

# The Cultural Context of the Jamaican National System: Ethnicity and Social Stratification Reconsidered<sup>1</sup>

CAROL S. HOLZBERG  
University of Toronto

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'intéresse au système national jamaïcain, en particulier aux domaines de l'économie politique et du nationalisme. Plus particulièrement, on cherche à comprendre pourquoi la communauté juive de l'île a diminué de 25% entre 1974-1975 et 1978. Ce problème sera traité avec l'aide de Sahlins (1976) comme le point de départ d'une révision du débat *pluraliste-stratificationniste*. Le texte souhaite apporter des éléments à la compréhension de deux processus généraux: 1) ethnicité et stratification sociale et 2) les élites et l'économie politique nationale.

Of the many debates that inform the theoretical writings in anthropology, arguments between the "materialists" and the "mentalists" have been some of the most consistent and controversial. The debate translates into "the dualism which separates a mindless external world from the universe organized by the activity of the mind" (Douglas 1970: 22). Fundamentally, it reflects an epistemological concern over what the anthropologist must examine in order to understand, explain, and even predict the structures and interrelations of socially constituted phenomena. Both the materialists and the mentalists seek to grasp the nature of the "social totality" (Keleman 1976: 865) in order to illuminate those principles

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that govern the production and reproduction of the total socio-cultural system, i.e. the society. The materialist however, looks to economic resources as well as technological and environmental factors in order to demonstrate how these material "forces" constitute the imperatives of culture and the blueprints for action. From this perspective, human beings are perceived as economic animals, rationally motivated to maximize their access to and control over substantive resources. They accomplish this maximization through collective organization designed to minimize deprivation and insure their own survival<sup>2</sup>. The mentalists on the other hand, suggest that the material forces (i.e. economic resources, technology, environment) are comprehended only by social apperception, structured logically in the mind. Furthermore, they claim that it is only by uncovering the nature of this logical structure that the analyst can derive the organizational principles that define the resources and govern the production and reproduction of societal forms.

Marshall Sahlins has recently added fuel to the debate with the publication of his book entitled, *Culture and Practical Reason*. For Sahlins, the social totality that must be explained is *culture* not society and though he claims he is not a mentalist, nor a materialist, the following quote which outlines the object of his book, suggests a definite idealist propensity. Thus, he writes.

For some, however, it is clear that culture is precipitated from the rational activity of individuals pursuing their own best interests. This is 'utilitarianism' proper; its logic is the maximization of means-ends relations. The objective utility theories are naturalistic or ecological; for them, the determinant material wisdom substantialized in cultural form is the survival of the human population or the given social order. The precise logic is adaptive advantage, or maintenance of the system within the natural limits of viability. As opposed to all these genera and species of practical reason, this book poses a reason of another kind, the symbolic or the meaningful... It therefore takes as the decisive quality of culture... *not that this culture must conform to material constraints but that it does so according to a definite symbolic scheme which is never the only one possible.* Hence it is culture which constitutes utility (1976: vii-viii, emphasis added).

From Sahlins' perspective, culture pervades all levels of thought and action and constitutes the social logic of praxis. Culture is the social expression of human perception, cognition, and experience; the

<sup>2</sup> For a more in depth discussion on how humans seek to minimize deprivation by a process known as "cathexis", that is, "the attachment to objects which are gratifying and rejection of those which are noxious", see Parsons and Shils *et al.* (1951: 5).

symbolic quality which governs social relations and mediates between social action and the material environment. "...in as much as the material forces are socially constituted, their specific effects are culturally determined" (Sahlins 1976: 14).

Sahlins criticizes contemporary anthropological theory for regarding custom as "merely fetishized utility". His argument is interesting for two reasons. First, he challenges the explanatory value of material determinism as the prime mover (underlying structural principle) of social behaviour. Second, he invests the cultural realm with a logic all its own and sets the stage for a reexamination and reinterpretation of the social arrangements of persons in time and space. And while he claims that *Culture and Practical Reason* was written for the analysis of the cultural dimensions of primitive society, his views on the cultural properties of social action have influenced the formulation of much of what is to follow below<sup>3</sup>. To some extent these views are echoed (pre-empted?) by Clifford Geertz, when he writes: "...culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which it can be intelligently – that is, thickly – described" (Geertz 1973: 14).

