

*Navigations:*

*The Fluidity of Identity in the  
Post-Colonial Bahamas*

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## **Introduction**

### *Navigations: tales of nation in the Bahamas*

It is not at all uncommon for Bahamian intellectuals to assert that the Bahamas has little or no sense of national identity. Discussions of the topic are often greeted with raised eyebrows and comments like 'National identity? and what is that?' or 'We don't have a national identity'. In June 1998, the fledgling nationalist-intellectual Bahamas Association for Cultural Studies (BACUS) entitled its first annual conference *Uncovering Bahamian Selves*. The implication was clear: if a 'Bahamian self' existed at all, then it was very well hidden indeed.

If one believes, as these intellectuals appear to do, that a national identity of any worth resides in a narrative/symbolic 'myth of nation' (Smith, 1988), then the palpable absence in the Bahamas of a readily observable symbolic product poses considerable problems. Yet among the Bahamian public, the sense that there is no national identity is not evident. On the contrary: the first thing one notices when beginning a study on identity and nation is the centrality of such conceptions. Everywhere one turns there is reference to the 'true' Bahamian experience. The Ministry of Tourism in the capital decorates its foyer with 'native' Bahamian handicrafts, and is located above the Straw Market, the quintessential 'Bahamian' market. Shops on Bay Street, the main thoroughfare, vie to promote their merchandise as being 'Bahamian-made'. Popular

artists invite members of the public to celebrate those things that are unashamedly 'Bahamian'; politicians, preachers and radio talk show hosts ground all discussions of appropriate behaviour in the question of whether it is really 'Bahamian' or not. People, places and things are singled out and judged according to their adherence to 'Bahamian' sets of ideals—a code that incorporates (among other things) Christianity, community and a strong commitment to family. The second thing one notices is that individuals know what 'Bahamian' is when they are confronted with the foreign. Extremely clear demarcations are made between who is 'Bahamian' and who is not. This reluctance to recognise outsiders is not remarkable in itself, but in a nation whose apparent lack of 'national' symbols has caused many residents to deprecate it, it is certainly significant.

My problem in discussing national identity in the Bahamas is manifold. How does one reconcile, theoretically, the disjuncture between the intellectual understanding of Bahamian national identity, and the actual national and nationalistic practices of Bahamians themselves? Part of my difficulty is descriptive, taking on the challenge of identifying Bahamian national identity in a context in which obvious methods—mining the literature of the nation, interpreting collective symbols, delineating processes of integration—do not yield expected results. In part, it is conceptual. Into what theoretical space can fit a study of national identity in the archipelagic Bahamas, a geographically fragmented, multi-ethnic, postcolonial state? And finally, it is a question of auto-ethnography. How do I balance my several roles—anthropologist, Bahamian, nationalist writer—in such a way that I might make sense of my data for *all* my potential audiences?

I intend to address these problems by employing a number of theoretical approaches. Drawing upon widely-ranging studies of nationalism, I shall examine how

the Bahamian example fulfils, and deviates from, expected norms. With regard to the fragmentation of Bahamian territory and the multi-ethnic nature of its population, I shall rely on theories of ethnicity and multiplicity as well as studies of space, place and identity. And finally, I shall investigate the problem of writing about my own society—indeed, of writing about *myself*—by referring to a discourse of auto-ethnography that expresses that relationship in a variety of complex ways.

### **Nationalism and the ‘myths of nations’**

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson discusses the ‘three institutions of power’ that helped solidify the nationalist enterprise—the census, map, and museum, which ‘profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined ... the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry.’ (1991: 164). Such institutions stand atop the pervasive power of print-capitalism, which permits the conceptualisation of the *nation*, defined by Anderson as ‘an imagined political community’ whose members delineate their belonging in relation to their fellows, despite the fact that they ‘will never know most of their fellow-members, or even hear of them’ (1991: 6). National identity, proceeding from this imagined community, is the fictive commonality that exists among the members of a group that is too large to be linked otherwise. This commonality distinguishes the members of this group from the members of other similar groups; nations are not only imagined, but they are also ‘inherently limited and sovereign’ (Anderson, 1991: 6).

The trope of *imagination* is common throughout the theories on nationalism. The nation, together with its traditions, is ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm, 1983); it comes into being

when certain economic and social factors exist that permit its creation (Gellner, 1983); it is held together by ‘narratives’ that identify it as a unique entity in a world of other unique entities (Anderson, 1991; Brennan, 1990; Bhabha, 1990). Indeed, as Foster observes, the concepts of *invention* or *imagination* highlight one assumption shared by various contemporary writers on nationalism (1995: 5): that contrary to the beliefs of nationalists, the nation does not spring from some primordial origin, but is rather the result of the conscious activities of some, or all, of its members.

If the ‘nation’ is a fabrication, how does it appear real to nationals and nationalists? For Anderson, it is the *process* of imagination that gives the ‘nation’ its power. All communities, from the lineage to the clan, are imagined communities. However, whereas communal links ‘were once imagined particularistically—as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship’ (1991: 6), nations construct themselves in more general, abstract terms. The older religious communities and dynastic empires were conceived of as though they were a series of centres without margins,<sup>1</sup> constructed ‘particularistically’—the former through one’s orientation to the deity, the latter through one’s allegiance to the ruler. By contrast,

... the very possibility of imagining the nation only arose historically when, and where, three fundamental cultural conceptions ... all lost their axiomatic grip on men’s minds ... first ... was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth ... Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres ... Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence, and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.

The slow, uneven decline of these interlinked certainties ... drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history. No surprise then that the

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Marshall McLuhan, 1962, for this term.

search was on ... for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search ... than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways. (1991: 36).

Thus the conceptualisation of the nation represented a markedly different way of imagining one's community than the ways that previously existed. Nationalism was a product of a new modernity that contrasted sharply with the 'traditional', and national identity a 'profoundly new way' of thinking about oneself and one's relation to others.

For those theorists who accept the association of nationalism with modernity, it follows that the concept of nationalism—and, by extension, national identity—is a construct that arises in a particular time and place; geographically and historically the nation is unique. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear the expectation that in the postmodern world nationalism (and national identity) will lose its force and relevance. According to such readings, the concept of the 'nation' is a circumstantialist response to a specific context, a myth used by elites to unite disparate groups under a single set of interests.

A. D. Smith (1988a) describes this approach to nations and nationalism as the 'myth of the modern nation'. The idea that nations are wholly constructed collectivities dreamed up for political purposes by nationalist elites, is, in his reading, as much a myth as the nationalist endeavour itself. Many of its components are far more relevant to the social scientists who espouse it than to nation-builders themselves, founded on the very western, state-centred concepts of territory, economy, law and 'civic ideology' (1988a: 9). These he contrasts with another national model, one which 'harmonises less well with Western modernity' (1988a: 9), based as it is on shared ancestry, demography, culture and history. This model, he contends, established on the 'ethnic origins of

nations' (1986), is more common in non-western regions, and may stand at odds with the 'modern myth' of nations. While he recognises that certain circumstances must be present for modern nations to form, he argues simultaneously that the symbols and myths upon which nationalists draw have deeper roots:

... any useful definition of the nation must do justice to both ethnic and territorial conceptions. In many ways, the nation is an ideal of the nationalists which has come to be accepted by very many people, and equally an abstraction and construct. But it cannot be defined apart from the conceptions of the nation entertained by nationalist and other participants, for these conceptions reflect the experiences and processes of the historical and present situations in which so many find themselves ... I have opted for a definition of the nation which, while founded on ethnic elements, includes the civic components that emerge in more recent periods of history ... In this way, the two overlapping concepts of the nation are brought together, while allowing different emphases, and ethnicity is closely linked to the nation and nationalism, in a way that accords better with reality than the more common attempt to oppose them. (1988a: 9-10)

For the student of national identity in the Bahamas, a country that is neither part of Europe nor of a region whose indigenous traditions survived nineteenth-century imperialism—both approaches are problematic. On one level, the idea that any nationalist endeavour is wholly instrumentalist, carried out by elites to create a homogeneous solidarity out of a diverse population, while not without merit, is nevertheless difficult to support, given the paucity of national symbols and narratives on the Bahamian ground. Smith's solution is unsatisfactory as well. The Bahamas is part of a region whose original population was decimated within a generation of the first landfall of Columbus. Myths of ethnic origins consequently have little *national* application, for all the present inhabitants of the Bahama Islands have come from somewhere else; because it is a nation completely formed by colonial settlers, the Bahamas has no indigenous 'tradition' upon which to draw. To add to the confusion,

the Bahama Islands are an archipelago, thus making the question of territory complex. How, then, does one approach the question of Bahamian national identity?

### **Bahamian national identity: a history**

Geographically and historically, the Bahamas may be considered one of the former British West Indian colonies. However, certain distinctions must be drawn, among them the proximity of the territory to the North American mainland, the unique geography of the country, and the corresponding economic foundation that resulted, all of which render the Bahamas a notably different creature.

Unlike the major Caribbean possessions of Britain, the Bahama Islands were not held for their economic potential—the colony was never a producer of sugar<sup>2</sup>—but for their strategic position on the borders of Britain’s enemies in the region, represented by Cuba, Haiti and Florida. As a result, the white population was not made up of fortune-seekers and planters, but was rather a motley crew of opportunists and non-conformists who sought in the Bahamas a measure of personal autonomy. They found it in their relation to the sea; piracy, privateering, wrecking, stevedoring, blockade running, sponging, trade and smuggling of every kind have sustained Bahamians throughout the centuries.

The earliest English-speaking settlers were Bermudian religious dissidents who in 1648 established the independent republic of Eleutheria in the Bahama Islands (see

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<sup>2</sup>Sugar production in the West Indies demanded many qualities the Bahamas does not possess: expanses of rich fertile soil, such as is found on alluvial plains; relatively close contact between plantations and the main port, which controlled the export of sugar and the import of slaves; a consequent high concentration of population in a few places, and an infrastructure reliable enough to meet the demand for the product (see Mintz, 1974).

Craton and Saunders, 1992: 104-114). Although the aspiration was utopian, the actual fortunes of the republic were poor; it began with shipwreck, was followed by a generation of painful wresting of subsistence goods from the soil, and was sustained by the trade of hardwoods and ambergris (whale sperm), not with Britain, or even Bermuda, but with the American colonies. By the time of the republic's collapse—within twenty years of its establishment—the Eleutherians and their descendants had learned the hard way the fundamental Bahamian lesson: that survival depends not on the land but on the sea. The ensuing centuries saw Bahamians engaged in various maritime activities, not least among them piracy, privateering and wrecking.

Most scholars of Caribbean society and history regard the plantation—or at the very least, the social structure resulting from it—as central to their understanding.<sup>3</sup> For them, the plantation has created societies which are reliant on one or two cash crops produced by forced or indentured labour, and constituted of complex and rigid hierarchies. Hannerz, writing of the Cayman Islands, makes a case for an alternative model, arguing that the existence of certain small islands on which extensive cultivation could not take place requires a different approach:

Here, however, we will be concerned with another Caribbean. It has intimate links to Plantation America and shares much of its traditions, but it has no large plantations and is oriented instead toward the sea. Scattered islands in the eastern Caribbean may be considered representative of it, and in the past the Bahamas and Bermuda further north shared several of its characteristics ... it may be seen in a historical network of English-speaking societies ... with economies which have involved piracy, wrecking, fishing, turtling, seamanship, logcutting, smuggling and small-scale agriculture in mixes which have varied over time and between different territories. (1974: 20)

Such was certainly the situation in the Bahamas during the early period of settlement, and the resulting social structure reflects this fluidity of the Bahamian economy. It is arguable, for instance, that slaves in the Bahamas before the 1780s possessed a measure of autonomy that slaves in the plantation Americas did not. First, the economy, based on commerce and seafaring, allowed for a cadre of skilled slaves whose activities permitted a high level of personal responsibility. Several of these were able to buy their freedom, as the existence of New Guinea (the Creek Village), a settlement of Free Coloured people, suggested (Craton and Saunders, 1992: 118).<sup>4</sup> Second, the history of piracy allowed for the blurring of such distinctions as slave and master, as blacks and whites alike were pirates. Craton and Saunders observe that

[t]he class divisions of the 'straight' world were consciously rejected [by the pirates], and racial divisions were also often ignored as being irrelevant ... suitable blacks and browns were often recruited along with the white crewmen of captured vessels ... Bahamian pirate crews were thus to an extent multicomplexioned and polyglot. (1992: 111)

Third, the difficulty in making a living from the sea meant that white Bahamians were precluded from owning many slaves or even from curtailing too much the activities of the ones they owned. One might argue there was a certain pragmatic value in allowing slaves to buy their freedom rather than having to support them in their less productive years. Consequently, black Bahamians did appear better off than their counterparts in the rest of the New World. (Craton and Saunders, 1992: 173).

