoral, loud, independent and sexually available"; in contrast Indo-Caribbean women who were constructed as "chaste, pure, controlled and sexually unavailable" (Reddock 2014, 4-5). Nevertheless, the bodies of both groups of women were exploited for productive, reproductive, and sexual labour.

Policy Narratives, Discursive Practices, Bio-Medical Framing

At this juncture I would like to bring into conversation Trinidad and Tobago's *National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases: Trinidad and Tobago 2017 – 2021*. According to Deborah McFee, "Policy narratives represent spaces where ideologies are owned and rearticulated in-

ternal to the state, and are then co-opted by external actors to become public" (McFee 2017, 109-110). In the National Strategic Plan, much emphasis is placed on what is termed "modifiable behaviours" and "risk factors" which include physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, alcohol abuse and tobacco and stress (Ministry of Health n.d.). However, we must consider interrogating "the cause of the cause."

The association of health and well-being with individual responsibility for life decisions and lifestyle choices, as seen in the language used in the National Strategic Plan, relieves the state of its obligation to ensure the well-being of its citizens by rendering individuals solely responsible for their health. The insistence on individual habits and construction of Caribbean culture as irresponsible, less productive than metropolitan cities (former imperial centers), lazy, and busy distracts from the responsibility of local government. Framing and discursive practices (how we write and talk about issues) can be used to manipulate material and ideological conditions of inequality, thus legitimizing suffering.

This framing was replicated in the words of the Minister of Health, who states in the foreword to the National Strategic Plan, "the success of this initiative will be determined by our ability to change deeply entrenched habits and accept personal responsibility for our health status" (Ministry of Health n.d., 1). The individualization of responsibility for health, consistent with neoliberal convictions, obscures the notion of personal autonomy, muddying it with problematic rationalities of self-discipline and productivity, all the while armoring neoliberal logics to delegitimize critical questions around the ideological and material structures and processes that create, maintain, and undermine health.

While there is acknowledgment that the risk factors and behaviours that contribute to the NCD epidemic take place in particular social, economic and physical environments, suggestions and policies geared towards tackling this issue continue to focus on: raising taxes on tobacco and alcohol to lower consumption (for which the National Strategic Plan reported that tobacco use was significantly lower among women, at 9 percent, than men at 33.5 percent); promoting healthy eating and exercise; and creating spaces to promote physical activity.

Not only is there a shift towards the individualization of health responsibility but the emphasis on consumption habits also shifts conceptions of personhood towards that of a consumer, again entangled in tentacles of neoliberal logics. It also calls into question the agenda and capacity of such state mechanisms to address gendered structural inequalities. I posit, therefore, that NCDs are not the problem *per se*, but are an expression of the problem. What matters is the system that makes our bodies vulnerable. This is a system that constitutes the workings of ideology and materiality, which echo a colonial past. What makes "the cause of the cause" of the risk factors and modifiable behaviours invisible and obscures it, is that this logic of NCDs relies on the notion that medical science and technology are neutral and apolitical. A view that depoliticizes well-being and a shared history of colonization and women's relationships with their bodies, and to labour, will continue to mediate the lives of Caribbean women.

While NCDs may be framed as scientific and empirical, in many ways they are ultimately rooted in ideology. For instance, if we maintain the notion that medical problems require medical solutions or medical problems require behavioural change at the individual level, this in turn rejects the idea that the system itself is flawed and may assert that our problems are problems of science, and not structures, morality, and conflict. Therefore, the way we define and frame the problem defines our capacity to make change.

The Gap Between Policy and Lived Experiences

To highlight the gap between policy and lived experiences, I share a few excerpts from the interviews that I conducted with five Indo-Trinidadian women. The interviews centered on questions around their understandings of themselves identifying as Indo-Trinidadian women navigating tradition and modernity, work, family life, values, opportunities and expectations of themselves and other women, as well as their goals, aspirations, and frustrations. Some women shared that they were survivors of NCDs and

other negative health experiences, and some did not share this information. The interviews incorporated conversational and semi-structured techniques to curate a space where the women felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

The participants ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-five years and described themselves as middle to upper-middle class. To provide additional details, they included Samaara, a nineteen-year-old first-year medical student who lives with her parents and younger brother, constantly navigating her own autonomy as she described her parents' views on gender to be "traditional" and at times "overly protective." Stephanie, a banking professional and graduate student in her twenties, who also lives in her family home, which is located nearby to her relatives' houses, remarks on the restrictive expectations of women that she constantly confronts at work and which contradict her autonomous sense of identity.

Shireen is a single mother and lawyer in her fifties who disclosed her battle with cancer and her nuanced understanding of gender roles and identity politics due to her experience living abroad, and also influenced by her faith in Islam. Linda, a retired primary schoolteacher and wife in her seventies had a "humble" upbringing that was also very much informed by religion. Her marriage to a successful businessman influenced her personal life, consumption, and leisure activities in terms of travel and employing domestic help – typically women.

And the final interviewee was Samantha, a wife, mother of three, and secondary schoolteacher. Samantha shared a bit about her female relatives' multigenerational battle with cancer, as well as how she navigated her own autonomy and value as a young working mother, which changed as her children became older, and because of a health scare that prompted her to join a women's health and wellness group called "Yes She Can."

Their stories, cited below, help to understand the interaction of different axes of experiences and conflict experienced by women in the Trinidadian present and the dialectical relationship between structure and agency.

Linda:

> I still think that as independent as women are I think there are certain things that you have to do that make you a woman. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, that is what makes you a woman. You should be able to run a home. That is management.
>
> When I started to work then I'm seeing what the modern woman was doing but the conflict came about because I was still living at home.

Linda's assertion that certain domestic tasks define womanhood highlights the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms prevalent in the Caribbean. The emphasis on cooking, cleaning, and sewing as essential feminine qualities reinforces traditional gender roles, perpetuating a problematic understanding of her place and power within Caribbean society. This expression highlights the constraints on women's agency through their internalization of their gendered assignment to specific roles within the private sphere, marginalizing their autonomy and contributions in broader social, political, and economic contexts.

