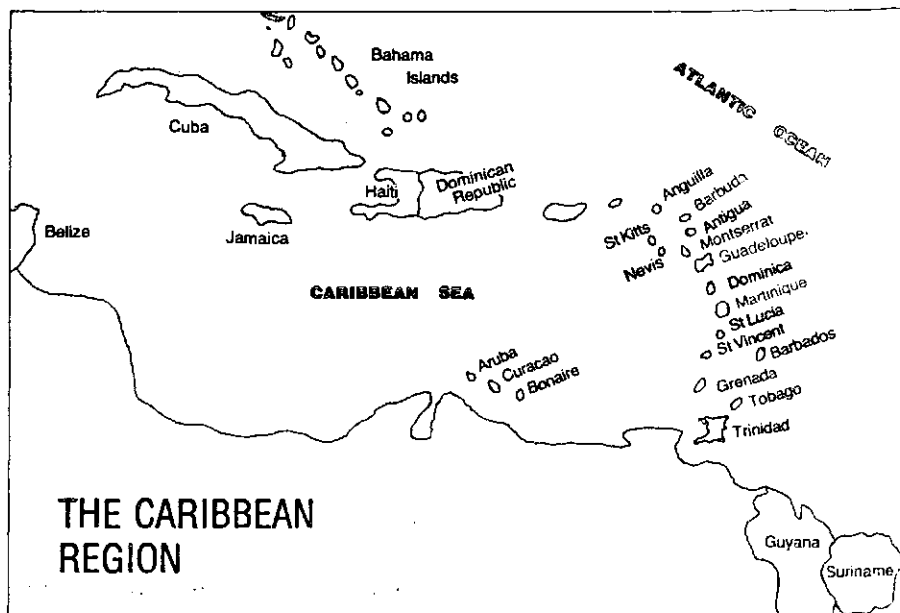


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 AND  
**C**O-OPERATION  
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CULTURE, DISCOURSE (SELF-EXPRESSION)  
 AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
 IN THE CARIBBEAN



**UNITED NATIONS**

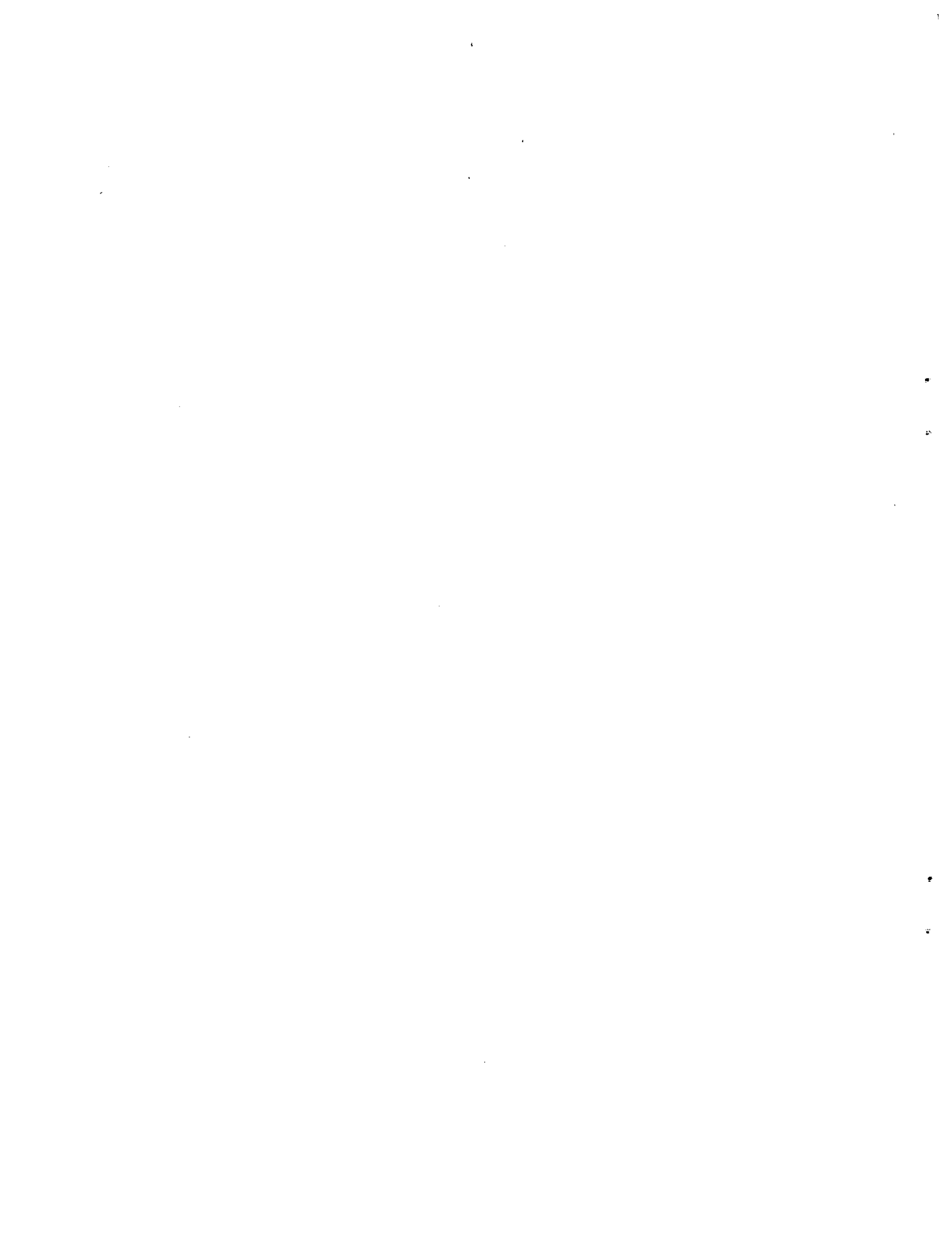
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean



CULTURE, DISCOURSE (SELF-EXPRESSION)  
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This document was prepared by Mr. Jean Casimir, staff member of the United Nations ECLA Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean. The views expressed herein are the exclusive responsibility of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Organization.



## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the impact of a given population on the physical and social environment in which it has settled explains its size, its growth rate, its differentiation into social groups, strata and classes, as well as the sum of material and spiritual means by which it ensures its regeneration. The daily practices of the population in question represent an enactment of this history and establish, on the basis of its accumulated experiences, which options are viable for the future.

From the day the Europeans set foot in the Caribbean, these elementary principles of social life have been held in abeyance. The efforts made by the colonized populations to react to their environment have been thwarted or subjected to the colonizers' interests. The geography of the insular and quasi-insular societies which were established following "the European discovery", their demography, sociology, anthropology and economy have to a certain extent become a product of the construction of the great colonial empires - in other words, of the intercourse between the colonizers and the "discovered" physical and social environment. Thus, the course of the colonized population's community life and even that of the private lives of the individuals in the community, have been traced without those involved seeing the other side of the picture, that is their intimate link with another history and distinctive and indigenous cultural contents.

The birth or rebirth of autonomous national entities, often opposed to the colonial empire, is an unforeseen and unavoidable consequence of the imperialistic adventures. The aim of social science is to determine how, between colonial dependence and control of the environment, the conditions and aptitudes necessary to achieve this rebirth, this "counter-discovery", are created.

Slowly but surely, the colonizers are losing ground. The progress made by colonized peoples in gaining control over their living conditions takes place both in opposition to and within the context of the history of the metropolitan countries. In order that this process may be accelerated, it is imperative not only to discover alternatives for survival in a world which is indeed dominated by the metropolitan countries, but also to occupy and control the institutional strongholds built by the people in response to

this domination. In other words, it is necessary to take stock of the autonomous aptitudes for collective initiative and develop them without losing sight of the context in which (and against which) these aptitudes are demonstrated.

The relationship between culture and development generally embodies the problems of the discourse on culture and development. Such a relationship is similar to that observed between history and historiography. Obviously, the manner in which we write (and perceive) history, reflects and guides the part we play in what is to become history. Mutatis mutandis, our development strategies are reciprocally conditional on the verbal expression of our development experiences.

In the Caribbean, however, this problem is further complicated because of the peculiarities of cultural and linguistic structures. The Caribbean is multilingual and multicultural. And between its languages and cultures obtain relations of asymmetry and domination.

Let us first say that all deliberate participation in what is to become history and in development strategies takes place, in our times, in the dominant languages and cultures. Moreover, the history of such social classes and elites capable of influencing collective projects for the future actually falls into the framework of the continuation of colonial history, whereas that of most of the populations concerned (and of their elites of artists, priests, healers, village chiefs, etc.) represents the other side of the picture. Finally, and to complicate matters further, the population as a whole, beyond class distinctions, operates in differing degrees, and except in the cases of Haiti and Suriname, in both the dominant and dominated cultures and languages. To suggest an equation between the terms: culture, discourse and development, and to offer a demonstration of it, is a far-reaching enterprise; here, we seek only to establish the necessity of such a venture.

## II. AWARENESS OF THE ISSUE

I shall use three texts by two of the greatest intellectuals of the Caribbean to define the issues as I see them. These texts, which date back to the late twenties and fifties, are excerpts from the works of Jean-Price and Eric Williams. Far be it from me, I would hasten to add, to consider analysing here the literary production of these authors. I have selected these texts in order to identify the terms of the equation and, at the same time, to show that these issues have been discussed for several decades.

In a paper called "The Political Leader as a Man of Culture"<sup>1/</sup> Eric Williams (1959) stresses that the basis of Greek democracy was: "recognition of the political leader as a man of culture - not of culture in the abstract nor of intellectual refinement, but of the culture of a whole people, of an entire city, of which he was the representative."

In another passage from the same text, he adds:

"For the second example of the relation between politics and culture and their interpenetration in Ancient Greece, I would recall Demosthenes in his attack on Eschines before the Jury of Athens. The powerful political exhortation of De Corona was intended for the common man of Athens, the ordinary citizen, all integrated into one electoral body, government and culture".

Williams denies the existence of an indigenous Caribbean culture. In his opinion, the problem of the West Indies lies with the destruction of pre-Colombian culture; except for a few surviving practices, African culture brought by persons reduced to slavery left few traces. He categorically claims that:

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<sup>1/</sup> In Présence Africaine (24-25), Feb/May 1959, pgs. 90-103, (Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Rome, 26 March - 1 April 1959). The author wishes to record his gratitude to Ms. P. Raymond for informing him of the existence of this article.

"The West Indian way of life and values are European or American at all levels".

Therefore, according to him, one of the main duties of the political leader is in some manner to create the national culture, either by promoting "all cultural productions which, though not indigenous, are based on an adaptation of European and American legacies", or by making a conscious effort to bring together "the dissimilar threads of culture which make up the West Indies - European, African, Indian, Chinese, Syrian":

"Today, the struggle for national culture is not only part of the struggle for political independence, but also the struggle for bringing about a new social order".

Still according to Williams, the absence of a specifically Caribbean language constitutes an important obstacle to decolonization which, in his statesman's vision, he sees as the result of a wide integration, "a cultural, economic, commercial and even political confederation of West Indian territories". To him, "This is the greatest nationalism". The following passage, with its numerous inaccuracies, serves as an example of the importance of the problems of social dialogue in the Caribbean and of the enormous difficulties of conceiving and systematizing a linguistic policy within the confines of the objectives of social development:

"The main difference between the West Indies and Africa or India in their nationalist struggles is that there is no indigenous language in the West Indies. The language of the imperial power has become the mother-tongue - English in Trinidad, French in Guadeloupe and Haiti, Spanish in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Dutch in Curaçao and Suriname. But because the process started in the days of slavery, these imperial languages have so degenerated as to become, in each territory, what is known as a kind of patois, or Creole as it is sometimes called (...) Whereas Creole is the lingua franca of each West Indian territory, there is by the very nature of the West Indies, no Creole language of the West Indies as a whole. This raises a dual problem: there is no rallying of



the nationalist movements of each territory; the absence of a common language is not only a barrier to contacts and communications between the islands (...) but also an impediment to a wider co-operation, on the cultural level, between all the West Indian territories".