This state of affairs was changed somewhat by the arrival of Loyalist refugees from the Thirteen Colonies who, retaining allegiance to the British Crown, were forced

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<sup>3</sup>For some examples see Mintz, 1974; Nettleford, 1970; Patterson, 1969; M. G. Smith, 1965; R. T. Smith, 1956; 1988.

to leave the United States after the success of the American Revolution. These came with their slaves to establish cotton plantations throughout the central and southern islands, and represent the first group of settlers with any extensive agricultural interest. Their presence transformed the colony socially, intellectually and politically. Many came from cities such as Charleston and Williamsburg in the Carolinas and regarded themselves as the superiors of the original white inhabitants of the colony, whom they considered the illiterate offspring of pirates (Albury, 1975). This group established schools and churches, rebuilt the capital, and injected the spirit of the Enlightenment into the community. Others, planters and farmers, brought with them the mindset of the plantation, and for a while enforced the social order with which they had been familiar in the American colonies. Parliament after their arrival concerned itself with the enacting of laws governing the owning and administering of slaves. Yet even they were unable to sustain an undiluted reliance on the land for long. Cotton flourished in the Bahamas during the first ten years of its cultivation, but by the early 1800s pestilence, exhausted soils and bad weather had taken their toll. Plantations were abandoned, often along with the slaves, or else planters diversified their crops, turning to the sea more and more to supplement their living. As a result, the end of slavery in 1838 had less of an impact on the economic and social structure of the Bahamas than it had on many other Caribbean colonies. Because Bahamian slaves had long been permitted—or required—to diversify their activities, the planters had no need for massive importations of indentured labour; moreover, the colony, already fairly poor, did not suffer a drastic change in financial fortunes. The Bahamian plantocracy did not, as was the tendency on the sugar islands, withdraw *en masse* to the metropolis (which

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<sup>4</sup>Ironically, this village no longer survives.

was, in any case, quite unlikely to be in Europe, as most of them had come originally from the Thirteen Colonies of the Americas); rather, it remained in the Bahamas, withdrawing perhaps to the capital, transferred its agricultural interests to sea-based commerce, as the Eleutherians had before it, and wielded power in that fashion.

One legacy of the white presence in the colony is found in its politics. For most of the history of European settlement in the Bahamas, the archipelago has enjoyed representative parliamentary government, established in 1729 and continuing unbroken until today. This fact makes it one of the two British possessions in the Caribbean/Atlantic region to have had uninterrupted self-government for more than forty years; the majority of British colonies in the region were, for the last century of British rule, administered as Crown Colonies.<sup>5</sup> The primary reason for the continued existence of representative government in the Bahamas was the significant white population—an estimated 15% of the total. By the twentieth century, therefore, indigenous whites, and not the more disinterested British, held the primary responsibility for the social and economic affairs of the nation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Originally, the British Empire was administered according to a three-tiered system. Dominions were provided with full internal self-government, with Great Britain, represented by a Governor, retaining ultimate control over foreign affairs. Certain other colonies were permitted Representative Government. Under this system there was a split government. Limited adult suffrage permitted the election of a parliament to the lower house, which administered all local affairs; the Governor appointed the upper house, and controlled the civil service and foreign affairs. All West Indian colonies were governed in this fashion until the rebellions of the mid-1800s which followed the abolition of slavery. After that, the sugar islands became Crown Colonies—administered exclusively by the Governor and his appointees, most of them British, where local citizens had no say in their government. It is possible to relate the three forms of government to the numbers of Europeans resident in the relevant colonies. Possessions whose populations were predominantly white were accorded Dominion status. Colonies where local whites made up significant minorities were permitted Representative Government. Colonies where the numbers of native whites were insignificant, or where the non-white majority proved intractable, were administered as Crown Colonies.

<sup>6</sup>In the Bahamas, their power was considerable. Even the Governor was effectively controlled by Parliament, which paid his salary and maintained his residence (Craton, 1986; Hughes,

This state of affairs, ironically, provided the mass of the Bahamian people with fewer privileges than their counterparts in the West Indian Crown Colonies. While the removal of representative government in Jamaica at the end of the nineteenth century has been viewed as a setback by Jamaicans (see, for instance, Nettleford, 1970), the fact that such government in the Bahamas was controlled by a white minority meant that avenues of advancement opened to inhabitants of other British Caribbean colonies by the British themselves—education and the civil service—were not available to the vast majority of non-white Bahamians; in most cases, there were enough white Bahamians to fill such places. What occurred in the Bahamian situation, then, was the establishment of a society in which individual enterprise, coupled with skin colour and ancestry, mattered more than education. The oppression of the Bahamian masses by the mercantile elite was considerable (Johnson, 1991a). Although the colony was, like the other American colonies, integrated into the global cash economy throughout most of its history, many ordinary Bahamians, particularly those living in the outlying islands of the archipelago, were excluded from participation in that economy. These people relied on subsistence farming or depended on the mercantile elite for employment. Such was the monopoly of the white bourgeoisie in the capital that most of these labourers, when hired, were not paid in cash. Rather, they worked according to the ‘truck system’, being compensated for their services in goods supplied to them by their employers (Johnson, 1991b).

Other areas provided some benefits. On the one hand, the ownership of land, unusually widespread in the archipelago, provided one source of Bahamians’ personal power and self-identification. Generally a customary tenure with little or no standing

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1981). So entrenched was the power of Parliament that the only Royal Governor to have gone against its will was HRH the Duke of Windsor.

in the courts, but with considerable *de facto* value, this property provided many Bahamians not only with the ability to engage in subsistence agriculture free from rents and taxes, but also with a collective identity upon which to draw. On the other hand, the intensifying depression of the turn of the twentieth century ironically increased the autonomy of many black Bahamians. In the late 1800s the expansion of the States into the Pacific west coast, together with the acquisition of the Hawaiian islands, had resulted in protective tariffs being levied against foreign imports. The Bahamian export industry, hitherto relying primarily upon the sale of tomatoes and pineapples to the USA, thus effectively lost its major market.<sup>7</sup> The depression that followed forced many men, most of them black, to emigrate in search of employment. Their gradual integration into the global cash economy, and their remittances of their wages to their families at home, meant that many of their relatives were no longer wholly dependent on the credit extended to them by whites. Beginning in the 1920s, moreover, the tourism and construction industries further freed many from their servitude to the 'truck' system. Finally, for those people who were able to build their own boats and man them themselves—thus avoiding the maritime monopoly of the capital—the ever-present fortunes of the sea provided their own rewards.

Despite their growing economic autonomy during the early twentieth century, the political influence of the black and coloured population was limited; black Bahamians, although a majority since 1783, held no real political power until 1967. Not only was the Bahamas deprived of the educational and economic advantages available

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<sup>7</sup>Bahamian exporters traded with the United States of America, the proximity of that country providing much surer returns than trade with Great Britain.

to middle-class blacks in British crown colonies,<sup>8</sup> but the presence of a sizeable group of native whites also hindered the establishment of a significant middle class. Plantation Caribbean society is understood as being constructed in layers which marry class with race and colour. At the apex were a number of people of European descent, often expatriates who governed the country. At the base were a large mass of working people—peasants, *lumpenproletariat* or both—who tended to be of predominantly African or Amerindian descent. In between was a buffer class consisting variously of people of mixed heritage, who were favoured over their black brethren for positions of minor influence in the society, and other groups of immigrants, such as Orientals, East Indians, people from the southern Mediterranean, and southern Europeans (Portuguese and Greeks).<sup>9</sup> Although *social* categories were recognised in the Bahamas that mirrored the wider Caribbean model, in *political* terms racial discrimination took place along lines more common in the USA. In other words, any admixture of African blood qualified one as ‘coloured’ and guaranteed one a subordinate position in society. This discrimination was intensified during the early twentieth century with the development of tourism and the frequenting of American visitors to the Bahamas.

Until the 1960s, then, the question of a *national* consciousness was not raised in the Bahamas. Until that time the country was governed by a white minority who regarded itself as an offshoot of Great Britain, and who identified—along with many

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<sup>8</sup>The first Government High School was opened in 1925; the first piece of labour legislation was enacted in 1942 (Craton and Saunders, 1998: 291); the secret ballot was not enacted throughout the Bahamas until 1944 (1998: 307); women were not accorded the vote until 1960; and the concept of one man, one vote was not instituted until 1964 (1998: 337).

<sup>9</sup>See Hughes, 1981, for a treatment of this theme, and Saunders, 1990c, for a discussion of the role of mixed-race Bahamians within the wider American-style frame. See too M. G. Smith, 1965, on Jamaica, Martinez-Alier, 1974, on Cuba, C.L.R. James, 1963, on Haiti, and R.T. Smith, 1956, on British Guiana.

non-white Bahamians—more or less wholly with ‘Mother England’.<sup>10</sup> Unlike other British West Indian possessions, independence from Britain was not actively sought; independence would bring no benefits for the governing elites, who had had self-governance for well over three hundred years. The struggle that arose during the mid-twentieth century in the Bahamas was a civil one. Black Bahamians, long in the majority but denied full participation in the affairs of the state, sought first and foremost majority rule. In other words, Bahamians themselves were divided in an interracial conflict; black Bahamians of all but the very lightest hues tended to unite in a bid to overthrow the white hegemony, while white Bahamians responded by closing ranks to prevent that overthrow. As the growing tide of nationalist movements swelled throughout the colonial world, the Bahamian gaze was focused internally, at the structures of power within the state. During the 1950s and 1960s, the movement that would ultimately lead to the independence of the Bahamian nation modelled itself far more on the Civil Rights Movement in the USA than on the anti-colonial battles elsewhere in the region. Race, not government, defined the fight.

In 1967, following two and a half decades of growing agitation on the part of the black and coloured majority of the Bahamian population, the white leaders were ousted for the first time and a black Bahamian government, the Progressive Liberal Party, was elected. The coming to power of the PLP has been referred to as many things, among them a ‘quiet revolution’ and an ‘exodus’; but in a colony where a black majority had been ruled by a white minority for longer than memory could tell, the psychic power of the change was profound. Independence was the goal of the new *black* government,

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<sup>10</sup>This identification was reinforced during the Second World War by the appointment of the Duke of Windsor as Royal Governor. His exile, one could argue, was the confirmation, for inhabitants of the Bahamian colony, of the islands’ intimate attachment to England.

and the nationalist movement that grew out of that mission defined what was 'Bahamian' in predominantly racial terms.

### **The Bahamas and the rhetoric of nationalism**

The nationalist movement in the Bahamas followed in the wake of the struggle for majority rule. As I have discussed, the benefits of self-rule had long been felt in the Bahamas, and the PLP government that was elected in 1967 inherited those benefits. However, what was lacking was a sense of Bahamian identity distinct from that of England. In attempting to create that sense of identity, the new government moved to expand its local authority and to establish the Bahamas as an independent nation. The second election in 1972 of the PLP was fought over the question of independence, and a referendum on the possibility was tied to the outcome. It is arguable that the triumphant return of the PLP to power at that time had more to do with the continuing racial fears of the majority than with any great desire for independence; the opposition Free National Movement, which consisted of a mixture of white Bahamians and the more cautious members of the first PLP government, argued that the country was not yet ready for full self-government, but it did not reject the idea of independence outright. The popular interpretation of this stance was a racial one: that *black* Bahamians, led by a black government, were not ready for independence. Independence for the Bahamas, therefore, was more the outcome of racially-based competition than the result of some universal, nationalist uprising.

Thus the rhetoric of nationalism that accompanied Bahamian independence in July 1973 was overwhelmingly a racialist one. The perspective was binaristic, dealing

with *whites* and *blacks* and making no mention of any intermediate groups. The new national symbols, expressly invented in a populist way by holding nation-wide competitions for their design, were by and large meaningless to the general populace, and had to be invested with significance in the years to come. Some steps were taken to make the symbols as inclusive as possible—the new coat of arms, for instance, combined a number of images, including a miniature replica of the old coat of arms, and was inscribed with the slogan ‘Forward, Upward, Onward Together’. That notwithstanding, most of the nationalist rhetoric took much the same path as the Black Power movement in the USA was beginning to take; the darker one’s skin, the purer one’s status as a ‘true’ Bahamian. White Bahamians, who indignantly claimed a far longer existence in the archipelago than the majority of blacks, were completely ignored in this rhetoric, and those people of mixed heritage, overwhelmingly identified as Uncle Toms, were increasingly marginalised. Images of Bahamians that appeared in the brochure discourse<sup>11</sup> of the tourist industry were almost exclusively black; the debate over the colours of the flag—gold, aquamarine and black—was a debate over the representation, or lack thereof, of white Bahamians in the nationalist narrative; and the tendency to emphasise the African heritage of the country at the expense of any other was central. Unlike than the Jamaican inclusive self-construction—‘Out of Many, One People’—or the Trinidadian multicultural society, the post-independence Bahamian nationalist rhetoric created an identity that was overwhelmingly Afrocentric.

The depth of division inspired by this rhetoric is illustrated in the movement, after the 1972 election, of the island of Abaco, the symbolic home of white Bahamians, to secede from the proposed Commonwealth of The Bahamas (Hughes, 1981;

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<sup>11</sup>Strachan, 1995, after Walcott.

LaFlamme, 1985),<sup>12</sup> and in the exodus, after the 1967 elections, of a number of white and fair-skinned Bahamians who, fearing racial reprisals, left the colony for places such as Great Britain, Spain and Australia. The new government's policy of 'nationalisation' was overwhelmingly perceived as a policy of hiring Afro-Bahamians, rather than *all* citizens, for positions. The longevity of this Afrocentric rhetoric was evident in the fact that until 1992, every election was fought with the PLP's successful reference to race, a reminder to the black majority that only a black and populist government could govern the independent black nation of the Bahamas (Craton and Saunders, 1998). Its pervasiveness was such that by 1989 average teenagers had little or no conception of the existence in Bahamian society of native whites; the overwhelming emphasis was placed on the blackness of the population, and whites were virtually invisible as nationals (Bethel, 1993).

