

**Towards a “New Parochial Wholeness”:
Brathwaite’s Dialectical Model of Creolisation**

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In an important essay, Nigel Bolland provides a very useful history of the concept of creolisation in the Caribbean as it has been deployed in recent times by a variety of sociologists and cultural theorists. The notion of creolisation, which denotes basically a “process of cultural interaction” (52), is in essence, he writes, a “version of the old ‘melting pot’ hypothesis, which conceives of a new cultural unity evolving from the blending of diverse original elements” (51). He argues rightly that the concept of creolisation has made it impossible to read Caribbean societies and cultures as the “result of a one-way process, of the unilateral imposition of European culture upon passive African recipients” (52).

Bolland is also correct to underline the neo-Hegelian dialectical problematic which generally informs the “creole-society thesis” (53). Implicit here, he writes, is a “dialectical view of social dynamics and cultural change” (64), that is, the “idea that the synthesis of new cultural practices emerges from the struggle between conflicting social forces” (64). What this means has been made more precise by Karl Popper, who offers a useful summary of the main tenets of dialectical logic. It is, he writes, a

theory that maintains that something—more especially human thought—develops in a way characterised by what is called the dialectic triad: *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*. First there is some idea or theory or movement which may be called a “thesis.” Such a thesis will often produce opposition, because, like most things in this world, it will probably be of limited value and will have its weak spots. The opposing idea or movement is called the “*antithesis*,” because it is directed against the first, the thesis. The struggle between the thesis and the antithesis goes on until some solution is reached which, in a certain sense, goes beyond both thesis and antithesis by avoiding the limitations of both. The solution, which is the third step, is called the *synthesis*. Once attained, the synthesis in its turn may become the first step of a new dialectic triad.... The dialectic triad will thus proceed on a higher level.... (313-4)

The logic of the dialectic, Popper correctly points out, as such “amounts to an attack upon the so-called ‘law of contradiction’ (or, more fully, upon the law of the exclusion of contradictions’) of traditional logic, a law which

asserts that two contradictory statements can never be true together” (316). Appealing in this way to the fruitfulness of contradictions, dialecticians claim that the law of non-contradiction at the heart of traditional logic must be discarded.

Bolland points out that the “process of decolonisation and nation-building” (52) in the Caribbean has been almost entirely predicated upon this dialectical model of creolisation: the “creation of a creole identity and the vision of the nation as a creole community,” he writes, “constitute a *synthetic* mode of nationalism” (64, his emphasis). Bolland warns, however, that some versions of creolisation, while often overtly dialectical, have often lapsed back into more “dualistic” (53) or “dichotomous” (64) frameworks of thinking. And here, too, another recent thinker lets us be more precise: Herbert Marcuse offering a useful definition of this “dualism” to which Bolland thinks proponents of creolisation are sometimes prone.

In an influential account of Hegel’s philosophy, Marcuse contends that common sense (what Hegel calls “understanding”) views the world “as a multitude of determinate things, each of which is demarcated from the other. Each thing is a distinct delimited entity” (44). It “conceives a world of finite opposites, governed by the principle of identity and opposition. Everything is identical with itself and with nothing else; it is, by virtue of its self-identity, opposed to all other things. It can be connected and combined with other things in many ways, but it never loses its own identity and never becomes something other than itself” (44). In this scheme of things, the “qualities the thing has distinguish it from other things, so that if we want to separate it off from other things we simply enumerate its qualities” (67). From this perspective, the world consists of “irreconcilable opposites” (44), “numberless polarities,” “polar concepts” and “antagonisms” (45).

It is with something like this in mind that Bolland makes the specific claim that creolisation, “as exemplified in the work of Edward Brathwaite, is *not dialectical enough*” (53, my emphasis). He criticises a number of what he deems blindspots in Brathwaite’s thinking (64), and while there certainly are aporia (which thinker is immune to them, I wonder?), many of Bolland’s particular criticisms here do not hold water, in my view. I do agree that there is a potential for dualism in Brathwaite’s work (this is something to which all dialectical thinking may be prone), but my thesis here is that Brathwaite’s *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (itself to a large degree culled from his *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*) is in fact a supreme example of applied dialectical thinking or, to put this another way, of dialectical theory and praxis conjoined. Moreover, my argument is that Brathwaite’s signal achievement here consists precisely, at a purely

