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Religion and Ethnicity as Differentiating Factors in the Social Structure of the Caribbean

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Abstract

Ethnicity and religion may or may not be related to one another, and their roles in the structure of Caribbean societies, separately or combined, may be dwarfed by the significance played by class, race, colour and non-religious aspects of culture, such as family, education and language. To evaluate the role of these variables in Caribbean societies it is necessary to consider the main social theories advanced to account for colour-class stratification, the assimilation or non-assimilation of racial minorities to that stratification, and the ethnic cleavages that affect the large Indian ethnic groups, based on Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

A typology of Caribbean societies is advanced to reflect the range and variation of the units' main societal characteristics; explain the role of Christian and syncretic religions in the structuring of societies during slavery; and explore the way in which the indentured followers of Hinduism and Islam created new social segments through their arrival during the post-emancipation period.

The final sections of the paper examine the influence of Hinduism and other religions on the ethnic politics of Trinidad and Tobago during the late colonial and early independence periods; and the relationship between religion, colour, race, class and other non-religious aspects of culture in the social and spatial structure of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica at the end of colonialism and the beginning of the independence era. The conclusion argues that it is the way in which Caribbean social stratifications were, or were not, historically associated with slavery, indenture and free labour that creates the significance of the cultural difference as reflected in religion and ethnicity.

Keywords

Author

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Introduction

Although three linked historical circumstances characterise the island Caribbean – colonialism, the sugar plantation and slavery, there are also enclaves in Central America (Belize formerly British Honduras) and the South American Guianas (Suriname formerly Dutch Guiana, French Guiana, and Guyana formerly British Guiana), adjacent to the Caribbean Sea, which experienced the same overall historical evolution as the islands (Fig.1). Every major Caribbean colony, whether island or enclave, was influenced historically by the sugar plantation, but not necessarily at the same time: moreover, other – usually minor – tropical products, such as coffee, cocoa and hardwoods, were produced for metropolitan markets in Europe and North America.

Most Caribbean territories had slaves, but African slavery was not the whole of the forced labour regime, since it was replaced by Indian indentured labour in the British West Indies after slave emancipation in 1838, when a new sugar frontier was opened in the South-Eastern Caribbean, notably in Trinidad and British and Dutch Guiana. Finally, Cuba received huge imports of free Spanish labour after 1900, as US capital was applied to virgin sugar land in the east of the island. The cultural history of the Caribbean is bound up with forced labour imports from Africa, India, (and China), and free labour imports from Europe – and the religions (or remnants of the religions) they brought with them centuries ago.

The social structure of the Caribbean region is based on differences associated with class, race or colour, ethnicity and culture, several of which may correlate closely in some societies, but not in others. Classes in the Caribbean are bounded groups whose positions in the social hierarchy derive from past and present divisions of labour, associated with various modes of production, such as pre-capitalist/plantation slavery, proto-capitalist/indentured labour and capitalist/free labour. To distinctions of wealth are added those of prestige and power, and these three aspects are often correlated in the class hierarchy of Caribbean societies.

Colour groups (white, coloured and black) and racial groups (Chinese and East Indian) are distinguished in the Caribbean by their alleged physical characteristics, such as skin colour, hair type, and facial features, from which, in the past, moral, intellectual and other attributes were believed to derive. Racism is the dogma that one group or more is condemned by nature to inherited inferiority and another to superiority. Whites exemplified the master race in European overseas imperial systems, and they systematically devalued the non-white majority in the Caribbean from 1650 to 1950.

Figure 1 Caribbean Societies: A Typology

1a Plural stratified with whites
1b Plural stratified without whites
2a Plural segmented: Creole-Indian
2b Plural segmented: Creole-Mestizo
3a Class stratified: white, but with colour-class correlation
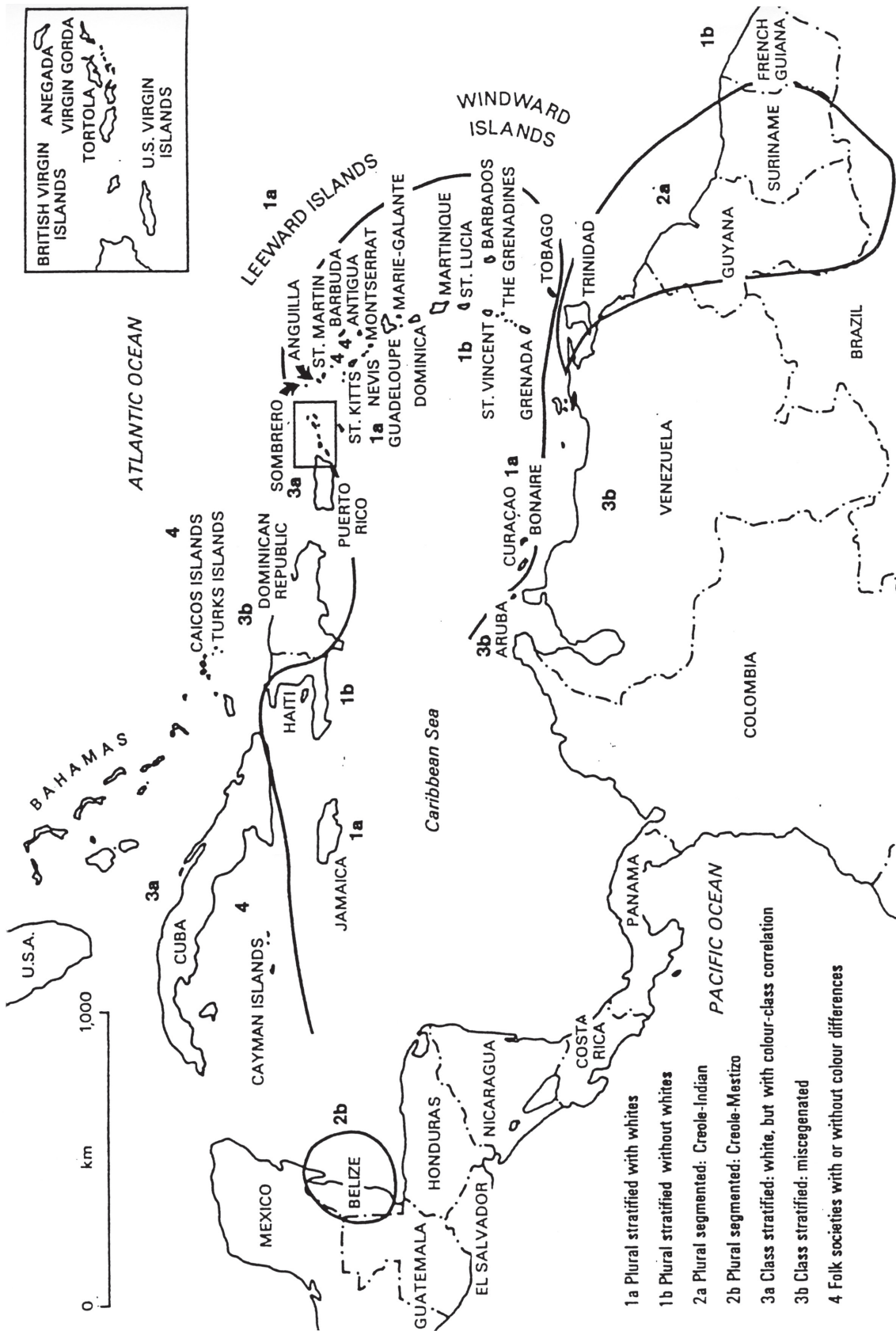3b Class stratified: miscegenated
4 Folk societies with or without colour differences