Price-Mars wrote his famous book Ainsi parla l'oncle<sup>2/</sup> during the North American occupation of Haiti. Contrary to Williams, he considers that a Haitian culture exists. Whether or not it is equipped to control the social environment is a separate question. The difficulty he seems to face is that of increasing the visibility and worth of this culture. He states his concern is introduced from the first sentence of his book:

"We have for a long time nourished the ambition of building up the image, in the eyes of the Haitian people, of the value of its folklore".\*

And by folklore, he means the knowledge of the people. In the same range of ideas, the existence of a language is not even questioned, even less so, the issue of the relative value of this language. Since Price-Mars does not envisage Caribbean integration in 1928 he has less variables with which to deal than Williams, and as a result, can be more assertive:

"In any event, one would easily agree that, as it is, our Creole is a collective creation resulting from the need felt by masters and slaves in former times to communicate their thoughts to one another.(...) For the time being, it is the only instrument used by the masses and by us to express our mutual thoughts.(...) As such, idiom, dialect, patois, its social role is a fact which we cannot escape. Thanks to Creole, our oral traditions still exist, live on and evolve, and it is through Creole that we may hope to one day bridge the gap which makes of us and the people, two apparently distinct and often antagonistic entities".

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2/ Ainsi parla l'oncle, Essais d'ethnographie, New York, Parapsychology Foundation Inc., 1954 (first edition 1928).

\* Our italics.

However, 20 years later (1948), in a discussion on the problem of the society's political structure, Price-Mars is assailed by the same anguish as Williams: cultural expression is restricted. He identifies the bases of authoritarianism in Haiti and raises the issue of collective outlook (*pensée collective*) as the touchstone of national unity and development. One is tempted to conclude as he does that it is essential to "build up the image\*, in the eyes of the people, of the value of the language". He compares the Haitian society towards the end of the last century with that of 1948 in the following terms:

"Thus, since the Haitian nation exists no less, it must be in a state of immaturity which prevents it from expressing its political existence. Is it not therefore more correct to borrow the American's qualification of this state, calling us an inarticulate people?\*\*\*

Inarticulate people: A term (...) which is supposed to describe a people powerless to express its thought, ~~powerless to express and to assert its will~~, and reduced; as a result, to a "confused bunch of individuals", paralysed by ignorance, a herd ready to follow any leader, so long as he is clever enough to impose himself. Such then, was the situation in 1870-1880, which actually has not changed much since..."<sup>3/</sup>

### III. THE TERMS OF EQUATION

There are thus three terms to the equation of Caribbean social development:

- i) The existence of a culture for the encounter of the leader and his people (Williams);

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\* Our italics.

\*\* In English in the original text.

3/ Jean-Pierre Boyer Bazelais et le drame de Miragoane (A propos d'un lot d'autographes) 1883-1884, Port-au-Prince, Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1948, pp.22-23.

- ii) The existence of a language to bridge the gap between elites and masses (Price-Mars) and to ensure greater solidarity among the nationalist forces (Williams); and
- iii) The realization (or science) of the value of this culture and this language (Price-Mars).

On the first point, we could establish, contrary to what is stated by Williams and in agreement with Price-Mars, that there exists a culture (or cultures) in the Caribbean, distinct from that (those) of the colonizer(s), and that its (their) existence is to be distinguished from its (their) capacity for being asserted in all spheres of social life. But rather than delineating these distinctions, our tasks will be that of identifying the area which Western culture cannot fill, notwithstanding its indisputably dominant position, and which thus becomes the sphere of collective initiatives, and of the rules by which these are created and enhanced.

As for the second point, Williams' opinion regarding the mother-tongue of the Caribbean peoples is now outdated. We shall also set aside the notion that the absence of a Caribbean language represents an obstacle to regional integration. We retain the fact that within each country of the region, there is one lingua franca, and one only. However, some countries have no national language proper, inasmuch as they use that of the former colonial country. If it is proven that a specific area exists for the development of a national culture, the fundamental issue of the relationship between culture and development is not modified by the fact that there is no Creole in countries formerly under Spanish rule. In their case, the problem of social discourse is apparently simplified, or at least it does not present itself in the same way as for the rest of the Caribbean.

This problem, in conjunction with that of the value of national cultures and languages, calls for a distinction between culture and the "discourse" which is conveyed by a given culture. The value of a culture (and a language) is defined by the ability it affords its creators to overcome the obstacles they are confronting. By national discourse or self-expression, we mean the formulas for meeting the challenges of the environ-

ment, embodied in the local culture. It will be seen that the value of local cultures and languages is a matter of (class) perception, and as a result, is an aspect of the logic of the corresponding human sciences. The question to be clarified is that of the conditions in which indigenous creations may be put to a practical use, thus allowing their "value" to be appreciated.

Once that question has been solved, the course of scientific development (science or awareness of the value of national languages and cultures) would have been defined and here, we shall not discuss the subject further. Suffice it to say that the development of human sciences aims at the optimum use of the means of social action controlled by the populations concerned, and controlled by them alone. There is thus a need for greater visibility of national cultures and for ensuring exclusive control over the Caribbean environment; such control may be gained by providing the national cultures with the tools indispensable to deal with the context within and against which they evolve. Interpenetration of politics and culture, - i.e. the culmination of the democratization processes, such as described by Williams, - will follow. In other words, the control - knowledge and science - of the national culture and its value, as the setting in which the politician becomes a man of culture, will be achieved.

#### IV. THE FRAGMENTS OF THE COLONIAL POWERS

In order to fully understand the difficulties of achieving an "interpenetration of politics and culture" in the Caribbean, it is essential to distinguish, at the risk of repeating commonplace ideas, between two superimposed levels of history in the region (and in every colonized land): that of politics or the State on the one hand, and that of culture or the nation on the other hand.

The first concept to retain our attention is that of the national territory which, in the generally insular Caribbean societies, appears to pose no problem. Within the framework of a sociological discussion, a

territory is not the arena in which certain relationships occur, but rather that created by such relationships. It is the set of human relations which limit the space and not the opposite. This is why the territory of the Carib-Indians, while made up of the same islands we inhabit today, differs so profoundly from ours.