theoretical level, in his seminal revision, with the aid especially of W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness," of the purely economic conceptual framework which informs Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, the *locus classicus* of neo-Hegelian dialectical historical materialism in the twentieth century. My point is that *within the field of vision permitted by a dialectic problematic* Brathwaite offered here a seminal account of the complex dialectic of identity, class, nationality, ethnicity and race to be found in the Caribbean (and, by extension, in any multicultural/multiracial society) as well as a persuasive map of the way forward. He was able, in other words, to show that economic class is not the only basis for social inequality which in fact manifests itself in many forms, nationality, ethnicity and race being three other and inter-related determinants (gender not figuring prominently in either of these studies).

Furthermore, Brathwaite may not have been the originator of the concept of creolisation but it is one with which his name has become more or less synonymous. If Hans Robert Jauss is right that the classic stature of a work is determined by the significance of its reception as well as its continuing impact, then Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens* is as much a classic as *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* and deserves as such to be republished. Both these works may be said to have set the scholarly agenda for a whole generation of Caribbean historians, cultural theorists and cultural critics in particular, not to mention sociologists and political theorists, during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. This dominant dialectical problematic may be, as I have argued elsewhere, in the throes of giving way (an arduous process in that epistemic shifts are always discomfoting affairs) to an emergent way of conceptualising Caribbean culture that is informed by (post-)Saussurean modes of difference and epitomised by the work of Stuart Hall, among others. However, dialectical modes of thinking about personal and collective identity, inextricably intertwined with a residual organicism that is arguably European Romanticism's most telling legacy, remain deeply entrenched, for good and for bad, in Caribbean discourse. (I have further explored the epistemic shift in Caribbean discourse in "From Dialectic," and organicism in "Root versus Rhizome" and "'Roots'.")

Bolland offers a useful summation of what a "dialectical analysis of society" (65) or problematic of the kind inspired by Lukács permits one to see. Firstly, each of the constituent groups which comprise a society are seen to be "parts of a whole, constituting a unity of opposites. They are parts of a system that have no independent existence, but are defined in their relation with each other" (71). Lukács puts it this way in *History and Class Consciousness*: "[i]deologically, no less than economically, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are mutually interdependent" (68)

and, as such, each is incomprehensible apart from the other and from their relationship to the whole. Secondly, a dialectical approach underscores the inherently conflictual nature of the relationships that exist between these groups which are, as Bolland puts it, “defined and differentiated in terms of power, between the dominant and the subordinate” (65).

It is important to remember in this respect that Lukács’s Hegelian brand of Marxism revolves less around the familiar Base/superstructure trope than Hegel’s metaphor of the “expressive totality.” In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács explains: the “category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel” (27). The “expressive totality” involves, Frederic Jameson argues, the “construction of a historical totality” (27) and the “isolation and the privileging of one of the elements within that totality ...such that the element in question becomes a mastercode or ‘inner essence’ capable of explicating the other elements or features of the whole in question” (27-8). Althusser asserts that the “expressive totality” consists of “so many ‘total parts’, each expressing the others, and each expressing the social totality that contains them, because each in itself contains in the immediate form of its expression the essence of the social totality itself” (94). The “inner essence” expressed by all the constituent elements which comprise the “totality” is evidently, in the Marxist scheme of things, in the final analysis the economic. Within a purely Hegelian and, thus idealist schema, each stage of history and the human communities therein is conceptualised, of course, in terms of the “Zeitgeist,” that is, as the expression or manifestation of Spirit. Lukács’s stated desire being, like Marx’s, to translate the “whole mysticism of the ‘spirit’ into materialist historical reality” (*Historical Novel* 119), he argues that each social totality as well as everything that comprises it is comprehensible, rather, as a function of its location along the dialectical sequence of the economic modes of production that constitute history. All the elements which comprise a given social totality are understood to have a common relation not to a static and self-sufficient economic base corresponding to an isolated moment of the dialectical development of human history but to a dynamic history always in the throes of change and, thus, of conflict.