Ethnicity implies a group's sense of a shared ancestry, cultural inheritance (family or religion) or language – as in the case of the East Indians. But inherited cultural features are often lacking in the Caribbean given the long history of broken cultures and severed communications associated with the African slave trade. More common in the Caribbean are cultural differences of a non-ethnic type, which have been created in the Caribbean itself and give rise to distinctive forms of family, and education/language, and – one of the themes of this working paper – religion (belief and worship).

It is clear, therefore, that ethnicity and religion may or may not be related to one another, and that their roles in the structure of Caribbean societies, separately or combined, may be dwarfed by the significance played by class, race, colour and non-religious aspects of culture, such as family, education and language. To evaluate the role of these variables in Caribbean societies it is necessary to consider the main social theories advanced to account for colour-class stratification, the assimilation or non-assimilation of racial minorities to that stratification, and the ethnic cleavages that affect the large Indian ethnic groups, based on Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

I shall then propose a typology of Caribbean societies to reflect the range and variation of the units' main societal characteristics; explain the role of Christian and syncretic religions in the structuring of societies during slavery; and explore the way in which the indentured followers of Hinduism and Islam created new social segments through their arrival during the post-emancipation period. The final three sections of the paper examine the influence of Hinduism and other religions on the ethnic politics of Trinidad and Tobago during the late colonial and early independence periods; and the relationship between religion, colour, race, class and other non-religious aspects of culture in the social and spatial structure of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica at the end of colonialism and the beginning of the independence era.

Colour-class, Cultural Pluralism and Differential Incorporation

Commonwealth Caribbean social science since World War II has been dominated by two indigenous models (developed by Caribbean-born sociologists and anthropologists) that identify and explain the complexities of the social structure. The first, colour-class, was originally developed by Fernando Henriques for Jamaica (1953) and Lloyd Braithwaite (1953) for the Creole segment in Trinidad and Tobago (but

omitting the East Indian component), and, by extrapolation, was also applied to the British Windward and Leeward Islands (Lowenthal 1972).

This had the advantage of linking Caribbean stratification to occupational/class systems in the US and Europe, while pointing to a colonial history of colour differentiation which shadowed class and reinforced it. So, the upper class was white or pass-as-white, the middle class brown with some black, and the lower class black with some brown. A number of racially or ethnically distinct groups fell originally outside this colour-class stratification, but had, over time, been accommodated within it: Jews were absorbed into the upper class, as were the Syrian professionals; Chinese, the remaining Syrians and a few East Indians were middle class; and the majority of East Indians were lower class (Lowenthal 1972).

Ideas about cultural difference were, in the 1950s, woven by M.G. Smith, like Henriques, a Jamaican-born, British-trained anthropologist (Hall 1997), into the theory of cultural pluralism and the plural society (Smith 1955 and 1960). Drawing on the ideas of Furnivall (1948), a British administrator in South-East Asia, Smith, in his summary volume on pluralism in the British West Indies (1965), concluded that the colonies were characterised by many cultures, assembled and ranked by colonial design. Standing at the apex of this system was European culture, with the Creole culture of the black, formerly enslaved population, who had lost most, but not all, of their African heritage, as the polar opposite. Between these cultural complexes was the culture of the middle-class browns and upwardly-mobile blacks, who drew on elements of each of the other two cultures (Smith 1965).

What were the ingredients of these cultures? Smith argued that the basis of culture resided in the institutions that all groups needed to perform socially, and that pluralism occurs where 'there is formal diversity in the basic system of compulsory institutions' – kinship, education, religion, property and economy, and recreation (1965, 85). According to his view, lower-class Jamaican culture is different, (but not deviant – as the middle class often sees it), from that of the middle and upper classes. However, Smith failed to explore the extent to which education, property and economy could be seen as dimensions of class, and, in the Caribbean context, preferred to interpret property and economy as plantation and peasantry (namely different modes of production).

Approaching culture in a relativistic way, Smith assumed that those whose institutional practices were most different would interact least well; he therefore associated pluralism with the distinction between, say, Christianity and Islam, or, in the case of Jamaica, between Christianity and Afro-Christianity – the latter comprising

a creolized and syncretic set of religious sects and cults. However, recent research, drawing on evidence from Northern Ireland (Doherty and Poole 1997), for example, emphasises that differences between branches of the same religion (in this instance Catholicism and Protestantism) may be socially constructed to be intensely divisive in terms of citizen's rights (Kymlicka 1997). Moreover, most social scientists would include language difference as a marker of pluralism in the Jamaican context, the distinction being between standard English and Creole, or patois, as Jamaica talk is increasingly called – a view accepted by Smith only late in his career.

Smith's comparative research on Caribbean household composition (1962), following on from the work of Edith Clarke in Jamaica (1957), showed that the lower-class black family had its own rules and regulations, with an age-graded set of expectations ranging over the life-cycle from visiting unions and cohabitation to marriage – but with a polygamous sequence of partners. He also explained that Afro-Christian religions had distinct belief, ritual and leadership systems (1963), and with Augier and Nettleford demonstrated that Ras Tafari was a prime example of lower-class creole religious creativity (1960). Smith contended that culture was the main social divisor in the British Caribbean, with race and class playing subsidiary roles (1984). The social strata were composed of three ranked cultures, each with its own value system. Smith called these ranked cultures social sections, each section having its own subsidiary colour-class structure.