Shireen:

> And the next step after school was to work. And that was fine because you just focused on that and do the other things on the side. But when you had the responsibility of a job and family life…multitasking, I really had to learn to do that."
>
> I want to be a homemaker. I like being a homemaker but I also have to work, I am also a working woman so I combine the both.

Shireen's experience reflects the burden placed on Caribbean women to balance multiple responsibilities. The expectation to manage a job and family life necessitates multitasking, adding additional layers of complexity and pressure. While Shireen recognizes the need to fulfil various roles, her words expose the inherent challenges faced by Caribbean women in reconciling their desires for personal and professional fulfilment. Neoliberal ideologies, emphasizing individualism and productivity, often intensify these pressures, blurring the line between personal choice and structural constraints.

Samaara:

> I am going to be a doctor so I am going to have money coming in. I have to have money coming in because

> I have to support the children and the husband and the house … Education is the most empowering thing you could do. Education helps you [change your status in society]and you have to fight for it

> From the time you born, mommy side of family and daddy [side] they would be telling you things and then you go to school and you have teachers telling you things and the principal telling you things and then your friends telling you things.

Samaara's aspiration to become a doctor is rooted in the pursuit of financial stability and independence. Her statement illuminates the economic realities faced by many Caribbean women who must support (or in this case aspire to support) their families while simultaneously navigating prevailing societal expectations of gender roles that situate women in the domestic sphere. The capitalist system intersects with gendered expectations, as Samaara feels the need to financially support her children, husband, and household. This depiction reflects the ways in which Caribbean women often shoulder the responsibility of both productive and reproductive labour, reinforcing traditional gender norms within a capitalist framework. Nevertheless, her belief in education as a means of empowerment provides a counterpoint to the structural constraints faced by Caribbean women. By recognizing education as a tool for challenging oppressive systems, she highlights the transformative potential of knowledge and its ability to challenge and navigate existing power structures.

Stephanie:

> Where we live is a lot of family so everyone is always watching what you're doing and growing up anything I did or wanted to do I always had to think about that.

> When I now started working (in the bank) my supervisor who is a woman, called me aside and told me that she thinks my skirts are too short, that I should wear longer skirts that I should cover myself up as much a s possible. And the thing is I didn't consider what I had on to be inappropriate."

Stephanie's expression about the constant surveillance she experienced growing up highlights the influence of a collective gaze on Caribbean women's agency. The scrutiny from family members and the broader community perpetuates norms and restricts freedom of choice. The existence of this surveillance apparatus reflects a postcolonial context where colonial legacies are actively reproduced in social and cultural dynamics. Such surveillance reinforces the idea that women's actions are not merely personal but subject to societal judgement, further constraining their agency and potential for self-determination.

W. E. Du Bois's (2017) concept of double consciousness helps to examine why identity breeds power and privilege for some groups while disempowering others. Double consciousness highlights how Indo-Caribbean women not only view themselves from their own unique perspective, but their awareness about how they are perceived by the outside world (whether their family, or other social groups) and the impact that this perception has on their identity construction and by extension their life choices and perception of reality. With such negotiation between "multiple selves and multiple communities" double consciousness can explore the unfavorable effects of conflict regarding "loyalty" to fixed identity categories (Akom 2008, 250). In this way, by engaging in loyalty to oneself regarding the construction of a most idiosyncratic, intimate expression of one's identity, Indo-Trinidadian women may be considered unsuccessful representatives of one category, self or community. However, while creating an identity which conforms to cultural ideologies in the hopes of being a successful representative of that community, she rejects her unique self and is, yet again, unsuccessful. The notion of loyalty exacerbates this feeling of lacking control over one's identity.

The problem of identity is undermined by awareness. Effectively, double consciousness highlights the discrepancy between awareness of the self and awareness of the other. The existence of such discrepancy posits the opportunity for dialogue surrounding the identities of Indo-Caribbean women and the need to rethink how these women experience life in the Trinidadian-present.

The interviews feature the realities of Caribbean women, accentuating the way that structural hegemonies influence their self-mode of understanding and, by extension their power and agency. Their expe-

riences demonstrate the ongoing struggle to reconcile personal agency with societal expectations, against the background of neoliberalism, capitalism, patriarchy, and colonial legacies, which have come to shape how their value is measured both materially and ideologically. Therefore, women's well-being cannot be adequately understood if we neglect to critically analyze the structures in which they operate and their understandings of these structures.

Conclusion

The NCD epidemic throughout the Caribbean, with similar expressions and incidences of ill-health, presents an avenue to examine the conditions under which the body exists, allowing us to examine a history of exploitation and varied and nuanced responses to exploitation by way of pointing at locations of ongoing class formations and its gendered components. Both subsumed and conflicted by the legacies of colonialism and challenges of neoliberalism, Caribbean women's collective expression of ill-health, in the case of NCDs can be understood as the embodiment of social, biological, political, historical, and economic conditions, which makes it important to examine dominant traditions and discourses used to explain women's well-being. Regional and local data in critical dialogue with feminist, materialist, intersectional and decolonizing frameworks, and the experiences of five Trinidadian women interpret a site from which the workings of power can be made visible. Thus, I join in the dialogue that calls for a shift in focus from symptoms to systems.

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Beyond the Singularity of Subordination: Césaire and Mbembe on "The Work of Man"

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how Achille Mbembe draws upon, then iterates from, the work of Aimé Césaire to provide a rich analysis of personhood in contemporary Africa. Typically, African treatments of Mbembe's theorization place considerable emphasis on the intellectual influence of Frantz Fanon, rightly so. And while Fanon does have a central role in Mbembe's writing, arguably it is Césaire who prompts Mbembe to conceptually insist upon the historical malleability of racial classification, racial civic ascription, and racial subjective comprehension as these social forms are reshaped by historical development. In tracing the development of these aspects of Mbembe's social and political thought, this paper discusses the bisections and points of departures with Césaire's poetry and philosophy as it pertains to the notion of Blackness. Effectively the dialectical encounter with Césaire and the Caribbean situation helps give rise to Mbembe's main conclusion that there is a severe limitation to Black Reasoning, especially when its discursive referents give preference to a sublime singularity over the mutable.