Then, when a foreign army and its accompanying institutions (moral persons) take over a territory, that territory and its constituent parts are gratified with a new definition. The redefinition varies according to the nature of the dominant classes of the colonizing nations. An "overseas territory" is created which can exist only within the geography of the colonial power. In fact, one observes an expansion of the conquering nation's territory which, together with that of the other colonial empires, ends up by encompassing the whole planet.

As for the habitat of the conquered nation or nations, this is presented as a distinct sub-set within the imperial geographies. New meanings, belonging to alien thought patterns, are imposed upon these territories and their constituent parts. It evidently follows that in the collective thinking of the conquered nation or nations, there is an overlapping of two systems of definitions, superimposed upon two systems of social relationships. (In order to facilitate the discussion which follows, it will be understood that the term "conquered nation" refers to all those now existing within borders created by the colonizers).

For the past five centuries, the army and other institutions of colonialism have placed themselves between the subjugated nation and its physical and social environment, thus preventing it from giving real expression to its internal differentiation (and therefore to its particular history). They have made it part of a new totality and converted it into one fragment, homogenous in its necessary ignorance and backwardness. A nation has thus become "a people powerless to express its thought, powerless to express and assert its will". It has lost its self-expression and may well be physically destroyed, to the conquering nation's advantage and, more precisely, to the benefit of the latter's dominant classes.

By self-expression or discourse of a nation, is meant the expression of its future, as upheld by the institutions (moral entities, as well as norms, laws and customs) which make up its specificity. A nation ensures its regeneration, thanks to the institutions through which it gives meaning and forms to the environment. Its discourse is this shaping of its continuity, the design of its future physiognomy as a sequence and consequence of a common past. The concept of discourse or self-expression of a nation is more limited than that of culture; it is an attempt at defining a projection into the future of a national culture. This leads to the observation that a conquered nation may lose the means of deliberately expressing itself while not necessarily losing its culture.

The expansion of the conquering nations' territory goes hand-in-hand with their class structures becoming worldwide. A bridge is created between two groups as different from one another as two national societies can be, and the oppressed nation as a whole becomes the most oppressed class of the colonial empire. "The confused bunch of individuals" occupying the new geography is a concrete achievement of the colonizers, and not a mere optical illusion or methodological aspect of the question. This "confused bunch" is the result of a new individuation system, and of its cleavages. A single path to evolution is open to the colonized peoples; it results in either the New Englands (the colonized people having been massacred) or the New Spains (the survivors having been submitted to one form or another of oppression). In the first case, a national way of thinking disappears; in the second, the means of expression of this thinking are forever obstructed.

The absence or near-absence of indigenous populations in the Caribbean represents no difference between the region and Latin America as far as concern the conflicts between colonized and colonizers. Blacks transplanted into the Caribbean or elsewhere in America established themselves as conquered nations. The question is to know what becomes of these conquered nations, Black or Amerindian, in the framework of the development process planned by the metropolitan powers, and how they will set themselves free from their new condition as oppressed classes.

As everyone knows, the partitioning of the world by the colonial empires did not take place in an amiable manner and the powers of that time have met with differing fortunes. The fragments of metropolitan societies made responsible for administering and exploiting the colonies suffered the consequences of these rivalries. The difference between the interests of these agents and those of their mother-country became more and more visible. Under the pressure of the local dominant classes (Creoles), these fragments emancipated themselves and formed new, so-called independent "nations".

Two points must be stressed. These class-struggles imply a certain mobilization of the colonial populations, and are reflected in nationalist struggles. The alliance of classes against the colonial power is expressed in an opposition between Creoles and agents of the colonial power. What is more, before these secessions occurred, the independent nation concept did not exist in the vocabulary of Creole America. The great Aztec, Inca and Maya States or Empires, and the Black quilombos, palenques or bush societies were not perceived as independent nations or States.

The nineteenth century independent nation - or more accurately, emancipated nation - is encumbered with aberrations inherited from colonial times. Just overseas territories could not, in the eyes of the colonizers, establish themselves as countries, likewise for the groups which cut off their links with the colonial empire, it is inconceivable that the conquered peoples (independently of the degree of destruction of their own structures) should be considered as nations in the full sense. The subjugated indigenous nations are not involved in the conflict between creoles and colonials.<sup>4/</sup>

Both in the colonization process and in the changeover from the colonial to the national State, we find double crossroads: on the one hand, of nations and social classes, and on the other hand, of two conflicting ideological

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<sup>4/</sup> Severo Martínez Peláez. La Patria del Criollo, Costa Rica, EDUCA, 1979, 5a.ed. "La patria del criollo (...) no era de modo alguno la patria del indio (...). La tierra ganada, involucra al indio. Y cuando el criollo tiene la vivencia del legado recibido de sus mayores, de 'lo que hoy gozamos', el indio está allí como algo que existe junto a la tierra y existe para trabajarla". (pgs. 254-255).

positions - two modes of self-expression - each doing its best to transform (to change the form of) reality.

The establishment of the emancipated State follows the colonial pattern: the aim of its nation-building process is to transform the natives into a series of identical units of political expression. For it to be achieved it is necessary to stifle any vision of the future not coinciding with that of the dominant classes; There is thus no difference between the national/emancipated State and the colony, as far as concerns the functioning of the official ideology. This explains why, when the colonial powers lose their immediate hold on their overseas territories, the institutions they had set up could survive these revolutions as remote as ever from the outlook of the local populations.

However, la patria del criollo differs from the colony, inasmuch as it attempts a form of nation-building implying both conflict and constant dialogue with the former colonial power. Indeed, it is this double implication which characterizes it as a special type of nation. The destruction of the conquered peoples is now pursued with a view to their integration into the large national family. The State claims to "educate" the indigenous to endow him with a new identity: the official self-expression, the Creole Word.

States born of the break-up of colonial empires differ from those who created such empires in two essential ways: in the rigidity of their borders and in the nature of their class relations. It is seldom pointed out that they are in fact the only States confined to a single fixed territory. Not only do the colonial countries own so-called overseas territories, but their political activities still have worldwide importance, as in the best years of preceding centuries.