During slavery in the British Caribbean these social sections had socio-legal boundaries depicting citizens, freemen and slaves – modally white, brown and black (Smith 1974). After slavery, and prior to adult suffrage in 1944, franchise distinctions based on income and property (class) – not race or culture – framed three categories that resembled the legal estates of slavery: those who could be voted for (white and brown), those who could vote (white, brown and a black minority) and those who could not vote (the black majority but with some who were brown). So, legal and political capacity turned cultural pluralism into differentially incorporated and ranked cultures – the plural society par excellence according to Smith (1984, 1991 and 1998), in which the minority dominated the majority by non-democratic means, and relied heavily on force – or the threat of force – to maintain the unstable *status quo*.

Nonetheless, in my fieldwork on Kingston in 1961, at the end of 16 years of Jamaican constitutional decolonization, predicated on adult suffrage, I realised that class, colour and culture were closely correlated in the city, and together produced three social strata associated with different geographical locations, anchored by com-

petitive bidding for real estate (Clarke 1975). I also showed that cultural difference based on education, religion, family/household composition – and, by implication, the linguistic distinction between standard English and Creole, too – while crucially important and derived from differences originally created during the slave period, was insufficient to displace colour-class as an analytical framework, provided that cultural and structural pluralism were taken into account.

A Typology of Caribbean Societies

After more than 50 years of research on the Caribbean, I conclude that models that emphasise (1) differential incorporation – of racially defined legal estates, such as black slaves, free people of colour and white citizens, (2) cultural pluralism, and (3) class are essential to an understanding of the evolutionary complexity and current diversity of Caribbean societies. I do not see class as universally of primary importance, though it is significant everywhere except in the simplest societies. Equally, race, colour and culture do not, in my opinion, carry identical weight throughout the region, whether *vis-à-vis* class or one another. It is a question of investigating the objective social circumstances in each society using a series of models, measuring goodness of fit, and then using the best-fit solutions to establish a regional typology of units.

Combining my knowledge of the social history of the region with the various competing models that seek to explain society, I conceive of Caribbean societies as divisible into four broad types (Lowenthal 1972; Clarke1991): (1) plural stratified, where colour-class and cultural distinctions have largely coincided; (2) plural segmented, where (white, brown and black) Creole and non-Creole segments are contraposed; (3) class-stratified, where occupational class predominates and other differentiators are recessive; and (4) folk, which lack stratification. Plural stratified societies were formed during plantation slavery; plural segmented societies were originally plural stratified, but received masses of Indian indentured labourers or Mexican immigrants from the Yucatan in the nineteenth century; class-stratified societies were a creation of the twentieth century and developed with free plantation labour, most of it white; folk societies were tiny insular appendages of larger colonies during slavery, and were often marginal for sugar production.

I argue that Braithwaite and Henriques' colour-class model and Smith's ideas about pluralism and differential incorporation provide crucial insights into the first

two societal types; notions of class – whether following Parsons (1952), or Weber (1947) – in the absence of colour-class stratifications, are central to the third; and social consensus (Parsons 1952) fits the fourth – though their social histories are usually closely aligned to the lower stratum of the plural stratified societies. These are, however, only best-fit solutions, and to be comprehensive it is important to point out that consensus may apply within culture and class as well as to folk societies; that cultural pluralism may have a residual part to play in explaining Afro-Christian *santería* in class-stratified societies once influenced by slavery; and that class structures are usually crucial frameworks, even where the colour dimension of colonial colour-class may have worn thin – as it has in Jamaica.

Each category in the typology is divisible into two sub-types (Lowenthal 1972; Clarke 1991): those societies listed under (a) are the commonest variant, while those listed under (b) are racial or colour variants on the class or cultural structures that appear in (a) (Fig. 1). Plural-stratified societies (1) include those within the full stratificational range – (a) Jamaica, Barbados, the Commonwealth Leeward Islands, and the French and Netherlands Antilles; and those that have had that social range truncated by the loss of white elites, for example (b) Haiti, French Guiana and the Windward Islands. Plural-segmented societies (2) encompass those with Creole-Indian contrasts, (a) Trinidad, Guyana (formerly British Guiana) and Surname (formerly Dutch Guiana), or (b) Creole-Mestizo differences as in Belize.

Class-stratified societies include those that are essentially white, but with a partial colour-class correlation – (a) (Cuba and Puerto Rico); and a society that has a miscegenated class stratification but with white-black polarization at the apex and base of the social pyramid, repectively, namely (b) (Dominican Republic). Finally, folk societies are tiny non-stratified communities with a weak resource base; either they have no major colour differences (a) Barbuda, black and Saba, white, or they are colour differentiated (b) – Desirade, white-black, and Anguilla, brown-black (Clarke 1991).

Plural-stratified, class-stratified and folk societies are essentially bi-racial (black-white), but tri-coloured (white, brown and black), while plural-segmented societies are multi-racial and include a third racial category. Historically, the plural-stratified society has been key to the evolution of Caribbean social structures. Jamaica during slavery, for example, represented a classic plural society that in its origins involved ranked cultural sections, legally enshrined, and largely correlated with colour and class. Haiti, Barbados, and the British and French Lesser Antilles were replicas. Slave emancipation, through slave revolt, took place in Haiti in the mid-1790s, in the British Caribbean in 1838, in the French Antilles in 1848 and in the Dutch colonies over

the period 1862-73, in each of the latter cases by legislative act of the imperial regime. Most other types of Caribbean society may be related to the plural-stratified Jamaican type, either as truncations, or as demographic expansions of the social pyramid.

Plural segmented societies were weakly developed as slave societies because they were neither British nor French in the eighteenth century, compared to the two great slave societies of the Western Hemisphere – Saint Domingue/Haiti (independent 1804) and Jamaica, with the greatest output in the world of sugar and coffee before and after 1800, respectively. Moreover, plural segmented societies had an abundance of potential plantation land when the slave trade in the British Empire was abolished in 1808. So, once Trinidad and British Guiana were transferred to the UK in 1815, a late phase of sugar cultivation was entered using East Indian indentured labour exported through Calcutta.

