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ISSUES OF FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY IN SURINAME AND THE ENGLISH SPEAKING CARIBBEAN.

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The societies with which this paper deals include, besides all of the former British West Indies and Suriname, the American Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Providencia and other Caribbean territories in which English is the most widely used language. Martinique, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, Haiti, Cuba, Cayenne, Santo Domingo, and their dependencies do not fall within our purview.

By "social science", I understand any and all of the following disciplines: anthropology, demography, economics, education, geography, history, jurisprudence, linguistics, political science, psychology and sociology. There may be others, applied or theoretical.

By "issues of fundamental social science theory", I understand any data or questions relevant to or arising from studies in Suriname or the English-speaking Caribbean that either enable or require us to reexamine or develop basic concepts and models of social science theory and/or method. Accordingly, the following discussion is concerned less with topics of urgent practical concern to these Caribbean countries and their social scientists but more with ways in which certain theoretical structures of social science may benefit from studies undertaken in these Caribbean societies. To pursue this objective as I understand it, we must therefore concentrate on the most general and abstract topics and avoid engagement in specific subjects such as ethnicity, population, family studies or the like. In effect, then, this discussion can only be rather abstract and general. It is to be hoped that it may be useful nonetheless.

The following general perspectives have probably been most influential in Caribbean studies over the past two decades: (1) the conception of the Caribbean as a sub-region of "Plantation America", in which societies originated and developed within plantation frameworks;¹ (2) the conception of Caribbean societies as plural societies characterized by ethnic and cultural differences within their populations, and established, modified and maintained primarily by political and military means, to which the economic organisation, though clearly very important, remains subordinate;² (3) an earlier view, which stressed the rich cultural heritages of these regional societies and advocated "acculturation perspectives" for their study, - perspectives that apply equally to Amerindian, Hindustani and other populations, as well as Africans;³ and (4) the view held by some structural-

functionalists that Caribbean societies are "consensual normative systems" integrated mainly by what Leo Despres has called a "reticulated model" of social stratification.⁴

Three other perspectives should also be noted. These are: (5) a basically race relations perspective;⁵ (6) a variety of economic interpretations of social patterns and developments which range from vulgar Marxism to detailed economic historical studies;⁶ and more recently emerging concerns with the political and industrial characteristics and organizations of these societies.⁷

For brevity we may label these alternative orientations: - Plantation society; Pluralism; Acculturation; Normative consensus; Race relations; Economistic; Political-industrial. Though clearly these are not the only social science approaches to the Caribbean community, they are perhaps the most comprehensive and influential ones.

Thus listed, several features of these divergent perspectives immediately spring to mind; for example, most of these perspectives have various versions or applications. Thus van Lier, Hoetink, Despres and I all offer somewhat different models of pluralism for Caribbean societies.⁸ Likewise, acculturation studies are as appropriate for Javanese, Hindustani (East Indian), Chinese or Amerindians, as for West Indians of African descent; they are equally appropriate in such fields as language, religion, family, marriage, sport and politics; and they may also be undertaken to indicate measures and processes of both "creolisation"⁹ and of assimilation to European norms. The economics and race relations perspectives each have a comparable variety of particular approaches. Within the past decade a variety of explicitly Marxist analyses of Caribbean conditions have appeared, stressing *inter alia* such phenomena as plantations, dependence on overseas capitalism, and incorporation into the world capitalist economy.¹⁰

A second notable feature of these several perspectives is their interdisciplinary scope. Virtually all are heavily concerned with history and geographical distribution as well as with various current social forms; and most have generated useful historical research into the foundations of contemporary social patterns. Nonetheless, some perspectives are more consciously interdisciplinary than others. For example, Marxists consider

the integration of politics and economics in their concept of "political economy" as the core of the social formations to be studied. The variable inter or multi-disciplinary implications of these differing theoretical orientations accordingly raise a number of fundamental issues in social science theory and organisation which concern the adequacy, differences, exclusiveness and integration of the various disciplinary perspectives in social science. For example, we may ask whether the "Marxists" stress on the unity of "political economy" as a particular field of phenomena and a discipline is preferable to the more conventional Western division between economics and political science. Which approach delivers better results, and by what criteria and on what scales are these measured, and how objectively?

Much the same may be said of the Marxist view of sociology and social philosophy; but many non-Marxist lawyers, historians, and linguists may also disagree as to whether or not their disciplines belong to the social sciences.

