

Out of Many, One People? Diaspora Studies, Postcoloniality, and the (Un)Making of Caribbean Identities¹

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Introduction

Over the past thirty years studies of diaspora – a term which has been applied to an increasingly wide variety of historical and cultural contexts - has grown dramatically. A major reason for this is a growing struggle among scholars since the 1980s to “capture the fluidities of the contemporary world” (Cohen 129) – a world which has been much complicated by the cross-currents unleashed through the dissolution of colonial empires, the burgeoning of post-colonial identities, the countervailing pressure to ossify political boundaries through the universal application of the Western model of the nation state, and the economic imperatives of globalization as articulated by international capital. It is not surprising that the challenge posed by these dramatic structural changes in international geopolitics and political economy rocked the foundations of the Academy itself during these years, with postmodernist and postcolonial discourses questioning and undermining traditional disciplinary boundaries and practices, and giving rising to vibrant new areas such as ‘Gender Studies’ and ‘Cultural Studies’, which, are almost by definition, ‘trans-disciplinary’ and ‘trans-national’ in scope.

Historians, by training and perhaps by instinct, tend to be highly conservative in their engagement with and assimilation of new ideas: this seems to be especially true in the Caribbean. Yet even in my own discipline, the influence of these debates may be seen in the powerful emergence as critical areas of study over the past twenty years of ‘local’ and ‘intimate’ histories on the one hand, and of ‘comparative’, ‘transnational’ and ‘world’ history on the other. To take just one of these approaches as an example, Patrick Manning (2005) provides this definition of ‘world history’:

To put it simply, world history is the story of connections within the global community. The World historian’s work is to portray the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past. The source material ranges in scale from individual family tales to migrations of peoples to narratives encompassing all humanity. World history is far less than the sum total of all history. Nevertheless, it adds to our accumulated knowledge of the past through its focus on connections among historical localities, time periods, and themes of study. (3)

It will be seen from this definition that ‘diaspora’ has a powerful connection to, and could be considered a critical theme and organising concept in, ‘world’ history. It is not surprising, therefore, that Manning has progressed from this perspective on ‘World History’ to write a global history of Migration, and more recently, has drilled down further to focus on the African Diaspora (see Manning 2010).

For historians of the Caribbean (no less than scholars in other disciplines) it has always been important to understand the processes and effects associated with diaspora, since Caribbean societies have been defined and shaped throughout their long history by successive waves of inward and outward migration. Nevertheless, the imperatives of post-colonial ‘nation-building’ have ensured that it is the ‘nation-state’ that remains the privileged unit of analysis among most historians based in the region. As a result, determined efforts continue up to the

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present – not least by historians at the University of the West Indies and their graduate students - to create 'national' histories of individual island states, and to enshrine in them appropriate 'national' heroes that embody these imagined identities.² Yet the rise of 'diaspora studies' in the postcolonial period urges us to consider a rather different agenda that could be followed in the developing historiography of the region.

With this context in mind, this paper reviews the (postcolonial) rise of 'diaspora studies' with special reference to our region, considering how this discourse has developed, and outlines some of the insights that have been imparted about the nature of Caribbean identity as a result.

The Concepts of 'Diaspora' and 'African Diaspora'

As Robin Cohen reminds us, the word 'diaspora' comes from the Greek: the verb *speiro* – to sow, and the preposition *dia* – over (ix). While its initial meaning referred to dispersal of a people through migration and colonization, it's usage through history until recent times gave it 'a more sinister and brutal meaning', particularly – but not exclusively - as it was applied to the history of the Jews: 'Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile.' It is only relatively recently that the term has come to imply, in a more neutral sense, a strong collective identity exterior to some real or putative 'homeland.' Much recent work has also shown that many peoples across the world and throughout history have been involved in diasporas. Cohen organised his book on 'Global Diasporas' published in 1997 according to a typology, consisting of 'victim', 'labour', 'trade', 'imperial' and 'cultural' diasporas. These are really ideal types: whilst acknowledging that some examples of diaspora do not fit neatly into these categories, and in some cases might easily be considered under one heading rather than another, or under more than one heading, he nevertheless offers this as a viable means of tackling a vast and complex concept. It is noteworthy that Cohen devotes a chapter in his book to the Caribbean because he considers the Caribbean case to be the model example of a 'cultural diaspora.'