The Indian communities that stayed in Trinidad, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana were so large in number that they stood outside the pre-existing social stratifications, and did not penetrate them as did their demographically smaller equivalents in Jamaica. Belize is a special case: it developed as a logwood (dyewood)-cutting enclave in Central America, and its black slaves were urban-based lumbermen, not rural cane cutters. Segmentation was reflected in urban-based, English-creole-speaking blacks and rural, Spanish-speaking Mestizos and Amerindians, though some East Indians were imported later (Lowenthal 1972).

The white class-stratified Spanish colonies with their port-havens, Havana and San Juan, played a supportive role to Spanish commercial activity on the mainland until Spanish decolonization in the 1890s. Sugar plantations, based on slave and free labour, had been re-introduced to Cuba during the brief British occupation in the late eighteenth century, and were expanded by the Spanish in the early 1800s, but the proportion of the labour force that was enslaved declined from 43 to 28 percent between 1841 and 1860, and slavery was abolished in 1886 (almost 50 years after the British Caribbean) (Knight 1970). In Puerto Rico, where tobacco and subsistence farming dominated the rural scene, slaves accounted for fewer than 12 percent of the population in 1846, when they were most numerous, and the proportion had shrunk to well under 10 percent before emancipation in 1873. The Dominican Republic remained detached from these changes, though free-labour plantations were created by US capital after 1875 (Fraginals, Pons and Engerman 1985).

Consequently, Cuba was a plural-stratified society in 1840, with free whites and enslaved blacks in almost equal proportions, separated by free coloureds. Yet by 1920, the modest increase of blacks and browns in contrast to the enormous influx of white

labourers (750,000 arrived from Spain between 1900 and 1920 when the total population barely exceeded 2 million) had transformed Cuba into a class-based society in which browns and blacks were accorded middle- and lower-class status, respectively, but were outnumbered by whites in each class (Clarke 1991). Similar shifts towards a white majority were recorded in Puerto Rico, where miscegenation and the gradual social incorporation of light mulattoes into the white population (as pass-as-whites), as in Cuba, have played a part in the reduction of the black presence (Hoetink 1985). In the Dominican Republic, however, whites and blacks (though fortified by black immigration from Haiti) form only small minorities, and race mixing has produced a mulatto majority (Howard 2001).

I shall say little additional in this paper about the class-stratified and folk societies, because they are fairly homogeneous in religion, and it adds little to the explanation of social differentiation. In the early 19th century Cuba, for example, was starting to become a slave society like Jamaica, but race mixing between demographically equal groups of whites and blacks/coloureds, coupled to the influx of European labour from Spain after 1900, turned it into a white, Catholic society – which it remains. As in the Dominican Republic, which is a mulatto society, and Puerto Rico, whose white inhabitants were peasants before they were proletarianized by sugar after 1900, Cuban social structure is now only loosely associated with colour difference, and belief in *santería* – a hangover from a pluralistic past, is an aspect of lower-class culture whose participants are black, white and mulatto.

Race, Colour, Legal Estate and Religion during Slavery

To understand the origins and development of the plural stratified societies, which I have argued are key to the evolution of all Caribbean societies, and the role of religion within them, it is necessary to examine social conditions during the foundation period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Caribbean developed as a colonial appendage of Europe after Columbus' first voyage of discovery in 1492. Decimation of the Amerindians under Spanish control in the 16th century created a green-field site for sugar cultivation on plantations in the 17th, but without an indigenous labour force to call upon.

The islands of the Caribbean were ideal environments for the control of potentially rebellious black slave labourers recruited by European planters, who themselves

originated in Britain, France and the Netherlands. Hence the pre-capitalist mode of production entailed a social stratification not of white planters and white labourers, but of white planters and black (African) slaves. This was partly the result of the large quantity of land that was available, the need to recruit labour *en masse* and keep it tied to the estates, concern about the viability of white labour in the context of tropical heat and diseases, and the racist perception that Africans (not Europeans) were suitable for degrading plantation work (Braithwaite 1971).

From the 1650s plantation slavery spread through the central belt of the Caribbean from Barbados, as each colony in turn took up sugar as its staple crop for export to Europe (Richardson 1992). There was no history of a class structure without an accompanying racial hierarchy of white over black, and with miscegenation between white planters and female black slaves – there were few white women in the region – a new category of coloured people started to emerge. During the first half of the 18th century they began to form a class of themselves, and those who were the children of men who could afford to free their offspring became the core of an emancipated group known as the free people of colour (Lowenthal 1972: Clarke 1975).

The free people of colour were not the product of the mode of production, but of the mode of reproduction. The social structure was thus composed of three legal estates, whites with full civil rights, black slaves with virtually no rights in law – and fewer in practice, and an interstitial group of coloured people, of various phenotypes ranging from light brown to black, who were not slaves, but had only limited civil rights – they could neither hold public office nor vote (Clarke 1975). Out of this socio-legal colour system evolved the colour-class structures that seized the attention of Henriques and Braithwaite, the first social scientists to study them in the Caribbean post-World War II.

The three legal estates also displayed distinctive sets of cultural characteristics in family, language/education, and religion. Upper class whites usually wed, provided white women were available, and formed nuclear, male-dominated authoritarian households. The slave household was likely to be female headed, since the slave owners had no compunction about breaking up domestic units imported from Africa or formed in the Caribbean. Among the free people of colour there were few examples of endogamy, since young women were rapidly made appendages of upper-class white men, and free men of colour engaged the favours of black or brown slave women as mistresses (Clarke 1975).

Similar distinctions applied in language/education. Upper-class men spoke with a European accent if they had been born or educated there, but most local or Creole

whites spoke with a Caribbean intonation, and would have had only a limited education. Slaves were illiterate and rapidly developed an English Creole tongue in which to communicate with one another, the planter class and their lower-class white associates. Men of the free people of colour were in a similar position to whites in terms of education and language, but free women of colour and many poorly-educated white women talked the Creole language of their household slaves (Clarke 1975).

Dominant religions were imported into the Caribbean from metropolitan societies – Catholicism in the case of the Spanish and French colonies and Protestantism in the case of the British and Dutch. In the Catholic societies slaves were treated as beings with souls, and the plantation regime was theoretically less burdensome than in the Protestant colonies, where slaves were beyond the human pale. In reality, however, all plantation regimes at their economic peak, whether French or British, were equally inhumane, and the religions of the three social estates were distinct (Goveia 1970). Whites were nominal members of the established metropolitan religions (Catholicism and Protestantism), but lead a brutalised and debauched life in keeping with their ownership of human lives. In the British islands free people of colour were abandoned by Anglicanism, and by the early 1800s were ripe for conversion to metropolitan Methodism and other non-conformist churches.