KEYWORDS Caribbean; personhood; pdentity; modernity

I

Modernity begins with "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population," as Marx wrote, and "the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins [which] signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production" (2011, 823). Subsequently one finds,

> at the end of first light burgeoning with frail coves the hungry Antilles, the Antilles pitted with smallpox, the Antilles dynamited by alcohol, stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dust of this town sinisterly stranded (Césaire 2013, 3).

Using his poetic aperture to capture the totality of what daylight reveals, this strophe in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* conveys the impetus for Aimé Césaire's drive to examine the "the dreadful inanity of our raison d'être" that later took the form of *Discourse on Colonialism* (2013, 3). Through showing emaciation and rampant extraction, it is for good reason that CLR James (2016) calls this text "the most devastating critique of Western Civilization that has been done in the twentieth century."

Undoubtedly Caribbean writers have had an extraordinary record in shaping the development of global social theory. In this spirit, this paper examines how Achille Mbembe draws upon, then iterates from, the work of Césaire to provide a rich analysis of the subjective comprehension of personhood in contemporary Africa and beyond. And much like how Jamestells of Césaire's agenda, so too is there also a larger project for Mbembe. It is revisiting how Africa

was read, how to re-read Africa, and how this re-reading is key to revitalize a canon that, Bruno Latour rightly laments, has "run out of steam."[1]

Treatments of Mbembe's work typically point to the centrality of Frantz Fanon's thought. For example, Sindre Bangstad (2018) notes how, notwithstanding the vast geography of Mbembe's archives, archives which span "the continental African, the Afro-American and the European African" and how his work is rife with substantive engagements with Marcus Garvey, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan among others, "the central figure … is undoubtedly Fanon." Indeed, Mbembe's conception of race owes a great deal to Fanon's influence. "For Fanon, the term 'Black' is more a mechanism of attribution than of self-designation," is a line from the early part of *Critique of Black Reason* that well encapsulates that influence (Mbembé 2017, 46). *Black Skin, White Masks* repeatedly underscores how the "negro" does not exist by and of himself; through being created as the Other his existence is codified by European institutions. And yet the imprint of Césaire's thought can be seen too; it provides a prompt for Mbembe to conceptually insist upon the historical malleability of racial classification, racial civic ascription, and racial subjective comprehension as these social forms sit in history.

In tracing selected aspects of Mbembe's thought, this paper discusses the bisections with Césaire's poetry and philosophy as it pertains to the notion of Blackness. Effectively, it is the dialectical encounter with Césaire's conception of the Caribbean (and African) situation – and how to read it – that gives rise to Mbembe's main conclusion that there are severe limitations to Black Reasoning, especially when its discursive referents give preference to a sublime singularity over the mutable. To be clear, the issue here is not about adjudicating the priority of intellectual debts or whether Fanon or Césaire is more "influential." Rather it is how Mbembe aims to enrich the analysis of the notion of Blackness by leaving behind Césaire's Négritude. In staking out a position adjacent to Césaire, Mbembe, rightly in my view, implies no authenticity, only a politics evoking authenticity; no essential attributes, only a politics evoking essential attributes. Through shattering the façade of primordialism, "a greater fraternity" that is "made to the measure of the world" becomes probable (2017, 160). The result is a subjectivity that acknowledges suffering but is not determined by it either.

II

The late Didier Kaphagawani summarized the efforts by African philosophers to theorize the notion of the person as trying to bridge "the rift between theory and lived experience," between "products of intellectual abstraction" and the "Lebenswelt" in its concrete form (2005, 77). This task has been made more difficult, he adds, because as "the scholars of African difference" invested energy into discussions of the alienation of European representation, so they neglected how their own representations were also alienating to the lifeworld they nominally addressed. These scholars "were so much steeped in articulating the ideological divides between African and Western worldviews that they lost the real self in their analyses in pursuit of something else, perhaps an esteemed value such as community," Kaphagawani writes; their ontological conceptions driven by a political goal rather than guided by the "the manifold experiences of the self" (2005, 77).

It is this problematic that Mbembe addresses, and while he works with the language of "high theory" he sides with the experience of material situations as opposed to abstract ontology and its manufactured distinctions. Consider, Mbembe says, how despite the effort to articulate ideological difference with Europe, many newly independent African countries adopted forms of nationalism outlined nearly exclusively by European thought, adopting the logic behind the phenomenon of symbolic capital that Bourdieu so well mapped. As there was little implementation of alternatives, "postwar African nationalism followed the tendencies of the moment by replacing the concept of civilization with that of progress. But this

1 "Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins?" Latour asks. "Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm?" (2004, 225). These are pressing questions for humanists given how late-stage colonialism has seen the fortification of Europe in advance of mass migration caused by the climate emergency, among other things.

was simply a way to embrace the teleologies of the period" (2017, 88). The influence of colonialism as an exploitative system as well as the role of capital imperatives in shaping both institutions and interpersonal conduct is here critical to the reproduction of the Black condition in the postcolonial present, it is bound up in notions of betterment.

If, as Mbembe writes, race "is an operation of the imagination, the site of an encounter with the shadows and hidden zones of the unconscious," it is an encounter with durable effects and postcolonial forms but also its own form of teleology (2017, 32). To wit: "The term 'Black' referred only to the condition imposed on peoples of African origin (different forms of depredation, dispossession of all power of self-determination, and, most of all, dispossession of the future and of time, the two matrices of the possible)," Mbembe writes (2017, 5–6). Producing Blackness, Mbembe explains, is a social bond predicated upon bondage, the Black Experience is linked by subordination in the service of extraction. Hierarchies of difference and other institutionalized forms functioned to legitimate accumulation by dispossession. Still, racism is not simply a product of class relations. "Race and racism are certainly linked to antagonisms based on the economic structure of society," he writes, "but it is not true that the transformation of the structure leads ineluctably to the disappearance of racism" (2017, 36).