The essence of the social totality is that essential contradiction at its centre which is construed, as Tony Bennett puts it, as the “clash between the dynamic momentum of new forces of economic production and the restraining hand of old social relations of production. This essential clash is then said to be present in, and therefore capable of being deduced or read off from, each of the constituent parts which, taken together, comprise the social totality” (*Formalism* 40). In short, every element within a given social totality expresses the “world-historical”

forces pertinent to a particular time and place, that is, the conflict between the ruling class fighting, on the one hand, to maintain its dominance in the face of changing forces of production and the other classes struggling, on the other, to attain social ascendancy.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, as Bolland points out, the dialectical conflict between the groups that comprise the social totality is the engine of social change: “social forces and social systems...are characterised by conflicts and contradictions...that consequently give rise to their own transformation” (53). To put this another way, out of the contradiction of thesis and antithesis arises a synthesis which is tantamount to progress and amelioration. However, change is impossible without the development of what Lukács terms the “class consciousness” of the proletariat which, he writes, “has been entrusted by history with the task of *transforming society consciously*” (*History* 71). If social transformation is to occur, Lukács argues, the working class must *become* “class conscious” or “self-aware,” that is, conscious of its objective location as a class in the social totality of which it is part. (The bourgeoisie as a class is unable to do this, he argues, because, given its social dominance, it is unable to look beyond its own narrow self-interest. It is, as such, a victim of “false consciousness.” Lukács puts it all this way: class consciousness is not an empirical “description of what men *in fact* thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any given point in the class structure” (51). It is not, moreover, a given: indeed, precisely because of the dominance of the ruling class and the pervasiveness of their outlook, it is something which must be arduously striven for. Class consciousness is, in fact, an acquired objective awareness of the proletariat’s position within “*society as a concrete totality*, the system of production at a given point in history and the resulting division of society into classes” (50). It is, in other words, the “*sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class*” (73). The “superiority of the proletariat” (69), he writes, resides in the resulting “ability to see society from the centre, as a coherent whole” (69), that is, to “lay bare the nature of society” (70), an ability that results precisely from its disenfranchised location. The development of class consciousness on the part of the proletariat, enabling it to “act in such a way as to change reality” (69), is the indispensable prerequisite for the ushering in of a classless society. With the rise to ascendancy of the proletariat, this argument goes, classes are abolished.

(Bolland hints at much of this when he underscores that a dialectical problematic “draws attention” [65] to the “interrelated and mutually constitutive nature of ‘individual,’ ‘society,’ and ‘culture,’ and of human agency and social structure” [65]. These are not dichotomies. Rather, emphasising the “mutually dependent relationship between social structure and human agency” [65], Bolland contends that “[c]ulture and society, in the form of traditions,

ideas, customs, languages, institutions, and social formations, shape the social action of individuals, which in turn maintains, modifies, or transforms social structure and culture” [(65).]

In short, in the Lukácsian scheme of things, there is no question of pluralistic relativism in that the characteristic experiences of different social groups do not provide divergent but equal grounds for reliable knowledge claims. It is for this reason that a distinction is drawn between “class consciousness,” on the one hand, and mere “perspective,” on the other. It is a given for Lukács that the lived realities of the lives of the working classes are profoundly different from those of the ruling class. Given that material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for different classes, it is only understandable that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other. As a result, as Nancy Hartsock claims, “in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse” (153) while the opposite is true for those who have been marginalised. However, precisely because the dominant ideology, to wit, the world view of the ruling class necessarily “structures the material relations in which all parties are forced to participate” (153), the standpoint or consciousness of the proletariat is an achievement, not a given, emerging only through the battles waged against the dominant/oppressive group. It is through the struggles against domination, this argument goes, that the experience of the oppressed can be made to “yield up a truer (or less false) image of social reality than that available only from the perspective of the social experience of men of the ruling classes” (169). This change in consciousness is the necessary prelude to social amelioration.

At least one other important influence on Brathwaite’s concept of creolisation in this respect is worth noting at this point: Du Bois’s seminal notion of “double consciousness” (Brathwaite’s work is involved in a complex negotiation with that of several other non-European intellectual precursors but the majority of these are beyond this chapter’s focus). The dilemma of being both American and black at the same time is most famously articulated in chapter I of his *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (written in 1897). Openly drawing on Hegel’s notion of the Master/Slave dialectic, he addresses what he describes as the “double consciousness” (102) with which the African American is afflicted:

this sense of always looking at one’s self from through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (102)

Du Bois evidently conceives of the American negro's psychomachia in terms of a struggle between two races and the two cultures that they represent, between innate endowment and the Eurocentric forces of acculturation to which the American negro is inevitably subjected. The "history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain *self-conscious* manhood, to merge his double self into a *better and truer* self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (102, my emphases).