However, wherever there were slaves, syncretised Afro-Caribbean religions were created among those blacks who were deemed non-humans or, at best, lowly humans. These non-orthodox, creolised religious forms had many names – vodun (Haiti), santería (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) (Scott 1985; Nicholls 1996; Palmié 2002; Moret 2008), but their core characteristics were similar to those of the Afro-Christian cults of the Protestant Caribbean (Simpson 1956). All syncretised African and Christian beliefs amalgamated every-day life and the afterlife, and their rituals involved ecstatic behaviour in which the spirit world was accessed by the participants. Once non-conformist missionaries entered the British West Indies after 1800, the slaves and their freed descendants began to be proselytised, only for them to turn away from orthodox Christianity and to re-embrace Afro-Christianity (Clarke 1975).

The social structure of black-majority Caribbean societies was built around issues to do with labour recruitment, not religion, though as we have seen, different types of religion were associated with the three socio-legal strata so typical of the slave societies. These three ranked strata – the essence of black-majority Creole societies in the Caribbean – were products of the plantation system and characterised both rural and urban communities. They were not separate ethnic groups with a clear sense of

identity based upon a shared antecedence, a shared tradition, and a sense of racial or biological descent; but creolised, ranked cultures that came into being in the Caribbean as a result of the system of legal estates – the cultures of citizens, half citizens and no citizens.

The only ethnic group that was found in several, but not all, Caribbean societies during slavery were the Jews. Sephardic and Portuguese by origin, they were racially and culturally distinct, and had the same legal status as the free people of colour – they were semi-people. Amerindians of British Guiana, and the descendants of runaway slaves (Maroons) in Jamaica and British Guiana, too, had ethnic characteristics. But, otherwise, neither culture nor race were linked to a continuing sense of ethnicity in Caribbean societies during slavery (Lowenthal 1972)**.**

Ethnicity and Religion in the Post-Emancipation Period

After slave emancipation in the British Caribbean between 1834 and 1838, new ethnic groups were introduced to the region, at first to make good the shortage of labour – especially, but not solely, in the sugar frontier areas of the South-East Caribbean (Trinidad, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana). The first indentured labourers were Chinese, but they rapidly gravitated into the grocery trade, and Indians, known in the Caribbean as East Indians, soon became the staple of indentured immigration. Many Chinese quickly converted to orthodox Christianity, but most East Indians, where they formed large demographic components, retained ancestral commitments to Hinduism and Islam, though some Hindus converted to Catholicism or Canadian (Mission) Presbyterianism. In British Guiana East Indians eventually became the majority of the population, but in both Trinidad and Dutch Guiana they formed large minority segments standing outside the Creole colour-class stratification of whites, browns and blacks (Richardson 1992).

In the late 19th century, Syrians entered the Caribbean as traders, emulating the Jews of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Three ethnic minorities – Jews, Syrians and Chinese, all using various branches of trade, by the 1950s occupied status gap positions between the two upper social strata, and had converted to the elite religions of Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism. Their upward mobility over time was contrasted with the lowly position of the ethnic groups descended from runaway slaves (such as the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana and the Maroons of Jamaica);

the Javanese ex-indentured labourers in Dutch Guiana; and the Amerindians (where they survived in Guiana and as a miscegenated group in Dominica). The descendants of the runaways and the Amerindians, despite their long histories in the Caribbean stretching back to slavery or beyond, could be thought of, with the newer Javanese, as outcast groups (Lowenthal 1972).

Among the status-gap minorities, only the Jews retained their religious affiliation, and then in an attenuated fashion, largely because of widespread conversion to Christianity or lapse into atheism. Neither the Syrians, nor the Chinese, maintained ancestral religions by the 1950s, and conversion to denominational Christianity accompanied their upward social mobility – yet another pattern in which the followed the Jews. In short, there was a tendency, by the end of the colonial period for the Jews, Chinese and Syrians to identify themselves by race/descent, and familial and group history, but for the religious dimension of their sense of peoplehood to have largely dissolved.

However, while the outcast Amerindians of British Guiana were Catholic, the Javanese of Dutch Guiana remained believers in Islam, and the Bush Negroes and Maroons retained substantial African elements in their religious beliefs and practices. Among the Amerindians, Bush Negroes and Javanese, their racial/descent and familial and group history sustained a religious dimension peculiar to itself in terms of its historic origin. The Bush Negroes were unique in claiming their religion as African (though in reality it was created by runaway slaves in a post-plantation context) (Lowenthal 1972).

Similar to the outcast groups in their retention of ancestral religions, as we have seen, are the Hindus and Moslems of Trinidad, British Guiana (now Guyana) and Dutch Guiana (Suriname). In Trinidad, on which I shall focus in the next two sections, the Indians, or East Indians as they were known in the Caribbean, first arrived as indentured plantation labour in 1845, serving 5-year contracts. During the 70 years of indentured immigration, 144,000 Indians came to Trinidad, of whom only 33,000 went back to India. Between 1871 and 1891 the Indian proportion of Trinidad's population increased from 22 to 32 percent. Most of the indentured immigrants came from the Ganges Plain between Delhi and Benares, and the area to the north of the Ganges lying between Benares and the Himalayas. Madrassis from south India were a small minority: only 5000 indentured Indians embarked from Madras between 1845 and 1892, though recruitment from the south increased again in the early 1900s (Clarke 1986).

Fewer than 15 percent of Trinidad's East Indian immigrants were Muslims. Among the Hindu majority a wide range of castes was represented in the records. Agricultural castes were greatly in demand for work on the sugar estates, and together with the low castes and outcastes formed over two-thirds of the immigrants. A large number of Brahmins and Kshatriyas – many of them cultivators – also immigrated, and together accounted for more than 10 percent of Hindus. Members of the Brahmin caste, in particular, were crucial to the maintenance of the Hindu priesthood, Hindu rituals, and Hindu family structures and rituals, as indenture ended in the early 1920s and a rooted East Indian community came to be formed (Clarke 1986).

On the eve of independence, the two-island colony of Trinidad and Tobago had a population of 830,000 (1960), and Creoles accounted for over 60 percent. The breakdown by colour groups was whites 2 percent, browns 16 percent, and blacks 43 percent. East Indians made up 37 percent of the island total, among whom Hindus comprised 23 percent, Moslems 6 percent and Christians 8 percent – Catholic in the north and Presbyterian in and around San Fernando in the south. In contrast, the neighbouring island of Tobago (33,000 inhabitants), had an almost entirely black population that was potentially at logger heads with the Creole majority in Trinidad.

