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# DEPENDENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY:
## A VIEW FROM WEST INDIANS IN COSTA RICA

by

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From the publication of Eric William's **Capitalism and Slavery** to the rise of plantation, dependency and world system theories, the Caribbean has been consistently, and correctly, portrayed as existing in a relationship of dependency vis-à-vis the "developed" world.[1]

Throughout the Caribbean region, social scientists examine social and political conflicts as well as economic malaise with a heavy emphasis on this relationship of dependency. With few exceptions, some of which I mention below, they view these social ills primarily as determinate, unidirectional products of the structure of dependency. The response of people at the local level — depending on their class position — is viewed in terms of either resistance to dependency, in which case there is approbation, or in terms of co-operating with dependency in which case they are categorized as exploiters or as victims of false consciousness. Furthermore, the actions of individuals are inadvertently reduced to insignificance by the underlying assumption that international and national structural pressures negate choices.

Plantation dependency theory has afforded us invaluable insights into the unequal relationship between the underdeveloped and the developed countries. Yet, it has somehow led us astray from the theoretically important recognition that, as R. T. Smith puts it:

> ... the present day system is being maintained, being
> reproduced every day, by the actions of independent
> West Indians exercising their prerogatives of freedom,
> privilege, dominance and submission.[2]

In other words, little attention is paid to the role of local knowledge and local social action, except where local knowledge is viewed as a product of hegemony. It is as if plantation dependency imposed a curse on a segment of humanity to be the historical puppets of the 20th century.

The danger of slighting local knowledge, social action and the strategies they involve lies in the fact that as social scientific theories increasingly influence policy decisions, politicians, benignly misled by some social scientists-cum-advisors, blame nefarious outside forces for local problems without a balanced consideration of local responsibility. The social scientist unwittingly becomes the enabler for the politician — even the local bourgeoisie — who wants to be absolved of responsibility. Solutions to the problems of the region are therefore premised disproportionately on historical and current external "objective" structural pressures.

It is an ironic, if benign, contradiction that a theoretical outlook so evidently informed by Marxian philosophy should posit man as the creator of his own history yet attribute to only certain sectors of society — the dominant — the responsibility that defines the human condition. This essay takes the position that while there is agreement that the nature of the relationship between metropolitan countries and dependent nations is responsible for aspects of the form and content of social action, if we view man as an active agent of history — that is, not ruled by absolute necessity — then we cannot attribute responsibility to structural relations only. Local, individual strategies and choices are also important. The slave had no choice about his enslavement but he had a choice, within the structural confines of slavery, as to whether he would collaborate with or help to destroy slavery.

Understandably, plantation dependency theorists have been mainly but not exclusively economists and political scientists, scholars who traditionally pay less attention to cultural minutiae than do anthropologists. Understandably also, their work has influenced that of many anthropologists and sociologists.[3]

In contrast to the "inward" looking, largely functionalist perspective that characterized Caribbean social science through the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s saw the maturation of plantation dependency treated in the Anglophone Caribbean by such scholars as Lloyd Best, George Beckford, Levitt and Best, Norman Girvan and Susan Craig.[4] Methodological differences among theorists abound, but the general thesis is that the societies of the region are systematically underdeveloped and that this underdevelopment results from, on the one hand, the nature of the relationship historically established between metropolitan countries and local economies and, on the other hand, the "institutional environment" of the local society.[5] The local economy is referred to conceptually as a "plantation economy", with the theoretical implication that the economic emphasis is on local production by foreign investors for foreign consumption. The logic of foreign investment and export production causes resources to be drained from the local society and at the same time stagnates peasant production and inhibits genuine independence. Ultimately this type of structural relationship generates a culture of dependency.[6]

Even if dependency theory is dead, as some would argue,[7] the attitude lives on. And the explanatory value of this thesis for Caribbean reality is indisputable. Yet the emphasis is on unilateral structural determinism and this leaves little room for "microprocesses which inhere within the dependency economy"[8] and which might expose more lucidly the nature of local participation in the process of class formation and domination. The importance of paying attention to local "initiative and local response" was emphatically made by the anthropologist Sidney Mintz in his critique of world system theory.[9] The economists George Beckford and Michael Witter have also given ample attention to specific local class forces in their class analysis of Jamaican society.[10] More recently another anthropologist, Diane Austin writing about the Caribbean in general and about Kingston in particular, touched on the local dynamic of dependency in discussing the role of education in class domination.[11] Perhaps of a more direct relevance to my argument regarding local choices, however, is Charles Carnegie's recent work on "strategic flexibility" (i.e. choice) among Caribbean migrant traders, and Rex Nettleford's more philosophical appeal for a home-grown "Caribbean creativity".[12]

It is implicit in the plantation dependency outlook that the structure of domination achieves a metasocial warrant — to borrow a concept from Touraine[13] — through economic and ideological appropriation. This warrant seeks to create a cultural hegemony through which local knowledge and conduct are completely determined. But the very notion of domination — as a process — ultimately negates this; the dominated social system produces social good only for some, and those who do not share in the social good will become aware of their relative disadvantage and therefore seek to transcend domination. This is consistent with the Marxian notion of praxis or the self-production of society. The question then becomes how dominated man negotiates his transcendence over domination; in other words, how does he exercise his responsibility[14] within the limits of structural pressures.