Brathwaite's signal achievement in *Contradictory Omens*, at a theoretical level, consists in his use of Du Bois in particular to transform Lukács's purely economic or class-based mode of analysis, especially his notion of "class consciousness," in order to stress the overdetermination of nationality, ethnicity and race within the Caribbean context. Brathwaite underscores that these determinants exist in a dialectical relationship with each other, as a result of which each is incomprehensible without reference to the others, the question of class, for example, being inextricable from that of race. Brathwaite's thesis is that, from at least 1770 and extending long after 1820, the social totality that is the Caribbean has been defined in its entirety by and thus "expresses" in each of its parts an essential clash that is similar to but not identical with that described by Lukács. At the core of Jamaican society (as well as other societies, like Barbados, with a similar demographic distribution), Brathwaite argues, there has historically existed a dialectical conflict between social groups configured simultaneously in economic, national, ethnic *and* racial terms which has entirely shaped the social totality of which it is part. On the one hand, there is the numerical minority of white European colonisers/slave-masters and their descendants who continued in the course of the twentieth century to comprise the ruling class and thus to wield effective economic, social and (at least initially) political power. On the other hand, there is the enslaved black African majority and their descendants who continued to serve as the working masses in the post-Emancipation period but who have, more recently, increasingly tasted of social mobility. The former has battled continuously to maintain its hegemony, the latter to attain equality, if not dominance in turn.

As Brathwaite states in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, creole Jamaica was a society in which there was a "*juxtaposition of master and slave, élite and labourer, in a culturally heterogeneous relationship*" (xvi, my emphases). The question which this consequently posed for Brathwaite is this: exactly how should the heterogeneity of West Indian culture be conceptualised? Precisely how, in other words, ought one to comprehend the relationship that exists between master and slave, white and black? To answer this, Brathwaite alludes in *Contradictory Omens* to several inter-related models of cultural interaction, each of which he finds useful in some

respects but unsatisfactory in others. He rejects, for example, the economic reductivism inherent in the so-called “plantation model” (associated with George Beckford) which, by virtue of its abstract economism and its reliance on a simplistic Base/superstructure model, does not do justice, he seems to feel, to the economic, social, and political diversity of social totalities such as Jamaica. These, he stresses, cannot be reduced to being merely something akin to a plantation “writ large.” He distances himself similarly from what he describes as the “classical ‘plural’ paradigm” (25) advanced by the sociologist M. G. Smith which, because “based on an apprehension of cultural polarity...on an either/or principle; on the idea of people sharing fixed divisions instead of increasingly common values” (25), fails to do justice to the cultural “give and take” or intermixture that is the hallmark of Jamaican society. Brathwaite also rejects what he terms the “syncretic/synthetic ideal” (58) (one which he possibly associates with the work of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, among others) which envisages the emergence of a “‘new’ racial type” (58) that is the product of miscegenation between the races. What seems to make Brathwaite uncomfortable with the syncretic model is, firstly, the way in which it privileges biology over the social construction of race and, secondly, the way in which it effaces the original races (the thesis and antithesis, as it were) thought to be synthesised in this way.

It is no doubt for this reason that, instead of biological race, Brathwaite prefers to emphasise what he terms the “common somatic image” (22) which a race has of itself. Brathwaite draws here upon the concept of the “somatic norm-image” advanced by Harry Hoetink in “‘Colonial Psychology’ and Race.” In a manner analogous to the Feminist distinction between anatomical sex and gender, Hoetink proposes to replace what he describes as the biological term “race” with its “social-psychological” (149) counterpart: the latter meets the “sociological demand of being transmissible by communication, instead of being biologically tied to hereditary substance” (149). To this end, he proposes that every “race” possesses what he calls a “somatic norm-image,” to wit, the “total of somatic characteristics...considered by a group as its esthetic norm and ideal” (149). This, he argues, is the “embodiment of a socially determined narcissism” (149). Sidney Mintz defines it this way: it is the “mental concept that individuals have of the appropriate (or ideal or preferred) way to look” (442). For Hoetink, “somatic distance,” by contrast, is the “distance subjectively experienced between one’s own somatic norm-image and a different somatic type” (150).