What is more, a metropolitan country is a national unit in which a gradual process of class differentiation took place. An emancipated State is a set of social classes always in the process of becoming a nation. Even though the behaviour of the dominant classes may be identical in both cases, there is still a basic distinction between them, as far as concerns the result of their behaviour: the dominant classes



of the metropolitan countries cater to the needs of the State and must thus maintain the national cohesion which presided to their own existence; in the emancipated States, the dominant classes, in order to safeguard the peculiar political apparatus under their control, have to ensure that the nation-building process never turns into a course of evolution that can be completed. La patria del Criollo is a project which is constantly regenerated as a further project. It is this regeneration which creates the Creole, and serves as a basis for the limited cohesiveness from which the dominant local classes emerge.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the emancipated State is imprisoned within a territory inherited from colonialism and within a future contained in that of the former metropolitan country. The national territory, remains in actual fact a fragment of the metropolitan country's territory, and the future of the independent State is a fraction of the future designed by the metropolitan country.

The context of indigenous nations is in contrast with this situation. Colonial exploitation, by silencing their self-expression, keeps their daily practices within the boundaries of their visible environment and short-term time horizon. The problem is further complicated by the fact that as time goes on, and as the metropolitan countries tighten their control on the environment, the social category formed by the Creoles becomes obsolete. This group's original division into social classes becomes more and more visible and the dominated sectors find themselves in a situation, every day closer to that of the indigenous. In other words, the number of citizens actually able to control or simply influence the emancipated State is each day reduced.

At the same time, the nation-building project deteriorates at each re-formulation. The Creole nation and its emancipated State lose their raison d'être, as their control over the environment keeps depleting. It becomes increasingly difficult to perceive the borders of the national territory and to safeguard the State's aptitude to define a plan for the future, even in the medium-term. More and more, national economies and emancipated Governments are unable to avoid operating within a time limit and a space defined exclusively in terms of the metropolitan country's proposals for the future.

To remedy this rather uncomfortable situation, the former colonies, or shall we say, the underdeveloped countries, have taken action on two fronts: on the one hand, we see the creation of regional integration projects and the non-aligned movement, aiming at the establishment of a new international order; on the other hand, we have the reawakening of nationalities, or the creation of new class alliances aimed at redefining both state and nation. It is in this latter context that the issue of the relationship between culture, discourse (self-expression) and development arises.

#### V. NATIONAL INTERESTS AND CLASS INTERESTS

Very often in sociological literature, reference is made to the relationship between national and class interests, or to the transformation of the interests of a particular sector of the society into interests of the society as a whole. For European countries, it does not seem necessary to analyse systematically this transfer. Attention is very rarely paid to the links between the primary units of any social formation (the family and the community) and the macro-units (the classes) which determine their evolution. Discussion is limited to the progress of forms of work, types of enterprises and remuneration, and, in general, to the improvement of the population's living standards.

If it is granted that underdeveloped countries are collections of social classes in the process of becoming nations, it would appear that the issue is to be seen in the reverse. It would be a matter of determining the conditions in which national interests become class interests. It could seem that the answer is obvious: i.e. when the oppressed majority class comes into power; but it is not so simple. Without claiming to solve such a far-reaching problem, we would like to show that nowadays, whereas all social classes in the Caribbean share similar characteristics and, as a result, similar national interests, the vested interests of the dominant classes lie in stifling the specific national characteristics which they themselves display.

In the same range of ideas, we would recall that the oppressed classes, in our wide open societies, have found a way to safeguard their national characteristics, which in no way involves an open struggle for the defence of their economic interests or the assumption of any power in the foreseeable future. The difficulty of transforming national interests into class interests or vice versa is precisely, to our mind, the stumbling block in the democratization process in the Caribbean, especially if we insist on considering the question of power in terms of a State confined within a given territory.

In the Caribbean, as in every colonized region, certain phenomena appear at the local level, then disappear from the social conscience (from the vision of the dominant classes and from the dominant vision) to give way to realities coming from worldwide spheres which, to the oppressed people, are only fads and weird illusions. I would mention two examples of this, one of which will be examined in more detail later.

French lexicon-based Creole was, as indicated by Price-Mars, born of the need for ~~communication~~ between the (first) masters (petty whites) and their captives. At the beginning of colonization, it was the language of the so-called French islands. Everyone spoke it and, roughly, nothing else. Then, French became institutionalized in France, the Court started using it; a section of the colonists took their distance from the local population and, along with the members of the civil service and the newly arrived grands blancs, they adopted French.<sup>5/</sup>

It is obvious that the substitution was dictated by class interests. It is just as evident that the transfer did not happen overnight. The amusing point is that, as if by miracle and as in the good dreams of the dominant classes, the so-called French islands became French-speaking. And centuries have gone by, with the fallacy widely believed that in France's Caribbean colonies, French is spoken as well as a sub-product (a degenerated version, as Williams would call it) of this language. The ill-advised think that French

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<sup>5/</sup> F.L. Prudent. Des baragouins à la langue antillaise. Analyse historique et sociolinguistique du discours sur le créole. Paris. Ed. Carinèennes, 1980. Jean Bernabé. "Allocution". Bulletin de la CSTM, Martinique, No.1, pp.22-27.

chronologically came first, and Creole second. Upon this optical illusion (class illusion), is built up a whole series of institutions-organisms (schools for example) which, of course, can never lose their characteristics as an undue imposition. In the formation of Caribbean societies as well as the upbringing of Caribbean individuals, Creole comes before French (and any official language, for what matters).

The second example, that we shall only mention, refers to the family. There are few fields of observation that are as embarrassing for the local sociologists. In our artificially assembled societies, family happens to be a social innovation. The Caribbean society is not made up of the sum or the combination of individual families. On the contrary, society was formed, chronologically speaking, before family; as for the nuclear family, it emerges only after an improvement, always liable to setbacks, of living standards.