### THE SETTING

Jamaica is an ex-British West Indian colony that achieved political independence from Great Britain in 1962. I have been working on the relationship between big business elites and political economy in Jamaica since 1973. My research has focused on the mechanisms and strategies by which the Jamaican national entrepreneurial elites secure access to and control over the pivotal positions of local economic power. It has highlighted the nature of their economic resource base, and has shown how the political administrators not only reinforce but also institutionalize and reproduce the privileged positions of those persons in charge of organizing, directing, and financing the largest publicly subscribed corporations on the island, i.e. the companies quoted on the Jamaica Stock Exchange. Government grants big business tax remissions,

<sup>3</sup> I wish to thank my colleagues and the graduate students who participated in the seminar called Kinship and Social Organization (taught at the University of Toronto 1977-78) for heightening my awareness and crystallizing my interest in the cultural meaning of social organization.

protected markets, depreciation allowances, low rents, financial incentives, and subsidies to expand its plants and modernize its machinery. Sometimes the government invests directly as a joint partner with the companies of the private sector; on other occasions government lends support indirectly by improving island infrastructure (roads, water, machinery). To some extent, the infrastructural improvements facilitate the production and distribution of local manufactures (Holzberg 1977c).

In addition to examining and documenting the social organization, composition, and characteristics of the national entrepreneurial elite (Holzberg 1977b), my research has also elaborated a general ethnography of the Jamaican Jewish community<sup>4</sup>. This was done in an effort to make more intelligible why the Jews constituted 23% of the national entrepreneurial elite (9 out of 38) while at the same time making up less than .025 per cent of the total island population (about 450 persons in 2 million). This part of the research addressed the relationship between ethnicity and social stratification in order to puzzle out the social and cultural dimensions of Jamaican Jewish ethnicity that predisposed these Jews to disproportionate membership in the class fraction identified as the national entrepreneurial elite. To some extent, I concluded that externally imposed pressures of social discrimination (until 1831) crystallised a segmental cultural response (Jewish) in the form of the establishment of a voluntary association matrix. The networks of overlapping ties that resulted consolidated Jewish mutual self-help and facilitated the collective upward social mobility of the segment. It wasn't the ethnic symbols or the ethnic content of the Jewishness per se (something generically Jewish) that was crucial to this process of upward social mobility. Rather, "Jewishness" served as the medium that articulated the social organization of the group into a cohesive community of criss-crossing ties and mutually-reinforcing social networks. This made Jewish identity economically expedient as well<sup>5</sup>. The fact that many of

<sup>4</sup> My fieldwork in the summer of 1973 and from January 1974 to February 1975 was funded by a Canada Council Doctoral Fellowship, a Québec Ministry of Education graduate scholarship, and grants from the Memorial and Canadian Foundations for Jewish Culture. In the summer of 1978 I returned to Jamaica for 13 weeks funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada Council).

<sup>5</sup> This view is consistent with Patterson (1975) who writes about the Chinese in Jamaica. He claims that the Chinese crystallized into an ethnic group as they became conscious of the fact that shared ethnicity would facilitate individual economic

the Jews in Jamaica are not Jews by birth but by marriage emphasizes this point<sup>6</sup>. Those who "marry in" to the community do not necessarily convert to Judaism, yet marrying in gives them access to membership in a number of voluntary associations and instrumental networks and enables them to achieve upward social mobility by obtaining employment, education, and finance from Jewish Jamaicans or the business associates of Jewish Jamaicans.

### THE PROBLEM

By pointing out the critical dimensions of Jamaican political economy, focusing on the hierarchies of economic and political power, and reflecting upon the Jewish experience as overlapping social networks and institutional affiliations, one might surmise that my theoretical affinities are materialist rather than mentalist. And yet, at the start I suggested that I would be looking at "cultural reason" as the meaningful context that one needs to examine in order to understand some ambiguous Jamaican social phenomena. The purpose of this paper is not to dismiss or refute the causal connections between the material condition of Jewish cultural response. In other words, no attempt is made to reverse the direction of the linkage between economic forces and the meaningful aspects of Jamaican Jewish culture, positing Sahlins' cultural reason as the *underlying* or *causal* structural principle of Jamaican Jewish ethnicity. However, the paper does attempt to come to grips with another order of phenomena, that is, the reciprocal relation between praxis and Jamaican *national* system in an effort to show that the current drop in numbers of the Jamaican Jewish community is not explainable in terms of a single factor such as internal group dynamics (ethnicity), or socio-economic imperatives, or racial conflicts. Thus, the paper represents some tentative suggestions on how to explain why the Jewish community has dwindled by almost 25 per cent from 1974-75 to 1978 (350 from 450). By addressing the question of the disappearance of the Jewish community, the paper hopes to shed light on

success through the establishment of ethnic-based commercial networks. Thus ethnicity derives from a motivation to accommodate to and be successful in an economic environment. This is similar to the approach taken by Aronson (ms) and Cohen (1974) who treat ethnicity as a political rather than an economic mode of adaptation.