Brathwaite suggests that the best way to conceive of the heterogeneity of Jamaican (and by extension West Indian) culture, especially during the period 1770 to 1820, is in terms of the process of cultural interaction which he calls “creolisation.” In Brathwaite’s famous formula, this is a “cultural action—material, psychological and spiritual—based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and—as

white/black, culturally discrete groups—to each other” (11). Brathwaite uses the term “creole” to denote all “born in, native to, committed to the area of living” (10) in question and thus to refer to “both white and black, free and slave” (10). However, he is at pains to emphasise that, by “creolisation,” he has in mind less the individuals or the groups they represent than the dialectical relationship between these groups, “not white but black / white: mulatto; the ‘white’ and the ‘black’ still *locked in competition for ascendancy*” (6, my emphasis). Creolisation is, he writes in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, a “way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole” (307). Brathwaite’s point is that white and black, master and slave may be forcibly segregated from each other by virtue of the complex overdetermination of economics, nationality, ethnicity and skin colour (this is the thrust of the “plural-society” thesis of M. G. Smith), but the defining characteristic of Jamaican society, the essential contradiction which Jamaican society in its totality expresses, is the relationship that each group shares to the other. This relationship, he stresses, may be a conflictual, rather than harmonious one, a relationship of difference rather than similarity, but it is a defining relationship all the same.

Brathwaite is keen to point out that Jamaican people have historically interacted with each other with results that vary from identification and accommodation at one extreme, to rejection and hostility at the other. But there is also a common *cultural* middle ground of sorts which is occupied not only by the offspring of racial miscegenation. Although that they may occupy it in a particularly clear way is why Brathwaite argues in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* that the “area of sexual relationships” (303) was one of the most potent *facilitators* of the process of creolisation: the “visible and undeniable result of these liaisons was the large and growing coloured population of the island, which, in its turn, acted as a bridge, a kind of social cement, between the two main colours of the island’s structure, thus further helping (despite the resulting class/colour divisions) to integrate the society” (305). It is by virtue of their miscegenation that those whom he describes as “‘mulatto culturalists’” have been “essentially concerned with the *integration* of the society” (305, my emphasis).

But that there is a common *cultural* middle ground is why Brathwaite stresses that “creolisation,” by contrast to the stark binary oppositions envisaged by Smith’s pluralism, seeks to capture the historical fact that there existed in Jamaican society a

historically affected socio-cultural *continuum*, within which...there are four *inter-related* and sometimes *overlapping orientations*. From their several cultural bases, people in the West Indies

tend towards certain directions, positions, assumptions and ideals. But nothing is really fixed and monolithic. Although there is white/brown/ black, there are infinite possibilities within these distinctions and many ways of asserting identity. A common colonial and creole experience is shared among the various divisions, even if variously interpreted. (25, my emphases)

The four principal orientations he defines as “European, Euro-creole, Afro-creole (or folk), and creole-creole or West Indian” (25). (Brathwaite emphasises that creolisation, because it commenced “as a result of slavery” (11), involved “in the first instance...black and white, European and African, in a fixed superiority/inferiority relationship” (11). However, with the arrival of other racial and cultural groups in the region, principally Indians and Chinese, it came to take on other configurations.)

To account for this continuum in Jamaican society, that is, the tendency towards certain directions, orientations and positions rather than hard and fast, monolithic divisions, Brathwaite seeks to define the relationship between the dominant and subordinate groups in Jamaican society more precisely in terms of two simultaneous and inter-related processes of cultural interaction. He speaks, firstly, of “ac/culturation”: this is Brathwaite’s term for the “yoking (by force and example, deriving from power and prestige) of one culture to another (in this case, the slave/African to the European)” (6). Elsewhere, he defines this as the “process of absorption of one culture by another” (11). Brathwaite speaks, secondly, of “[i]nter/culturation” (6), the process of cultural ‘give and take’ that historically occurred between white and black, master and slave. This has been a “reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each” (11). In other words, it denotes the

unplanned, unstructured but *osmotic* relationship proceeding from this yoke. The creolization which results (and it is a process not a product) becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society. Yet this norm, because of the complex historical factors involved in making it (mercantilism, slavery, materialism, racism, superiority/inferiority syndromes, etc.) is not whole or hard...but cracked, fragmented, ambivalent, not certain of itself, subject to shifting lights and pressures. (6, my emphasis)