Mbembe's analysis by necessity has much to say about distinction-making and civic ascription. He opens the *Critique of Black Reason* by providing a periodization of the racialization of consciousness. It commences with the process of legalized distinctions following Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in 1676 to co-opt and dissipate the grievances of European indentured workers by giving them higher status while simultaneously breaking the broad coalition that had formed with indentured servants of African origin. These legal decisions set in motion the mass-organized enslavement that traversed the Black Atlantic. This consciousness was reformed under colonial segregationist conditions with its scientific racism providing the rationalization for Blackness being, which denied human reciprocity and gave a social license to atrocities that follow through in Apartheid. As "beings-taken-by-others" regulated by scripts like *Le Code Noir*, these entities are rendered to the logic of Carl Schmitt's absolute state of exception, meaning they are ruled through a total necessary suspension of justice (Mbembe 2017, 3). As assets with the same status as furniture, extra-legal force is duly permitted to "stabilize" this exception. The "exceptional" racism towards Blackness was conjoined in "the logic of profit, the politics of power, and the instinct for corruption" and which educated the populace in "behaviors aimed at the growth of economic profitability" (Mbembe 2017, 62, 81). The result was excessive violence as a norm for the Black ruled, this violence necessary because of the vulnerability of capitalist social relations to broad-based coalitions. Although this initial periodization of consciousness does not yet fully demonstrate it (nor does it speak to trajectory) Mbembe frames Blackness as a historical conception of a kind of being that is neither entirely subject nor object, neither entirely determining nor determined.

Considering this history, how might "beings-taken-by-others" become "beings?" Can the "negroes" Césaire describes as "désêtre" (non-beings) ever "just-be-beings?" In his mature work, Mbembe believes so. But perhaps the "possibility of an autonomous African subject" requires leaving Blackness entirely (2017, 14). But to embark on explicating that argumentation, some groundwork is required, especially regarding how other intellectuals, Césaire in this case, addressed the same question but came to a different conclusion.

III

In seeking to comprehend the phenomenon of Black identity under French rule, there is some value in comparing the themes that appear in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, a play first performed in 1964. In *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* the first twenty-four strophes draw the readers across Martinique from mornes to board houses. The geography of Black suffering is charted through the rise and fall of sugar plantations. "The poet coming to terms with his own hard logic," is how Emile Snyder puts it; this description of the physical degradation of the "inert town" precedes the descriptions of moral degradation, for

instance Snyder (1970, 198) and Césaire (2013, 5). The dilapidated board house becomes synecdoche of colonial society and for what colonialism does to the family unit. There is the sacrificial mother, the father who beats the child to ensure that colonial authorities do not beat them worse. Through the catalogue of punishments and means of dying, so race takes form. Punishment is due because the colonial subject is Black, and the subject is Black because of the punishment dealt. Three hundred years of colonialism produced multiple signifiers of Blackness attesting to the ugly dehumanization where populations are present and presented purely in aggregate, where a "masterpiece of caricature" exists to justify that dehumanization (Césaire 2013, 29).

The rhetor emerges in strophe twenty-five and over the course of the remaining poem has an epiphany that their colonial education was one of alienation wherein Christian rituals are empty; that their intellectual formation was mainly the denial of the meanings of Blackness, which was to become bodies ready-at-hand for instrumentation. Alienation is also found in estrangement from Africanness. The rhetor invokes the Ethiopians, whom they call "truly the eldest sons of the world" (Césaire 2013, 37). Then as the *Notebook* climaxes, so the rhetor prepares for a transformation, but not one predicated upon French assimilationist ideals, but rather one informed by the recognition that what is at stake is nothing less than an insistence of fully throated humanness itself. As the strophes continue so the land comes alive through the encounters with the people it birthed. The whole purpose of this poetic movement "is to invent some form of solidarity or collectivity to fuel in turn his anti-colonial revolt," as Jane Hiddleston writes. "To this end, he oscillates between affirming the Martinican's belonging to the specific category of negritude on the one hand, and seeking to transcend that specificity in a celebration of universal humanity on the other" (2010, 88). Here Césaire uses the term "nègre" to symbolically subvert the pejorative connotation of the term.

In Cesaire's view the formation of collective identity requires addressing psychological dynamics. This is because colonial society was an interjection in the development of organic institutions, norms, and relations, matters attuned to the proverbial roots and routes that form Caribbean societies. In this case the sociological supports the philosophical. These first experiments in modernity that Sidney Mintz and Orlando Patterson identify in their respective bodies of work were founded on processes of coercion, forced labour and systemic brutality. Within this socioeconomic system gender roles and their associated norms, expectations, and behaviours were naturalized; there was the accompanying violence that policed the boundaries of those roles. Despite sustained decolonization efforts, these patterns of domination have continued well into the postcolonial period. Despite much labour, even changes in political leadership and legislation appear unable to alter these violent social codes.

"The product of Caribbean experience, French education, and African studies," Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land* is a palimpsest, revisited several times after publication (Hale 1983, 136).[2] Such a revisiting is not uncommon in radical Caribbean social and political thought. As Rachel Douglas has shown, CLR James's *The Black Jacobins* evolved through several modalities and permutations. Douglas attributes this iterative rewriting as an exercise in "rewriting historical misrepresentations" of colonial propagandists by "writing back." If Douglas is correct that "what rewriting encapsulates is the dynamic of revolutionary process," then it is possible to understand "rewriting as the application of Marxist historiography predicated upon a dialectical relationship of a changing text to a changing context" (Douglas 2019, 210, 211; Timcke 2020). In James's case, both a grand narrative in *The Black Jacobins*, but also successive iterations that show how the text is "unfinished and provisional" (Douglas 2019, 132). This mirrors the character of West Indian identity, which in fusing together the grand and mutable and

2 Interested readers can refer to James Arnold's discussion of alternations and additions to strophes in various published iterations. Arnold draws attention to Césaire's intensification of anti-capitalist anti-colonialism from 1947, and well the role of various publishers in shaping the text. Accordingly, "from 1956 onward the reader is no longer oriented toward a network of metaphors that undergird a drama of personal sacrifice. Henceforth the drama is a sociopolitical one that calls for decolonization and the democratization of economic institutions" (Arnold 2013, xix).

hereby adhering to the precepts of modernity, stands adjacent to the white bourgeois world West Indians built through sweat and sorrow.