In numerical terms, at least – but perhaps in ideological terms as well - the most significant diaspora affecting the Caribbean region in late colonial and more recent post-colonial times was the African Diaspora. According to Michael Gomez, "Redistributions of European and Asian populations have also marked history, but the African Diaspora is unique in its formation. It is a story, or collection of stories, like no other" (1).

The concept of the African diaspora has developed through several phases. According to Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley:

For African Americans . . . the concept of diaspora and its particular meaning in New World black cultures has clear biblical roots. Early activists, historians, and clergy frequently cited Psalms 68:31, which says, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God," as a way of describing the black (world) condition and the source of liberation. This understanding of Ethiopia as the metaphor for a black worldwide movement against injustice, racism, and colonialism lay at the heart of the early historical scholarship on the role of African peoples in the making of the modern (and ancient) worlds. (14)

Many of the first generations of black intellectuals in the West during the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – ranging from Ottobah Cuagano, Olaudah Equiano

²It is notable that recent changes in the BA History programme at the University of the West Indies has seen a growing emphasis on local island histories in the respective campus territories (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados).

and Frederick Douglass to Blyden, Du Bois and Garvey – understood the relationship of African peoples to the modern world in this way.

However, as Patterson and Kelley also point out, this 'Ethiopianism' was replaced by a somewhat different understanding of the term 'African diaspora' during the course of the twentieth century, as activists on one hand, and scholars on the other, debated the meaning of black identity in the era of African decolonization. Of course many of those in both camps were of African descent themselves. During this period the 'African Diaspora' served both as a political term, with which to emphasize unifying experiences of African peoples dispersed by the slave trade, and also as an analytical term that enabled scholars to talk about black communities across national boundaries. Much of this scholarship examined the dispersal of people of African descent, their role in the transformation and creation of new cultures, institutions, and ideas outside of Africa, and the problems of building pan-African movements across the globe. (14)

Also at this time, African identity and accompanying Africanist sentiments were being mobilized as part of the cultural, political and ideological movement towards independence in the Caribbean. Ironically, however, the string of small independent black states which emerged across the region between the 1960s and the 1980s explicitly rejected the implications of the diasporic and pan-Africanist project. Instead the tiny governing elites set themselves the task after independence of building 'nation-states' in the islands and territories of the Caribbean, in which multiple separate 'national' identities were carefully nurtured and jealously guarded. The seeming paradox of mobilizing 'Africanist' sentiment in the Diaspora in the cause of consolidating narrowly conceived nation-states is strikingly illustrated by a collection of essays by Trinidadian Max Ifill published in 1985 entitled, *The African Diaspora: a Drama of Human Exploitation*. "Now that Caribbean peoples can no longer identify with foreign flags and foreign anthems," he wrote, "they have to turn to their histories to find the basis for a new identity" (9). So far, so good. Yet it soon emerges that despite the title of his book, Ifill is actually referring to the history of individual territories under colonial rule – not the shared history and culture of African peoples in the Diaspora – as the basis for post-colonial national identities in the Caribbean:

can Jamaicans forget that throughout the long history of British rule, what Burns describes as 'the maroon menace' was ever present and was such an important equation in British power that the government came to terms with the Maroons, by Treaty, to prevent them from being sympathetic to slave uprisings? *Countries* with experiences of these kinds, which are not singular in Caribbean history, have a basis on which to establish pride and dignity. (9; emphasis mine)

As the Jamaican national motto aptly proclaimed, the aim in that society after independence was to create 'Out of Many, One People'; however, it was clear that the new Jamaican national identity, once applied beyond the local, was in effect exclusionary, since it eschewed such transnational identities as pan-Africanism and pan-Caribbeanism which might have led to more meaningful regional unity among people of predominantly African descent in the post-colonial Caribbean.

African Cultural Transmission and Agency in the Diaspora

Perhaps the most important shift in scholarship during this phase of decolonisation and nation-building in the diaspora was that much of the work produced in these years sought to valorize black identity in the Americas not in religious, but in cultural terms. The most important mechanism for this – as seen in the work of many and varied scholars, including Fernando

Ortiz, William Bascom, Roger Bastide, Leonard Barrett, Sterling Stuckey, Joseph Murphy, Winifred Vass, and Joseph Holloway, and in the English-speaking Caribbean, Kamau Brathwaite, Maureen Warner Lewis, Richard Allsopp, Rex Nettleford, and others – was to identify a wide range of African social and cultural practices, as well as African modes of thought - that had survived the Middle Passage among Africans en route to slavery in the Americas. Evidence was accumulated in the work of these scholars for identifiable African cultural 'survivals' in areas as diverse as philosophy, language, oratory, religious belief and practice, medicine, art, eating habits, music and dance styles. The purpose of much of this was overtly political; to counteract what Maureen Warner Lewis calls the "theory of cultural nakedness" (xxiv-xxvi) (which, she believed, misread the physical nakedness of the slave on the auction bloc as evidence that enslaved Africans were also culturally denuded), and to demonstrate that despite superficial overlays of western culture promoted by the colonial and slave masters, black people in the Americas remained ineluctably 'African.'