Perhaps most ironic about the Afrocentrism of the PLP rhetoric is the fact that, comparatively speaking, the numbers of people of exclusively European descent are higher in the Bahamas than in any other independent British West Indian nation. As a result, the numbers of 'coloured' Bahamians—people of mixed African and European background—are higher as well. Unlike Jamaica, where the population of African descent counts as over 90% of the total, and where a 'white' person is extremely likely to have black ancestors, the number of Bahamian citizens of overwhelmingly African descent can be as low as 70%. Even so, the numbers are difficult to calculate, as hybridity and fluidity of identity—and of *identification*, I shall argue in Chapter III—are commonplace in the Bahamas. Moreover, for many white Bahamians—particularly those descended from the first settlers—people of African descent are regarded as

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<sup>12</sup>The petition was summarily rejected.

interlopers, having arrived with the Loyalist exodus of the USA over a century after the establishment of the initial Bahamian colony. The image of Bahamians as 'black and proud', therefore, was for years at odds with the lived realities of many.

By 1992, however, the binarism of the PLP's nationalist rhetoric was wearing thin. White Bahamians, who for 25 years had been silent members of the society with no political leverage (although their economic power had flourished under PLP rule), had long backed the more broadly-based Free National Movement, whose rhetoric was more inclusive than that of the PLP. By the early 1990s, too, members of the new black and coloured middle classes, products of the populist policies of PLP government, became dissatisfied with the continual association of Bahamian nationalism with the poor and the dispossessed—the so-called 'grass roots' who still inhabited the areas of the city the middle classes had left during the 1970s and 1980s. These also threw their support behind the FNM. Perhaps most comfortable with the FNM rhetoric were the considerable numbers of 'coloured' Bahamians whose mixed heritage and consequent inability to identify wholly with the African rhetoric of the PLP had left them the choice to 'act black' or continue their political marginalisation. As a result, the 1992 general election saw the defeat of the PLP after a quarter of a century.

As I write in June 1999, the older racist hegemony is gradually giving way to a more pluralistic discourse which recognises the Bahamianness of white and coloured Bahamians as well as affording a place in society to foreigners who have the good of the nation at heart. Although the rhetoric of nationalism has yet to become as pluralistic as those of Jamaica and Trinidad, and although all Bahamians of whatever background have yet to feel that they have an *equal* position in society, at least they feel freer to claim *some* position there. The multiplicity of identities that constitute Bahamians' realities is slowly being incorporated into the nationalist rhetoric of the country.

### **Nation making and transnationalism**

Clearly, the prevailing theories of nationalism are inadequate to address the Bahamian nationalist endeavour. On the one hand, as I shall contend in Chapter I, the generally accepted cornerstones of 'imagination' and 'invention'—literature, 'myths' of nation, monuments, museums and the reification of history—while not absent in the Bahamas, are only marginally important. On the other, Smith's 'ethnic origins' are employed in ways which are far from unifying. Neither a true example of the 'myth of nations' nor of the 'myths of modern nations', Bahamian national identity is theoretically problematic.

For Robert Foster, the nation-states of the South Pacific pose many of the same difficulties.

These states attained formal political independence in the years between 1970 and 1980. Relative newcomers to nation-statehood, they arrived quietly and quickly—not through noisy, protracted struggles for liberation, but mainly through the instigation of their colonizers. Anticolonial resistance, which surely did occur, did not provoke broad-based national consciousness, not even temporarily. (1995b: 1)

The Bahamian case has much in common with that of Melanesia. Bahamian independence in 1973, as we have seen, was less the outcome of a protracted nationalist anti-colonial struggle than the culmination of decades of fighting by the black majority for political representation; it also received tacit encouragement from the colonial government of the day. The main conflict over independence took place between those Bahamians who believed that a black government could lead an independent state and

those who were sceptical. Independence did not inspire any ‘broad-based national consciousness’, and was followed by Abaco’s attempted secession.<sup>13</sup> Nationalism in the Bahamas, then, fits well into Foster’s concept of nation making, as the construction of ‘Bahamian’ has in many ways been a conscious, state-generated movement.

Like the Bahamas, the nations of the South Pacific occupy archipelagoes whose territory is fragmented, and whose frontiers, drawn on water, possess a fluidity that land-based borders do not. Individual islands or groups of islands do not necessarily identify themselves with the state; thus nationalism in these places, far from being a revolutionary, collective construction by a class of native elites, is an *official* enterprise that follows in the wake of statehood (Foster, 1995b: 1). Unlike the more familiar understanding of nationalism—which is often termed nation *building*—the nationalist enterprise is a shell which the members of the nation inhabit as they choose. Foster labels this process *nation making*: ‘both the production of a collective definition of “peoplehood” and the construction of individual “personhood” in terms of such a definition’ (1995b: 2).

Unlike Oceania, however, where ‘tradition’—an emphasis on the identities and cultures of the region that existed before European conquest—becomes an integral part of the nation-making exercise (Foster, 1995b; Lawson, 1997; LiPuma, 1995), the Bahamas has no pre-colonial past upon which to build. Like Trinidad or Mauritius (Eriksen, 1992), the Bahamas is an *entirely* invented nation. With this contradiction at the root of Bahamian identity, it is not surprising that the traditional/modern, community/nation dichotomies apply very poorly, both in the creating of Bahamian nationalism, and the

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<sup>13</sup> As Foster, has observed, secessionist movements were likewise common in Melanesia (1995b).

study of it.<sup>14</sup> Bahamians present a somewhat puzzling case to the researcher in that they appear not to be overly concerned with ‘tradition’ in *any* form, preferring rather to emphasise flux, change, and the reshaping of the present in spite of, or perhaps to spite, the past.

Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc, investigating Caribbean and Pacific migrants in the USA, have developed the concept of *transnationalism* to account for their informants’ multiple national identifications. These migrants, who are often citizens of their adopted states, nevertheless remain incorporated economically, sentimentally and politically into their countries of origin, thus calling into question ‘analytical paradigms that ... [focus] ... on immigrant incorporation within the country of settlement’ (1994: 3). The authors challenge the very notion of fixed categories of *nation* and *national*, arguing that the convention of regarding these as coeval with a certain territory runs counter to the lived realities of many contemporary migrants. In their words:

[i]n contrast to the past, when nation-states were defined in terms of a people sharing a common culture within a bounded territory, this new conception of nation-state includes as citizens those who live physically dispersed within the boundaries of many other states, but who remain socially, politically, culturally and often economically part of the nation-state of their ancestors. In the case of the Haitian ‘Tenth Department’, the Grenadian ‘constituency’, in New York, and the Filipino *balikbayan*, transnational ties are taken as evidence that migrants continue to be members of the state from which they originated. (1994: 8)

In attempting to account for the anomalies they discovered in their respective fields, the authors draw upon various theoretical perspectives, aspiring in the process to unite disparate approaches into a single framework. They contend, among other things, that

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<sup>14</sup>Part of this may be due to the fact, familiar to Caribbean scholars—and propounded most elegantly by C L R James (Grimshaw, 1992)—that the islands of the New World, inextricably linked to the industrial revolution, resist the categories of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’.

'[b]ounded social science concepts that conflate physical location, culture, and identity' are inadequate tools to apply to the identity-formation of the people they study, and that these concepts inhibit the ability of researchers to comprehend the processes of transnationalism (1994: 22). Particularly limiting are certain assumptions inherent in many of the theoretical approaches brought to bear on migrants—for instance, that *race*, *ethnicity* and *nation* are discrete categories, and that these ideas carry universal definitions. Migrants' identities are shaped not only by the hegemonic discourses of race and nation within their host societies, but equally by the discourses of these concepts within their countries of origin—discourses that may or may not coincide exactly with those of their host countries. To be of African descent in Haiti or Grenada, for instance, does not necessarily carry the same implications as being of African descent in the USA. Basch *et al.* seek to collapse the boundaries between these theories, and in so doing hope to provide an alternative, transnational perspective.

For Basch *et al.*, transnationalism encompasses 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (1994: 7). Like the transmigrants in their study, Bahamians occupy shifting ground. Unlike them, however, Bahamians occupy this ground *within their own nation*; Bahamians negotiate different identities, 'forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations' while remaining within the confines of their state. My study Bahamian of national identity, therefore, requires a shift in perception which is akin to that proposed by Basch *et al.* in their study of transmigrant identity.

### **Navigations: national identity in the Bahamas**

In the introduction to *Routes*, a recent collection of essays, James Clifford questions traditional definitions of 'culture'—and, by extension, identity. 'During the course of this work', he writes,

*travel* emerged as an increasingly complex range of experiences: practices of crossing and interaction that trouble the localism of many common assumptions of culture. In these assumptions authentic social existence is, or should be, centered in circumscribed places—like the gardens where the word 'culture' derived its European meanings. Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. But what would happen, I began to ask, if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as *constitutive* of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension. The cultural effects of European expansionism, for example, could no longer be celebrated, or deplored, as a simple diffusion outward—of civilization, industry, science, or capital. For the region called 'Europe' has been constantly remade, and traversed, by influences beyond its borders ... And is not this interactive process relevant, in varying degrees, to any local, national, or regional domain? Virtually everywhere one looks, the processes of human movement and encounter are long-established and complex. Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things. (Clifford, 1997b: 3)

Like Basch *et al.*, rather than accepting the familiar embeddedness of identity in particular locations, he chooses to sever the connection, preferring to regard *movement* as fundamental, 'constitutive' of individual identities. For Clifford, culture and identity reside not merely *in place*, but *across space* as well.

Lavie and Swedenborg (1996b), addressing the intellectual and physical migrations that shape postmodern identities, similarly deconstruct the anthropological relation between location and identity.

Anthropology's unique function as an official discipline was to differentiate between self and other ... The discipline therefore consistently denied the 'coevalness' of the 'native,' whom it conceptualized as the inhabitant of a space (the 'field') that was at once spatially and temporally distant and distinct ... Anthropology's own self-conception depended on a notion that 'they' were supposed to be 'there' and 'we' were supposed to be 'here'—except, of course, when 'we' showed up 'there'—as ethnographers, tourists, missionaries, or development experts. As those others were subjugated by colonial institutions, anthropology performed the additional mission of humanizing the Others while differentiating them. (Lavie and Swedenborg, 1996b: 1-2).

In attempting to isolate the concepts that explain the unique nature of Bahamian national identity, I have been challenged by the fluid character of my society, a society that, like the Wahgi in the exhibition 'Paradise', 'inhabit[s] a historically concrete, changing, and often unsettled place' (Clifford, 1997: 164). Faced with a situation in which movement and travel are normal for Bahamians, and where pragmatism permits the adoption of whatever mode of communication is most appropriate, I realised that the best reading of the situation is one which privileges the idea of travel and movement over that of stasis. Such a reading may be found in Clifford's assertion that 'travel and contacts are crucial sites for an unfinished modernity'. Clifford's view permits the idea of nationality to be 'untethered' from the conception of locality and to construct itself around movement. According to his reading, the fluidity of the Bahamian character must seem as natural as the 'fixity' of other nationalities; even that fixity, when stared at long enough, may also dissolve into multiple origins and mobility. In such a reading, *routes* precede *roots*.

In this thesis I ask, like Clifford, what happens when *movement* is taken as fundamental, and *place* as incidental. The Bahamas is an archipelago, after all. Any 'homology between [its] culture ... and its particular terrain' is non-existent; its borders, drawn on water, carry Anderson's concept of *imagination* perhaps further than he

himself intended. A mountain range or a river is a fairly concrete marker of territory; but where does one recognise a boundary drawn on the sea? Bahamian borders are porous; Bahamians and others pass in and out of the country regularly, often with an ease that confounds the rituals of customs and immigration. Within the state, perhaps in contrast with South Pacific archipelagic nations, migration from island to island is common; travel is fundamental to Bahamian identities.

Common to the studies of travel and migration referred to above is the fact that they begin by bringing anthropology 'home' (to Europe/America), and pointing out the limitations of classical anthropological thought by applying it to the complexities of the metropolises. What is interesting about Lavie and Swedenborg's critique of anthropological constructs, for instance, is that many of the dualities to which they refer are often replicated, without explicit recognition of their source, in the popular collective imaginations of postcolonial societies, often through the agency of native intellectuals. The concept of occupying a place that is 'there'—a place that is *not* part of the 'real world', but somehow on its margins—is ironically current in many postcolonial societies. The Bahamas is no exception. Indeed, it is more than possible that the internalisation of such distinctions lies at the root of many Bahamian intellectuals' assertion that the Bahamas has no identity; for according to these concepts, 'here' is located *beyond* one's own space—in the First World, the 'developed' nations, the centre. The Bahamas, on the other hand, is 'there', and occupies a different time and place. What goes on in the space understood as 'there', moreover, is *unreal*, exotic, outmoded, attractive to visit but ultimately an illusion.

Where I would differ with Lavie and Swedenborg is in their association of concepts of movement and hybridity with what they call 'the Eurocenter'.

When anthropology started coming to terms with the failure of its humanistic project of modernizing the primitive, modernist ethnographic theory focused on suturing together the primitive and the modern. This joining took place in distant time-spaces through a deployment of such concepts as syncretism and bricolage. But at least by the 1980s such suturing became impossible. Alleged primitivities and modernities were colliding at the heart of the Eurocenter. The movements, flows, and interpenetrations of populations and cultural practices frequently produced startling and creative juxtapositions and cultural fusions ... The products and processes of fusion and intermingling have been endowed with various names: hybridity, syncretism, cyborgs, interculturalization, transculturalization, and ... intermixture. (1996b: 7-8)

While I recognise that the penetration of the *metropolis* ('here') by people formerly known as 'natives' have made it difficult, if not impossible, for traditional dualities to remain intact, I would take issue with the idea—implicit in their introduction—that this condition is essentially a postmodern one, something associated, again, with a particular time and space. In this thesis, I hope to show the limitations of traditional anthropological concepts by examining the complexities of *the field*. The Bahamas, I propose, is a society which has *since the beginning* been constituted on the hybridity and transculturalization to which Lavie and Swedenborg refer.