For Cesaire's intellect these difficulties underscore the psychology of political leadership in the difficult pursuit of decolonization. This topic that would stalk him as he founded the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais in 1958, the problems and other various considerations are on display in *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*. Césaire had a great admiration for the Haitian Revolution as for him it represented Négritude in action, knowingly writing *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* against a backdrop of French colonial wars raging in Algeria and Indochina. As a treatise on decolonialization, in this 1963 play-text Césaire provides a commentary on postcolonial leadership. Here the three main points are what does a leader do for independence; after independence; and, again, what role might a metaphysical conception of race be leveraged to achieve independence.

Similarly, the main motif is the fallacy of colonial imitation of the *métropole* expressed through the protagonist, Christophe. Christophe's counterpart in the play is Pétion; these two characters intended to personify different politics in the second wave of Haitian leaders during the revolution. And while Pétion has faults aplenty, it is Christophe's desire for Black identity found through re-establishing the oppressions that made the French rich so that he himself may become rich which deserves greater critique. Indeed, Christophe's projects become conjoined through the construction of a grand citadel intended to celebrate Black freedom and self-determination; but which frankly could only be built using the whip. There is also a greater moral lesson. Although there is not a neat functional relationship between Toussaint | Christophe and Lumumba | Mobutu, aspects about betrayal and foreign intervention to murder revolutionary leadership are shared and intentional. In effect, Césaire's point is too often inheritors of rule do not possess the rhetoric or gravitas to advance the ideals of revolutionary emancipation. Sensing they are not up to the task, over time they retreat to corruption, kill critics, and intensify repression to the point that present conditions are comparable to past enslavement. And so, it is a dreadful pattern of punishment and esteemed identity that connected the colonial and postcolonial worlds that both Césaire and Mbembe seek to interrupt. But whereas Césaire acted in the realm of psychology and representative politics, Mbembe proposes that self-determination of the person can give rise to self-determination of the polity.

IV

Given how Mbembe's work emerges out of the disillusionment as efforts to consolidate democratization were eroded by theatrics and performativity, a quick reading of his work will likely reach the conclusion that his project is yet another lamentation about Africa – certainly well-constructed, yes – but otherwise merely ordinary in type. Indeed, because of quick readings like this, Mbembe has not found a sympathetic audience in South Africa, where he has been based for more than two decades, where the very temper of current discourse and the preoccupation with rapid accumulation does not easily lend itself to steady contemplation. This impatience is especially keen among the country's Black Consciousness scholars (Chipkin 2002). Whereas Mbembe discusses Blackness as an imposed ascription upon a way of being that signifies modern doubt and contingency, Black Consciousness scholars by contrast think there is little equivocation around race. "He seems disinterested in pointing out the deliberate creation of the notion for political and conquest reasons," Rothney Tshaka (2018, 1) writes. But does it not seem like these are the words of those invested in using history to generate a final vocabulary, to overlook developments around the de-convergence between race and class, to pursue private gains through foreclosing the possibility of the person?

There is another charge, and that is Mbembe's philosophy that nothing positive characterizes the Black experience comes to jeopardize the tenuous political solidarity between Africans and the wider African Diaspora. In the process of that argumentation over Black subjectivity, Mbembe places considerable emphasis on the cultural differences between Blacks in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa. Remarking on this portion of the argument, Tshaka says that "Mbembe seems to endorse some of the most bizarre sentiments on Black people that would make any self-respecting Black con-

scious scholar cringe" (2018, 1). The cause of these dismissive remarks arises from Mbembe's framing of Black Reason: "from the beginning, its primary activity was fantasizing. It consisted essentially in gathering real or attributed traits, weaving them into histories, and creating images" (2017, 27). In effect, Black Reason has taken on the attributes of colonial interpretation of African beliefs as fetishism and thus is not suitable for a project of an actualization of identity. "Mbembe has a deep dislike for anything African," Tshaka says in defense of Black singularity, thereafter likening Mbembe to "Joseph Conrad" writing a catalog to please a European audience, the barb here involving invitations to speak internationally (Tshaka 2018, 1). But if acts of unnecessary meanness like these have been introduced and deemed permissive, is it not fair to comment upon how reactionaries are typically unsettled by another so conversant with Hegel and Heidegger on the one hand and Césaire and Fanon on the other? Is it not fair to comment upon the fears that the singularly cannot abide difference? Do not the answers to these questions reveal a distinctive South African intellectual xenophobia directed at the Cameroonian?

Mbembe's project has been to take the Hegelian philosophy of history and strip it of all its racial ignorance of Africa, to insist that Africa has happenings, changes, and meanings. Hegel's conclusion that Africa is motionless and preoccupied with fetishism provides Mbembe's definition of the colony, "as a series of hollows" (Mbembe 2001, 179): tropes of empty land rife for Lockean property claims because the colonist cannot or will not see the "exercising of existence." The beings that are present are deemed morally and socially empty too, suitable only for subjection. The hollows produce a place where little matters, or little can be cared about. "The colonized belongs to the *universe of immediate things,*" Mbembe writes, "useful things when needed, things that can be molded and are mortal, futile and superfluous things, if need be" (2001, 187). Subsequently, the colonized are neither entirely subject nor object. Their human fears are required to drive their utility, their objective status decided by what they are denied.

While it is somewhat standard fare to use Heidegger to amend Hegel – Herbert Marcuse and Paul Ricœur are the preeminent precursors – Mbembe does much more than simply apply phenomenological hermeneutics to historical idealism for the purposes of analyzing the current situations on the African continent. Rather it is his thoughts about negation and death that become central to the question he poses about "how does one get from the colony to 'what comes after?'" (Mbembe 2001, 196). This next step involves theorizing about the subjects of the various historiographies, to put those historiographies about the lifeworld into a dialectic to then examine what potential supersession may arise. Without metaphysical burdens or the expectation of being world-historical agents, what might be possible?