In the case of the Whites, whether pirates, buccaneers or indentured, they made up societies of males who then received cargoes of women, most of them prostitutes, which they purchased against cash money and with whom they organized the so-called family units. As for the Blacks, they were not in a position to create such units. Not only were they mated against their will (and whole islands were entirely reserved for the breeding of Blacks), but father, mother and offsprings circulated as separate goods on the market and were disposed of according to this rationale. To establish a viable pro-creation unit became a feat and a social conquest, both for the petty Whites and the enslaved Blacks. It was upon such a social invention that all sorts of legal codes, inspired by one version or another of Judeo-Christian religions, were superimposed.

Thus, on the one hand, whether it be the history of language or the history of family, none has common grounds with what obtains in Europe or in Africa. On the other hand language and family are creations of the dominant classes as well as fundamentals of Caribbean nationality. What has been said about language and family goes for education, religion, peasantry, land tenure systems, principles of inheritance, relations with community authorities or colonial/national authorities, ... in a word, the whole oppressed culture becomes a social conquest, a product of class struggles.

It seems to me that efforts for economic survival fit in with a pattern (a rationality), not yet mastered by scientific reflection. The search for solutions to class conflicts cannot be limited to mere economic interests, to the mere improvement of living standards, without guaranteeing these social innovations and achievements. Therefore, I would suggest that the concept of class consciousness, in the study of oppression in the Caribbean, includes the defence of institutions created to improve living conditions. In order to survive colonial oppression, these local institutions had to be invented. As a whole, they constitute the basis of the oppressed culture, and cannot be separated from the defence of the collective economic interests of the dominated classes. Living standards (the result) and way of life (the insitutionalized means of achieving this result) are part of the same indivisible unit. The results and the means of achieving them could certainly be improved and developed; but these two dimensions must be included in the same process.

#### VI. THE LIEU OF NATIONAL SELF-EXPRESSION

The problem is to show how, in the nation-building or decolonization process, certain social classes set themselves apart from the rest of the population and manage to satisfy their material needs at the expense of endogenous institutions. We shall try to identify the different stages of this process and to prove, by the same token, that the local dominant classes stand to benefit if the effort for nation-building is constantly regenerated as an unimplemented project: the project (or the self-expression) of the amancipated State.

The transformation of a colonized territory into a fragment of the metropolitan country's geography represents only one side of the picture. The ultimate goal of colonial public life is to ensure the greatest possible exploitation of the colonized people. This extreme exploitation tends to reduce to a strict minimum the areas necessary for the reproduction of the life of the colonized people, and affects even the framework of their private lives. By denying them the product of their work and, if possible, the vital minimum for their biological reproduction, the colonist at the

same time denies them access to the forms of public and private life of the metropolitan country. The conqueror thus unintentionally provides a space for the formalization of family and community structures and, as a result, for new cultural structures. These aim, among other things, at an optimum distribution of the little which escapes the colonial monopolization of available resources. While breaking up the dominated groups and imposing on them new forms of individuation, this unrestricted form of exploitation paradoxically gives rise to the creation of new forms of social life and of an oppressed culture. As a consequence, the development of endogenous solutions is one of the contradictory results of colonial exploitation.

These endogenous ways of perceiving, conceiving and reorganizing the environment, naturally based on the surviving traditions of cultures dating from before the conquest (the dissimilar threads mentioned by E. Williams) are systematically looked down upon or at best, considered banalities by the colonizing nation. However, it must be conceded that the latter is not entirely wrong because, at first sight, these innovations do not jeopardize the colonial system. On the contrary, in the short-term, they ensure its reproduction, by allowing the colonized people to receive less than their vital minimum requirements and still survive, preserve their sanity in spite of the folly of their situation (remember the African-born enslaved) and to enjoy social solidarity in spite of dehumanizing oppression.

In a word, colonialism tends to destroy the conquered nations while at the same time establishing the conditions necessary for the birth of a new national entity. In the Caribbean, this tendency is exacerbated. The destruction of the conquered nations takes place in an environment different from the habitat in which the survivors of the massacres had to evolve. The African diaspora is not a tribal emigration, but the transfer of isolated individuals whom the colonial system attempts to deprive of any possibility of taking into their hands even their individual destiny. We have analysed elsewhere the creation of new nations from this breakup/reassembly.<sup>6/</sup>

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<sup>6/</sup> Jean Casimir, La Cultura Oprimida, México, Nueva Imagen, 1981

The effort made by exploited people to reorganize themselves into new nations, around cultures which are themselves new, is the object of detestable misrepresentations; as these cultures lack institutions specifically responsible for producing knowledge, they are unable to even protect themselves against the aggression of the dominant cultures. The oppressed people remain powerless to deal with the institutions of the colonial system and with the definitions imposed by that system. As a result, they are unable to participate within the colonial framework, in a collective struggle for the defence of their class interests.

What must be stressed is that class exploitation within colonialism gives rise to contradictions expressed, in the long run, in social cohesiveness and cultural creation. The parameters of class struggle which, in this context, is always a national liberation struggle, are defined in this way.

The interpenetration of class and cultural conflicts is particularly complex in view of the fact that, in the Caribbean, excluding Haiti and Suriname, the vast majority of people share the two existing cultural systems. We have already mentioned that underdeveloped countries are composed of a collection of social classes striving with difficulty towards the building of a nation. It therefore seems necessary at this level of the discussion, to analyse how the gulf between colonizers and colonized is transmitted to the latter, dividing them into "masses" and "elites", making them "often antagonistic bodies", and transferring beyond the colonial period a class structure capable of interfering with the decolonization and nation building processes.

In the colonial system, it is particularly effective to show off one's cultural alterity and thus secure the solidarity of ethnic partners, if not of one's equals, when in want for protection from the misdeeds of the conquerors. But in public life, and especially at the work place, to show off one's cultural distinctiveness, is one sure way of courting disaster.