National identity in the Bahamas, I argue, is an assortment of tales told, not myths of nation. According to Anthony Smith, 'myth exaggerates, dramatises and reinterprets facts'; for him, myths are 'widely believed tales told in dramatic form, referring to past events but serving present purposes and/or future goals', and thus 'nationalism's peculiar myth of the nation may be seen as a particularly potent and appealing dramatic narrative, which links past, present and future through the character and role of the national community' (1988: 2). The *tales* to which I refer may or may not be widely believed, nor necessarily 'told in dramatic form'; while they are readily observable for the researcher to find, they may or may not be part of Bahamians' conscious stockpile of national markers. I choose to call them *tales* rather than *myths* to

emphasise their fluidity, their very lack of authority. These tales rise above the ocean of possible identities like islands, and Bahamians move among them (and others) like sailors on a familiar sea.

This dissertation is structured, accordingly, around five main areas. Chapter I addresses the difficulties of describing Bahamian national identity in a conventional manner. First, I consider the shortage of concrete national symbols in the Bahamas, and examine the ambiguity of those that do exist. Next, I outline in detail the problems inherent in seeking out Bahamian literature as a clue for national consciousness. Finally, I outline Bahamian identity as sets of tales told to both self and other, and point out the complexities of the intermingling of these tales. Taking as a central metaphor the physical archipelago through which Bahamian sailors must navigate in hopes of arriving anywhere, I envision Bahamian national identity as a *cognitive* archipelago, in which different points of reference are used by all Bahamians in a series of navigations of selfhood. The remainder of my thesis is an attempt to navigate one account of Bahamian identity through four harbours which, I hope, will illuminate the fluctuations and constancies in these sets of tales.

Chapter II presents the enigma of Fox Hill, the village of the mind. In this section, I examine a particularly conscious anchor of Bahamian identity, but show that, despite a general conviction that Bahamians know what Fox Hill is, and what Fox Hill means, in actuality the settlement is quite different. I begin with a description of the village from the point of view of the observer, taking a particularly well-worn method of understanding. After that, however, I strip away the illusion (for the description I initially produced was the result of my own illusion, as a Bahamian, that Fox Hill was a village, and that I expected it to look like a village) and argue that in fact, Fox Hill is more like a neighbourhood rather than a village, and that it functions as a suburb of the

city. In first presenting, and then destroying, the illusion of 'Fox Hill', I underscore the complexity of any conscious Bahamian 'national' symbol, and open the way for a consideration of symbols that, although largely unremarked by Bahamians, themselves provide important foundations for the self.

The first of these, I argue in Chapter III, is the geography of the nation. Constructions of Bahamian identity are irrevocably shaped by the land/seascape of the country. The tension between the fragmented nature of the Bahamian archipelago appears strangely at odds with the extremely cohesive, if elusive, sense of 'Bahamianness' which obtains throughout the islands. The sea is fundamental to the Bahamian concept of self—not only (as might be presumed) as a barrier to communication, but as the medium of communication as well; the sea, I contend, unites Bahamians even as it separates them. In addition, I discuss the *practical* results of living in an archipelago, and show that in the Bahamas geography, as well as history, inhibits the production of typical manifestations of national consciousness. Literature, particularly the printed news media, has limited application in a country as far-flung and sparsely-inhabited as the Bahamas, and as such has had a limited development.

In Chapter IV I turn to another anchor, the role of generation property (or family land) in the construction of Bahamian identity. Far from being rendered irrelevant by the archipelagic nature of the Bahamian nation, land is central to the imagining of self, representing, in many cases, extended family lines. This land, I contend, provides Bahamians with more than merely 'cultural sites' (Olwig, 1997), for it is the source of very real political and economic power as well; and yet, owing to the peculiar nature of its tenure it is concomitantly a symbol of poverty and dispossession.

Chapter V takes the symbolic resonance of Junkanoo, long touted as the quintessential emblem of what is Bahamian, and places it in the discussion. First,

pursuing the concept of locality in the construction of the Bahamian self, I show how in the past different participants in the festival affiliated themselves with neighbourhood groups. Moreover, Junkanoo situates itself in the heart of the city, and the occupation of this locality, the symbolic core of political and economic power in the nation, grounds the festival in place. Next, using a case study—that of the participation of Bahamians in the Smithsonian’s Festival of the Americans—I show how Bahamians refashion themselves—and Junkanoo—through performance for the Other.

In this way, this thesis itself is a series of navigations. As is fitting in a nation-state whose territory is separated into scattered islands, and whose identity is in fact a constellation of many identities, my search for Bahamian nationality explores many possibilities, docks in many harbours. In the end, I hope to show that Bahamian national identity appears elusive because it is fluid. Its fluidity provides endless possibilities for those who share it.

## I. National Identity in the Bahamas

### **The Communal Voice of the Griot:**

#### *The Bahamas and the nationalist literary enterprise*

Throughout the post-colonial world, literature is seen as a cornerstone of new national identities.<sup>15</sup> In the Caribbean region, Trinidad is a well-studied example of this trend. For Stefano Harney, fiction, specifically the novel, is the centre of his consideration of the nationalist enterprise in that country (1993; 1996). Using Jameson's theories of public and private in Third World novels as a springboard, Harney takes to task the argument that

in Third World literature, and particularly in the novel, the public and private spheres of existence have not been split, as they have in developed societies, by post-industrial capitalism. Consequently writers in the Third World always produce novels that are 'national allegories' in which the growth and self-realization of the narrative reproduce those of the nation. (1996: 31)

His work contends, rather, that in Trinidad, particularly among younger writers, the novel is not a site of 'public' allegory, as Jameson suggests, but of private struggle, a space in which membership in the wider nation may be contested. Harney illustrates the essentially post-industrial/postmodern condition of Trinidadian nationalism by mining the literary output of his country. For Harney, although they do not necessarily provide a contiguity between nation and narrative, 'literary texts have a unique advantage in the interrogation of the nation.' (1996: 2). Similar assumptions underlie

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<sup>15</sup>E.g. Bhabha, 1990; Lavie and Swedenborg, 1996a.

works throughout the region, from writers as varied as (James, 1963 [1938]; Nettleford, 1970; 1978; Strachan, 1995).

In the Bahamas, however, to apply such an approach is difficult. The Bahamas stands virtually alone in the Commonwealth Caribbean nations in having a significant absence of a national literature.<sup>16</sup> That is not to say that a nationalist rhetoric does not exist in the Bahamas, or that there is no Bahamian literature to speak of. Paradoxically, there are both; yet the two appear separate from one another. Unlike Trinidad, where novels abound (Harney, 1993; 1996) and the proliferation of academic papers ensure that Trinidadians' self-conceptions are constantly and consciously made and examined (Eriksen, 1994), the relation between *literary* representations of the Bahamian condition and the public conception of that condition is tenuous at best.

In the first place, the existence of literature on or about the Bahamas is, by comparison with the Trinidadian oeuvre, slim. What is more, the most remarkable point about it as a body is its style. Rather than stripping away the surface of the society in order to expose the bones underneath—rather than, in the words of the first BACUS<sup>17</sup> conference, *uncovering* the Bahamian self—the Bahamian literature that exists in print is overwhelmingly descriptive, narrative, often conversational.

This is most evident in the largest category of books on the Bahamas—those which address the history of the country.<sup>18</sup> Despite the profusion of these publications,

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<sup>16</sup>See, for example, Cabrera, 1993: 11: 'Discovering a literature is always a revelation ... My years of research in teaching the literatures of the Anglophone Caribbean had never brought me into contact with a piece of creative writing from the Bahamas.'

<sup>17</sup>Bahamas Association for Cultural Studies.

<sup>18</sup>There are books on economics, books on law, books on the collective psychology of the Bahamian people, books on the geography of the islands, books on the flora and fauna of the country, and books of stories and poems. These, however, when compared with the numbers of pages written about the 'history' of the islands, are minor contributions—particularly if one

the vast majority of them are narrative or descriptive texts. Until 1998, there existed only one comprehensive analytical historical account: Michael Craton's *A History of The Bahamas* (1986). For the 'scholar'<sup>19</sup> of Bahamian history, then, this was the sole introductory reference to the subject—a far cry from the Trinidadian situation, where the presence of several works of this kind, most of them indigenously produced, led Eriksen to conclude of that country that '[t]here are ... many natives who have reflected theoretically on the foundation of their society and their own social identity' (1994: 170). Not surprisingly, the book is a product of its time, originally written by an Englishman about a small colony. The initial work was written before the enactment of some of the most fundamental political reforms in that colony—reforms such as the enfranchisement of women in 1962, the institution of one vote per person and the granting of more complete internal self-rule in 1964, not to mention the coming to power in 1967 of the first majority government, formed by the Progressive Liberal Party. The work was reissued in 1968, following the election of the PLP, and incorporated a final chapter recounting the decline and defeat of the white United Bahamian Party; a third edition was published in 1986, in which the final section had been revised again, this time offering an analytical account of the PLP administration from its election in 1967, through independence (1973) to its apparent decline—the accusations of corruption and involvement in drugs during the 1980s.

It is arguable that this isolation of the Craton text during what is arguably the time of the most conscious imagining of a 'Bahamian' national identity—the PLP years of nation-making, 1967 to 1992—is evidence of a poorly-developed Bahamian sense of self. Rather than following the Trinidadian model, where the written word figures

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takes into account the forty-odd *Bahama Handbooks*, which provide for the student one of the best collections of historical articles about the Bahamas that can be found.

prominently in the discourse of self-conception, the definitive Bahamian text was written by an Englishman—and not even a permanent resident. Craton himself, today an altogether different scholar from the man who wrote the original book, is quite aware of *A History's* shortcomings. The preface to *Islanders in the Stream*, a collaborative reworking of Bahamian history informed by sociology, anthropology, archaeology and oral accounts, observes that *A History* was

... first published by Collins in 1962, during the hiatus between the author's six years of high school teaching in Nassau and graduate studies leading to a Canadian university career ... it remains essentially an old-fashioned narrative account, concentrating on political history, events, and the activities of the elite. (Craton and Saunders, 1992: xii)

It is possible to blame this apparent analytical 'thinness' on the perceived lack of readership for these books. Bahamian writers, it is often lamented, are at the mercy of foreign publishers who invoke the tiny book-buying native population in their selection of texts for publication. The books that are produced are more often than not directed at the large transient population of the islands—the over three million tourists who visit annually—and so tend to emphasise the pretty, the quaint and the 'authentic' over the analytical and the serious. To lay the blame too squarely on the doorstep of foreign publishers, however, is to overlook the salient fact that when Bahamians themselves publish books they often follow the same formula. Witness the various observations about Bahamian society published since 1992 by Patricia Glington-Meicholas. Glington-Meicholas, an academic and expert on Bahamian folk culture, has chosen as the medium for the results of her research not a series of academic articles written for journals but rather a best-selling set of illustrated volumes written in an informal, witty style. The title of one of the most popular, for instance, is *How to be a True-True*

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<sup>19</sup>I am using this word here in the sense of 'one who studies texts' (Ong, 1982).

*Bahamian: a hilarious look at life in the Bahamas* (1994), in which the author identifies her intended readership as 'non-Bahamians and Bahamians'. In her introduction, she comments: '[This book] will be of considerable benefit to those visitors and resident expatriates who want to touch the pulse of the "real" Bahamas or who wish to put down some Bahamian roots.' (Glinton-Meicholas, 1994: 5-6).

To underscore the difference between this Bahamian trend and that of its neighbours: as early as 1970, a scant eight years after Jamaican independence, a Jamaican intellectual could write: '...these essays imply an invitation for the Jamaican readership to turn its mind critically to its own society...' and proceed to publish a book of scholarly articles exploring the Jamaican 'national character' (Nettleford, 1970: 9). On the other hand, when Patrick Rahming, architect, poet, songwriter and thinker, published a collection of critical essays nineteen years after Bahamian independence, he entitled it *The Naive Agenda: social and political issues for the Bahamas through the eyes of a confessed dreamer* (1992b). Despite his good intentions, even that book is less a work of scholarly papers than a collection of speeches, articles and letters to the editor penned over the course of two decades.