V

Although great caution should be taken to ensure a philosophy does not become reduced to a slogan, or a phrase reified and dis-embedded from its wider text, there is some value in using an anchoring concern as an entry point for that philosophy. Mbembe provides several openings, but among the best comes from the early pages of *On the Postcolony*, a book that took at least six years to write. This phrase is "exercising existence." The term speaks to the interplay of spirit and lifeworld. While there is the distanced knowing of the becoming of spirit, it is the lifeworld where "individuals' existence unfolds in practice; it is where they exercise existence – that is, live their lives out and confront the very forms of their death" (Mbemb, 2001, 15). Mbembe seeks to examine the "signs" of this lifeworld, to discuss its "eccentricities, its vocabularies, and its magic" to conceptualize subjectivity. There are three major conceptualizations of the African lifeworld worth discussing here.

First, essentialism attempts to anchor identity on features of African existence, using these particularities to claim distinctiveness. The appeals have oftentimes been to affect (like négritude), pre-colonial practices, language, or spirituality. Each is claimed as an intrinsic inalienable property, that because of its claimed durability, can be used as the focal point of reflection for African subjectivity. Primordial essentialism inverts the European racial natural and social science that assumed that Africans were inferior; primordialism instead claims superior traits or privileged insight. Notwithstanding its regressive tendencies, essentialist

accounts at least give the opportunity of considering African subjectivity for itself, not as the result of external historical forces or discourses. For example, négritude was first a moment of "situated thinking," borne of place and time. Similarly, Garveyism had a "heretical genius." But these are both partial within "the rise of humanity" and so need to be superseded (Mbembé 2017, 161, 102, 156).

Second, postcolonialism holds that contexts produce subjects. Accordingly, the context of enslavement, colonization, and marginalization gives unique meaning to the African experience. Through confrontation with this power/knowledge complex, postcolonialism shows the constructedness of the 'other' under conditions of Western modernity. To remake themselves, existence requires resistance to modernity. While always already oppositionally defined, postcolonialism makes possible thinking about new kinds of conceptions.

Third, academism positions Africans as the subject of intentional social/scientific methodology. In structural anthropology, Africans followed precepts governed by "deep" structures that are universal to the human mind. In rational choice economics, Africans made acute preferential choices given sets of constraints and opportunities. In contemporary philanthropic-development theory, Africans are actors engaged in neo-modernization with technology and trade (Mbembe 2001, 7). These subjects may have voices in these methodologies through mandated consultation exercises but are typically mute except for a small set of self-critical researchers catering to overriding global expectations and norms.

But these three conceptions will forever be partial; because through discussions of what is missing, they overlook what exists. While Mbembe suggests these conceptualizations have value insofar that they offer counterparts to the awful forms of racism they encountered, his project is to supersede them through finding a way to "exercise existence" that is not essentialist, ahistorical and elite, but rather one that centers the contingent, contemporary, and plural lifeworlds of people on the African continent. As such, Mbembe has no interest in creating a Black singularity, but rather seeks to use history and theory to contemplate present predicaments to imagine the "possibility of an autonomous African subject," one that is positive. But that task requires recognizing how current "exercises of existence" are fraught with violence while the construction of the subject comes during brutalization from colonial structural legacies, neo-colonial relations, and rapacious dispossession by African rulers who have little desire to end the violence (Mbembe 2017, 14). Accordingly, the lifeworld of those on the African continent are forms of hollowness, absences, negations, and death. In other words, these lifeworlds are constituted by alienation. Answers to this alienation are not to be found in religion like Christianity, which seeks to convince the faithful that through their testimony of belief they can negate death. In the face of violence, the divine "is suddenly exhausted" giving rise to "astonishment and incredulity, to the point that people laugh" (Mbembe 2001, 231). Perhaps then, "exercising existence" requires subtracting negative meaning?

VI

Life in the postcolony is "nasty, brutish, and short," rife with excessive destructive forces that bring forth pain. Concurrently the global periphery is expanding with the postcolony suffering under debt and austerity, while avenues for people to migrate to the core are tightening. But Mbembe also wants to underline that the point is to "discover what 'spirit' is at work in this turbulent activity" (Mbembe 2001, 240). To begin, the resurgence of identarian beliefs around "racial realism" and their various permutations from white and black nationalism, plus the refusal to even contemplate under what conditions a subject would be willing to give up racial categories altogether, all the while navigating a heady politics of identity with boundary policing enforcing strict criteria about who is or is not, who may or may not, be a member, identify or affiliate, is troubling. Lastly, regardless of their intention, colour blindness or post-racial ideologies have functioned to dismiss the historical suffering of marginalized groups or as an excuse to argue against targeted redress. In this global context, can Blackness, as a political relation, be re-thought? Are different political relations possible?

Mbembe defines race as a system of images that forestalls any and all encounters with a subject.

Fantasy replaces reality while fear replaces ethnography with tropes of sloth, intellectual inferiority, animalism that justifies enslavement and colonial oppression, becoming a "reservoir that provided the justifications for the arithmetic of racial domination," Mbembe writes. These notions were helpful to placate any moral reservation about "how to deploy large numbers of laborers within a commercial enterprise that spanned great distances" as a "racial subsidy" to the expanding plantation system. Accordingly, race "is an operation of the imagination, the site of an encounter with the shadows and hidden zones of the unconscious" (Mbembe 2017, 27, 20, 32).