In other words, by virtue of its dominant economic, political and social position, the ruling group was able to impose its culture upon the ruled (this is the acculturation of which he speaks). However, creolisation also implies a two-way process of “give and take” by which the ruled were able in turn to shape the culture of the rulers (interculturalism). The outcome was a complex, hybrid, creole culture which, as a (not always acknowledged)

mixture of European and African, forever changed the respective identities of the participants in this social totality. The result is that the white Jamaican was as different from his/her “pure” European counterpart as was the black Jamaican from his/her African, the subjectivity of each having been profoundly moulded by the creolised socio-historical environment that was Jamaica during this period.

It is from this point of view that Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* likens creolisation to an “obscure force” (297) compelling all members of Jamaican slave society to “conform to a certain concept of themselves; makes them perform in certain roles which, in fact, they quickly come to believe in” (297). False consciousness, Brathwaite seems to suggest, has historically been a fact of life in the region for all parties concerned. The false consciousness of the ruling white (and “whitish”) group—Brathwaite has in mind what he calls in *Contradictory Omens* the “Euro-centered elite” (29), the “Euro-orientated creole upper class” (29), and the “small creole intellectual elite” (29)—is largely the product of their privileged location within the social totality. Trapped within what Lukács might term the false “antinomies” (110) which infect their world view, this group as a whole was unable to see beyond the boundaries of its own narrow self-interest and historical origins. The “[c]ohesiveness and direction” (32) of the first two “orientations” came, Brathwaite avers, from a “sense of being ‘European’, derived from their metropolitan origin or memories; and a sense of being white, ‘civilised’ and superior, derived from the ‘philosophy’ elaborated to justify slavery” (32). In a manner not unlike Lukács’s treatment of the bourgeoisie, Brathwaite asserts that the Euro-orientated’s

cultural contribution...was essentially structural / functional and materialistic in quality. Its objective was to perform well within the “raw materials” sector of the mercantilist framework. Its great achievement was the plantation and the evolution of highly efficient political Assemblies. Its aesthetic achievement was the Great House and the “civilisation of the wilderness.” (32)

Although he acknowledges that there was “among the best of them, a certain measure of commitment to creole as opposed to European/imported values” (33) and that, because “of the concern for what was being created, some Europeans in the West Indies during the period of slavery came to know and love the landscape” (33), Brathwaite alleges that “their sensibilities never reached deep enough to possess it in other than a superficial, economic sense” (33). He blasts them, moreover, for practising what he calls in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* a “bastard metropolitanism” (307), rather than embracing more fully the phenomenon of creolisation which has necessarily altered their identity in the Caribbean. In so doing, had they acknowledged the humanity of and forged a

strategic alliance with the ex-Africans, the history of the West Indies might have taken a different course. The last “orientation” in this list, the so-called “small creole intellectual elite,” he also dismisses in *Contradictory Omens* because, being without “real roots or vision...[w]ithout a concept of ‘Caribbean,’ they really had nothing to orient towards” (29).

It is from this perspective that Brathwaite stresses the necessity of performing “psycho-social analysis” (33) upon all views expressed about West Indian culture, especially those which emanate from the aforementioned groups. The diversity of perspectives upon West Indian society and culture, he writes, “result[s] essentially from a subjective apprehension of ‘reality’, based upon the particular individual’s socio-cultural orientation” (34). That is, each individual’s perspective derives from his/her location within a particular group, configured simultaneously and complexly in economic, racial and other terms, and the relationship of that group to the others which comprise the social totality. In other words, in the Lukácsian schema which evidently informs Brathwaite’s argument here, the members of each group share a communal vantage-point or perspective upon society but the validity of any given perspective is dependent upon that group’s precise location within the social totality. Not all truth-claims are, consequently, accurate.