It is therefore impossible to do as Harney does for Trinidad, and seek evidence of Bahamian national identity in the literary output of the nation. Bahamian writers are quick to express their frustration at their marginality in the society they seek to define. The writer/literary critic Ian Strachan, opening the BACUS conference on cultural identity in June 1998, recognised the need to control 'the recording of our culture' and called for Bahamian intellectuals to 'assume their rightful role' in Bahamian life (Strachan, 1998); on the same occasion Glinton-Meicholas deplored the 'cover-up' of the self as part of the tourist endeavour, and sought empowerment in literature (1998). And these writers and intellectuals fight their case bitterly. Despite their marginality,

they exhibit a very real sense of their role as definers of the national identity through writing. It is obvious, for instance, in *Lignum Vitae* (1992),<sup>20</sup> a collection of poetry, prose, drama and critical essays, that many of the writers in the collection share a sense of isolation in their task, and express their goals in the language of struggle; they see the very production of the journal as a victory over considerable odds. Their work has been slighted by officials:

The bulk of the work in this journal was first submitted in 1990 to the BWA [Bahamas Writers Association] for inclusion in the Ministry of Education's attempt at creating a text to be used in the new BGCSE English Literature syllabus. Ministry of Education officers rejected the submissions, stating that the work submitted was suitable only for the top 15 per cent of the students. The majority of the pieces in this first volume were selected from those 'rejected submissions'. (Huggins, 1992a: i)

They sense deeply that the production of creative writing is something that is undervalued by their society:

Some years ago, a small group of writers made a commitment to the development of Bahamian literature. The task at hand was enormous. With little or no financial resources and no official sanction, they had committed themselves to the encouragement of literary excellence in what everyone said was a non-literary community. With little encouragement from the administrators of the formal education system (but tremendous appeal from individual teachers), they had committed themselves to affecting the path of education. Their only weapon was their deep appreciation for the importance of literature in the development of society. (Rahming, 1992a: ii)

Indeed, one might consider their dissatisfaction with the society for which they wish to write to be almost hostile. In the same publication, reference is made to the lack of impact of writing in the Bahamas (Georges, 1992: 59); to the 'bedlam and pieces that never get beyond the contemplation of their producers' navels' which constitute Bahamian literature (Huggins, 1992b: 61); and to the 'dearth of literary production in

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<sup>20</sup>Even the title of this journal emphasises the supposed centrality of the literate endeavour to

the Bahamas as compared to that found in [the rest of the West Indies]' (Bethel, 1992: 62). Thus even in a journal dedicated to the creation and expansion of a Bahamian literature, and among the writers who regard this job as crucial to the development of Bahamian culture, there is a sense—implicit more often than not—that what they are attempting is in some way foreign to the society at large.

That this debate is endemic, part, indeed, of the national character, is apparent by the concerns expressed at the BACUS conference held in Nassau in June 1998, which took as its theme 'Uncovering Bahamian Selves'—a title which, while implying that a Bahamian 'self' (or identity) exists, suggests at the same time that it is covered, hidden. In her introductory address, Ginton-Meicholas called for the exploration and promotion of Bahamian national identity, and spoke of 'launching a search' for national identity twenty-five years after independence (1998). In her view, the nation had 'failed to develop a clear idea' of self, evident in the 'chameleon nature' of the Bahamian identity, whose youth preferred reggae to indigenous music, and whose entire character was becoming more and more American. Moreover, she deplored the centrality of Junkanoo, the national festival, to discussions of Bahamian identity, its function as 'the very language of our culture or a translation device'. Indeed, her critique of the government's 'hazy' view of culture as limited to festival and the performing arts made specific reference to the tourist economy, which required the 'covering' of the 'true' Bahamian self in the creation of a 'paradise myth' designed to sell the nation to strangers. Drawing explicit connections between literacy and power, Ginton-Meicholas emphasised the 'rightful' role of the intellectual in the imagining of the nation, and called for the establishment of a literature which, externalising and

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the national enterprise. *Lignum vitae*, or tree of life, is a tropical hardwood which, at independence, was chosen as the national tree of the Bahamas.

codifying the 'covered' Bahamian activities, would serve to build a greater sense of a national self, a stronger national pride.

Equally significant at the conference was the presentation of papers on Bahamian literature, which was carried out solely by women. This fact may not appear terribly consequential at first glance, but the discussion that followed shed light on the *political* position of literature in the Bahamas. The session began with a paper presented by one of the most acclaimed contemporary writers, Marion Bethel—a particularly personal presentation detailing her frustration at the lack of *space* in the national imagination for writers, and weaving her account of her own need for time and place to write with the role of the written in the critical self-construction of the American slave Phyllis Wheatley, the first black American woman to be published. Writing, for Bethel, was presented as a tool of empowerment, a means of escaping the 'barren' Bahamian social landscape—a landscape carved out by the 'twin monsters' of tourism and banking, a landscape hostile to artistic creation (1998). Bethel's paper was followed by Paula Grace Anderson's close reading of the writings of three authors, two male and one female, for whom the emblems of women, money and sex were central (Anderson, 1998); after that came another presentation on the writings of women in the Bahamas (Rahming, 1998), and the session was closed with a consideration of the place of female artists in Bahamian society (Pratt, 1998).

The discussion that followed this session, which stemmed from Bethel's meditation, ultimately raised the question of why the presentations had been so dominated by females. The sponsors of the conference reported, rather defensively, that it had certainly not been planned that way; but as the only people willing to present on the topic were women, the outcome was not surprising. This began a discussion on the role of women in the creation of Bahamian literature. It was

suggested that, in the Bahamas, it was more socially acceptable for women to write, that writing was regarded as a *feminine* activity. This explanation was not a comfortable one for many members of the audience, as it placed writing in a feminised, weak position in the national imagination. For many, as for Marion Bethel, writing ought to be a path to *power*; thus the (accidentally) gendered presentation of Bahamian literature was profoundly disturbing. During the discussion, however, it was observed that, for the Bahamas, the *spoken* word, and not the written, brought power. Bahamian 'masculine' arts were all oral. The politician's speech, the preacher's prayer, the sparring of the radio talk-show host—*these* were the media that were influential, that were disseminated throughout the country, and these were the media in which power resided. Women wrote, and thought about writing, and presented papers on literature, because in the Bahamas, writing was a medium for the weak and the powerless; *speech* was the medium of the strong.

Thus the examination of Bahamian literature as a concrete, tangible, fixed manifestation of Bahamian identity, has little value. Literature, often regarded as an essential tool of nationalism, occupies a peculiar position in the construction of Bahamian national identity, for it appears to reflect, rather than shape, the ideas of the time.

## Concrete Symbols

### *Historical monuments and the Bahamian nationalist enterprise*

Literature is not the only tool of national identity that puzzles the researcher. In the Bahamas, few artifacts of nationhood are concrete. Clifford's notion of collection as 'a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity' (1988b: 231) is

assuredly not shared by Bahamian nation-makers. Maps and museums exist, but the former are difficult to keep in order, the nation being an archipelago and the land tenure system such that boundaries between properties, particularly on islands that are land-rich, are complex at best (see Ch IV); the latter tend to be unprofitable, both in financial and social terms, and are therefore uncommon. There is one official museum in the capital, a small two-storey building.<sup>21</sup> Assorted archaeological artifacts are displayed on the lower floor, while the upper functions as an art gallery. Other permanent collections have throughout the years been kept elsewhere: for example a display of indigenous people's skulls and weapons at the top of the staircase in the Nassau Public Library,<sup>22</sup> a selection of tools, machinery and craftwork on permanent exhibit in the foyer of the Department of Archives, and a wider collection of artifacts, many of them indigenous, in the building belonging to the Nassau Historical Society, a voluntary organisation. Critical to the Bahamian imagining of 'history'—and its presentation—are the periodic exhibitions presented by the Department of Archives, most commonly placed on display in the General Post Office; and perhaps the most comprehensive historical preserve to be found in the capital is in one old house, restored and furnished with antiques and reproductions. Perhaps most importantly, the only museum to receive considerable governmental support and prestige is the Junkanoo Expo, established in 1993 to store and display junkanoo costumes after the parades, and (perhaps equally importantly) to sell junkanoo artifacts to cruise ship

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<sup>21</sup>Other small collections exist in various other parts of the Bahamas. However, none of these are initiated or sponsored by the Bahamas government.

<sup>22</sup>More recently, during renovations to the Public Library, the collection in question has been removed.

passengers. History and historic representation in the Bahamas are by no means fixed 'traditions', but are, rather, continually shifting ground.

Censuses enumerate, but do little to help categorise the elastic population of the country. High numbers of strangers—Cuban and Haitian refugees from the south, and American and European tourists from the north—give very little meaning to the officially-sanctioned figures published by the Department of Statistics. As for the expected national symbols: where monuments exist they are ambiguous; historical markers—old buildings, for instance—are commonly removed or remodelled to make way for new,<sup>23</sup> and statues and other creations are (ironically) as fluid as sculptures can be. Although the *official* erection of commemorative statues in stone or plate has not been a commonplace activity in recent Bahamian history, throughout the island of New Providence are found numerous metal figures—a giant crawfish, a crown pigeon, a rooster, a massive conch shell. These are the work of a self-made sculptor who during the 1980s created them annually and presented them as gifts to the government. The difference is crucial; these sculptures, while the result of considerable national feeling, are not *official* expressions of national identity. What is more, these statues are (oddly enough), mobile; although some of them have remained where they were placed by the government after their presentation by the sculptor, others—most notable among them a likeness of the former Prime Minister, which disappeared altogether from the public's gaze—have had several different places of display.

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<sup>23</sup>The interiors of Anglican churches, for instance, are currently being adjusted to provide room for central air conditioning units, despite objections from historians. While I was in Long Island, the Anglican community of Deadman's Cay was discussing the appearance of their church building, one of the oldest churches in the country, pointing out that it was too rustic for the bustling community they envisioned coming with electricity, and suggesting improvements. Many parish members supported the idea of remodelling the old church; I even heard the suggestion of tearing it down and building another in its place. Not all members were in favour of altering the building. Those who opposed it, however, were regarded as old-fashioned.

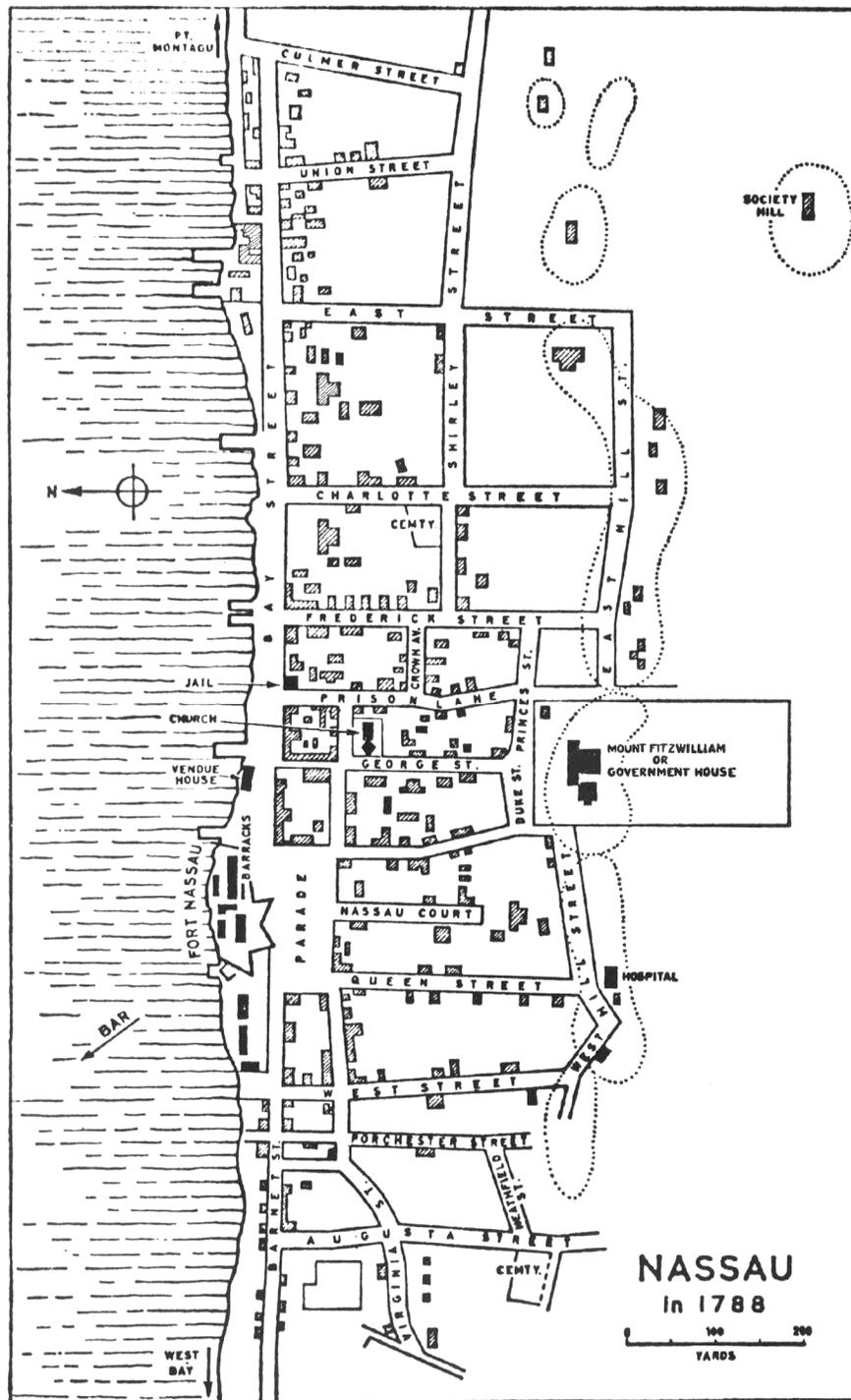


Figure 1.1 – Nassau in 1788 (Saunders and Cartwright 1979: 15)