Race as signifying a biological subject is pure fiction, but when persons engage in racialist identifications, through letting it mediate one's experience, the users allow a master's concepts to establish the lifeworld. Certainly, there are several poor discourses of race, one of which "consists in expanding the Western ratio of the contributions brought by Black 'values of civilization,' the 'specific genius' of the Black race, for which 'emotion' in particular is considered the cornerstone." Mbembe writes "the term 'Black' referred only to the condition imposed on peoples of African origin (different forms of depredation, dispossession of all power of self-determination, and, most of all, dispossession of the future and of time, the two matrices of the possible)." Subsequently, through its generalization, the term "institutionalized as a new norm of existence." In this respect "Black Reason" cannot be separated from the "violence of capital" with its "logic of occupation and extraction." Mbembe concedes that Black Reason is an "ambiguous and polemical term," but he invokes it to "identify several things at once: forms of knowledge; a model of extraction and depredation; a paradigm of subjection, including the modalities governing its eradication; and, finally, a psycho-oneiric complex." He explains, "to produce Blackness is to produce a social link of subjection and a body of extraction." Currently, the deep investment in modernity has given rise to "new imperial practices" at the confluence of market globalization, economic liberalization, and technological and military innovation in the early twenty-first century: "If yesterday's drama of the subject was exploitation by capital," Mbembe writes, "the tragedy of the multitude today is that they are unable to be exploited at all. They are abandoned subjects, relegated to the role of a 'superfluous humanity.' Capital hardly needs them any more to function" (Mbembe 2017, 90, 5–6, 4, 10, 18, 6, 3, 11). In effect, calls to center historical specificity cannot escape that the epistemologies are shaped by recurring structures of domination.

VII

Mbembe positions Black reason as a challenge to Hegelian conceptions of reason wherein it is regarded as objective and universal. But this Hegelian account presumes reason is revealed by spirit, rather than simply being a construction of human enterprise in specific situations. Entertaining the notion that there are different forms of reason between Europe and Africa, then the contact between Europe and Africa produces a white conception of Blackness and black conception of Blackness. We can see one part of this when, for example, Senghor equated the Africans as being close to instinct and Europe as being close to Hellenic reason. A white conception of blackness holds that Blacks are, at best, only able to comprehend the appearances of the world. As they cannot grasp the world as such, they have no grounds to claim admittance as full, moral equals and persons able to give and take reasons because they lack the capacity to understand reason and its implications. Black consciousness of Blackness "aspires also to be a color ... It is a coat of arms, its uniform" (Mbembe 2017, 152). Bearing the consequences not of choice, Blacks are aware of what is being done to them and so there are two options. The first is to concede, the second is to oppose. Both bring death, but different narratives of esteem. These two consciousnesses are classic Hegelian master and bondsman dialectic, a codependency that traps both parties in unproductive ways. The inequality further means that when the bondsman is charged with being dirty after fixing the carriage, they are sent to wash with the soap the master provides. In contemporary terms, the ills of Blackness are to be washed away through the "conversion to Christianity, the introduction of market economy," Mbembe observes, "and the adoption of rational, enlightened forms of government" (Mbembe 2017, 87–88). However, freedom requires

that there are no masters and no bondsman.

In Hegelian categories, when the particular is falsely subsumed within the general, representation is forced to assume a determining role, which is not its calling, much like how the bourgeoisie formed the false concept of themselves as the universal class. Because of this error, the normal relationship to reality is distorted and people can only see the representation which they mistake for reality. When construing themselves as the universal class, they make their norms and values – what could also be called Whiteness – the social center. For Marx, treating representation as material and substantive is an ideological process, to idolize and treat the representation as real. The temptation to idolize representation serves the interests of political tyranny, which aims to shift focus away from the real and relies on the creation of the autonomy of representation. Marx's analysis seeds the critique of the aestheticization of politics. This is the central tenet of Marxism's conception of ideology as a mystifying effect.

Race is an abstraction. But like in Hegelian categories where opposites are mutually definitive, the same relation is at play in the dialectic of Whiteness and Blackness. Ideology turns on an inability to recognize the mediating function of representation, in assuming it is an autonomous sphere. Whereas identity is relational and historical, ideology involves overlooking how concepts of the person and their attachments are mediated through their relations to other concepts. "In consciousness – in jurisprudence, politics, etc. – relations become concepts," Marx and Engels (1845) wrote in *The German Ideology*, "since they do not go beyond these relations, the concepts of the relations also become fixed concepts in their mind." Calling it a "giant cage," Mbembe concedes that Black Reason is an "ambiguous and polemical term," but he uses it to signify "forms of knowledge; a model of extraction and depredation; a paradigm of subjection, including the modalities governing its eradication; and, finally, a psycho-oneiric complex" (2017, 10). This conceptualization is useful to address how ideology both reifies and mystifies identity.

Targeting Hegel's "cunning of reason" in which reason avoids being implicated when reasoning goes awry in the atrocities of modernity, so Blackness is complicit too as a subtle instrument of oppression and degradation. Is it enough, like Adorno and Horkheimer argued in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that reason must be accountable to itself, for Blackness to hold itself to account? Likely not. Aside from being forever partial, at best Blackness could become "a metaphysical and aesthetic envelope" that inhibits liberatory "exercising existence" aiming "to belong fully in this world that is common to all of us" (Mbembe 2017, 176). This envelope might be comfortable for some. Many even. But is this different from prior strategies that pose either concession or opposition to Whiteness? As an alternative emancipatory avenue Mbembe believes there is much to be gained from aspiring to a "post-Césairian era." Whereas Césaire has tried to ideologically deconstruct ala Derrida, this Black | White dialectic, Mbembe means that "we embrace and retain the signifier 'Black' not with the goal of finding solace within it but rather as a way of clouding the term in order to gain distance from it" (2017, 173). Such an exercise is ever more vital in the world where subjectivity is increasingly foreclosed, neurologically fixed, set by algorithmic tools in service of market exploitation. Without metaphysical burdens to carry or the imposed presumption of being history's agent now "filling in" hollows, African peoples can just live as themselves on their own terms.

VIII

There are those who are likely to be frustrated that Mbembe points to transcendence but does not offer up a comprehensive programmatic agenda. Indeed, at times Mbembe actively resists that exercise. Such can be the frustrations with work that seeks to provide a hermeneutic construction of subjectivity considering a post-structural account of violence. But at this point, historical materialism might be able to offer due counsel. Much like Marx did not want to write "recipes for the cook shops of the future," Mbembe is not outlining a future society. Rather he is trying to identify the dialectical counterparts that may produce the conceptual resources for a future lifeworld. As opposed to thinking of African identity as a singular crystallization, identities on the African continent are capable of change, and are constantly changing. And much like Marx and Engels in *The Communist*

Manifesto understood in 1848 that communists did not yet have the movement of economic laws of motion on their side and so they bravely faced unready conditions for their revolutionary activities, regardless of whether identities on the African continent are ready to move beyond the singularity of subordination, the conditions for new ways for exercising existence could be on the horizon. Until then, through the negation of the negation, Mbembe's efforts resemble those of Theodor Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*. It is fitting that he be held in the same esteem.