By the time Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence in 1962, it had already had four elections based on universal adult suffrage in which race and religion – Hinduism and Islam – had played increasingly important parts. While race was used as a vote catcher by Creole and Indian politicians, politics enhanced racial rivalries, and led to informal racial-religious coalitions. As David Lowenthal perceptively commented over 40 years ago, 'much of what passes for Indianness … is, indeed, a result as well as a cause of East Indian-Creole stress (Lowenthal 1972, 146).

Creoles and Indian Religions in Trinidad and Tobago's Politics

In January 1956 Dr Eric Williams, a former Professor of History at Howard University in the USA and an employee of the Caribbean Commission in Trinidad, created the People's National Movement (PNM) – some 10 years after the introduction of universal adult suffrage in Trinidad and Tobago. From the outset in 1956 Williams had intended that the PMN should be not only nationalist and reformist, but also multiracial – it should therefore include Indians, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian (Ryan 1972).

However, the very existence of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) – formed in 1953 – as the political arm of temple-building orthodox Hinduism (the Sanathan Dharma Maha Sabha) – an outstanding example of cultural pluralism being projected into national politics – ruled out the possibility of Hindu mass support for the PNM, and drove many Indian Christians and Muslims into the PNM's open arms. The PNM snatched victory in 1956 by a single-seat margin (13 out of 24) with the PDP (5 seats), Butler Party (2 seats), the Trinidad Labour Party-Caribbean National Party (2 seats), and the independents (2 seats) trailing in its wake (Ryan 1972).

The final colonial phase in Trinidad and Tobago was one of intense inter-segmental competition to achieve racial hegemony – either Creole or Indian, and every topic of the day was highly politicized. A major issue at this time was the establishment of a West Indies Federation and the holding of a federal election in 1958, the Trinidad and Tobago component of which was won by the Democratic Labour Party (affiliated to the various opposition groups throughout the islands). A consequence of the DLP's victory by six seats to the PNM's four in the federal election in Trinidad and Tobago, was Williams's public attack on the Indians, during which he branded them as a 'recalcitrant and hostile minority' (Ryan 1972).

Henceforth rank-and-file Christian and Muslim Indians, in retaliation, would turn their backs on the PNM and vote 'Indian'. In this they were facilitated by the 1957 merger between the PDP, the Trinidad Liberal Party and the Party of Political Progress Groups to form the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) of Trinidad and Tobago (an affiliate of the Federal DLP), for they would no longer be supporting a purely Hindu party. In fact, by the late 1950s the DLP was essentially an Indian-white alliance, which greatly simplified the battle lines for the 1961 election (Malik 1971).

The 1961 general elections were the most bitterly fought in Trinidad's late colonial period. Whereas only 53 percent had turned out in 1946, the figure had risen to 70 percent in 1950, 80 percent in 1956 and 88 percent in 1961; the electorate was deeply politicized and the co-ordinate socio-racial segments were organized into electoral participants. The PNM gained 58 percent of the vote, an enormous increase over their 1956 result when they achieved 39 percent, taking 20 seats to the DLP's 10. Once more the urban-rural split underpinning Creole-Indian residential polarization was in evidence, though the DLP was to argue that the result had been rigged not only by the gerrymandering of constituency boundaries, but also by the use of pre-programmed voting machines (Ryan 1972).

The influence of race and religion may be estimated from the characteristics of the successful candidates. Only two of the PNMs 20 seats were held by Indians – both

Muslims (the Muslim communities were interested in government grants to support their religious schools); similarly, only two of the DLPs ten legislators were Creole, though three of their Indians were Christians and one Moslem. However, at least three out of the four Hindus who were elected for the DLP were Brahmins (the highest and holiest of the Hindu castes), and this shows how high caste was projected via the Sanathan Dharma Maha Sabha onto the national political stage. Of the 12 PNM cabinet places, two went to Muslims, two to whites and eight to brown/black legislators: for the second time since 1956 Hindus were not represented in the government – soon to become the government of an independent state.

An in-depth survey of Trinidad's society at the beginning of independence is given by a 1964 sample survey of the major racial and religious groups in the population of San Fernando (40,000 population in 1960) and in the neighbouring, but largely Hindu, village of Débé, located on the Orpouche Lagoon. This survey was devised by my wife, Gillian, who was my field assistant, and me, and a carefully tested questionnaire was applied to samples of 890 adults selected at random from the Creole (211), Hindu (149), Muslim (126), Christian East Indian (256) and *Dougla* (Indian-black mixed) groups in San Fernando, plus 109 from Indian Débé. Through this survey it is possible to make careful comparisons between the racial and religious groups that were sampled, and their political opinions and values (Clarke 1986).

Virtually everyone surveyed agreed that the two-party system was vital for democracy, though urban and rural Hindus doubted that Creole hegemony *was* democracy. There was equally strong opposition – in theory – to political parties based on race, though a small minority in Débé (10.1 percent) saw this as perfectly natural. By 1964 hardly anyone wanted Trinidad and Tobago to have stayed in the West Indies Federation, but there was disagreement over the alternatives. The vast majority of Creoles and *Douglas* preferred independence, Christian East Indians were split between favouring independence and continued self-governing colonial status, while the majority of Hindus, Muslims and Débé residents preferred continuing colonial affiliation to any other outcome (Clarke 1986).

These results demonstrate a variable but strong polarisation of political opinion between Creoles and Indians, though East Indian disquiet in 1964 was somewhat muted. The *Douglas* emerged as a small but intermediate element, yet significantly different from the Creoles and Christian East Indians according to statistical tests of significance. There was a good deal of East Indian solidarity in San Fernando, but the Christians were significantly different from the Muslims and Hindus in many of their political attitudes. The material reveals minor shades of distinction between

urban Hindus and Muslims, but many clear differences between them and Débé villagers, who were members of the core national opposition to Creole governance.

Indians and the Decline of Religion in Trinidad and Tobago's Politics

During the five decades following Trinidad's independence, the political significance of religious difference (the Hindu/Muslim/Christian split) among the Indians declined in significance, as it became clear that the Muslim leadership lacked the capacity to deliver to the PNM the rank-and-file Muslim vote they craved, and Creoles became ever more secure electorally as rigged constituency boundaries delivered the results they wanted. Political polarization, therefore, became even more racially determined by Creole-East Indian segmentation.