<sup>6</sup> At a B'nai B'rith meeting in 1975, 18 of the 25 couples present were inter-marriages. Of these 18, at least 2 couples were composed of females who did not convert to Judaism upon marriage.

two more general processes: 1) the relation between ethnicity and social stratification and 2) the relation between elites and national political economy.

### PLURALISM AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION RECONSIDERED

The problematic debate between the materialists and the mentalists seemingly extends into the writings on the Caribbean through the work of the "stratificationists" and the "pluralists". But for someone working in Jamaica on the social organization and characteristics of the national entrepreneurial elites and the Jewish community it becomes difficult to classify the Jamaican social structure as an either/or proposition. Kuper and Smith refer to plural societies as "societies possessed of a minimum of common values. They appear to be maintained more by coercion than by consent. They are divided by sharp and persistent cleavages which threaten their dissolution" (1971: 3). Some amplification on the points raised by the pluralists and the stratificationists are necessary in order to highlight the nature of the problem. As will become evident later on in this section, the solution does not lie in choosing sides – of determining which structural representation is of greater analytic value. Rather, it is more appropriate to designate an "encompassing" (Dumont 1972) conceptual scheme, one that frames ethnicity, race, and social class into a meaningful systematic whole. This should not be at the local level of confrontation that is, between ethnic, racial and class groups in the society, but rather at the national level of the cultural integration.

Jamaica has frequently been described as a plural society with a multiplicity of cultural segments that participate in socially differentiated institutions (Smith 1957, 1960, 1961, 1974). These segments have been characterized by M. G. Smith (1960: 81) and Leo Despres (1967, 1968) as "cultural sections" or as "ethnic groups" by Patterson (1975)<sup>7</sup>. To some extent, culture/ethnicity in the Carib-

<sup>7</sup> Patterson (1975: 309-310) differentiates an ethnic group from a cultural group primarily on the basis of shared consciousness. Though both ethnic and cultural groups are marked by distinctive symbolic content, members of an ethnic group are consciously aware of belonging to a distinct group, while members of a cultural group do not have a sense of shared identity.

bean also reflects phenotypic variations, though like in Latin American societies there is a tendency for money to whiten and for rich “non-whites” to be socially accepted in elite social circles.

The first person to coin the term “plural society” was Furnivall, the Dutch economist and colonial administrator, who used it to account for the problems of unity and disruption in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies (1939). Furnivall argued that the plural society in Indonesia was characterized as a “medley of peoples” united only through the political force exerted by the dominant segment rather than by a common system of shared values, beliefs, and cultural symbols which were in fact non-existent. According to Furnivall, people mixed in the market place, but they did not combine. Each group operated in terms of its own culturally specific – way of life – region, dress, language, ideas, and values (Furnivall 1939). Although the groups seemed to coexist side by side, they really lived “separately within the same political unit” (1948, in Morris 1967: 170). Thus, as regarding the nature of social action, the pluralist position suggests that ethnicity sets cultural parameters and organizational guidelines around behavioural and ideational repertoires and can help to *explain* institutional discontinuities and disharmonious (conflict) relations. Society is not a unitary phenomenon; it is characterized by a plurality of differentiated societal segments. This is not a tautological argument, i.e. that culture determines cultural response. Rather, it suggests that culture is a system all its own and can govern the nature of social expression.

Those who have taken issue with the plural model as an analytical device have argued that society is a unified entity, not a plural structure. A “culturally divided society” (Smith 1960: 81) would therefore be a contradiction in terms, since the unitary theorists see society as integrated by a system of *social stratification* based on class membership or participation in a common “economic structure” (Benedict 1970: 32). Thus, the structural principle that organizes thought and action for the “unitary” theorists is not cultural logic, but rather the nature of access to society’s critical resources (Benedict 1962, 1970; Skinner 1955, 1960). Social conflict results from opposing class interests, that is, from the social perception of inequality of access. Classes may be polarized one against the other, but they are still integrated into a single institutional framework such that there is a general consensus over

occupational, income, and status rankings. Benedict, for example, suggests that the underlying difficulty with pluralism as a model is that it is basically descriptive and classificatory rather than analytical. He notes that plural phenomena diminish in importance as "the society [begins] to change from one which is ethnically stratified, with each ethnic section confined to a single set of occupations to a society which is economically stratified with each section pursuing a whole range of occupations" (1962: 1244). Hence the sections should be defined "structurally, and not by cultural criteria" (Benedict 1970: 32). People from different socio-economic strata are likely to hold somewhat different views (Mau 1968: 48) but these views are based upon conditions of unequal resource control rather than ethnic specific and mutually exclusive cultural affiliations.