To put it simply, for Mbembe Blackness and Black Reason are irrevocably partial. Hence, they put undue constraints on the thought required to meet the contemporary situation. By investing in the particularity of Black Reason one risks essentializing Blackness. This regressive movement is fantasy too, unrealistic for it declares common identity and interest that spans the globe, in doing so erasing the actual "existing exercises" taking place in diverse situations. Such an idea, much like race, can do a great deal of damage for its reification of ascription. Besides which, as Gabriel Apata writes, "to be black in America is not quite the same thing as to be black in South Africa or Brazil or Cuba or even in Saudi Arabia and allowance must be made from the different evolution and particularities of blackness across the world and the differences that each has acquired in their new locations." Lifeworlds are fragmented, and so homogeneity is pretense. What remains is complexion and lineage – race and caste – which are "superficial and unimportant" (Apata 2017). Considering this history, freedom becomes letting the subjectivity of "beings-taken-by-others" recede into the distance and embracing "beings" that are in new situations. It is in these moments we find that "the work of man has only begun" (Césaire 2013, 49).

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Symposium Report
Race, Class, and Nationalism: The Fundamentals of the Caribbean Situation

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The interest by Western academics in decolonization and reparations for colonial occupation is a welcome turn, especially after the considerable amount of work done by postcolonial scholars on these topics in previous decades. If there is any sense that these are well-worn arguments to those in the majority world, it is because scholars and activists like CLR James and Claudia Jones, among many others, did considerable work over decades to document and theorize the atrocities of colonial capitalism.

In July 2022, H-Empire held a symposium to explore topics related to enduring consequences of colonial capitalism in the contemporary Caribbean. The event was organized by Scott Timcke and Shelene Gomes with assistance from Antonia Mungal and Juan Vicente Iborra Mallent. Additional support was provided by CLACSO's Crisis, Respuestas y Alternativas en el Gran Caribe working group and the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean.

The goal of the symposium was to amplify Caribbean-based researchers currently writing on various aspects of colonial capitalism. In their collective expression, the papers helped the audience trace some of the issues that traverse the contemporary political, economic, and social geography of the Caribbean. The presenters confronted the dynamics of Caribbean societies, both subsumed and conflicted by the legacies of colonialism and challenges of neoliberalism, while also suggesting pathways for resistance and liberation.

Savrina Chinien's paper explored the coloniality of power in and through the work of novelist Patrick Chamoiseau. In his reconstruction of narratives of nationhood in Martinique, predominantly reconstructed out of the memory of historical traumas, Chamoiseau's various projects seek to draw attention to Martinique's positionality to France, and by extension to the rest of the world. The coloniality of power is reinforced as the metropole mediates the periphery's terms of engagement with almost every other place. Chinien discusses how this primary mediation appears in the other aspects of everyday life in Martinique, like the ego-politics of knowledge, language, and self-comprehension. In effect, the pervasiveness of such coloniality constitutes the politics, race, class, and nationality in Martinique.

With a focus on the Garifuna community's struggles against land grabbing in Honduras, Kimberly Palmer's foregrounded the cycle of dispossession resulting from enclave tourism. Without many good options, some Garifuna seek to migrate to the United States, where they encounter the United States border imperialism apparatus and state security officials. Upon apprehension, these Garifuna are deported to Honduras, a territory that is similarly hostile. Palmer's discussion of the participation of deportees in those processes, in addition to promoting the defense of the territory, she suggested are a key aspect in the recovery of cultural traditions, ancestral forms of cultivation, and links with the territory. These same things are being threatened by continuous migratory cycles of young people, who seek in other countries new opportunities in the face of material precariousness and lack of job opportunities in their regions of origin.

Stanley H. Griffin analyzed the legacies of fragmentation from settler colonial society in the Leeward islands, and resistance against it. Griffin expressed willingness to serve the various territories like Antigua and Barbuda, Saint. Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla, and Montserrat while proposing alternative roots to dependency and colonial fragmentation. He argued that a history of informal and formal practices of sub-regional integration at the cultural, social services, and institutional levels illustrate how transnational blocs can overcome the dynamics of fragmentation that are so apparent in the politics of many twenty-first century polities.

In her exploration of the social struggles in Suriname, Kirtie Algoe provided a broad overview of the 2020 elections in that country. Her presentation sought to understand the relationship between notions of cultural diversity and political struggle. As the political monopoly which presented itself to embody cultural diversity (the National Democratic Party) was challenged by the Progressive Reform Party (formerly Indo-Surinamese presenting, but currently embodying the ideology of a culturally diverse party), intercultural relations in Suriname reached a nuanced juncture. Amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, political scandals and an economic crisis, the role of "e-politics" increased. Within the Surinamese multicultural society, ethnicity had become an important issue in the conformation of political coalitions, and having an important role in political campaigning.

Finally, Shelene Gomes provided some clues to understanding the possibilities of international class struggle and interracial fraternalism through the cross-cultural idea of "betterment" which emerges from her fieldwork with Rastafari communities who embarked on repatriation to Ethiopia from Jamaica and other places. Spiritual returnings from Kingston to Shashamene express another type of Caribbean migratory processes beyond racial labour migrations of workers to metropolitan areas and the construction of other ways of life with a Pan-African cosmopolitan orientation in a multi-ethnic setting. These connections reflected the construction of countercultures of modernity, which have been essential as part of the history of the Caribbean, in which peoples who faced legacies and trauma of colonialism produce new ideas and imaginaries that are central in their social reproduction strategies, creating links and connections beyond those created by slave trade and recent cycles of mass migration.