In 1964, when I completed my first period of fieldwork in Trinidad, no one could have predicted that the political hegemony of the Creole PNM would extend for a further 22 uninterrupted years, (Prime Minister Williams died in office in 1981 after a quarter of a century in power), until a rainbow coalition of Indians of all religious affiliations – but the Hindus in particular, disaffected middle-class Trinidad Creoles, and virtually the entire black electorate of Tobago, formed the Alliance for National Reconstruction and in 1986 consigned the PNM to the opposition benches (Ryan 1988 and 1989).

It is important to note, however, that race voting persisted at the 1986 election (Clarke 1991), and that it continued in subsequent elections, returning a PNM government under Patrick Manning in 1991 (Premdas 1993), and an Indian government headed by Basdeo Panday, leader of the United National Congress (UNC), in 1995. Despite the emergence of the Indians as a greater electoral force after 1986, they relied on the support of Tobago, and its political leader and broker, A. N. R. Robinson, to take power in 1995.

Since 2000 there have been five general elections held in the context of heightened racial tension. The first three witnessed the erosion of the UNC lead, so that in 2002 the PNM formed the government with 20 out of the 36 seats (Meighoo 2003; Ryan 2003). In 2007 two parties – the UNC Alliance and the Congress of the People – split the Indian vote, allowing the PNM a further term in office with 26 out of the 41 seats. However, the Indians rallied at the last election in 2010, returning an Indian

coalition government (UNC Alliance and the Congress of the People) with a female Prime Minister, Kamela Persad-Bissessar – the first in Trinidad and Tobago's history. Although religion played no major part in these elections (other than Hinduism's long association with Indian politics), it did not mean that Hinduism, for example, had atrophied.

Indian exclusion from political power (the Indian DLP did not contest the 1971 election), combined with high wages for manual jobs during the oil boom of the 1970s actually led to a Hindu revival in rural Trinidad – contrary to the expectations of most of my 1964 informants (Vertovec 1992 and 2000). Hindu marriages were transformed into massive, costly events; individuals and communities vied with one another to put on expensive Hindu ceremonies; peasant Indian Trinidad was revitalised by a Hindu ritual – *jhandi* – culture with English as the main medium of communication. It was as if the Hindus were saying to the Creoles, you have political power, but we are different from, and superior to, you culturally (Ryan 1999; Munasinghe 2001).

Paradoxically, Hindu religious revival went hand in hand with creolization of many aspects of Indian life. Convergence with Creoles in values and taste has accompanied cultural fusion in the arena of popular culture, giving rise to a Trinbagonian way of life. Ryan notes that this 'blending of the sitar and the steelband as well as the fusion of calypso, soca and chutney music are now taking place in the musical hothouses of Trinidad and Tobago, and that the bowdlerised product now forms part of what constitutes an emergent "neo-creole" or "post-creole" aesthetic' (1999, 33).

In the last resort, however, it does not matter whether the Hinduism or Islam they practise is primordial or syncretic, provided that each was perceived by Indians to embody significant cultural differences. Despite considerable similarity in household composition between Creoles and Indians – based on the nuclear biological family, (to which Munasinghe (2001) also alludes), Hindu and Muslim hostility to mixed marriages has ensured racial and cultural endogamy, thus guaranteeing the biological continuity of the East Indian segment as a separate entity (Clarke 1993).

However, even in the early 1960s, my interviews showed that most members of the San Fernando elite (both Creole and Indian) insisted that, in their urban community, pluralism was negotiable, not doomed (Clarke 1986) – and so it has proved for Trinidad and Tobago more generally over the last 50 years. This is because citizenship has been enjoyed by both segments of the society; Creoles and Indians have accepted democratic electoral outcomes; and governments have changed. When violence has occurred it has been confined to the Creole segment (black power in 1970, and black

Muslim disturbance in 1990). The party-political situation in Trinidad and Tobago may not yet be indifferent to race (as it has become more or less indifferent to religion), but it has worked pseudo-democratically.

Creole Religions in Kingston, Jamaica

In Jamaica, as we have already seen, the major distinction is not between Creole and Indian, but between the various Creole strata distinguished by class, culture and colour. In Kingston, the Jamaican capital, in 1960, on the eve of independence, there was a marked neighbourhood-religion correlation between uptown Protestant denominations (Anglican, Moravian, Methodist, Baptist and Congregationalist) and Roman Catholics, and downtown Afro-Christian cults and sects – very much as one might have predicted on the basis of nineteenth century information. This broad spatial split was underlain by class and colour: white, brown and black coincided quite closely with upper, middle and lower class (Clarke 2006).

Outside this colour-class hierarchy were located the racial groups, such as Jews, Syrians, East Indians, and Chinese. Whites were predominantly denominational Protestant or Catholic – as were the Syrians and Jews, though a few hundred of the latter retained their ancestral religion; browns spread across the religious spectrum; and blacks were recorded among the denominational Protestants and Roman Catholics, but concentrated among the Afro-Christian cults and sects. East Indians were only residually Hindu or Muslim, but otherwise followers of Catholicism or the sects and cults, while the Chinese were mostly Catholic. In short, the nineteenth-century ethnic groups were substantially converted into the ranked religions of the Creole cultural system (Clarke 2006).

Since independence, colour and race have fallen away as major correlates of class, largely because of the emigration – especially during the period of democratic socialism in the 1970s – of the whites, mulattoes, Jews, Syrians and Chinese. Kingston is a class-stratified black community, with a small black and brown elite, in which are located even smaller groups of white and Chinese allies. So, while the Afro-Christian cults and sects remain a major feature of blackness, denominational Christianity and agnosticism/atheism have also become major features of upper and lower class black society. The only exception to this generalisation is the Roman Catholic Church, which retains its historic association with the whites and the Chinese.

Religious pluralism (and cultural pluralism more generally, involving family and education/language as well as religion) remains strongly correlated with class. The upper and middle classes are still markedly associated with denominational Christianity, high educational achievement and marriage. The enormous, but spatially concentrated, lower class is split into an upper echelon suffused by Afro-Christian sects, moderate educational and living levels, and an urge towards respectability; and an underclass of atheist illiterates, among whom serial polygamy is the norm and poverty is mitigated by illegal activities often involving drugs and violence. These sharp distinctions are set in a socio-spatial matrix involving uptown, but declining, denominational Christianity, and a downtown characterised by Afro-Christian sects and cults (Clarke 2006).