The methodological challenge in this perspective is to relate microprocess to wider structural concerns. We might begin by moving away from the dependency emphasis on transfer of capital and focus analysis instead on the accumulation (and spread) of capital. Analysis might then be extended to consider how the accumulation and encroachment of capital affect the ability of workers and peasants to exercise responsible options — the essence of freedom — as life strategies.

The concept of social action (i.e., action which takes into account and is oriented by the behaviour of others) might be helpful in examining the socio-economic settings in which strategies are played out. I am not, however, referring to a strict Weberian concept of social action. The concept, as it is intended to be understood here, is informed by Habermas' critique and reformulation of the Weberian/Parsonian idea. For Weber, social action is defined by purposive utilitarian rationality. It takes its meaning from the intention of the actor, whose use of social knowledge is for his egocentric calculations of success and not for socially responsible action.[15] Social action, as I employ it, encompasses but is not restricted to individual intentions of success. It is strategic (rather than instrumental) action, based on rational choices but involving a social group which achieves common understanding through communicative action.[16]

It needs to be stressed — for all the political implications contained therein — that the dependent invididual is also a responsible individual, whether his/her actions amount to co-operation with or resistance of domination. Resistance as well as co-operation involves individual and group conduct which, while partially determined by dependency structures, occur as locally generated micro-processes. These micro-processes affect the emergence of consciousness and social process in a manner that cannot be explained purely in terms of the structure of dependency.

To illustrate the point, I draw on fieldwork conducted between 1976 and 1978 among West Indian migrants on the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica.[17] These West Indians worked for the United Fruit Company on its banana plantations — including the shipping facilities — from the 1890s until the 1940s when the plantation relocated to the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. This transnational plantation represents a classic setting of socioeconomic domination. Yet the mere ethnohistorical outline that follows shows that even

within such strict structural confines workers did exercise strategic choices. When the plantation relocated, the workers again exercised their options in the manner in which they adjusted to the wider Costa Rican society. The choices they made fall into three related groups: economic opportunity choices; personal/psychological choices; and societal adjustment choices. The Costa Rican material is not unique in this regard, I use it because of my intimacy with it.

## West Indian Advancement Strategy in Puerto Limon

West Indians started arriving in Limon in the 1870s and by the 1940s most saw their fate as inextricably linked to their only employer, the United Fruit Company. But the 1940s saw a radical transformation in the organization of the productive system of the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica, which in turn brought on changes in the structure of domination of labour. To understand the relationship between the productive system, on the one hand, and the type of structural·constraints imposed on workers, on the other, we need to take a brief look at the type of social organization that emerged out of the plantation setting. It is the social organization which sets limits on responsible choices.

## Social Organization

The nature of the plantation, and therefore its social organization, depend on the type and scale of the productive forces and the way in which they are combined and controlled. In this instance, land was granted by the government; the importation of labour was made possible by the relaxation of restrictions regarding the immigration of non-Whites,[18] and the government provided the necessary politico-legal sanctions to facilitate the maintenance of a disciplined labour force and the distribution of surplus according to the wishes of the United Fruit Company. West Indians were therefore in a racist society whose government collaborated in their exploitation.

There are three factors of immediate importance which influence class as well as interpersonal relations in such a setting: 1) the organization of the productive forces; 2) the relationship among ethnic groups, viewed as a function of the organization of labour; and 3) the role of certain distinctive cultural symbols in the interaction (or non-interaction) of people within the context of the plantation, and in the type of social hierarchy which resulted. All of these factors influence individual strategy and choice. I will focus on the second and third factors.

The plantation, being a capitalistic labour-intensive enterprise, as Sidney Mintz argues elsewhere,[19] sought to maximize its surplus through, among other things, the manipulation of cultural distinctions such as language and racial attitudes. This set the conditions for Antillian labourers to manipulate cultural distinctions in the competition for positions which later developed between them and Hispanics. Culture, colour and values therefore became important elements in the organization of the productive forces, and reflected themselves in the social hierarchy and its concomitant pressures (more on this later).

The plantation was a closed system for West Indians; they were constrained by the government from seeking employment elsewhere in the country. Thus they were at the mercy of conditions on the plantation itself,[20] conditions involving menial wages, an exploitative monopoly company store, and an authority system policed by the company.