The inevitability of acculturation/assimilation practices is rooted in this need to refrain from showing signs of one's ethnic and cultural identity in order to benefit from the better opportunities of life. Inasmuch as the colonized people as a community are not in a position to put an end to national oppression and class-exploitation, individual emancipation or an effort at

assimilation is the only option to be adopted if living standards are to be improved. In this context, emerge the native private and public administrators: the first wage-earning employees of the Caribbean. This is the basic nucleus of the middle classes. The oppressed people, aspiring quite naturally to a better life, see that of these administrators (the public servant being the most privileged of all) as an alternative to their condition of poverty. All the habits, standards, principles and values which govern these class transfers are expressions of the local dominant culture, a colonial version of the metropolitan country's culture.

The dynamism of the local dominant culture is subordinated to the progress of the metropolitan country's economic, political and ideological structures. As a result, the acculturation/assimilation process never comes to an end. The middle classes, freed from slavery, servitude or low-paid manual labour, live haunted by the ghost of national alterity. They must constantly set a safe distance between their social class and the underprivileged; this allows them to gain the colonizers' favours (social promotion) and to guarantee for their descendants the cultural and ideological means necessary for safeguarding a minimum of material well-being.

And thus, a set of rules and principles with reference, at the outset, to public life, tends to penetrate the spheres of the private lives of certain sectors of the local population. The aspiration, undoubtedly legitimate, for an average living standard, and for the preservation of this living standard, calls for a change of life-style, as success comes. This is possible because, with a decrease in their exploitation, these sectors gain access to material conditions which allow them to organize their lives in the European way.

This repudiation of the local heritage should not be confused with a lack of knowledge or information concerning these national cultures. It is precisely by admitting and justifying the prevalence of colonial culture and civilisation that the middle classes build an insurmountable obstacle to their assimilation into Western culture. Recognition of the pre-eminence of the official dominant culture implies that the oppressed



culture is visible. Thus, it is not that the middle class does not perceive the national culture with which it is impregnated whether it likes it or not, but that it refuses to perceive it. This refusal represents the unequivocal expression of the worthlessness of the local culture for the concrete circumstances in which the middle class evolve.

Notwithstanding this fact, since these middle classes must renew their credentials each time the metropolitan country moves towards new development horizons, their constant efforts to adapt, produce in the end, certain qualitative changes in the relations between the oppressed national culture and the dominant culture. The need to reject national cultures must be understood as an expression of their class interests, while the indefinite reproduction of these same national cultures constitutes the material basis of their existence as a peculiar class. The acculturation project, or more precisely the westernization of the masses, represents the very raison d'être of the middle classes. The end product of their activities is to ensure that the colonized milieu never ceases to be a fragment of the metropolitan country, even after independence/emancipation.

The changes in the relations between dominant and oppressed cultures brought about by the full development of the middle classes, can be illustrated by a description of the fate of the languages spoken in the Caribbean. It is a known fact that in most of the countries in the region, people are at least bilingual. Or rather, they live in a diglossic situation. The basic characteristic of their linguistic structure is that the two languages are not used indiscriminately in any circumstance. Some activities take place in Creole (they generally refer to private or community life and manual work), whereas others take place in the official language (these deal with public life, particularly politics, legal matters, administration, schooling, European religion, ...).

Since public and private life are organized in different cultural frameworks, and the former tends to stifle the latter, diglossia illustrates the distinct uses of the two cultures. In principle, the official culture and the "imperial language" serve primarily to perpetuate the world of colonialism, whereas the oppressed culture and the national language remain the environment par excellence of endogenous creation.

The improvement of living standards in the colonial milieu is conditional on a mastery of the official culture and language. Thus, this "imperial language" tends to become the language spoken in certain middle-class families, and forms of organization and values of private life in the metropolitan country concomitantly take root in the indigenous colonial milieu. In this manner, at a given time in colonial history, official languages become the mother-tongue of a certain minority. It results from this, the upcoming of generations scarcely exposed to the national culture and able to do without the communal solidarity which defines that culture. This is the class of "petty bourgeois" ready to take the place of the colonists when independence is gained.

The ill effects of this reduced visibility of the national culture should not, however, be exaggerated. A series of very complex phenomena occurs: first, because this petty bourgeoisie is not really a dominant class capable of autonomously pursuing its development plans; second, because to carry out its role of intermediary, it must maintain contact with the colonized (or recently freed from colonialism) manual workers; and finally, from its comings and goings in the metropolitan countries its members soon become aware of their status as second-class citizen and are forced to expressly resort to forms of national solidarity.

In the region, the existence of Creole languages used as lingua franca before and after independence, gives great effectiveness to the oppressed cultures and makes a total break impossible between the middle classes and the exploited classes. Several mechanisms must contribute to this phenomenon. Short of more exhaustive research, we shall limit ourselves to the analysis of the use of official and national languages.

It may be categorically stated that the Caribbean child and youth enjoy themselves solely in Creole, and from this is derived a fundamental ambiguity of the institution par excellence of cultural domination:

"The analysis of the 'terrorist' role of the French language in school", writes L.F. Prudent, "would be incomplete if the other side of the picture were forgotten: school is also the place where a good part of the urban petty bourgeoisie discovers and learns Creole."<sup>7/</sup>

It should thus be noted that even in the case of the minority for whom the official language becomes a mother-tongue, the child obtains an intensive knowledge of the vernacular when its circle of interpersonal relations is widened and when it moves about

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<sup>7/</sup> op.cit. p. 124-125.

autonomously within the community. In effect, it would be interesting to examine the use of the vernacular by the middle classes and the local dominant classes in Caribbean countries, as a rite of passage and initiation to adult life. The vernacular, language of the nation, stands out in its relations with the dominant language, as the medium of disobedience, of individual initiatives, of freedom discussed with peers and controlled by them.

The problem is that what the vernacular, as used by the classes which have detached themselves from the masses, transmits of the national culture is not very well known. In any event, on the one hand, it may be concluded that in the Caribbean, there are social pressures which go against the establishment of a distance between the bearers of the dominant or official cultures and those of the oppressed cultures. No physical or social distance separates the persons and groups living these cultures, except in the cases of Haiti and Suriname. The pluri-cultural situation of the Caribbean is certainly not that of the Andean or Meso-American countries, where there is a veritable gulf between Amerindians and the rest of the population. It is more like the distances between Whites or Mestizo peasantry in Latin America and urban classes of these regions.