The infiltration of American Churches into lower-class Jamaica, originally represented in the immediate post-World War I period by the amorphous Church of God, has been stepped up since independence by the creation of a number of powerful sects, such as the Pentecostalists. They have reiterated the same message of godliness and respectability as the missionaries of the nineteenth century, but have had a greater impact on society because of the loosening of imperial control, the relative decline of the denominational Churches, and improvements in the general level of education in Kingston, especially among the upper ranks of the lower class. However, Austin-Broos is at pains to emphasise that 'Pentecostal practice in Jamaica has become Jamaican practice rather than a mere hegemony derived from a foreign source' (1997,12).

Into the class-culture-colour nexus of the late colonial system in Jamaica the Pentecostals introduced the idea of 'perfectionism', but the creolised Pentecostal rite stresses the creation of 'living saints', not in the afterlife, but in the lived world of today (Austin-Broos 1997, 128-9). 'Perfectionism was used to address a history that had become Jamaican and thereby able to redefine the new meanings that were introduced. Perfectionism became not a simple holy state but a state that inverted the socio-racial world' (Austin-Broos 1997, 234).

In competition with the Pentecostals, the Rastafari movement has not developed, as it seemed it would in the 1960s, when an Ethiopian Orthodox Church was set up in the wake of the Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Kingston. Haile Selassie was believed by cultists to be the incarnation of God. The cult is not a major focus among the Kingston lower class, and in the 1991 census accounted for less than one percent of the capital's population. Rather, the Rastafari are concentrated among the poorest of the city's residents, and the most deprived in terms of housing and facilities.

However, many Kingstonians – and, indeed, Jamaicans – have been deeply influenced by the cultural rather than the religious aspects of Rastafari – including its use of ganja (marijuana) as a sacred weed. It has been important far beyond the size of its following as an expression of Creole creativity, as a vehicle for artistic and musical expression (reggae), and as a source of anti-white, anti-establishment sentiment both in the secular world and in religion (Campbell 1985; Chevannes 1995; Waters 1989).

Perhaps one of the most significant features in Kingston since independence has been the growth of atheism in the context of secularism, materialism and poverty. Downtown lower-class youth has been socialised into a get-rich-quick mentality (get-dead-quick reality), given that they lack the education and supports (family and community) to achieve material well-being by socially acceptable avenues (Gunst 1995; Moser and Holland 1997). Hence the preoccupation with hard drugs, the emergence of local gang leaders or dons, and the transformation of many downtown districts in Kingston into nihilistic, no-go areas (Sives 2002; Small 1995). Marx's dictum that religion is the opium of the people hardly applies to the atheists, for whom crack-cocaine is undoubtedly more dangerous than any of Kingston's belief systems.

Conclusion – Religious Pluralism, Ethnicity and the Plural Society

Religion is not fundamental to the social structure of the plural stratified societies of the Caribbean, though in combination with education and family, with which the religious strata correlate (as we saw in the case of Jamaica), it is an important building block of the Creole stratificational system. In the plural segmented societies, the religions introduced by Indian indentured labourers have provided the basis for ethnic continuity among Hindus and Muslims, and for the reinforcement of the entire Indian segment of society (including Christian Indians) as a discrete entity separate from Creoles.

Religious pluralism in the folk societies of the Caribbean is non-existent, since they lack class structures and the cultural distinctions and hierarchies of the plural stratified societies. However, in the class-stratified Hispanic territories, there are distinctions between orthodox Catholicism and *santería*, which are class-correlated, but only vaguely fit the colour spectrum, since whites or mulattoes predominate, and colour-class correlations are much weaker even than in the plural stratified societies. The Catholicism/*santería* bifurcation is a hang-over from an historic slave-plantation

culture like that of Jamaica and Haiti, but is no longer solely the preserve of the black lower class.

In the plural-segmented societies, Hinduism has played an important role in opposing the Creole community, racially, culturally and in politics – in this context the role of the Sanathan Dhama Maha Sabha in the formation of the Peoples Democratic Party in Trinidad is instructive. Through this link, Hinduism fed into national politics, producing a string of Indian leaders who were Brahmins (Clarke 1986; Clarke 1991). In Jamaica, religion has played no major role in politics. Each of the two political parties is multi-class, multi-cultural and multi-racial, but Jamaica is as riven by dissent as Trinidad and Tobago, largely because politics are so tribal and so violent. The turning of the party-affiliated black lower classes on one another at election times has gone a long way to deflect violence away from the class-culture-contradictions so manifest in Kingston's community and Jamaica's society (Clarke 2006).

In concentrating on plural stratified and plural segmented societies in the Caribbean, I have drawn on the ideas of M. G. Smith. In his view Caribbean societies were more complex than the colour-class stratifications that Henriques and Braithwaite identified, though Henriques also wrote also about differences of family and religion in a colour-class context. According to Smith, plural cultures exist where there are fundamental differences in the institutional composition of a population, such as the distinction in belief, ritual and world view associated with Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. However, this cultural relativism is, in my view, less significant than the class or legal contexts in which these religions, (or family, or educational/linguistic systems) were embedded historically.

It is the way in which Caribbean stratifications were historically associated with slavery, indenture and free labour that creates the significance of the cultural difference. Smith's notion of differential incorporation is therefore crucial, because where strata or segments are distinguished into white citizens, free people of colour and black slaves (and, in the case of Trinidad into Indian indentured labourers), the cultural differences that accompany the politico-legal framework are totally different from situations, where plantation slavery, for instance, played no part in the colony/country's evolution and miscegenation was the norm (exemplified by the Dominican Republic).

Smith saw plural societies, where a minority (white) ruled the majority (black) undemocratically, as inherently unstable and controllable only by force (as in Jamaica from slavery to the beginning of decolonization after the containment of the labour rebellion of 1938). The constitutional evolution of Commonwealth Caribbean colo-

nies to independence since 1962 has removed this condition through citizens's universal incorporation in sovereign states. Yet Guyana's post-independence history of black Creole hegemony (1964-92), based on electoral gerrymandering by a minority, shows that this condition is not settled for all time (Ryan 1999). Vigilance is required to sustain the elimination of differential incorporation, especially in the South-East Caribbean, where Creole-Indian contraposition is endemic, and Hinduism provides an outstanding example of religious pluralism – and ethnicity.

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