A reworking of this position can be seen in the work of Barbadian Africanist Deryck Murray. In a recent doctoral thesis, Murray argues that 'African ways of knowing' challenged and resisted the hegemonic power of the Eurocentric world view and ontological system during the centuries of African enslavement in the Caribbean, and afterwards, in the struggle to establish a distinctive, independent 'African-Caribbean' identity in the post-emancipation era. According to Murray, 'Obeah,' the term used to encompass the methods used in the Caribbean by African sages to enlist and unleash 'forces' in support of the struggle for survival of the enslaved African and creolised black population, was the most visible demonstration of the persistence of an African world-view in the context of European-controlled colonial Caribbean societies. It was, in his view, the driving force behind the 1816 slave rebellion in Barbados, in which an African-born slave named Bussa and other black leaders, fought to overthrow European power in the island, and to install in their place an African king, enthroned on his own 'golden stool' (see, in this regard, chapter 7 of Murray's thesis). Thus, Murray sees the episode as a last desperate attempt by enslaved Africans to resist the onslaught of modernity and re-establish a society based on pre-modern principles. In contrast, Hilary Beckles, in his classical interpretation of the Bussa Rebellion published in the 1980s had seen the same episode as – in effect – a proto-nationalist liberation movement, in which the chief protagonists demonstrated (individually, as well as collectively) their consciousness of, and determination to embrace freedom – one of the foundational concepts of modernity. Later, fragments of these African ways of knowing survived in Barbados - as in the wider Caribbean - in snippets of wisdom carried in proverbs and stories, in the chants, spells and potions of the 'obeah-man' (or woman), in the intensity of the worship experience and the key role of the spirits in the many rising Pentecostal Christian sects, and – in the political sphere – in the rise of modern Pan-Africanist thought.³

Inevitably, attempts at 'reading back' cultural practices attributed to black people in the Americas to a putative African root have sometimes led to controversy. Some scholars have questioned the assumptions made about how these practices were transmitted to the New World in the first place. Others, question the validity of a static model of cultural 'survivals,' arguing the case for a more dynamic reading of cultural interaction, in which the encounter with other cultures in the Americas necessarily transformed a dislocated 'African' culture into

³See, in this regard, Richard Allsopp, *A Book of Afric-Caribbean Proverbs*, Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean* (especially chapters 6 and 7), Tony Martin, "The Caribbean and Pan-Africanism," and Rodney Worrell, *Pan-Africanism in Barbados: an Analysis of the Activities of Major 20th century Pan-African Formations in Barbados*.

something entirely different and new, through processes variously described as 'adaptation', 'syncretism', 'creolisation' or 'hybridity.' A less prominent third strand in the discourse, which in some ways intersects with the other two, adopts what may be called an 'Afrocentric' approach to the question, in so far as it emphasizes the complexity and heterogeneity of African cultures and societies and so resists the notion – implicit in so much of the scholarship on the western side of the Atlantic – that there was a single, monolithic African culture or identity transmitted to the Americas. However, all of these controversies can be said to resolve down into one fundamental question: to what extent, if any, can black people who had lived in many cases for generations outside Africa, still be described as African?⁴

Evidence that these controversies are very far from resolved among scholars can be seen in the 'Black Rice' controversy which raged recently in the pages of the American Historical Review. In 2001 Judith Ann Carney published a book entitled: Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas, in which she argued that the extensive cultivation of rice in the Southern United States had been pioneered by, and had used techniques derived from enslaved Africans. In the December 2007 issue of American Historical Review, David Eltis, Philip Morgan and David Richardson challenged Carney's thesis based on research they had conducted in their monumental Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. In their article, entitled "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," they dismissed Carney's views on the African origins of rice cultivation essentially as wishful thinking, born out of a desire to promote the notion of African cultural agency in the Americas, rather than on a sober reading of the evidence. They further suggested that more caution was needed in future in asserting such examples of African cultural transmission in the diaspora. Their article provoked a furious response from Gwendolyn Midlo Hall in the December 2010 issue of the same journal. She dismissed their evidence as inferior to her own, derived from her more detailed Louisiana Slave Database, and supported the claim for the African slave origin of American rice cultivation. For good measure she took Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson to task for what she believed was not merely unfounded but unsavoury criticism of the 'black rice' thesis. Hovering beneath the bitter exchanges were unspoken charges of 'African essentialism' on the one hand, and of closet racism on the other.⁵