As would be expected, the entire plantation system, occupying almost the whole province of Limon, was tightly hierarchical, socially as well as geographically. Anglo-Whites occupied an exclusive, well-delineated area called The Zone. Non-Whites, except for domestic workers or those on special errands, were forbidden to enter that area. In addition, the administrative centre, Puerto Limon, was perceived as being at the apex of a hierarchy of population centres. This social and geographic structure implanted itself on the consciousness of the workers, coercing them to make competitive choices based on self-improvement within the imposed hierarchy. The structure therefore constituted an effective means of economic and social control for the United Fruit Company.

Charles Kepner, who studied the plantation in the late 1920s, noted that the company played one ethnic group off against another.[21] Hispanic workers, though of the same structural level as Blacks, were separated from Blacks as a matter of policy. They paid Antillians more than Hispanics for similar jobs. Some West Indian nationals were used to break strikes initiated by other West Indians. They discouraged Blacks from learning Spanish, claiming that they would become too powerful. They used one group to spy on the other, and they had a policy of **not** placing Costa Rican nationals in high positions — "because of their divided allegiance" in disputes with the national government.[22] There was therefore on obvious policy of divide and rule — in which workers participated — as will soon become clearer.

Within the central administrative structure, colour gradations reflected the occupational hierarchy. Positions such as accountants, clerks, timekeepers and foremen were held mostly by Coloured Jamaicans. The higher, more strategic positions were held by Whites who, of course, presented a unified image — a clear line of class opposition vis-à-vis Blacks and Hispanics. The social organization was *de facto* "apartheid".

Obviously, any bid for mobility meant that the White controlling factor had to be placated; and those Blacks and Coloureds in positions of authority made certain of that in order to exercise their own sense of authority and to secure their own, precarious positions. A Black foreman, for example, would hardly risk the privilege of having a company mule. Upper-level Blacks had to be placated also, for access to Coloured foremen and White overseers had to be negotiated with them. They were in a socially and economically strategic position.

For instance, for two years Charles Morgan was the "clean-up" after the mechanics in the maintenance shop in Puerto Limon. He wanted to be an apprentice but he had no one "to speak for him". He had to prove himself. With a smiling willingness he did exactly as he was told and more, never less. After about a year the Coloured foreman "took a liking to him" and began to "learn him a t'ing or two about the machines". In his own words he "was not like those vagabonds – want something for nothing. No sir". In his frequent admonition the foreman mentioned names of co-workers who "could not get anywhere because they don't have ambition".[23] Charles Morgan obeyed orders, and "did little extra errands for the foreman and Mr Williams", the White supervisor — who was "a good man and he appreciate the Queen English". After about nine years on the job Charles Morgan was heading his own field maintenance crew. He was a model of success.

Whether in the field or in the shop, for most West Indians, acceptability and a compliant attitude were important attributes to getting ahead. It was a setting in which capi-

talist individualism was nourished, balanced only by the fact that the racial segregation of social life forced Blacks to unite around their own social and cultural institutions — religious, educational, recreational — within which the traditional spirit of communalism was cultivated.

In spite of the structural equality between Blacks and Hispanics, given the hierarchical frame of reference within which consciousness developed, it seemed predictable that Blacks would jostle with Hispanics for favoured status. Blacks saw themselves as superior, using whatever cultural and historical factors they could to support their contention. They regarded Hispanics as inferior for a number of reasons, the most salient of which was the fact that most Blacks, being largely of British West Indian provenance, accepted the colonial British ideology of cultural and national superiority. Their self-definition relied heavily on assimilated British values, and therefore anyone who did not share this identity was regarded as inferior. Furthermore, and most important, the majority of West Indians, unlike Costa Ricans, spoke a common language with their employers. This, and the fact that they had seniority — it was they who braved the elements to colonize the area when the "Hispanics were dying like flies" — gave them preferred status.

Hispanic labourers also had their stereotypes of Blacks; they were regarded as boisterous drunkards, irresponsible and simple. But the data indicate that by the early 1930s they were more willing to join West Indian labourers as a class than most West Indians were willing to join them.

In general, West Indians saw themselves as a privileged people in the middle of a three-tiered ethnic hierarchy with Anglo-Americans at the top and Hispanics at the bottom. Moreover, they perceived Americans as their socio-economic superiors but their cultural equals. In fact, several authors have observed that West Indians "passively co-operated" and identified with their Anglo employers.[24] However, this is only part of the picture. There were several instances — as in Moin and other areas of Limon in 1887 — of militant work stoppages by Blacks. Yet in 1934 when Hispanic labour struck against banana growers, most Blacks refused to support the strike, choosing to take an ethnic rather than class position.