By way of an illustration for the Jamaican situation, the pluralist would argue that membership in the Jamaican Jewish community predisposes the individual to act in ways that are institutionally incompatible with other cultural affiliations. Thus Jews have their own unique bundles of symbolic forms that encompass behavioural strategies for specific situations, and these symbolic forms separate them from other groups in the society. The stratificationist would counter the argument by demonstrating how Jews share much in common with other cultural/ethnic segments by virtue of their membership in the middle and upper classes. Class affiliations are assumed to override cultural/ethnic allegiance.

To the pluralists, the fact that the Jewish community has dwindled by almost 25 per cent since 1973 (50 per cent since 1960) might suggest that Jews are responding as Jews to intra-segmental problems or rivalries, or to external situational pressures and contradictions that they cannot deal with as Jews. Jewish response therefore takes the form of emigration. They seek out places where they can be free to practice their ethnicity. The stratificationists however, see socio-economically derived assimilation rather than emigration as the critical process whereby Jews are "disappearing" from the Jamaican scene. Actual emigration doesn't even seem to be considered. Hence Patterson (a stratificationist) notes,

Unlike their counterparts in Curaçao, Jamaican Jews have already slowly given up their ethnic identification in favor of middle and upper class allegiance and a growing identification with the white and light-skinned community at large. Today they are found in all aspects of the country's life, including its economy, its political system (the recently elected Minister of National Security



and Justice comes from a prominent Jewish family), in the professions, and in the arts and recreational institutions. It is only a matter of time before the group becomes completely absorbed in the creole elite" (1975: 320).

The common failing of both the pluralist and the stratificationist arguments, is that members of a society can hold serial but not simultaneous allegiances. It is impossible to be both Jewish and a member of the creole elite. This assumption creates a double analytical dilemma. First, it denies the role of culture within a given situational context. Second, it creates an artificial separation between ethnicity and class, reducing ethnicity to purely voluntaristic identity (conscious affiliation) and explaining behaviour in terms of a response to pragmatics, whether these be ethnic strategies or socio-economic pressures.

In order to explain why the Jews are leaving the island, it is important to note that it is not only members of the Jewish community who are in fact emigrating. Newspapers report the heterogeneous composition of the emigrés. Bumper stickers read: "Will the last person to leave the island, please turn off the lights." Whites, Blacks, Chinese, middle class, upper class, Jews, Christians, the unemployed in search of jobs, etc. are all flocking from Jamaica. Hence emigration cannot be reduced to a distinctly ethnic and/or racial phenomenon. An explanation of the exodus should not lie in focusing upon ethnicity as a segmentally distinct cultural system that has failed to cope with or adapt to the Jamaican environment. On the other hand, the movement cannot be explained as a distinctly class phenomenon, because the Jews who have left do not belong to the same socio-economic class. Moreover, some Jews who remain in Jamaica are doing extremely well under Democratic Socialism. Their economic positions are bolstered by the expansion and diversification of their corporate holdings and by their appointments to para-political positions in the Government<sup>8</sup>.

To some extent it is possible to reconcile the artificial dualism of ethnicity (pluralism) and class (stratification) by showing how each is a "reciprocal" of the other rather than its antithesis. As Sahlins points out: "In most general terms the reciprocal logic is that each

<sup>8</sup> Those who move from Jamaica after retirement must sometimes make do with a lower standard of living than they were accustomed to on the island. They move to smaller homes, and have less domestic help.

'kind' mediates the nature of the other" (1976: 25). By examining the historical development of Jamaican society, it is possible to show how the Jamaican national context favoured both, 1) the social isolation and cultural perpetuation of a qualitatively distinct Jewish ethnicity by predisposing individual Jews to group together and establish ethnic-specific (exclusive) voluntary associations. This was the result of civil disabilities and legislative discrimination imposed upon a "community" of Jews until 1831 (Holzberg 1976), and 2) the integration of Jews in the social circles of the white elite which favoured Jewish interaction with non-Jewish whites. Though Jews were identified as ethnically distinct and differentiated from the whites of European descent in the censuses, the plantocrats and the colonial administrators perceived them as allies against the blacks and created a social and cultural environment that predisposed the Jews to adopt European lifestyles in order to be accepted by the colonial bureaucracy and plantocracy. This in turn fostered the collective upward social mobility of the Jamaican Jewish community.