Controversy over the nature and agency of the African diaspora in the Americas has long raged in the political activist sphere as well. The arguments over the role of black people in the Americas and their continuing relationship with Africa have been a constant and often divisive part of organizations built to promote black rights in the diaspora over the past two hundred years. Should black people organize and fight for equality and justice as members of the body politic in the societies they helped to build in the Americas, or should they withdraw in the face of persistent racism and structural inequalities and seek to reconnect with the motherland – whether politically through Pan-Africanism, spiritually through various Afro-centric syncretic religions or religious practices, or physically through repatriation? Leading black intellectuals from Booker T. Washington, Edward Blyden, Sylvester Williams, Burghardt Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore and C. L. R. James through to Martin Luther King, Stokeley

⁴A useful review of much of this literature is presented by Patterson and Kelley in their "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World."

⁵See AHR Exchange: the Question of 'Black Rice' in American Historical Review (2010).

Carmichael, and Malcom X have grappled with this question, and come up with a widely varying answers according to the particular challenges they faced in their own time and place.

The 'Black Atlantic'

When Paul Gilroy published his landmark book, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness in 1993, he was standing on the shoulders of a burgeoning scholarship about and around the Atlantic World since the early 1980s. For example, in his book he very properly credits the pioneering work of labour historian Peter Linebaugh on the emergence of a radical multi-ethnic international working class in the Atlantic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as one of the inspirations for his own understanding of the networks of political, ideological and cultural exchange among black people in the Atlantic World during the same period. In my view, Gilroy's The Black Atlantic should always be read in conjunction with Linebaugh and Rediker's magnificent study, The Many Headed Hydra: Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic, published in 2000, since it explains the wider historical context of struggle among the common folk of the Atlantic world, of which the 'black Atlantic' was part. Also, a year before Gilroy's book was published, the first edition appeared of John Thornton's influential book, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800. Thornton's book is important because it discusses the earliest phases of the African diaspora in the Atlantic, largely ignored by Gilroy, and also places Africa at the centre of his analysis of the emergence of the Atlantic world. Meanwhile, efforts by black scholars and activists over generations to write the history of black people in the diaspora had led them to stray far 'beyond the boundaries of nation-states' and to suggest different organizing principles on which black agency and identity in the West were based, long before Gilroy presented his synthesis of these ideas.

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that Gilroy was able to draw effectively on this vibrant tradition of diasporic scholarship to develop his own understanding of the experience of what it meant to be black in the West during a period of dramatic global transformation. However, this did not lessen the impact on scholars engaged in African diasporic and black cultural studies of his central premise: that black intellectuals were constituted effectively during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as 'transnational' subjects and actors in a space he calls the 'black Atlantic.' He sees the Atlantic as "one single complex unit of analysis" (15) and as a space which is "continually criss-crossed by the movements of black people – not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles toward emancipation, autonomy and citizenship" (16). Not only was black identity profoundly shaped by the experience of the transnational condition in the crucible of the Atlantic world: as 'agents' in their own right, Gilroy argues, blacks had a profound impact on popular culture, social mores and ideological discourses in the West. Not least amongst these, as Orlando Patterson has shown, was the profound influence of black struggles against slavery in giving content and meaning to the concept of individual freedom on which the modern West is built. People of African descent in the diaspora thus played a critical role in shaping the modern western world of which they were part. As Patterson and Kelley argue, the

making of a 'black Atlantic' culture and identity, in general, and pan-Africanism, in particular, was as much the product of 'the West' as it was of internal developments in Africa. Racial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism – the processes that created the current African diaspora-shaped African culture(s) while transforming Western culture itself. In saying this, we are not speaking of the 'black Atlantic' as merely 'countercultural,' but as an integral part of the formation of the modern world as we know it. (13)

Despite the large implications of his thesis for the study of the development of the modern world, Gilroy was at pains to underscore the more modest objectives of his own work:

This book addresses one small area in the grand consequence of this historical conjunction – the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world. (3)

Nevertheless, the implications of the 'black Atlantic' concept have proved to be far-reaching and have been much debated by scholars in the years that followed the book's publication.