The segment which Brathwaite describes as the “Afro-Caribbean (black) population” (30) is also not immune to false/double consciousness. In their case, however, this is not inherent in their structural/functional location within the totality, as it is in the case of the white and “whitish” ruling classes, but is the tragic consequence of their acculturation. He is particularly concerned with the negative impact of acculturation upon the “orientations” he labels “elite blacks and the mass of free coloureds” (22) (he calls the former “Afro-Saxon” [39]). Although he acknowledges that the “[m]imicry” (15) in which the elite blacks and free coloureds were forced to engage was one of the necessary “conditions under which creolization had to take place” (15), Brathwaite views it as “one of the tragedies of slavery” (15):

“Invisible,” anxious to be “seen” by their masters, the elite blacks and the mass of free coloureds conceived of visibility through the lenses of their masters’ already uncertain vision, as a form of “greyness”—an imitation of an imitation. Whenever the opportunity made it possible, they and their descendants rejected or disowned their own culture, becoming...”mimic-men”. (22)

These blacks, he argues, were doubly mimic-men in that they were guilty, firstly, of an “imitation of an imitation” (308) (rather than, presumably, of the “real thing,” the “true” European). More importantly, however, for the (ex-

)African to imitate the (ex-)European at all was in effect not to be “true” to his/her “real” self. The key element in the acculturation of the black élite and free coloureds was an education system the object of which was, Brathwaite stresses, “‘civilisation’, and the eradication of all existing or remaining African traits that might have been found among the ‘lower classes’” (30).

However, Brathwaite stresses that the “friction created” by the “confrontation” of white European and black African, master and slave, “was cruel, but it was also creative” (22), involving “both imitation (acculturation) and native creation (‘indigenization’)” (16) with the “blacks giving as much as they received” (17). Indeed, he contends, “our real/apparent imitation involves at the same time a significant element of creativity, while our creativity in turn involves a significant element of imitation” (16). As a result, Brathwaite is equally concerned to underscore the positive contributions made to the process of interculturalization by that component of the black population especially which he describes as “the folk” (39), the “orientation” towards whom he is, arguably, most favourably disposed. He identifies the “folk” as the “peasants, labourers, illiterates: the majority” (39) who have not only “managed to survive” (30) but, precisely because they are “in most direct line of descent from Africa” (39), also managed to hold “within themselves the potential of a real *Alternative Tradition* since they have successfully replaced the Amerindians as the folk or “little tradition” of the society” (30, my emphasis: the idea of “great” and “little” traditions is one Brathwaite draws from Robert Redfield’s *Peasant Society and Culture: Development* 213).

Although, Brathwaite laments, the “folk” have since at least Emancipation found themselves “losing ground fast” (30) and, as a result, in “retreat from an Afro- to a kind of Euro-orientated cultural disposition” (30), he is at pains to emphasise that historically, it was the so-called “folk” who were responsible for the fact that a “strong Afro-creole element continued to persist within West Indian society” (31) in several ways: it “expressed itself in the Africanization of Christianity, ...in Garveyism after 1900, in the Rastafari movement (in Jamaica) since the 1930s, the Black Power of the 60s” (31). As Brathwaite points out, these are

indications (only) of an *African consciousness* in the West Indies, the possibility of a *tradition alternative to the European*. At a deeper, though less articulate level, there is an actual *African presence* in the Caribbean based on a continuous African tradition passing into the present through the period of slavery. (39-40, my emphases)

Brathwaite has in mind in this respect the “continuing African forms of marketing habits, family practices, speech (dialect), magic-medicine (obeah), and religious practices” (31), among others.

In short, Brathwaite stresses, mimicry leads to false/double consciousness rather than that collective consciousness or self awareness which reveals the true nature of one's objective situation and thus identity, as well as induces one consequently to undertake the process of changing an unfair status quo. He blames the "black élite" (308) especially in this regard who "failed, or refused, to make conscious use of their own rich folk culture (their one indisputable possession) and so failed to command the chance of becoming *self-conscious* and *cohesive as a group* and consequently perhaps winning their independence from bondage" (308, my emphases). Brathwaite's point is that it is precisely the folk's location on the margins of Jamaican and West Indian society, however, that has allowed them as a group to maintain a strong bond with Africa and thus to preserve within themselves that flame of self-awareness which only needs to be rekindled to burn brightly again. It is precisely this vantage-point which, once cultivated, will grant them the ability to "see society as a coherent whole," that is, to "lay bare the nature of society" and initiate social change. In Brathwaite's eyes, it is with them that hope for a West Indian future unmarred by class, racial and other divisions lies.