A third feature of these diverse perspectives in Caribbean studies is their many overlaps and convergences. This is immediately obvious among the perspectives of pluralism, race relations, acculturation and plantation society, together with certain economic and political science approaches. Even the work of Lloyd Braithwaite and R. T. Smith¹¹ incorporates data that illustrate theses of plantation society, acculturation, economic and political models. Indeed, almost every one of these distinct theoretical perspectives presupposes conditions and structures that are adopted as central points of departure in each of the competing frameworks. Thus, for example, pluralism clearly acknowledges the realities that underlie the political, economic, plantation, race relations and acculturation approaches, and employs structural-functional analyses, while rejecting the postulate of normative consensus as the basis of social order in these Caribbean societies, both historical and contemporary. In the pluralist perspective, the nature and basis of social order in contemporary Caribbean societies is more properly an object of investigation than a matter of assumption.

The problems presented by such frequent and complex overlaps of competing perspectives merit further attention. First, it is not surprising that each approach appropriates data from a common pool for re-study and presentation in its own distinctive analytical framework. The frequent use of common data by scholars of such differing persuasions clearly illustrates the deep historical roots and functional interconnections of those patterns that have central significance for these Caribbean societies. One effect of such intricate and multivalent relationships is that each major historical process or social institution has a variety of aspects, any one of which may be adopted and elaborated as a framework for analysis of all the others. The key questions generated by such phenomena are twofold. First by what criteria, method and reasoning can we firmly rank these competing dimensions and perspectives in order of their significance and utility as bases for a comprehensive analytic framework to guide the study of these Caribbean societies? Secondly, assuming that we are able to answer

the first question successfully, so as to be able to rank these alternatives on logically convincing grounds, what significance, if any, attaches to each of these ranked perspectives for analyses of Caribbean phenomena? Further, do these ranked perspectives have a constant relevance or meaning in all contexts, however different the phenomena or purposes of study?

These questions may perhaps raise some of the most profound issues for general social science theory to emerge from the field of Caribbean studies. Let us try to restate some of their implications simply and clearly. First, as noted above, we ask how defensible are the criteria by which the subject matter and approaches of the various social sciences have conventionally been distinguished. How necessary, useful or defensible are the contemporary divisions and boundaries of these social sciences, in terms of method as well as of substance? If we assume that the preceding questions are positively resolved to reaffirm the contemporary Western division, organization, approaches and orientations in social science from this brief review of contemporary social science approaches to the Caribbean, we must then ask: by what criteria and procedures, can we rationally and convincingly demonstrate the objective analytic superiority and relations of either of these competing perspectives for the study of West Indian societies, and their respective usefulness for our understanding of the Caribbean and other societies?

I shall try to formulate, separately, some of the many basic issues of social science theory and method which are inevitably taken together in the preceding questions. For example, some scholars assert, as a functional prerequisite, that no human society can be established or persist except on the basis of shared common values, and stratification. Theories of social pluralism normally deny that plural societies exhibit common values and frequently challenge the stratification postulate. To date, despite much ink, there has been no agreed criteria or method for resolving this contradiction except the evidence of history. Yet, in social theory, the confrontation of pluralists and consensualists is paralleled by the opposition of Marx and Engels on the one hand and Durkheim, Weber and Talcott Parsons on the other. How does social science resolve such direct and basic contradictions? By what procedures, criteria, reasoning? To what ends? For example, are the Davis-Moore "functional theory of social stratification" and its later Parsonian elaborations, or antecedent which attempt to list the "functional prerequisites of society" non-negotiable tenets of modern social science? If so, why and how? But if not, what do we have in their place?

Secondly, how and by what criteria and procedures may we convincingly demonstrate the relative significance of economic, political, cultural and other factors in the structuring and development of these Caribbean societies? This confronts us with the issue of demonstrating the "determination" of social events and structures by "causal" factors of differing kind. This question underlies the clash between Marxists, and a variety of non-Marxist theorists, about the foundation and evolution of social structures and affairs far beyond the limits of the Carib-

bean. For example, at what level of significance as a decisive factor in the "determination" of social action and social structure must we place the factors of racial, ethnic or religious difference? On what logically and empirically defensible grounds may this be done? While theorists of a liberal or Marxist persuasion commonly derive racism from socio-economic conditions, others reverse these relationships. Setting aside all humanistic values, how can social science theory adequately embrace these opposed perspectives and objectively dissolve their conflict?