A more appropriate framework that encapsulates the variables of ethnicity and class and highlights their mutual interdependence focuses on the national cultural context in which the Jamaican emigration takes place. This revolves around the analytic conceptualization of Jamaica as a national level cultural system whose historical trajectory has laid the foundation for a social arena of multiple and simultaneous intranational allegiances and conflicts. This multiplicity of "reciprocals" alludes to the socio-cultural complexity of Jamaican social structure. The contradictions and conflicts that result are the logical consequences of historical and contemporary confrontations among groups of people organized in terms of ethnicity, race, political parties, business interests, and social class membership and the like. The confrontations cannot be reduced to simple expressions of either ethnic hostilities, racial antagonisms or class conflicts. As Dumont suggests, "...the whole should not be seen by starting from the notion of the 'element', in terms of which it would be known through the number and nature of the constituent 'elements', but by starting from the notion of the 'system' in terms of which certain fixed principles govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating 'elements'" (Dumont 1972: 71). This is not an argument in favour of integrating pluralistic cultural segments within a unitary encompassing structure of social stratification based on competing class interests. Rather, it is a plea for examining those dimensions of

the national cultural context that frame and integrate both the ethnic-specific cultural forms with the social class strata.

In arguing for the theoretical utility of the "plural model", Despres suggests that the stratificationists have erred because "the structure of society cannot be systematically delineated as a unitary entity either in terms of logic or empirical evidence. To state the matter differently, society is composed of numerous structures, and not all of them reticulate in terms of the criteria of differential command over the actions of others and differential command over resources and benefits" (1968: 12). Whereas I would agree with the second part of the statement, that the meaning of action cannot be reduced purely to power relations, the remainder of this paper will be a critique of his first statement by showing the logical and empirical factors that unify Jamaican experience. The diacritica of societal unity lie in the cultural integration of ethnicity and social class within a national socio-cultural system. In other words, it is not a contradiction in terms to conceptualize the structure of a plural society as unitary. But the integrating principles are more than simply either the features of social class or the regulatory force of the political administrative bureaucracy.

#### THE JAMAICAN CULTURAL CONTEXT: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The Jamaican national system constitutes a cultural context which makes sense of the social action of individuals, ethnic groups and social classes. The national cultural context constitutes an encompassing framework to the extent that it is a system of interrelated parts wherein the definition of the parts is governed by the relation of the parts to the whole. As Geertz points out: "Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them, we seek to turn them by a sort of intellectual motion into explanations of one another" (1974: 235). So far, the paper has examined the inter-meshing of ethnicity and social stratification with respect to the Jamaican Jewish community in an effort to demonstrate how neither of these elements are sufficient in and of themselves to account for Jewish emigration from the Island. This is true even when set against the back-drop of the historical development of the society.

The features of national cultural context that are relevant to an explanation of Jewish emigration are 1) political economy and 2) cultural nationalism. Political economy articulates a context that is not simply reducible to ethnic and social class oppositions; cultural nationalism suggests that the Jews as members of a differentiated ethnic minority or as symbols of a déclassé “white” social elite, may have become irrelevant in an environment that stresses Afro-West Indian national identity.

I have chosen to deal with political economy and cultural nationalism at greater length rather than the more traditional institutional domains such as religion, education, family and kinship because in Jamaica the different cultural sections, ethnic groups, racial enclaves, and social strata participate in differentiated forms of these respective institutions. Thus for example, lower class blacks are often members of the fundamentalist or pentacostal sects rather than the official state religion (Anglican); Chinese tend to be predominantly Anglican; Syrians are divided between Anglicans and Catholics; Jews worship at the *Shaare Shalom* (“Gates of Peace”) as members of the United Congregation of Israelites. Thus religious affiliation does not unify the Jamaican population under a single encompassing framework. Similarly, some of the ethnic groups and social classes have their own private and parallel educational facilities – Jews have Hillel Academy<sup>9</sup> and the Sabbath Religious School at the synagogue, Chinese have their own parochial schools, and upper class individuals in general send their children to private rather than public secondary schools. With respect to family and kinship relations – lower class blacks are characterised by consensual unions, female headed households, and absence of the rule of legitimacy<sup>10</sup>, whereas the middle and upper classes place more of an emphasis on marriage, monogamy, and nuclear families.

On the other hand, Jamaican national political economy and cultural nationalism are the dynamic encompassing structures which

<sup>9</sup> Hillel Academy has many non-Jewish children in attendance than Jewish children (250: 30 in 1974/74, 280: 15 in 1978. But the school was built and architecturally designed by members of the Jewish community, its trustees sit on the board of the United Congregation of Israelites, it closes on Jewish holidays, and the Jewish children must attend the Hebrew classes.