As individuals, Blacks stood for themselves (in the interest of advancement), but more than that, it was the "ambitious" against the "unambitious". As a group, they stood against Hispanics and at times against the company. In both instances their actions constituted conscious, responsible choices, given the nature of the social system. Some, certainly not all, may have had no choice but the United Fruit Company jobs, but their behaviour need not have conformed to company expectations. To be mobile, they had to push against constraints but how they pushed made a difference. Clearly, however, the alliance with their American employers and their prejudice against Hispanics had more to do with socio-economic strategy than with racial or cultural considerations. They were simply invoking "cultural superiority", on the one hand as self-definition, and on the other hand as a means of achieving economic stability and upward mobility.

Once again, to borrow the words of Gilberto Freyre, the Black man had become "the white man's greatest and most plastic collaborator in the task of agrarian colonization". But while most chose to exercise their options within the confines of the planta-

tion others sought independence from it. A small but significant number ventured into peasant cultivation; some squatted on State land or company land while others used land given them by the company as partial compensation for unremunerated work. The case of Mr Thomas, a successful independent farmer on the southern coast, is illustrative. His father arrived in Costa Rica in the 1930s and worked for the United Fruit Company for about two years. While working he squatted on State land and planted banana. Later he switched to cacao and acquired rights to more land. In the meantime he had two sons, who he insisted should "get a profession". One son, Mr Thomas, became a plumber and the other a cobbler. The latter migrated to the Panama zone, while Mr Thomas eventually took over his father's farm which had expanded to over 200 hectares by the 1970s. His father, he said, always told them to avoid "working out".

In some cases whole villages sprang up around peasant cultivation. Still there were other individuals who straddled the line between plantation proletariat and peasantry.[25] A few became fishermen and, of course, there were the teachers, independent tradesmen, a few small-scale traders, and even fewer medium to large-scale farmers. The choices were few, but occupational multiplicity was nevertheless a reality.

### Transformation of the productive system

Labour conflicts, banana diseases, and further land concessions conspired to transform the economic structure of the region, culminating in the relocation of the United Fruit Company to the Pacific coast beginning in the early 1940s.

With the relocation of the Company, competition in Limon tightened. At the same time that banana production was decreasing, the number of Hispanics in the region was increasing. They started arriving in the 1920s; by 1927 there were over 13,000 Hispanics on the Atlantic coast, and by 1928 approximately 45 per cent of the railroad employees were of Hispanic extraction.[26]

Political (though not economic) control of the region by Hispanic Costa Ricans crystalized after 1948, the year in which Jose Figueres, the father of Costa Rican social democracy, seized power. Many Blacks fought under the Figueres banner and consequently, it seems, a concerted effort was made to facilitate their political integration into the wider society. With political integration Blacks came fully under Hispanic control, with gains in some areas of social life but with increasing economic disfranchisement and displacement in others.

In effect, the transnational United Fruit Company released control of the region and its people to the state. The process was accompanied by significant demographic changes and, in effect, Limon which was a closed community under the plantation regime became incorporated into the wider society, but at the lower level.

The changes in the productive system and political control of the region set in motion a process of assimilation of Blacks into Hispanic culture. West Indians were no longer a preferred group. Indeed, many Hispanics resented their presence; the mid-1930s was punctuated by protests against the preference accorded West Indians. Now West

Indians found that their livelihood depended almost entirely on the goodwill of the very ethnic group they previously relegated to socio-cultural inferiority. At this point, a new economic dependence now forced Blacks to change their system of social evaluation in order to fit the new hierarchy in which Hispanics were now on top.

Instead of merely adjusting to economic demands many, though not all, West Indians made an about turn in their cultural values and national allegiance. Their use of language is a telling example: they not only learned Spanish, they made it their prestige language. By the 1970s many third-generation immigrant West Indians were embarrassed to speak English — partly because they could speak "standard" Spanish but only Creole English, of which they were ashamed. An interviewee told me: "El Espanol es mas decente" (Spanish is more decent). Others say they speak it because es lo que domina (it is the dominant language). In spite of such attitudes, English maintains a modicum of prestige among many.

As signatures of prestige and privilege, language and colour work hand in hand but not without some ambiguity. In 1978 a British volunteer teaching primarily Black kindergarten students in Limon found that they spoke to her in Spanish only. The reason was later revealed when a four-year-old said: "A Diana le quiero, porque aungue es blanca es negra porque hable  ingles" (I like Diana because, although she is White, she is really Black for she speaks English).[27] In other instances, children more clearly express the level of assimilation and re-evaluation since they are less self-conscious and less aware of the cultural and ideological strictures on such expressions. A nine-year-old daughter tells her divorced mother that she wants another father, but this time not a Black one.

Cuisine and clothing have both gone the way of language also. The *guayavera* (native Costa Rican dress shirt) has replaced the shirt and tie as semi-formal wear, and *arroz con pollo* threatens the continued attractiveness of the Jamaican rice-and-peas. A four-year-old forced by her mother to visit and eat with her grandmother responded in disgust: "Vamos a abuela a comer comida negra; que pereza"(We are going to grandmother's to eat negro food; what a bore!).