Yet another perspective which has recently subsumed these Caribbean societies emphasizes their progressive incorporation as peripheral regions, since the early sixteenth century, into the expanding world system of European capitalism.¹² As regards social science theory, the fundamental questions raised by such perspectives are twofold: namely, what are the appropriate units of study for intensive or comparative purposes, given this assertion of progressive incorporation in the capitalist world economy? What are the real boundaries of these societies as systems, and how can we convincingly demonstrate them? These are old and highly variable versions of a contemporary issue in social theory: namely, given recent trends towards a single global society, what other units may we convincingly employ for analysis, and in what contexts, for what purposes? Is it any longer appropriate for us to treat such analytic units as systems of any type? More generally, using Caribbean data as our basis, we might surely ask for what purpose, when, and how is it presently appropriate for us to use "societies" as units of sociological or economic analysis, given the present and increasing levels of interdependence and unity of human society across the globe? When is it appropriate, under what conditions and by what criteria, for us to treat a given social field or unit as a discrete "system" or unit of any type for analytic purposes? Again, given the severe criticism and limited value of functional analyses in the study of Caribbean societies, what unifying theoretical schema may we put in their place? Marxism? Hardly - except in its global forms as world system or dependency theory, both of which invite severe criticism, and both of which, to an older generation brought up on Lenin and Hobson, are more familiar as imperialism.¹³

These questions of the appropriateness of societies as separate analytic units despite differences of size, composition, historical period, economy and political situation, implicitly raise the issue of criteria of comparability for analyses of societies or "social formations"; for if we adopt the global perspective as the only appropriate one, then, necessarily, no less a unit will seem sufficient or appropriate for study; but it is of course patently absurd to analyse social processes of all kinds and levels only within a global framework of reference.

The English-speaking Caribbean includes a number of minuscule societies such as Carriacou, Bequia, Union, Providencia, San Andros, the Caymans, Turks and Caicos, for which these questions of boundary and integrity are more obviously appropriate than to such moderate-sized units as Jamaica, Guyana or Barbados. However, if size and scale are criteria for independent

sociological study, then, given their great variability within this region, we must ask by what criteria and at what points such societies should be treated as subordinate sections of larger entities for purposes of analysis, and if so, entities of what kind? This question of the appropriate framework for social science study corresponds closely to that already mentioned concerning the validity or invalidity of disciplinary divisions and approaches in social science itself, and the relevance of history and time-depth to most or all of these competing approaches to Caribbean study.

Let me briefly list some other issues inherent in Caribbean studies that seem to raise fundamental questions for social science theory.

- (1) In the light of the historical demography of Caribbean societies, can social science appropriately maintain the present boundaries and relations of demography and sociology, and other disciplines? Is it not already evident that some wider, more inclusive perspective is required to integrate and theorise the relations of population and society in this region and, accordingly, beyond it, in societies of similar and different type and situation?
- (2) Given the history and structure of Caribbean societies, what methodology and what theoretical framework are best fitted for the study of such units? Could these questions also raise fundamental theoretical issues for social science generally? Surely Caribbean societies float in the no-man's-land between conventional anthropology and sociology, with respect to method and analytic models.

Ever since their foundation, these Caribbean societies, all created *de novo* by immigration from Europe, Africa and Asia, immigration which eliminated or suppressed the indigenous peoples of these areas, have undergone ceaseless change. Such change has had many modalities, variable rates, conditions, dimensions and levels, such as the economic, demographic, political, etc. It is normally unequal and uneven in its incidence and scope. So, given these conditions, how best then may social science study and analyze the development and structure of societies that are so continuously and variously in process of change? In what frameworks, by what methods, concepts and criteria? For what purposes? To test what hypotheses? To formulate what generalizations? And, given that other larger and stabler societies are likewise in the process of change, even though sometimes at slower rates and rather more steadily, by what combination of theory and method may we best grasp these phenomena, understand them and extract their significance? Clearly the structural-functional method and rather stationary models of Parsonian theory are ill-suited to Caribbean realities and to many non-Caribbean societies as well; perhaps increasingly to all. Yet, if these and their Marxist alternatives are excluded as inappropriate, what particular combinations of social science perspectives, methods and principles may best serve to encompass and penetrate these diverse Caribbean realities so as to unlock their hidden significance? It seems clear from all recent work in this region that if there is any set of superior perspectives, this will take history

fully into account, and will be intrinsically multi-disciplinary in focus.

Finally, Caribbean studies confront social science theories with three challenging questions - namely, theory for what, for whom, and how? The issue here turns on the application of social science to the practical affairs and interests of these societies. For many social scientists, fundamental theory eschews such practical application almost by definition. For others, and not only for

Marxists, social science theory without application or praxis is worthless and void. The Caribbean societies we have been discussing are acutely impoverished, unstable and at risk of collapse as the global economy plunges further and faster into chaos. Can there be any "fundamental theory" of social science or of such societies that rejects or eludes application? Indeed, more generally, can we conceive a social science theory removed from praxis altogether?

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