Looking back, it is clear that the publication of Gilroy's The Black Atlantic was a watershed in the development of African diaspora studies, and it is unsurprising that it provoked praise and criticisms in equal measure. South African literary critic Ntongela Masilela was among the first to point out that Gilroy's conception of the 'black Atlantic World' was confined largely to the North Atlantic, and to English-speakers, thus largely excluding critical discussion of the African diaspora in Brazil and other parts of the South Atlantic where Portuguese and Spanish were the dominant colonial languages. A special edition of the journal Slavery and Abolition in April 2001 sought to address this gap by focusing on the Brazilian dimension of the African diaspora. It was subsequently published as an edited collection under the title: Rethinking the African Diaspora: the Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil. Masilela was also highly critical of Gilroy's notion of 'Africa', which appears to be culturally homogeneous and static in his analysis, while the role of black intellectuals based in Africa in the intellectual exchanges that animated the black Atlantic World is underplayed. Gilroy has also been criticized for focusing his attention on the black intellectual elite, when it can be argued that the greater part of the exchanges in the black Atlantic world – and certainly the more pervasive influences – were in fact the product of the efforts of members of the black working class – the common folk, who circulated constantly throughout the Atlantic world as labour migrants. Despite such criticisms, the over-arching concept of the 'black Atlantic' continues to be invoked by scholars as a useful shorthand to encompass a complex range of cultural and ideological processes in the development of the modern world.

The Black Diaspora and Recent Postcolonial Scholarship

The opening up of the discourse on the black diaspora in the 1990s has led to a wide range of new explorations and adaptations of the concept. One of the more notable examples of this was Michael Gomez' work, Reversing Sail: a History of the African Diaspora, published in 2005, which projected the concept of the African Diaspora back into antiquity to show that diaspora has been a formative process in the history of the African continent for thousands of years. At the other end of the spectrum, the pan-Africanist impulse continues to foster publications which seek to promote black solidarity using asserted commonalities among the peoples of the African diaspora as an organising principle. Examples include: Brain Belton's Black Routes. Legacy of African Diaspora (2007) and Keith A. P. Sandiford's A Black Studies Primer: Heroes and Heroines of the African Diaspora (2008).

The new interest in the black diaspora has also provided fertile ground for a range of new work on the relationship between the African diaspora and Caribbean identity. One of the features of this work has been that it has encompassed discussion of the more recent diaspora of Caribbean people to Europe and North America. For example, a collection edited by Harry Goulbourne and Mary Chamberlain and published in 2001 entitled Caribbean Families in Britain and the Trans-Atlantic World, focused on the displaced identities of Caribbean families associated with migration to Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, and the travails

of returning Caribbean nationals as they sought to reconnect with the societies in the Caribbean that they had left. Meanwhile, Stefano Harney is one among many literary critics to consider the working out of Caribbean identity by Caribbean writers in exile such as C. L. R. James, in his book Nationalism and Identity: Culture and Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora published in 1996.

Another interesting twist in the tale of the black diaspora in the Caribbean, concerns the influence of the ideology of 'return to the motherland' on generations of people of African descent in the Caribbean. The most obvious example of this within the region itself is the Rastafarian movement, which has generated extensive scholarly interest since Rex Nettleford first began to write about Rastas in Jamaica more than forty years ago. However, another intriguing strand in recent writing concerns those who were moved by their commitment and sense of affiliation to Africa to return physically to the continent to assist in the upliftment of its people. Works in this area include Nemata Blyden, West Indians in West Africa, 1808-1880: The African Diaspora in Reverse (2000); Waibinti Wariboko's, Ruined by Race: Afro-Caribbean Missionaries and the Evangelisation of Southern Nigeria 1895-1925 (2006), and most recently by the same author, Race and the Civilising Mission: Their Implications for Blackness and the Framing of African Personhood 1860-1900 (2011).

White and Brown Diasporas in the Caribbean

Much of this discussion has focused on the definition and agency of the black diaspora. However, Caribbean identity is, as previously suggested, the product of multiple diasporas. While I believe a strong case can be made for the primacy of the black Diaspora in Caribbean identity and consciousness – to the extent that other ethnicities in the region have adopted numerous cultural traits associated with their black neighbours – it is unquestionable that European and Asian diasporas also had a formative role in the shaping of Caribbean identity.