<sup>10</sup> González (1969) pinpoints the structural features of lower class household structure in the Caribbean. See also Slater (1977) for more information on matrifocality, mating, family and household patterns among the lower classes in Martinique.

serve to integrate a bounded national entity and differentiate the Jamaican national cultural system from others in the Caribbean, Third World, or the international market economy. And, when ethnic groups and/or social classes are seen as elements governed by the interplay of political economy and cultural nationalism it becomes possible to understand why either a pluralist or a stratificationist explanation of Jewish emigration would be inconsistent and ambiguous.

a) *Political Economy*

To some extent it is impossible to ignore the fact that the rate of Jewish exodus has seemingly increased since the political proclamation of Democratic Socialism in 1974. In September of that year, the Prime Minister declared an end to "capitalism" and announced the government's intention to create a new economic order. The response of the national entrepreneurial elite to this new politico-economic platform was one of fear and ambivalence. In lieu of popular rapprochement with Cuba, China, and the U.S.S.R., big businessmen became apprehensive of a "communist" takeover, and the adverse economic effects that socialism and greater state intervention would have on foreign investment and the private sector's capacity to expand the scale and scope of their business interests. Their initial public statements in the media (T.V., radio, and newspapers) suggested that they would be responding with a "wait and see" approach to investment. They were afraid that government involvement in the economy might prove deleterious to economic stability.

Interesting enough, three years later this apprehensive response to government intervention has been expressed by others in the society. In a recent opinion poll carried out by Dr. Carl Stone of the Department of Government at the University of the West Indies in Mona, the findings suggest that the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporate Area middle class and working class as well as the rural small farmers each ranked government mismanagement above radical talk, import prices and the private sector as factors contributing to the current economic difficulties on the Island. "In all three classes, however, the directing of blame towards the private sector as a whole falls lower in order of rank than either of the other three causes..." (*Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, January 16, 1978: 1). (See Table 1).

TABLE 1  
 Factors Contributing to Current Economic Difficulties

Factors	Middle Class	Working Class	Rural Small Farmers
1. Government Mismanagement	82%	55%	87%
2. Radical Talk	70%	44%	54%
3. Import Prices	58%	45%	80%
4. Private Sector	21%	38%	37%

Source: Opinion Poll # 1, Dr. Carl Stone, *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner* Jan. 16, 1978, p. 1.

The similarity among the opinions of the national entrepreneurial elite, middle class, working class, and the rural small farmers in relation to government activity and Democratic Socialism suggests a unity of social perception and experience that transcends ethnic and class interests. To the extent that everybody in the country participates in, or is affected by, matters of national political economy, the constituent segments and classes of Jamaican society are encompassed within a unitary interaction framework. Some elaboration of the features of Jamaican national political economy that articulate a collective (mutually supportive) response will serve as illustration. These features are abstracted from a description of the economic environment and the actions taken by the politico-administrative bureaucracy to cope with increasing economic difficulties.

Symptoms of the current economic crisis that is affecting the island are reflected in the statistics on balance of payments, annual rates of Gross Domestic growth, and Consumer Price Increases, compiled by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These statistics point out Jamaica's weak economic situation. Jamaica's financial insolvency becomes even more critical in the light of comparisons with Trinidad, an oil rich nation. (See Tables 2 and 3).

In June of 1977, Finance and Planning Minister David Coore revealed that the total public (governmental) deficit at the end of December 1976 was more than J\$1 billion, made up of J\$653 million in internal debts and J\$580 million in external debts (Caribbean Monthly Bulletin 1977b: 4). Add to this the fact that the Jamaican dollar has just undergone its third devaluation in the 1977-78 financial year and the seriousness of the "economic crisis" becomes all the more acute. In April 1977, the government adopted a

TABLE 2

Summary of Balance of Payments, 1974-76<sup>a</sup> (in millions of U.S. dollars)

	Current Account Balance			Capital Account Balance <sup>b</sup>			Surplus or Deficit <sup>c</sup>		
	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976
Jamaica	-151	-310	-316	201	231	36	50	-79	-280
Trinidad	304	197	253	-3	163	24	301	360	277

## Source:

<sup>a</sup> *Finance and Development*, Volume 14 (2): 35, 1977. *Finance and Development* is a quarterly publication of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

<sup>b</sup> includes changes in commercial banks' foreign assets and liabilities and error and omissions.

<sup>c</sup> as measured by changes in the monetary authorities net foreign reserve holdings.

TABLE 3

Annual Rates of Real GDP Growth and Price Increase, 1974-76<sup>d</sup> (in per cent)

	Annual Rate of Real GDP Growth			Consumer Price Index		
	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976
Jamaica	4.3	-2.3	-4.3	27	17	11
Trinidad	0.3	6.8	9.6	22	17	11

## Source:

<sup>d</sup> *Finance and Development*, 1977, Vol. 14 (2): 33.

two-level exchange rate, a *basic* rate for import transactions involving "goods which are consumed by the masses, government transactions and the transactions of the bauxite alumina section" and a *special* rate for "other exchange transactions" (Caribbean Monthly Bulletin 1977a: 4)<sup>11</sup>. Not only does the devaluation create an ambiguous investment climate for the private sector, but it also creates severe economic strains for members of the working and non-working lower classes whose minimum wage of J\$24.00 a week or J60¢ an hour is insufficient to cope with spiralling consumer prices. In 1974-75, the

<sup>11</sup> The third devaluation which occurred in February 1978 represents a 15.5% devaluation of the Jamaican dollar against the American dollar on the basic rate, and a 45.5% devaluation on the special rate since the first devaluation in April 1977.

government had instituted a minimum wage of J\$20.00 a week or or J50¢ an hour.