The question with which Brathwaite concludes *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* is a significant one. He wonders

whether the society will remain conceived of as "plural"—the historical dichotomy becoming the norm—or *whether the process of creolisation will be resumed in such a way that the "little" tradition of the (ex-)slaves will be able to achieve the kind of articulation, centrality, prestige and influence—assuming that it is not by now too debased—that will provide a basis for creative reconstruction*. Such a base, evolving its own residential "great" tradition, could well support the development of a *new parochial wholeness*, a difficult but possible *creole authenticity*. (311, my emphases)

The choice, he is clear, is between social apartheid and cultural interaction in which the African contribution is given its true weight. He sounds a similar note in *Contradictory Omens*. Here, assuming that "all societies ideally move towards norms based upon certain significant core values" (52), he wonders "what are the norms in our society, or, ...what are the 'cores' from which they might derive" (52) in a multi-racial society such as the West Indies. The core values which Brathwaite envisages are explicitly those pertinent to the ex-African majority: he yearns for the "acceptance of the culture of this black ex-African majority as the paradigm and norm for the entire society" (30). In much the same way that an ultimately classless society paradoxically come about only with the rise of the working

classes to social ascendancy, so too, Brathwaite seems to suggest, will only the rise to ascendancy of the black population usher in a Caribbean society free from ethnic, racial and other rifts.

For creolisation to turn from tragedy into romance, Brathwaite seems to say, it must be predicated upon the rise to dominance and the move to centre stage within Caribbean society of the ex-African majority. For this to occur, the black segment of the population must grow into self-awareness or class/race consciousness. An integral part of this process is the recuperation of the “knowledge of ancestral cultures” (61) which only the “folk” historically kept alive. Gesturing, arguably, to Friedrich Engels’s famous (but controversial) use of corn to illustrate the dialectical process (the germination of the plant [antithesis] is the negation of the seed [thesis] because the seed ceases to exist when the plant begins to grow, while the production of new seeds by the plant is the negation of the negation [synthesis]), Brathwaite expressly advocates that for the black West Indian, the synthetic product of creolisation, to arrive at a properly dialectical self-understanding, a return to cultural “roots” must be undertaken in order to discover the African “thesis” negated by the European “antithesis.” Such a “return” is indispensable, Brathwaite writes, because the “virtue of a plant...is in its seed; and however elaborate, and however beautiful a plant might become, it cannot escape its essential beginning—the mysterious, triumphant life that goes on beneath its surface; the origin of all things” (59). For the ex-African majority, a return to the cultural seed from which it springs, Brathwaite asserts, is indispensable. It is this, he contends, which will “take us forward to the definition of our own authentic life/styles and the bodying-forth of ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions from our own milk” (61), traditions that are residential rather than located elsewhere. In this regard, he posits that in the Caribbean there have historically been “two ‘great’ traditions, one in Europe, the other in Africa,” but concludes that “neither was residential.” “Normative value-references were [thus] made outside the society,” while cultural homogeneity “demands a norm and a residential correspondence between the ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions *within* the society” (24, my emphasis).

Brathwaite lauds modern Jamaica which, he feels, is well on the way to bringing the process of creolisation to a successful conclusion: it is, he writes, “in the course of developing a National Tradition by *blending* different *racial geniuses*” (56, my emphases). This is what Brathwaite means by his paradoxical concepts of “parochial wholeness” and “creole authenticity”: a national identity necessarily forged out of diversity but in which the African component has attained its rightful and *central* place. Brathwaite’s model of creolisation is evidently a paradoxical one, stressing simultaneously both wholeness and parochialness. Perhaps, however, we should bear in mind in this respect Orlando Patterson’s distinction between “segmentary” and “synthetic” modes of creolisation. In his view, the

synthetic creolisation of thinkers like Wilson Harris “seeks to unite all the different segmentary cultures into a unified national culture; it is, indeed, the dialectical synthesis of the various antithetical segmentary Creole cultures.” By contrast, segmentary creolisation, which he associates with thinkers like Brathwaite, “by its very nature, resists such unification” (334). Can wholeness be parochial? Is such a term a contradiction or a paradox? The answer to this question will determine whether Brathwaite is guilty ultimately of lapsing back into dualism or whether his concept of creolisation is truly dialectical.

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