The transformation in the valuation of culture and colour found expression in marriage patterns also. Over the decades, separation of Blacks and Hispanics in terms of cultural hierarchy preserved ethnic endogamy. In recent years, however, there has been a partial reversal of this tendency: of 218 households sampled, 6.5 per cent of all unions were racially mixed, and 45.2 per cent of all respondents expressed a positive disposition regarding interracial unions. A few Black women now expressed the desire for Hispanics to father their children so that they may have *piel claro*  (clear skin) — a clear asset in social mobility. This is not to indicate that all such unions are utilitarian; my field notes show several cases of unions established on moral grounds. Even so, the importance of colour and culture for social advancement is neither lost on the members of moral unions nor on the interpreting public.

West Indians have been shifting their national allegiance also. First generation immigrants still feel linked to the West Indies, particularly to Jamaica, but second-, third- and fourth-generations find it  convenient to view themselves as Costa Rican nationals. In the

village of Cahuita, a heated debate between a Jamaican visitor and three Afro-Costa‹
Rican males regarding the relative merits of identifying with Costa Rica rather than
Jamaica soon, with the aid of a few beers, developed into a cruel bout of fisticuffs. Not all
Afro-Costa Ricans would physically defend the country against an opinionated Jamaican,
but "this is our country," some say, and "it is the freest country in the world." Under-
standably so: regardless of racial discrimination, Costa Rica promised and in some cases
even provided opportunities for West Indian migrants which their homeland had failed to
provide. Yet in 1962 they celebrated Jamaica's independence. But expressions of allegiance
to Costa Rica, particularly by the young, are choices based less on appreciation for his-
tory than on the understanding — the basis of social action — that social and political
participation is a prerequisite for acceptance and advancement.

In the face of rampant but often subtle racial discrimination, many upwardly mobile
West Indians, under the influence of the democratic socialist ideology as well as personal
success, vehemently deny its existence. The tendency among them is to assume that there
is graded acceptance for Blacks according to their closeness to Hispanic Costa Rican ideals.
The situation is somewhat similar to that of Blacks in Brazil[28] and pre-revolutionary
Cuba[29] where the ideology of racial democracy gained strong currency. A successful
Black farmer in Limon said: "If you carry yourself like a decent person and respect the
Spanish you can reach anywhere in this country."

It was not until 1978 — the same year Black nationalism raised its touchy head in
Brazil — when a group of middle-class Blacks organized a national conference on racial
discrimination that the issue became, in a limited way, part of the national discourse.
West Indians, then, in the interest of smooth self-advancement, accommodated them-
selves to Hispanic Costa Rican hegemony; a hegemony legitimized by the opening up of
opportunities in the various state-run administrative and service institutions, as well as by
the ideological proclamation of equal opportunity.

The early stage of the transformation, however, found many West Indians shifting
to peasant cultivation as opposed to wage labour; as with their earlier counterparts they
occupied State land, or rented or leased parcels of United Fruit Company farms. But
within a generation, they "sold" the rights to many of these farms to Hispanics — in some
cases Hispanics wrested the rights from Blacks through devious means — as Blacks moved
to urban areas and their children opted for opportunities as teachers, clerks, and skilled as
well as unskilled wage labour. Of 218 heads-of-households surveyed in 1978, 78 per cent
gave white collar occupations, instead of working on the land, as the preferred means of
advancement for their children. This process became endemic throughout the province,
draining needed labour from the land.

It is not that Blacks believe they can no longer live by the land; they simply feel
that advancement, in accordance with the standards set by the society at large, is more
probable through the urban and professional labour market. It is not that Blacks spurn
their traditional culture; they simply wager that under the new circumstances being cul-
trually conservative is a potential obstacle to acceptance. When in the mid-1970s, for
instance, a few nationalist Blacks attempted to have Creole English included in the Limon

public school curriculum, one of the more effective arguments posed by Black parents against it was that they wanted their children educated "not just for Limon but for the world." This attitude speaks eloquently not just to the nature of the Limon community but to that of the diaspora in general. Witness the importance of migration in strategies of upward mobility;[30] there are perhaps more West Indians in the United States, Great Britain and Canada than there are in the West Indies. For too long, however, we have viewed such strategies as structural necessities, relegating the element of responsible, conscious choice to theoretical insignificance.

In a capitalist system accumulation is achieved by bringing together property-less workers and commodities through the medium of money. The process limits options to workers since it controls their life chances. But options are not eliminated. In the following chart I schematize the options exercised by the West Indians I have been describing, set against the constraints imposed by the United Fruit Company, on the one hand, and the society, on the other.

OPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

| TYPES | CHOICES | ALTERNATIVES | CONSTRAINTS |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Economic opportunity options | Wage labour (skilled and unskilled) | Peasant cultivation or other independent activity | Company and State reduces options by keeping wages low, restricting access to land, and providing minimal training |
| | Dual adjustment: wage labour and peasant activity | | |
| | Pursue upward mobility | Remain static | Upward mobility in company and in society restricted by racial/cultural barriers |
| Interpersonal/ political options | Compliant/docile | Rebellious/unyielding | Company and society set standards of behaviour |
| | Detached | Collaborative | |
| | Judicious/critical | Indifferent | |
| Societal adjustment options | Culturally conservative | Assimilation | Dominant classes in society impose standards for cultural and social acceptability |
| | Instrumental integration | | |
| | Lowlevel of material existence | Highlevel of material existence | Standard of consumption imposed from outside |

**Inherent Ambiguity; Structural Necessity, Consciousness and Choice**

The switch in West Indians' evaluation of Hispanic culture and society in response to the structural changes following the relocation of the United Fruit Company is a clear indication that they were devising strategies of adjustment based on their acquired knowledge of what the system had to offer and the pathways of achieving it. Although I have concentrated on the broad outline of historical transformation, these were individual

responses to structural demands; but they had some structural causes as well as some structural effects. In a similar manner that an idea is an individual transformation of social/cultural circumstances, the emergent social structure is a transformation of individual strategies, given collective coherence by common understanding of structural pressures. There is, therefore, a dialectical interaction between individual pragmatic choices regarding strategies and structural demands — whether it be class or international relations of dependency. The apparent contradiction between structural determinism and individual responsibility is only that, apparent. It speaks to the inherently ambiguous nature of class forces; for dominance to perpetuate itself it must tolerate some degree of freedom, minimal though it may be.

In both instances of adjustment discussed earlier, that is, to the plantation hierarchy as well as to the post-plantation Hispanic-dominated society, the strategies employed by Blacks were choices — within structural constraints — not structural necessities. In like manner, the slaves who fled the plantations at Emancipation for a peasant existence in the hills of Jamaica were expressing a responsible choice, as was the Manley government in deciding to go against mainstream wisdom and withdraw from the International Monetary Fund in 1980. In Limon, people chose whatever means their environment and their subjective being afforded to achieve social advancement. The choice was informed and constrained by a particular philosophy of the "desirable" life — but options were at the same time expanded in accordance with the world of knowledge within which choices occurred. In today's world, for example, consumerism and possessive individualism become motives which shape conduct, but frugal self-sacrifice remain an option.

A while back, anthropologist Steve Barnett conducted a study of "identity choice and caste ideology" in contemporary South India, in which he noted that what is involved in establishing identity is a struggle to be excluded or included in various spheres of symbolic dominance, emphasizing sub-ideologies while making use of indeterminacy in defining one's position in or out of particular groups.[31] In like manner, West Indians engaged in value transaction as a means of elevating their social position and at the same time mitigating domination. But many did it in a manner defined by the dominant social sectors, and by so doing their actions became constitutive of the very constraints they tried as individuals to avoid.

This is often, and only too easily, attributed to false consciousness. But such explanations only create a dilemma, for on the one hand the individual's action is said to be structurally determined and he or she is therefore absolved of responsibility. On the other hand, the individual's consciousness is said to be false, which raises questions about the truth content of consciousness generated by structure and, more specifically, about the extent to which knowledge is determined by practice.

There is a sense in which consciousness may be false: it is associated with the development of ideology, arising in Marx's view out of primitive division of labour and maturing "when a division of material and mental labour appears".[32] Whether or not we accept the origin, we can agree that ideology is a function of the ability of consciousness to partially emancipate itself from practice, and therefore able to retract and distort existing social relations.[33] Seen in this light, the ruling class is also burdened with ideology (consciousness which is not united with practice), yet its consciousness is not said to be false. Understandably so, since it uses ideology to its benefit at the expense of the

working class which, without **true** class consciousness of itself as a class, shares the ideology — what Antonio Gramsci calls "theoretical consciousness" — of their oppressors. For the dominated class, then, consciousness is "false" not by virtue of being tainted by ideology but because it fails to apprehend its true interest or need.

On the one hand, to label the worker with false consciousness is to deny his *sui generis* consciousness. On the other hand, to expect him to fully and independently penetrate the ideology imposed from above — that is, to transcend hegemonic propaganda — is to require a breadth of social structural knowledge and an encompassing philosophy of praxis that even the social scientist finds difficult. In short, theories based on dependency have yet to decide exactly where the human being, the responsible agent of history, fits into the determinate structure of domination. Has he achieved a critical understanding of self and society, or is he being duped by domination? Or is the reality somewhere in-between?