In response to pressures exerted by the international market economy, to spiralling prices brought about by the higher costs of petroleum products, and to local demands for more jobs and higher wages, the government deems it necessary to intervene in the operations of the Jamaican economy, to stimulate production and to push for import substitution. To this end, government has taken over ownership and operation of many companies (sugar, flour mills, bus company, the radio station, etc.), has invested heavily in the private sector (bauxite and banking), has legislated import quotas and has limited the amount of foreign currency that can leave the country. The executive director of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ) has noted that while government was not the prime mover in the Jamaican economy

it was the dominant force in the housing sector having set a target of 13,500 new units with itself being responsible for 10,000 and the private sector 3,500. In the banking sector, as soon as negotiations are completed it would hold more than 50%... in the tourist industry Government now owns 51% of the hotel rooms... in the export of bananas and sugar, Government would be the biggest planter and would also be controlling the bulk of sugar processing facilities (*Caribbean Monthly Bulletin* 1977b: 7).

Some companies have gone into voluntary liquidation since 1974 and while there is no specific evidence that Democratic Socialism has been the direct cause of these bankruptcies, there is the suggestion that matters of national political economy may be the instrumental catalyst of the recent wave of Jamaican emigration. The situation, however, is quite complex and it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail which businesses have gone bankrupt, which businesses have experienced heavy government investment, and which businesses are managing to sustain and even increase the scale and scope of their interests<sup>12</sup>.

While the role of the politico-administrative bureaucracy must be taken into account in a description of the Jamaican economy, it is not sufficient unto itself to explain the emigration of Jews from the Island. For example, data support the curious conclusion that despite

<sup>12</sup> Such a paper is in preparation.



the popular consensus regarding government mismanagement, Democratic Socialism is not actually antithetical to the private sector. To be more specific, 1) In May of 1977, the Jamaican Development Bank (the central bank) secured a loan of J\$2.5 million from the Reconstruction Loan Corporation of the Federal Republic of Germany. The loan was to be "used for the financing of credits to cover import costs of capital goods for small and medium sized private enterprises engaged in manufacturing and processing" (*Caribbean Monthly Bulletin* 1977a: 11). 2) The executive secretary of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica went on record at the monthly luncheon of the Life Underwriter's Association of Jamaica, as saying "that a strong shift away from a private sector economy to a mixed economy [government participation] has been made without much dislocation but with much misapprehension" (*Caribbean Monthly Bulletin* 1977b: 11). 3) The majority of corporations which continue to be listed on the Jamaica Stock Exchange are still expanding and diversifying (Holzberg 1977b). 4) Members of the national entrepreneurial elite are still being called upon to serve the politico-administrative bureaucracy as advisers, consultants, diplomats, chairmen of statutory (government) boards, and commissions of inquiry.

In addition, there is evidence which suggests that corporate executives who emigrate are in fact really "absentee proprietors" in relation to their Jamaican investments, given the governmental restrictions on taking money out of the country. In other words, the Jamaican businessman becomes an absentee proprietor as he moves his residence but not his assets from the country. Retaining control of his corporate holdings, a member of the national entrepreneurial elite returns to visit Jamaica for holidays, board meetings, and business conventions. This tendency to maintain social and economic linkages with the country has been reflected in the recent decision of the executives and trustees of the United Congregation of Israelites to introduce in 1977/78 a "by-law allowing for life membership for those residing overseas and who wish to continue their membership" (United Congregation of Israelites 1977: 7). As many of the Jewish émigrés return to visit sometimes as many as six times a year, they are still regarded as "members" of the community.

The preceding analytical focus on Jamaican national political economy brief though it may have been, highlighted features which constitute the integrative material conditions of Jamaican society.

Ethnic groups and social classes are encompassed within a single political-economic framework as Jamaicans. They must come to grips with the limited resources of the Jamaican national domain. The fact that individuals, ethnic groups, social classes and racial groups are differentially positioned with respect to access to and control over limited resources (social class) does not negate the integrative nature of national political economy. Rather, it sets the stage for a unique collective response in the form of Jamaican cultural nationalism.