The European diaspora was constituted largely as an economically and politically dominant but numerically small white elite at the apex of Caribbean plantation societies during the colonial period – though 'poor whites' were also present in some societies. The hegemonic power of the Europeans was buttressed through the establishment of structures of governance based on European models, as well as Eurocentric systems of law, religion and education and the privileging of European mores and modes of cultural expression. However it was race and ethnicity that proved the most important and enduring organising principles for people of European descent in the Americas. 'Whiteness' was a construct built in conscious opposition to the 'blackness' of the majority who constituted the bulk of the common folk in Caribbean societies. Here was an enduring irony: Du Bois little thought, when he spoke of the 'double consciousness' of black people in the Americas, that as they constituted a new 'African' diasporic identity they simultaneously conjured its mirror image among people of European descent in the Americas, who experienced their own 'double consciousness' as they encountered and assimilated aspects of African culture. It was to this form of white 'double consciousness' that Rex Nettleford often jokingly referred in informal conversations when he described creolised whites in the Caribbean as 'roast breadfruit turned inside out.'

Space does not allow discussion here of the dramatic cultural impact of the Asian diasporic presence in the Caribbean, once Indian and Chinese indentured workers began to arrive and settle in parts of the region from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It will have to suffice to point out here simply that they had a major influence on emerging Caribbean culture and identity in those regions where they settled in large numbers – most especially in the Southern Caribbean. The story of the Indo-Caribbean population is sometimes couched in terms of their cultural exclusivity, yet there are myriad examples of encounter, exchange and

adaptation between and among the black and brown populations of the Caribbean. People of Indian and Chinese descent in the Caribbean have in fact proved highly receptive to ideas and practices borrowed from other diasporas present in the region, and ultimately provide another example of the cultural dialogue that diasporas sharing the same physical space can foster. It is striking to consider that the Rastafarian movement, for example - often seen as nothing more than a reassertion of African identity and culture in the Americas - has in fact borrowed extensively from East Indian cultural practices encountered in the Caribbean. Examples include the smoking of marijuana and vegetarianism.

Concluding Remarks: A Note of Caution

As with all conceptual constructs, there is a danger that privileging the concept of diaspora as a tool for analysis will result in a tendency to over-estimate the significance of diasporas in the making of the modern world, and - in our own region - in analyzing Caribbean identities. It is important to remember that privileging 'diaspora' can keep us from seeing the full range of transnational political, cultural, and intellectual links that have shaped our world. Cross-cutting currents based on gender, class and ethnicity are no less significant and add considerable complexity to a discourse that is too often over-simplified or essentialised. The erroneous assertion, for example, that black people across the world share a common culture is sometimes taken as an *a priori* justification for discussion of the African diaspora. As Stuart Hall explains in his much-cited essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," this essentialising project was central to anti-colonial and pan-Africanist movements and counter-hegemonic in a fundamental way, "imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas" (243). In similar vein, Patterson and Kelley argue:

[d]iaspora has always been employed (invoked) in such a way as to hide the differences and discontinuities. The very concept of diaspora has been extracted from peoples' lived experiences and then molded into metaphors for alienation, outsidership, home, and various binary relationships such as alien/native. The metaphor has come to represent those experiences and, in so doing, erases the complexities and contradictions as it seeks to fit all within the metaphor. (20)

To cite just one more example, it is striking how much of the existing scholarship on diaspora omits the fundamental dimension of gender from the analysis. Yet, even the most superficial research on the African diaspora to the Americas during the era of transatlantic slavery will show the predominance of females, while the European diaspora to the Americas in the same period was overwhelmingly male. The implications of this asymmetry during the formative years of Caribbean societies were plainly enormous. Similarly, discussions on the modes of cultural transmission and adaptation in the diaspora are clearly deeply flawed unless it is recognized that this has a gendered dimension too, since women play a leading role in many societies as the main guardians and reproducers of cultural mores.

Ultimately in seeking to study the nature and agency of diaspora, whether in the Caribbean, or globally, we must recognize, as Paterson and Kelley put it, the "linkages that tie the diaspora together must be articulated and are not inevitable":

the diaspora is both process and condition. As a process it is always in the making, and as condition it is situated within global race and gender hierarchies. However, just as the diaspora is made, it can be unmade, and thus scholars must explore the moments of its unmaking. (11)

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