Social man is conscious, responsible man; responsible in the sense that he is self-creative, and conscious in the sense that through his awareness and manipulation of the constraints in his environment, he achieves some domination over himself. By "acting on the external world and changing it," says Marx, "[man] changes at the same time his own nature. He develops potentialities that slumber within him and subjects these inner forces to his own control".[34] Obviously, Caribbean man, by reason of being the object of a history of domination, has not achieved full domination over self. But recogintion of his responsible role is the first step in that historical process.

A more productive way of explaining the co-operation of individuals with domination, or their susceptibility to hegemony, is to hold individual responsibility as a human constant and look at the constraints or power relations within which social action occurs. The process of making social action choices I call "transaction" — to borrow a concept from the anthropologist Frederick Barth — meaning a process of evaluation taking into consideration the constraints and incentives that canalize choices in interpersonal relations.[35] Adoption of the notion of transaction as an analytic tool allows us to view domination as **process** as well as structure.

In the case of West Indians, I attribute the historical foundation of transaction in social action to two processes — combining material, cultural and psychological factors — of colonialism: (1) the removal of viable economic and social alternatives from imported slave labour, that is, complete deprivation evolving later into relative deprivation; and (2) the redefinition of the social world of African peoples and their descendants, that is, the gradual imposition of a worldview, inconsistent with the African-derived worldview, but providing an explanation of how deprivation may be relieved. In this sense, then, culture became a force of production; accepting the dominant culture and values was and continues to be the first step toward shaking deprivation, which in turn means reproducing the exploitative relations of production. To culturally redefine the relations of production as, for instance, Rastafarians in Jamaica have attempted to do, is to be subversive in the most profound sense.

Fianlly, even if we agree, as we must, with plantation dependency theorists that the relations of domination do constrain choices, we should also agree that dependent man

still maintains individual responsibility and consciousness whether or not his actions support domination or subvert it. This is the assumption on which we must act to achieve real independence in the Caribbean.It would be too simple to say, for example, that those West Indians who refused to join the Hispanic challenge to the United Fruit Company in the 1934 strike were misled, while those who did were conscious of themselves as a class against their oppressors. Nor can these actions be reduced to ideological domination. These actions can only be explained in terms of the interaction between the historical constitution of consciousness and material relations within a system of social action intended to avoid domination.

## NOTES

1. In view of the strong similarities between dependency theory, world system theory and what developed in the Caribbean as the plantation economy theory, I use **plantation dependency** to refer to the general theoretical outlook. There are important differences in these positions but they are not crucial to my argument.

2. Raymond T. Smith, "Family, Social Change and Social Policy in the West Indies". **Nieuwe West – Indische Gids** 56 (1982), p. 137.

3. Paget Henry, "Decolonization and Cultural Underdevelopment in the Commonwealth Caribbean". In **The Newer Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy and Development.** Paget Henry and Carl Stone, eds., pp 95–120. Inter American Politics Series, Vol. 4 (Philadelphia: ISHI Publications 1983). Peter Wilson, **Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies in the Caribbean** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). Marilyn Silverman, "Dependency, Mediation and Class Formation in Rural Guyana". **American Ethnologist** 6 (1979).

4. Lloyd Best, "Outlines of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy". **Social and Economic Studies** 17 (1968): 288–99. George Beckford and Michael Witter, **Small Garden . . . Bitter Weed: The Political Economy of Struggle and Change in Jamaica** (Morant Bay, Jamaica: Maroon Publishing Houses, 1980). George Beckford, **Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). **Caribbean Economy,** (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975). K. Levitt and L. Best, "Character of Caribbean Economy". In **Caribbean Economy,** G. L. Beckford, ed., pp. 34–60. (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975). Norman Girvan, "The Development of Dependency Economics in the Caribbean and Latin America: Review and Comparison". **Social and Economic Studies** 22 (1973): 1–33. Susan Craig, "Introduction" and Chapter 22. In **Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader,** Vol. 2. Susan Craig, ed. (Published by Susan Craig, The College Press, Trinidad and Tobago, 1982).

5. Beckford 1972, pp. xvii–xxvii.

6. Cf. Henry 1983

7. Ronald H. Chilcote (ed.), "Dependency and Marxism: Toward a Resolution of the Debate". **Latin American Perspectives Series,** No. 1 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981).

8. Silverman 1979, pp. 466–67.

9. Sidney Mintz, "The So-Called World System: Local Initiative and Local Response". **Dialectical Anthropology** 2 (1977): pp. 253–70.

10. Beckford and Witter 1980.

11. Diane J. Austin, "Culture and Ideology in the English-Speaking Caribbean: A View from Jamaica". **American Ethnologist** 19 (1983), pp. 223–40 and **Urban Life in Kingston Jamaica; The Culture and Class Ideology of Two Neighborhoods** (New York: Gordon Breach, 1984).