While unification of the Jamaican national system seems an impossibility in a politico-economic environment of duplicatory and parallel ethnic segments and social classes, cultural consensus stemming from participation in a common political economy still exists. I have already discussed the similarity of opinions concerning government intervention in the Jamaican economy. This consensus is not indicative of a total and absolute homogeneity of values, attitudes, beliefs, styles of life, etc., but rather sensitizes us to the extant relative cultural agreement over what may be the most important factors sustaining the island's current economic problems.

#### b) *Cultural nationalism*

The material conditions of Jamaican society however, are not the only factors which give rise to a mutually supportive collective response. There is also the symbolic content of cultural nationalism which in and of itself articulates a unified Jamaican national context. In other words, what distinguishes a Jamaican from a non-Jamaican besides matters of national political economy revolves around the symbols of a qualitatively unique cultural nationalism. These cultural symbols are institutionalized and they interact with and mediate the domain of political economy. To some extent they even constitute the social logic of praxis.

National integration is accomplished through the popularization of such symbolic idioms as: language, reggae, rastafarianism, the national flag, the national Heroes, John Canoe, "Miss Lou", the Pantomime, the national Dance Theatre School, the coat of arms, the national bird, the national flower, saltfish and ackee, the "pattie", Air Jamaica, "Joshua", the "capitalists", the "sufferers", "white man", and more. The meaning of these symbols may be differentially perceived by those in different situational contexts. There may even

be disagreement over which symbols constitute the most important ones for national unity. For example, the Jamaican private sector is often referred to as being made up of “capitalists” or “oppressors”, while the workers or unemployed are known as “sufferers”. However, members of national entrepreneurial elite are not particularly pleased with their characterization as “capitalists” because it suggests that their business activities are the cause of the oppression and suffering. Thus, while in the long run these symbols may be inherently divisive, they nonetheless frame a common social arena of interaction. To say that these symbols are differentially perceived does not negate the fact that they are perceived nonetheless. Jamaicans agree over what to disagree and it is because of this differential agreement (perception) that it becomes possible to suggest that the Jews are emigrating not only as Jews interested in raising their children in a more “Jewish” environment; not only as national entrepreneurial elite apprehensive about their investment and property holdings and/or the general state of the economy; but also, as “whites” in an environment where “whiteness” makes them extremely visible and even places them at a cultural disadvantage.

The new Jamaican cultural nationalism stresses Afro-West Indian cultural traditions, a commitment to the “new economic order”; and a history of colonial exploitation by whites of European descent<sup>13</sup>. Thus, at this moment, the Jews also constitute a segmental component of a social stratum of the Jamaican population – white elites – whose phenotype, social privilege, and economic resource base have been called into question since the promulgation of Democratic Socialism in 1974. The “cultural” irrelevance of the white minorities appears to have increased since the advent of Democratic Socialism but perhaps this is more of an illusion than a cultural reality as some analysts would trace the demise of “whiteness” to political independence from Great Britain in 1962 or even universal adult suffrage as far back as 1944.

## CONCLUSION

Societies that are characterized by certain conditions of cultural diversity (ethnic segments) and social conflict (class antagonism) may

<sup>13</sup> See Holzberg (1977b) for a more detailed elaboration on the role of the White minorities in the formation of Jamaican national symbols.

still be a unitary system of shared experience. The paper has concentrated on the social arrangements that obtain when ethnicity and social stratification are considered against the backdrop of the Jamaican national cultural context. Ethnicity and social stratification are reciprocal phenomena not antitheses. They are mediated in a national cultural environment that is framed by the integrative structures of political economy and cultural nationalism. It is just as much of an oversimplification to treat ethnicity and social class as independent variables as it is an oversimplification to treat the island's materialist conditions as the prime mover of collective action. To the extent that Benedict (1962, 1970), Patterson (1975), and others dismiss the role of cultural factors in the organization of social structure – their analyses are oversimplified descriptions of national political economy.

The fact that members of the national entrepreneurial elite do not come from the same ethnic group, religious background, or racial groupings, suggests a “cultural” heterogeneity that upon first glance predisposes the analyst to dismiss “national culture” as a significant organizational context. And yet, there is an underlying cultural logic that informs social behaviour and serves as context wherein matters of political economy are played out. Jamaica is an ex-British colony, a tropical island in the Caribbean, a Third World developing nation in a state of dependent underdevelopment, a producer of primary resources (sugar, bananas, and bauxite) for export, an historically defined socio-cultural entity with tendencies to cleavage along racial, ethnic and class lines. All these factors combined suggest that there exists a qualitatively distinct Jamaican national sentiment that is engendered by the aggregation of reciprocal elements culturally integrated into a social totality. This is the meaningful context that frames social action and transcends ethnic and class divisions. Without understanding the nature of the Jamaican national culture it would be impossible to understand why the Jews (whites? national entrepreneurial elites?) are leaving the island.

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