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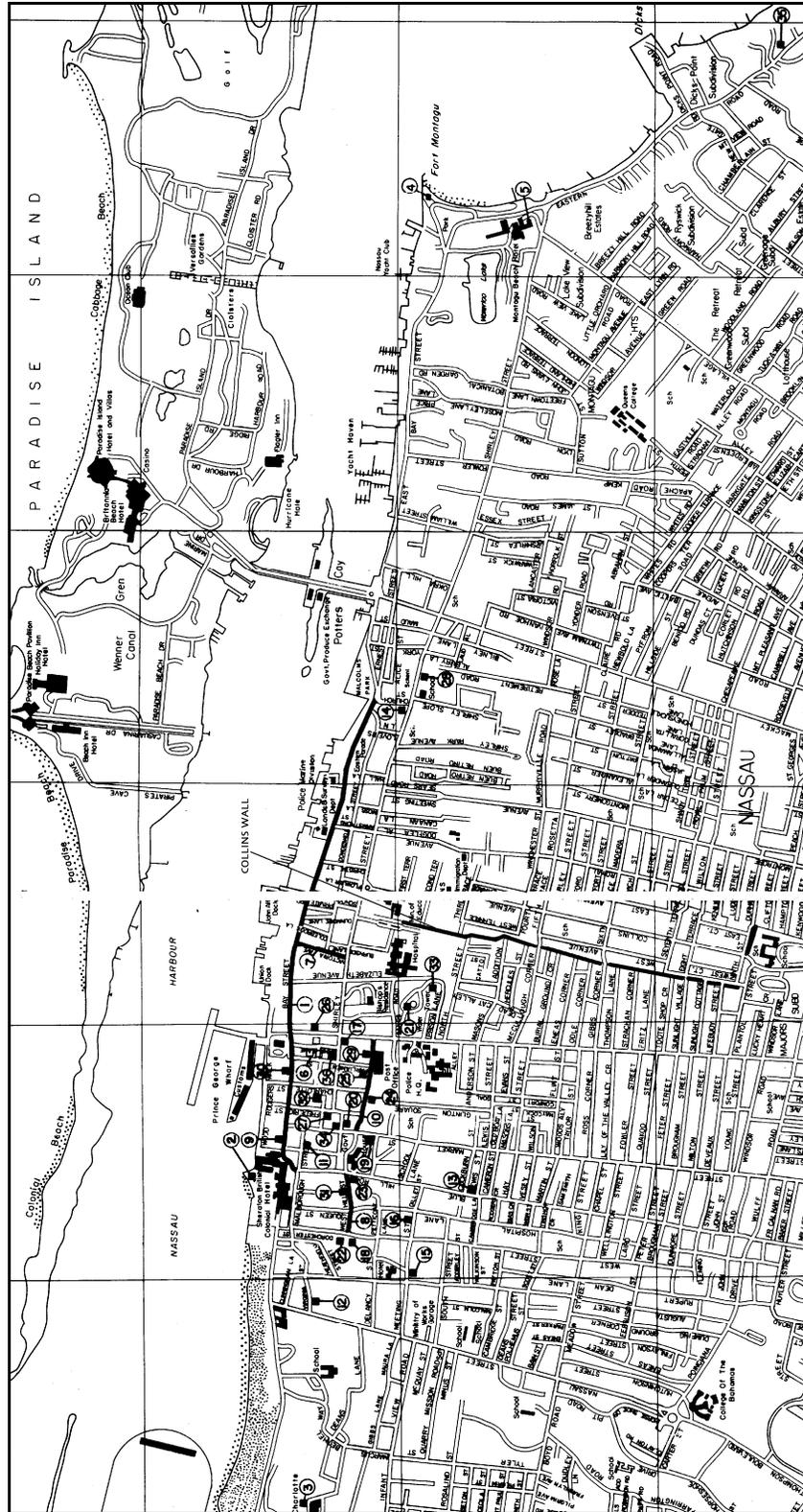


Figure 1.2 – Nassau in 1979 (Saunders and Cartwright, 1979: vii)

For Peirce Lewis,

[t]angible objects form a challenging and stubborn kind of historic record. They challenge us because they are there—and because we know, as an article of faith, that those objects have meaning, if we are only clever enough to decipher it. They are stubborn because they simply refuse to go away, by their very presence demanding to be interpreted ... Human landscapes differ in appearance from place to place for the self-evident reason that all cultures have certain collective ambitions about the way the world should operate ... Simply because cultures are peculiar, their landscapes are peculiar too. And, of course, because cultures change through time, their landscapes also change. Those landscapes become in effect a kind of document, a kind of cultural autobiography that humans have carved and continue to carve into the surface of the earth ... if landscape is a document, we ought to be able to read it in a manner analogous to the way we read written documents. (Lewis, 1993: 115-6).

According to his view, a landscape—that of a town, for instance—should, when studied like a document, yield valuable information on the culture that created it. Yet a landscape is not a document; to approach it as one may be misleading, as it assumes that the creators of the culture and the creators of the landscape are identical. If we apply his reasoning to the city of Nassau, starting at the public squares, we can get some idea of the possible difficulties inherent in it.

The city of Nassau, as designed by the Loyalist settlers in 1788,<sup>24</sup> lies on the northern coast of New Providence, in the centre of a natural harbour protected by Paradise (formerly Hog) and Athol Islands. The town was constructed along one major thoroughfare: Bay Street, originally built along the coast, but now land-locked owing to extensive land reclamation schemes throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In its earliest conception, the town was centred around Fort Nassau, a stronghold built on the harbour (see map). Soon, however, the town centre was moved eastward

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<sup>24</sup>Nassau's history is at least one hundred years longer than that, having been founded in 1666 by the first settlers in New Providence. However, the layout of the city owes much to Loyalist refugees from the USA, whose arrival in the Bahamas in the 1780s wrought fundamental changes in the colony.

with the Loyalists' construction of a major seat of government. The new main square, constructed on the southern side of this street, was surrounded by the Houses of Parliament and the courts of justice; opposite this point was the main wharf. During the mid-nineteenth century, partly as a result of money earned by smuggling guns and cotton between the Bahamas and the Confederate States of the American Civil War, the land along the harbour was reclaimed, and a second square, on the northern side of the street, constructed. This square was named after a former Royal Governor, Rawson W Rawson, and served as the main landing for passengers and freight. Arguably, its principal function was to provide a fine vista of Parliament Square, as many paintings and photographs depict the Houses of Parliament—touted by architects as a very fine example of colonial Georgian design (Douglas, 1992; Saunders and Cartwright, 1979)—as though regarded from the centre of Rawson Square.

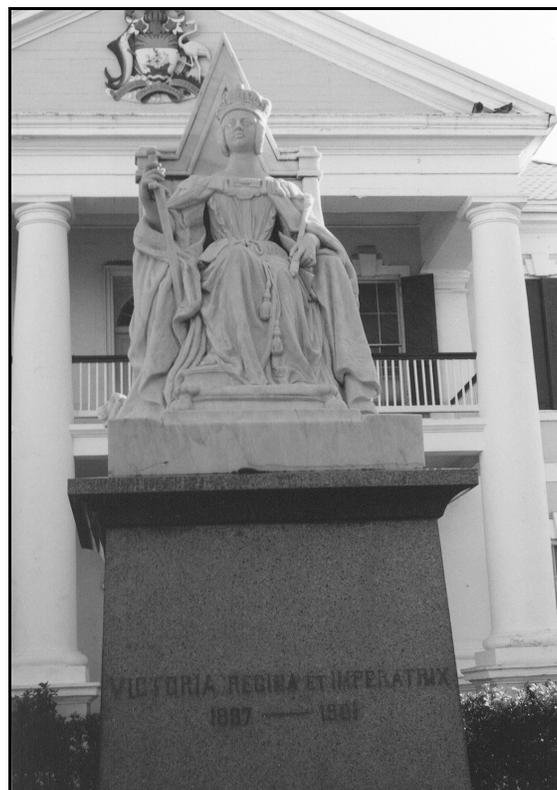


Figure 1.3 – Statue of Queen Victoria, Parliament Square, Nassau

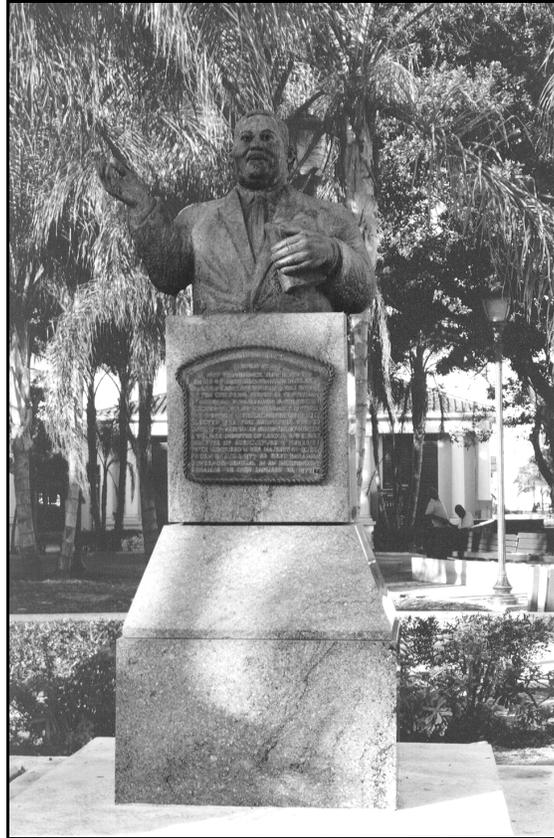


Figure 1.4 – Statue of Sir Milo Butler, Rawson Square, Nassau

The distinction between these squares is a fine one, but full of symbolic resonance, as evinced by the statues which grace them. On the southern side, surrounded by the seats of government, sits a statue of Queen Victoria, in whitewashed stone, larger than life, stern, raised on a pedestal which requires the craning of necks to admire her (Fig. 1.1)—a monument erected during the early years of the twentieth century in memory of the queen who created a global empire and freed the slaves. On the northern side, blending with landscaping designed to welcome cruise ship passengers to the centre of town, is the smiling torso of Sir Milo Butler, first Governor-General of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, cast in green-tinged bronze, placed at such a level that one can look him in the face (Fig. 1.2)—a statue of considerably shorter pedigree, located not far from the place where once stood a signpost indicating the

location and distances of the major European and North American cities from Nassau. The overall effect is that of an ex-colony still tied to its imperial past; the independent governor, coloured, legless, set on the less auspicious side of the square, must gaze up at the white empress, enthroned in stony splendour among the seats of government and justice.

If one were to 'read' these signs in the traditional manner, regarding these artifacts and the way in which they are treated as representative of the way Bahamians think about nationhood, one would be tempted to conclude that Bahamian national identity is a poor thing. Indeed, interviews with some non-Bahamian residents reveal this opinion, and it is shared by middle-class Nassauvians as well. One woman, not a Bahamian, but often mistaken for one (her name and her ethnicity permitted her to 'pass' as a native), told me that her sense of paucity of the Bahamian national identity was derived from what she had observed Bahamians do in Miami: as soon as they landed, they assumed American personae, took on American accents, and blended into the landscape—unlike their Jamaican counterparts, who remained aggressively Jamaican years after they had adopted American citizenship. As one man explained:

The outside, the American media, is really the thing that to me shapes the culture. And I think indeed the whole Caribbean. Because I was surprised, when I was in Barbados last year, how teenagers in Barbados and teenagers in the Bahamas dress exactly alike—same sneakers, same type of clothing—as the kids in Miami.

Yet the question is a little more complicated. For me, a Bahamian who has been studying and working outside the country for the past several years (although a frequent visitor), it is more than obvious that a Bahamian identity exists. To begin with, anyone who has resided in the Bahamas for any length of time is very clear on who is Bahamian and who is not. The same woman who compared Bahamians to Jamaicans in

Miami also provided me with a fascinating list of the people who she considers most 'Bahamian', breaking it down in terms of nationality, ethnicity and gender; according to that list, it is very clear who (or what) is Bahamian. Another woman, originally from England but now a Bahamian citizen by marriage, told me that she has never felt, and will never feel, accepted; while she has lived and worked in the country for years, borne children, taken up citizenship and voted, she has got no farther in her belongingship<sup>25</sup> to the Bahamas than being called a 'paper' Bahamian. Again, despite the fact that Bahamians display a proclivity to travel, they are loath to leave the Bahamas forever; many roam the world, but return home when they are done, unlike their Caribbean neighbours. This fact becomes all the more remarkable when one realises that until very recently, nowhere in the Bahamas was it possible to complete a university degree, and that the vast majority of Bahamian professionals (lawyers, doctors, accountants, architects, and others), whose degrees are gained in universities throughout the Caribbean, North America and Europe, return home to work and live. The argument that economic factors alone make this possible is not strong enough. These factors do not, for instance, outweigh the benefits of settling in the USA, certainly; the pull of home is stronger than mere economics. Not even those Bahamians who choose to begin careers abroad can contemplate living all their life in a foreign land; most of them plan,

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<sup>25</sup>I use this word advisedly. During the rule of the final white government, the status of 'belonger' was invented for a certain category of immigrants. Under the 1964 Immigration Act, such people were defined as *belonging* to the Bahamas, and could claim the same rights as those people born in the Bahamas (Hughes, 1981: 99)—and *be* claimed, when the time came to vote, *by* the government. Perhaps not coincidental was the fact that most 'belongers' tended to be immigrants of European or Euro-American heritage. The category of 'belonger' is not unique to the Bahamas; it is found also in at least one other British West Indian colony, the Virgin Islands (Maurer, 1995). The category of 'belonger' was replaced, after independence, with that of *citizen*, for which one had to renounce any other citizenship, and which alone would permit one to vote in a general election; and *permanent resident*, attainable on the payment of a stiff sum of money, which came with or without the right to work, and which prohibited one from voting.

at some point, to go home. And that is the way they often describe it: not as 'the Bahamas', or 'my country', but as 'home'.