On the other hand, it is also undeniable that dominant and dominated cultures are distinctly different from one another even though they may be closely related. They maintain asymmetric relations; the colonial dominant culture initiates all kinds of measures aimed at destroying and eradicating the local culture, basis of national cohesiveness. This cultural war is but an aspect of colonial oppression. The colonial dominant culture becomes the official culture of the independent/emancipated State and the cultural war takes an ambiguous turn, which permits it to develop a basis for the evolution of the middle class and petty bourgeois sectors. The self-expression of the independent State accommodates that of the nation, but takes care not to formulate a plan which would destroy its class structure.

#### VII. OBSTACLES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL SELF-EXPRESSION

Efforts to destroy the endogenous sources of reflection and creativity are an aspect of class-domination in the region. During the decolonization or national liberation process, the local culture gradually becomes more

visible. This trend is irreversible because it corresponds to the necessity for the new power elites to legitimize their position. Just like colonization, the decolonization process occurs through the defence of the interests of certain social classes. The dominant and middle classes of the Caribbean endeavour to safeguard their material interests, while advancing on the path to decolonization and regional development. Price-Mars published Ainsi parla l'oncle during the second decade of this century; the supporters of the Negritude movement would turn a deaf ear to his ideas on the use of Creole; and certain of them would even set themselves up as heralds of the world-wide Francophonie movement. More recently, once the new elites gained power in the so-called English-speaking Caribbean, the supporters of the Black Power movement would oppose White domination and advocate a return to Africa: an Africa as removed from the masses as the culture of the metropolitan countries, and as close to the middle classes as Western culture.

It is therefore necessary to fully understand the deep meaning of the alibis invented by the elites in order not to assume the national culture and so as not to make too much progress towards a total democratization of social relations; their control and direction. At the same time, the ambiguity and difficulty involved in any cultural development project directly aimed at mental decolonization are evident. Such projects help to give legitimacy to the power elites but conflict with their class interests.

Nonetheless, the most difficult point to explain is that the dominated classes themselves do not seem eager to seize the reins of power and to expose the splendour of their national culture for all to see. This is one of the most inner characteristics of social negotiation in the Caribbean. In contrast with the anxiety felt in some sectors of the middle classes, especially those submitted to the brainwashing of the mass media, calm and carefree attitude of the dominated classes seems to indicate that they do not feel that their national culture is on the verge of losing the war waged on it by the official culture. For the oppressed classes, it is therefore a question of choosing between, on the one hand, a compromise with the dominant structures, thereby achieving certain standard of living

in the short term, and on the other hand, far-reaching structural reforms, full of glorious promises for the future, but uncertain.

What differentiates the exploited peoples of the Caribbean from those of most of the South American continent, for example, is that they are all in touch with the former metropolitan countries and especially their labour markets. They have access to these opportunities, which are not to be looked down upon considering the levels of unemployment in the region, ensuring that they gain some workable mastery of the world of contents embodied in the official culture and that they have the possibility of emigrating to the metropolitan country.

This results in an overflow of the Caribbean whose territory covers not only the reduced space where our peoples were established, but also the ghettos and suburbs of almost all the large cities north of the Atlantic. In other words, in the face of the failure of the local dominant classes to prevent the increasing decline of the population's standards of living, the latter migrates and reproduces its cultural forms in the very midst of the capitals of the great empires. As yet, there are no endogenous solutions which can encompass local institutions and cultures and thus satisfy the customs of the masses, while guaranteeing them a better tomorrow. Therefore, with the scattering of the Caribbean nation(s), it becomes more and more difficult to conceive a project for the future, if the traditional borders inherited from colonialism are to be respected.

For Eric Williams, the politician is a man of culture. However, it is a fact that the inhabitants of the region make no institutionalized effort to carry out the scientific research aiming at the inventory of their cultural heritage and its systematic application to development. The region does not have a single school of anthropology, and less so a regional centre for cultural research. How could we blame the Caribbean Black Power movement for seeking inspiration in distant Africa, when local culture as a deliberately chosen subject matter for scientific reflection and practice is not being processed and remains, for what matters, even more distant and more inaccessible than African culture?

Price-Mars suggests the use of Creole, since it is the only bridge between elites and masses. But it is hardly surprising that supporters of the Negritude movement, in spite of their doctrinary stand, should use only French to express themselves. It could certainly be assumed that the national languages of the Caribbean, like any other language, contain virtually all styles of discourse; but it is a fact that these styles are neither developed nor codified; even less so, are they systematically taught. The development of a literary, scientific, political, technical discourse and, particularly the creation of a public capable of participating in such discourse, is another collective task which should be institutionalized without delay.

We have tried, in this paper, to show that the oldest form of class exploitation, established upon the arrival of the Europeans, consists of depriving oppressed nations "of the power to express their thought". We have recalled that the underdeveloped States of America belong to the same tradition and that the class interests of their dominant sectors are safe only if the national culture (or cultures) has (or have) no influence on the creation of options for the future, whereby the anti-colonial tradition would be carried on.

We would propose, to parody the Bible, that in the beginning (of the nation) was the Word. The exercise of the nation's right to express its collective thought must be restored. Culture is an experience which is lived, and its bearers must be able to deliberately use it to measure up to the problems of private and public life.

We assert that the national culture was created in extraordinarily difficult conditions, so that living standards of the oppressed classes might be improved. We therefore suggest that contrary to the strategy of the dominant classes of the Caribbean, the exploited people continue to accept great sacrifices which, while safeguarding - if not improving - their living standards, ensure the reproduction of their life-style. We also suggest that the best proof of this line of behaviour is illustrated in the result of migrations to the large cities of the industrialized countries.

We would conclude that the Caribbean can develop only if it ensures that its way of life, its own culture, blossoms out. It seems to us that this process starts with the institutionalization of a collective effort for systematic research and teaching, at all levels, of the local culture, as well as for the development of national languages. The economic problems we face cannot be solved by the manipulation of economic variables. The development of economics must go hand-in-hand with that of anthropology because in the Caribbean, the every day struggle of the oppressed people shows that in the forming of their class consciousness, both the economic and cultural dimensions are equally relevant.