12. Charles Carnegie, "Strategic Flexibility in the Caribbean: A Social Psychology of Caribbean Migrations". **Caribbean Review** XI (1982, 1): 10–13. Rex Nettleford, "Definition and Development: The Need for Caribbean Creativity." **Caribbean Review** XIV (1985, 3): 7–10.

13. Alain Touraine, **The Self-Production of Society.** Translated by Derek Coltman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

14. Responsibility presupposes freedom or liberty, and freedom is simply understood as the power of selecting any of two or more alternatives. This understanding of freedom, however, precludes determinism, for it assumes that one can select any of all alternatives. A second and more acceptable view of freedom is simply: doing what one wishes. (This is the view accepted long ago by David Hume.) One may realize one's wishes even in the face of constraints, and even if the wish were determined by a set of causes. Freedom is contrasted with constraint and is not necessarily opposed to the idea of necessity.

15. Max Weber, **Economy and Society.** Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 4–25.

16. Jurgen Habermas, **The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society.** Translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 279–86.

17. The data on which this essay is based were collected over an eighteen-month period between 1976 and 1978. The fieldwork was funded by grants from the Organization of American States and the Ford Foundation.

18. Carlos Melendez and Quince Duncan, **El Negro En Costa Rica** (San Jose: Editorial Costa Rica, 1977).

19. Sidney W. Mintz, "The Plantation as a Socio-Cultural Type." In **Plantation Systems of the New World** (Washington: Pan American Union Social Science Monograph, 1959).

20. Richard Biesanz, K. Z. Biesanz and M. H. Biesanz, **The Costa Ricans** (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982), p. 66.

21. Charles D. Kepner, **Social Aspects of the Banana Empire.** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 173.

22. Kepner 1936, p. 177.

23. Among West Indians in Costa Rica, the meaning of the term "ambition" is not restricted to the literal English usage. It also means, to display a wide range of characteristics deemed to be "decent" and to be necessary for social and moral uplift. That is, one who behaves in a manner acceptable to one's social superiors.

24. Melendez and Duncan 1977, p. 66; Kepner 1936; Roy S. Bryce-Laporte, "Social Relations and Cultural Persistence (or Change) Among Jamaicans in a Rural Area of Costa Rica." Unpublished Ph. D dissertation (UCLA, 1962); Michael Olien, "The Negro in Costa Rica: The Enthnohistory of an Ethnic Minority in a Complex Society." Ph. D. dissertation (University of Oregon, 1967).

25. Trevor W. Purcell, "Conformity and Dissention: Social Inequality, Values and Mobility Among West Indian Migrants in Limon, Costa Rica". Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (The Johns Hopkins University, 1982). "Modern Maroons: Economy and Cultural Survival in Jamaican Peasant Village in Costa Rica." (MS, nd.).

26. C. W. Koch, "Jamaican Blacks and Their Descendants in Costa Rica". MS (University of Omaha, 1977), p. 10.

27. Diana Woollard, "Approaches to Language in Limon, Costa Rica: With Particular Regard to the Teaching of English to Limon Creole Speakers, Especially at Primary Level". Unpublished Final Exam Paper (The University of York, U.K., 1979).

28. Marvin Harris, "Referential Ambiguity in the Calculus of Brazilian Racian Identity". In **Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspective** Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed, eds., (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 75–86. Anani Dzidzienyo, "The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society". In **The Position of Blacks in Brazilian and Cuban Society.** Anani Dzidzienyo and Lourdes Casal, Report #7 (Minority Rights Group, London, 1979), pp. 11–27.

29. Lourdes Casal, "Race Relations in Contemporary Cuba". In **The Position of Blacks in Brazilian and Cuban Society.** Anani Dzidzienyo and Lourdes Casal, pp. 2–11. Report #7 (Minority Rights Group, London, 1979), p. 13.

30. Bonham C. Richardson, **Caribbean Migrants: Environment and Human Survival on St. Kitts and Nevis** (University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

31. Steve Barnett, "Identity Choice and Ideology in Contemporary South India". In **Symbolic Anthropology,** Janet Dolgin et al., eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

32. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, **Selected Works, Vol. One** (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) p. 33.

33. Erich Fromm, **Marx's Concept of Man** (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), pp 20–1.

34. Karl Marx, 1967 quoted in **Textbook of Marxist Philosophy,** prepared by the Leningrad Institute of Philosophy under the direction of M. Shirokov. (Chicago: Proletarian Publishers, 1978), p. 276.

35. Fredrik Barth, **Models of Social Organization,** Occasional Papers No. 23, Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1971) pp. 1–12. I borrow Barth's concept, "transaction", with an important modification: For him, as for me, the notion of choice within constraints is intrinsic to the concept of transaction. I differ, however, in my insistence that choices take place within a set of oppressive power relations, a point Barth does not make.