## National Emblems

### *The ambiguity of the Bahamian flag*



Figure 1.5 – Bahamian flag

What becomes evident upon close examination of Bahamian society is that Bahamians promote very few concrete markers of a collective identity. Those it does favour are ambiguous symbols at best. For example, the Bahamian flag (Fig. 1.3), which consists of a horizontal band of gold sandwiched between two bands of aquamarine, with a black triangle against the left edge, has frequently been the object of fierce contention in political circles. The commonly-accepted explanation of its symbolism suggests that the gold represents the sun and sand, the aquamarine the sea, and the black triangle the Bahamian people. In the first place, it must be remarked that these representations are

superficial at best; in a region whose flags symbolise far more lofty ideals—blood and justice, fertility and wealth, for instance—the Bahamian version has a suspiciously commercial ring. In the second, the equating of the black triangle with the Bahamian people has engendered more conflict in some quarters than unity; unlike most of the rest of the Caribbean, Bahamians of European descent form a significant minority of the population, and these are explicitly left out of this explanation of the flag's symbolism. That this is a concern to Bahamians themselves is illustrated by the fact that during the 1980s the flag was the subject of a heated debate, native white Bahamians criticizing the black government for leaving them out of the picture. At that time, an ingenious white politician observed shrewdly that the symbolism of the flag was all very well and good, but that on every flag made there was a white band at the edge where the flag was attached to the flagpole, so that the triangle might be the black people, but the whites were those who held the nation together. Black (or non-white) Bahamians, for their part, rejected this interpretation outright. The discussion becomes moot if one accepts the *official* explanation of the flag, which states that the black triangle represents the *power, strength, or unity* of the Bahamian people, thus avoiding the sticky issue of race; however, that this explanation is never broadly presented demonstrates its absence from the public imagination. Indeed, the debate has not disappeared even with the election of a middle-class, integrated party. In late 1996 the issue resurfaced on radio talk shows and on chat pages on the internet, and this time it was an ingenious *black* politician, the former Prime Minister, who suggested a solution: to outline the black triangle with a thin white band (his suggestion was ignored). Thus the flag, whose

ostensible function is as a symbol to unite the nation, works instead to emphasise existing divisions within the society.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Bahamas: nation, community, self, other**

National identity in the Bahamas constructs itself against a set of paradoxes. On the one hand, one notices the apparent centrality of the nationalist ideal, which rears its head in everything from the discussion of what to do about the influx of illegal Haitian immigrants to the success of indigenous musicians abroad. On the other hand, however, it is difficult to ignore the close relation between many of these demonstrations of 'Bahamianness' and the tourist trade. One is quickly tempted to ascribe an illusory quality to these demonstrations of nationality.

The Straw Market provides a classic example. On the surface, it appears a 'genuine' instance of the Bahamian experience. Located on Bay Street at the foot of Market Street, on the site of the centuries-old city market, it is an open-air constellation of vendors of native handicrafts. Scratch that surface, however, and the authenticity disappears. The location of the Straw Market in this spot is a fiction of the 1980s, as is evident in its uneasy merger with the Ministry of Tourism—the nation's wealthiest, most upscale ministry. The spaces for vendors and stalls occupy the ground floor of the ministry building, a number of open-air passages leading to a central plaza. The offices above are air-conditioned and locked away from the stalls below, accessible from a small glassed-in foyer on the eastern side of the building, half-concealed by concession stands. The apparent 'nativeness' of the market is illusory, as the majority of the merchandise offered for sale—strawcrafts of various kinds, woodcarvings and various

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<sup>26</sup>For another account of the mutability of the flag-symbol, see Clarke, 1997, who records a

other souvenirs— is in fact imported cheaply from elsewhere (Patullo, 1996: 197), and (sometimes) adorned with the word 'BAHAMAS' to provide local flavour. Among the crowd of imported straw artifacts are a variety of generic 'Caribbean' T-shirts, sold at any price imaginable. When locally-produced work (normally of a superior quality to the imported articles) is found, it is more expensive, and thus less favoured by vendors and buyers alike. The market is frequented almost exclusively by tourists. Bahamians rarely shop there in any serious fashion, as the market sells very few objects considered to be of practical value to them (but see Clifford, 1988a). Finally, its association with its predecessor, the City Market, in which Bahamian consumers bought their daily subsistence—fish, vegetables, fruit and ice—is tenuous at best, as the old market burned down during the early 1970s and all vendors—of straw, fruit, and fish—were dispersed to numerous other locations throughout the capital for a good decade. The erection of the present Straw Market on its site was a conscious attempt by a populist government to provide straw vendors (a large and vocal section of its constituency) with a prime place to sell their wares, but at the same time its exclusion of other sellers relegated the vendors of fish to wharfs and docks east and west of the town, and of fruit and vegetable sellers to roadside stands throughout the capital. Thus these manifestations of identity appear to be aimed at the tourist trade, and may be dismissed as being consumed primarily by foreigners, bypassing Bahamians.

The third thing one notices is the absence of any *concrete* manifestations of the same conceptions. As soon as one moves in to document what exactly it is that makes up a Bahamian identity, the ground begins to shift under one's feet. While this is a common experience in all studies of identity—identity being a particularly slippery, nebulous concept (Cohen, 1994)—the difficulty is particularly marked in the Bahamas.

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similar fluidity of identification with the flag of Papua New Guinea.

Beyond the lack of a critical Bahamian literary output, other markers of national identity which reveal themselves in songs, art, artifacts and the like are remarkably chameleon-like. In the Bahamas, change occurs at a rate which is bewildering for the scholar, and which is certainly much faster than that of its Caribbean neighbours (Miller, 1998); trying to get a handle on what is 'Bahamian' is like trying to catch a fish with one's bare hands. In the absence of fixed cultural icons (books, statues, museums, protected historical areas of towns, and so on) the pinning-down of this pervasive sense of 'Bahamianness' becomes exceptionally difficult.

### **National Identity: tales told to self and other**

#### *Tourism and Bahamian national identity*

Part of the ambiguity surrounding the question of a Bahamian 'national identity' lies in the fact that that identity is constructed in not one, but many different official ways. If we were to regard the construction of identity as a tale, for example, we might observe that Bahamian national identity involves many tales. Not all of these are comprehensive, and they are designed for a wide range of audiences. Some are very specific, others more general, but they serve the same purpose in the end: the outlining of what is Bahamian.

It is possible in the Bahamas to point to two main sets of tales. The first is the set told within the boundaries of the nation, the tales told by Bahamians to one another to invoke a sense of unity. The second, equally prominent and sometimes difficult to distinguish from the first, is the set of tales told to strangers about the Bahamas. The latter set of tales always exists within any country, but it does not always have the prominence that it does in the Bahamas; for in a nation that makes its income from the

exchange of services of all sorts with the outside (tourism, banking and foreign investment—in real estate and the tourist industry, less so in manufacturing—are the legitimate sources of income, and smuggling of various kinds accounts for much of the rest) the tales told to the ‘other’ are as much a part of the national consciousness as the tales told to the ‘self’. What is more, as each set of tales affects and shapes the other, it is difficult, if not impossible, to state decisively where one leaves off and the other begins.

For Foster, the relation of capitalism to nationhood is as fundamental to the existence of the nation as are print-capitalism, concrete symbols or invented emblems and traditions. As he points out, ‘the nation’ is a resource itself—‘fought over in contests between local populations and state representatives to control the material and legal means ... for participation in the global capitalist economy’ (1995a: 6). It is also a commodity to be packaged and sold ‘to foreigners such as investors and tourists’ (1995a: 6). Participation in the global economy is crucial to any nation’s survival. In the Bahamas, capitalism is not only fundamental to definitions of nationhood, but it is *consciously* inscribed on Bahamian society in many ways. Nation *is* commodity. What gets preserved and put into the nationalist set of tales, then, is more often than not whatever can best be sold; thus the more commodifiable an object or custom, the more central it becomes. Small wonder that the tales told by Bahamians to one another and to outsiders slip from one into another. Bahamians consume the idea of the Bahamian nation just as foreigners do.

### *National Identity: tales told to the Self*

Within the Bahamas, representations of the national self tend to be embodied in emblems which are flexible and accommodate change. The most touted national

symbol is Junkanoo, the Christmas festival which resembles Trinidad's Carnival. An extravaganza of colour, sound and movement, Junkanoo (like any festival) changes and yet remains the same. Like the statues in the square, Junkanoo occupies the centre of the city; but unlike the statues, it is different from year to year. The parades begin in the darkness of the early morning, and last until full light. They are a competition between different groups for supremacy of artistry, music and performance, but the spectacle created by the combined efforts of the various artists is a unified whole; innovations in the building of costumes and the arranging of music resonate from parade to parade and multiply rapidly, creating a festival in constant flux. The foci of the festival are the lead costumes, huge sculptures of cardboard and styrofoam, which present and represent different facets of Bahamian reality; like the statues, they are concrete images of identification. Unlike the statues, however, these costumes are brightly coloured, and they move. Unlike the statues, too, they are not permanent monuments. According to custom, they appear once only; once shown, they have traditionally been discarded.<sup>27</sup>

Other images are placed on the stage or in the pulpit. In these settings, 'nation' becomes 'people', 'family', or 'community'. Under the PLP, the archipelago was 'a family of islands';<sup>28</sup> to this day the Bahamas is presented as 'a Christian nation'. While the titles may not vary, the conceptualisation of them does; in the island family, different islands may be senior members at different times, and different church

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<sup>27</sup>In recent years efforts have been made by junkanoo group leaders, who annually invest considerable time and money in the creation of the parades, to preserve the lead costumes for the year following their appearance. To this end the Junkanoo Expo was established, and since 1993 selected costumes have been salvaged for display in the renovated customs warehouse a block away from the parade route. However, it is arguable that this practice just delays the inevitable. Junkanoo costumes are constructed of perishable materials—cardboard, crepe paper, staples and glue—and can be preserved only for a limited time.

congregations may be privileged as emblematic of the nation as a whole, depending on situation. During the administration of the PLP, for instance, the central emblems of the island family or of Bahamian Christianity were the islands of Andros or Cat Island and the Baptist and Pentecostal churches, all symbolic of the black working class. Since the FNM's rise to power in 1992, accompanied by a middle-class support base and middle-class ideals, these have been replaced with the equally middle-class icons of Abaco and Eleuthera (the homes of the majority of white Bahamians) and the centrality of the Anglican church.

'National culture' is defined for the most part not in books or historical objects, but in the discussions that take place in high school debates, politicians' speeches, and on the air; in such exchanges music, food, language and dances feature prominently. They are assisted by stage performances which emphasise iconic figures and stock situations—conversations about 'culture', embodied in the comic skit, are a favourite, as are satirical sketches about various events. Familiar figures and settings reappear in such performances: the mother, the drunkard and the wise elder are common, and most often in such plays the action takes place out-of-doors, in a yard,<sup>29</sup> on the dock, on a street or in the market. The stage also serves as a showcase for such 'real' Bahamian culture as certain types of songs, such as traditional hymns and spirituals as well as

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<sup>28</sup>The concept of the 'Family Islands' remains current. However, in more recent official usage the stress on 'family' has been replaced with references to individual 'out' islands.

<sup>29</sup>The 'yard' was traditionally a compound which consisted of separate dwellings. The typical example of such living quarters requires that the land on which the dwellings rest be the property of a particular landlord; the occupants of the yard are tenants. This style of living was common throughout the Bahamas. In some cases, the landlord would own the plot only, and the tenants would pay for the right to place their houses (which, mounted on stone blocks, were portable) there. In others, however, both land and buildings would be owned by the same person, and rented out individually. In the past, yards were occupied by extended families, and on occasion the owners would live in one or more of the buildings in the compound. Today, however, many are inhabited by tenants only, several of them immigrants to the city, as

long narrative songs which recount specific historical events, and certain traditional dances; most of all it provides an arena in which Bahamian dialect can be spoken publicly without censure.

Other symbols are invoked. For politicians in competition for votes, the myth of the natal community, the connection with the 'grass roots'<sup>30</sup> are favoured; all candidates invoke personal histories that tell of triumph over adversity, most commonly poverty and racial discrimination, to become what they are. It is the rare politician who will publicly admit to having been comfortable in childhood; even if a man is not particularly darkskinned (and therefore is unable to play the race card too freely), he will refer to his father's sacrifice to send him to school or to his mother's life of hard work (in the case of the present Prime Minister, his grandmother's). Again, the emblem of family is employed. The parents of political leaders, the Prime Minister in particular, are often familiar figures in the national consciousness; the deaths of the present Prime Minister's mother and grandmother made national news.<sup>31</sup> In more general conversation, 'Bahamian music' is touted, although there is a lack of consensus across generations as to what 'real' Bahamian music actually is; folk historians point to indigenous inventions and adaptations, such as the rhyming spiritual and the junkanoo song (Bethel, 1978), while they dance to Bahamian merengue and calypso and their

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Bahamians have moved from their yards to suburban neighbourhoods where communal living has been replaced by single-family homes.

<sup>30</sup>In the Bahamas, this phrase has particular meaning. While retaining some of the idea of building from the base of society in a political sense, to use it conveys much more than campaign politics. In it has been incorporated a connection with one's (African) past, and a rediscovery of one's identity through a reevaluation of that which had previously been denied; thus to make reference to the 'grass roots' in the Bahamas is generally to invoke the image of hardworking black people whose struggles led them to achieve social, economic and political ascendancy over their oppressors.

<sup>31</sup>This is by no means a new habit. Public funerals were also planned for the parents of the former Prime Minister, each of whom died while he was in office, and in each case the country entered an unofficial mourning for the leader's loss.

children listen to reggae and rap. Common to all the definitions of 'culture', however, are the symbols of language and food. All 'true' Bahamians speak dialect (Glinton-Meicholas, 1994), and all share diets of fish, chicken and various 'native' dishes, most prominent among them the national delicacy, conch.<sup>32</sup> The media in which conversations about 'culture' take place are remarkable for their similarity; for in the Bahamas, such debates tend to be exactly that—debates, conversations, talk. Discussions are heard onstage, in pulpits, at political rallies, on the air, but they are rarely carried on for any considerable length of time in the printed media. The one exception are the newspapers, which are known for printing verbatim the content of politicians' speeches, and which publish letters to the editor which often take up discussions and render opinions in written form.

All in all, those images which are officially conjured up as representative of the 'Bahamian national identity' are in many ways ineffectual as markers of national unity, either through being the property of the capital alone (as in the case of the national festival, Junkanoo) or else bearing the ambivalence of the flag or the statues in Rawson Square. And yet when pressed, inhabitants of the archipelago consider themselves 'Bahamian', and believe that idea to unite them nevertheless.

### *National Identity: tales told to the Other*

The stories told to outsiders have traditionally stood in contrast to those told to Bahamians. The vast majority of Bahamian revenue is generated by interaction with foreigners; the main industries, tourism, banking and foreign investment, depend at least in some measure upon the Bahamas' representing itself as up-to-date and

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<sup>32</sup>A shellfish eaten throughout the islands.

technologically advanced. The concepts which are the stock and trade of the Bahamas' presentation of itself to the outside world—the domain not of actors or preachers but of the Ministry of Tourism—describe an alternative Bahamian identity. Central to this identity is the image of paradise: for the tourist, the idea of the exotic destination, the tropical wonderland; for the investor, the tax haven, the sunny clime. These images, though divergent in some respects, nevertheless have one point in common: Bahamians are rarely prominent in them.

The festival of Junkanoo may provide a good example. Although it has long been used emblematically as a symbol of Bahamian 'culture', appearing since the 1970s on stamps, posters, tourist brochures and airline magazines with clockwork-like regularity, it is only the occasional tourist who attends the Junkanoo parades. Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that tickets are sold for seating along the main streets, and that these tickets, like those to major sports events in the USA, are sold out well in advance. But perhaps part of the reason is that Junkanoo is a fundamental part of the tales Bahamians tell themselves, and as such cuts to the heart of what it means to be a Bahamian *person*. The tales told to the other are generic in nature, ignoring the personal in favour of fitting into a broader, globally-fashioned mould. It is telling that despite the *apparent* importance of Junkanoo as a cultural attraction, the administrators of the parades make little accommodation for tourist attendance.

On the other hand, countless visitors are subjected to the presentation of 'floor shows' in hotels and cabarets which incorporate an ersatz Junkanoo with more 'traditional' (and more imaginably 'savage') performances: limbo, fire dancing and, sometimes, steel bands borrowed from Trinidad—a virtual conglomeration of all the images the tourist *expects* to find in 'paradise' (Strachan, 1995). The Bahamian festival of Junkanoo, inextricably linked in the Bahamian imagination with Christmas and New

Year's Day, is thus remade on the visitors' behalf. The tales told to visitors are censored; Bahamians and Bahamian activities, *as Bahamians themselves understand them*, are not normally part of them.

Even here, though, the tales take two distinct forms. One must consider the audience to whom each story is pitched; the tales generated by the Ministry of Tourism for potential investors differ fundamentally from those told to run-of-the-mill tourists.<sup>33</sup> In the first instance, the tales emphasise the similarities between the Bahamas and the western world. To potential investors the nation is represented as modern, affluent and stable; stress is placed on the natural beauty of the islands, the enviable climate, the tax-free policies of the government, and the complete integration of the Bahamas into the global community. The people who do appear in this set of tales are sophisticated, businesslike, educated. Dialect is never used. Clothing is western and stylish; 'natives' never appear; the Bahamian businessman wears a suit, the Bahamian businesswoman smart dresses. The following is a fine example of the kinds of issues that take prominence in such promotions:

*Looking for a home with year-round sunshine, a spectacular ocean view and all modern conveniences within an hour's flight from the U.S.?*

*Then consider The Bahamas for your dream home. The islands are a natural greenhouse for lush, tropical greenery. The average year-round temperature is 72 degrees Fahrenheit. A near-constant southeast breeze tempers humidity and makes the environment one of the most comfortable in the world.*

*English is the official language of The Bahamas. There are hospitals, clinics, good schools and major international banks, familiar brands in American food chain stores and a rich cultural life. (Anonymous, 1997a. My emphases)*

To sell the nation to the tourist, the Ministry features those qualities which it considers most appropriate to visiting westerners. Attributes considered 'typical' of

tropical vacation spots are highlighted (Strachan, 1995: 226ff). It is here that the greater symbolism of the flag is most applicable; the Bahamas is presented as an aggregate of bright beaches, sunshine, and spectacular waters. The following is typical:

Ours is a nation of islands and cays blessed with sunny skies, powder-white and pink-sand beaches and incredibly clear aqua-blue waters. These consist of The Islands of The Bahamas which lie scattered across 100,000 square miles of the southwest Atlantic Ocean, from the tip of Florida to the edge of the Caribbean, near Haiti.

... We invite you to share in these riches, guaranteed to soothe your body and restore your soul. We offer you the calm and excitement of water sports—whether beneath the surface or at water's edge. And when you've had your fill of swimming, boating, fishing, diving and more, we have championship golf and tennis, and many other ways to entice you on land (Anonymous, 1997b: 73).

In short, it is promoted as a tropical playground where people are 'natives' and form part of the scenery; references to what Bahamians consider their 'culture' are often explicitly left out. When included at all, traditional dance and music are commodified, and those customs which are assumed not to sell—for example, the strong emphases on family and worship which are common to most Bahamians—are ignored. Dialect becomes a colourful and homogenised part of the experience; for instance, Bahamians are presumed to address one another as 'mon', a word coined by Americans to characterise any inhabitant of the English-speaking Caribbean. Religion, far from being central, is replaced by a sort of touristic hedonism that often contravenes the very things religious leaders support, opposing family values by emphasising guilt-free sex, encouraging all the vices (greed, gambling, and excess of all kinds).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>The two sets of tales may be found side by side on the Ministry of Tourism's homepage (<http://www.interknowledge.com/bahamas>, Geographia Travel Services, 1997a).

<sup>34</sup>I am greatly indebted to Strachan's work with regard to the promotion of the Bahamas as 'paradise' to the outsider. For a full articulation of it see Strachan, 1995: 167ff.

What is more, those metaphors which are so freely employed by Bahamians in their tales to themselves undergo a subtle transformation. Food as a symbol of Bahamianness provides a case in point. The food served to visitors is very often elaborate and sophisticated, and incorporates imported ingredients, with the exception of certain seafoods; it is rare, for instance, to find a Bahamian vegetable on a plate served in major restaurants. Similarly, the use of live performance—on stage and in the pulpit—to promote what is quintessentially Bahamian is replaced with the glamorous imagery of the mass media. ‘Nation’ is transformed into ‘destination’ in glossy photographs, magazines, posters, travel brochures and television commercials. Again, the ideas of *home* and *family* are supplanted by a hedonistic, abandoned individualism.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, the islands as individual destinations has received more attention than the sense of the island ‘family’; the slogan ‘The Bahamas: A Family of Islands’ has been replaced by the idea of ‘The Islands of The Bahamas’, and a dedication on the part of the Ministry of Tourism to promote each island as a single entity. Ideas of community, of being in a place where one knows and is known, are contradicted by the sense of anonymity promoted by regular tourist advertisement.

These touristic images of the Bahamas appear to be at odds with the images that Bahamians present to themselves. However, one is not independent of the other. The tales told to self are no more authentic than the tales told to other; rather, they are two sides of the same Bahamian coin.

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<sup>35</sup>That Bahamians recognise this commitment to anonymity is evident from the words of the following song: ‘I don’t know where you come from/Ya far from home, gal, have ya fun/Your indiscretion will be concealed/It’s all in the package deal.’ (Rahming, 1995).

*National Identity: Tales told to Self and Other*

Bruner, considering the two-way engagement of tourists and 'natives' in Bali, contends that the encounter, despite popular western conceptions of it, is never a unidirectional event. Pointing out that the 'exotic' is shaped by the visitor's expectation of it, he examines the incorporation of the touristic into the Balinese construction of identity, and concludes that, rather than being destructive to Balinese 'authenticity', the tourist encounter creates its own reality in what he considers the 'touristic borderzone' (1996: 157-58). As is the case with any nation dependent on the global capitalist community for its survival, one set of tales affects the other. The tales told to the Bahamian self have always been shaped by the tales told to the foreign other; likewise, the latter are subject to the vicissitudes in the fortunes of the former. Tourists have been part of the Bahamian ethnoscape for well over a century, so much so that the most foreigners are automatically classified as 'tourists', no matter what their context. Bahamians' self-identification is often inseparable from the image of themselves that they provide for the visitor.

Again, like a close inspection of the statues in the city square, a deconstruction of these images could lead one to conclude that Bahamians have a poor sense of self. Consider the following monologue. It is taken from the bridge of a song that recounts one of the pivotal incidents in the Afro-Bahamian struggle for self-government, the Burma Road Riots of 1942,<sup>36</sup> and as such provides a fine study of the levels of irony inherent in many portrayals of self that are filtered through the touristic lens. The recording from which it comes is a re-release of one made popular in the early 1970s by a singer whose audience was made up primarily of tourists. Having gone through the

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<sup>36</sup>For a full account, see Saunders, 1990a.

song, which, according to tradition, was sung by the rioters as they marched to the town,<sup>37</sup> the performer launched into the following:

*I'n ga lick nobody*<sup>38</sup>  
*I'n ga lick nobody*  
*I'n ga lick nobody*

Cause I got guinea corn hominy, yes indeed, stew shad and johnny cake, guinea corn hominy and lard, you must get some a that. Listen. I watch these fellas coming round here, ordering these big-time dish, they talking bout steak and all them kinda thing and thing like that. Well lemme tell you. I know them long time. I know when we used to go in the bush, catch couple of crabs, carry them home, get out the old iron pot in the back of the yard on t'ree rock, boil them crab, get lil bit of flour, cook it half done, and eat crab fat and dough! Yeah! Now they round here talking bout steak and thing? Listen. You should hear them when they ordering these big-time drink, talking bout zombie and slow gin fizz and thing? I don't get it. Cause I know when we used to go in the market, buy couple sourlime, carry it home, squeeze them in one them old peaches can half full a water, throw lil sugar in that and drink switcher! That's right! Listen. I know them long time. Listen. Lemme tell you. You gotta get some old yam and some old pumpkin, some old sweet potato, some old cabbage, some old carrot, some old salt beef, and old dry conch, throw that in the pot mongst some peas, let that boil down together, then you get one pound of flour, throw that in one pan, throw some salt and water in that, mix it up with you hand, and boom! Peas soup and dough boy! That's right! Listen! Lemme tell you. I'm a native son, you see. I know where it's at cause that's where I'm from. Over the Hill. In the bush. Down Burma Road. Well, lemme tell you something. You gotta get dis good old native food. Peas soup and dough boy. Guinea corn hominy and lard. Steam conch and johnny cake. Boil crab and hominy. You gotta get some peas and rice and steam jackfish. You gotta get some stew fish and potato bread, and thing like that.<sup>39</sup> You see? Listen. Now, just to go off the course for lil bit here, I got some friends, have a habit of coming in wearing big-time shirt, fella come here the other night, tell me say, 'Boy,' he say, 'I wearing a twenty-five dollar, custom-made shirt.' And I look at him and laugh, cause I remember when all of we used to thank God for

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<sup>37</sup>In this case, tradition and documentary evidence appear not to agree—see Saunders 1985.

<sup>38</sup>This was the refrain of the song 'Burma Road', and indicates the peaceful nature of the rioters, being translated as 'I won't hit anybody.'

<sup>39</sup>*Hominy*, or *grits*, a staple of the Bahamian diet, is ground corn, boiled till it is soft and sticks together. *Shad* is a Bahamian fish. *Johnny cake* is a type of bread, sometimes made of cornmeal, eaten alongside many Bahamian dishes. *Switcher* is Bahamian limeade. The *peas* in question are most commonly pigeon (gunga) peas, or black-eye peas (beans). *Steaming* meat refers to the process of cooking it in its own juices in a covered pan over a slow fire. Often tomato is added, to provide more 'juice' or gravy.

Robin Hood flour! That's right! Flour bag! And then he have the heart to come and tell me say he wearing ninety-five dollar alligator-skin shoes. Well, I'll be doggone—listen. I remember when we used to go to high mass Sunday morning wearing high top tennis with no socks on, and God help you if it rain, cause toe jam'll kill you! Listen. Lemme tell you. You gotta go in the bush. Over the hill. Down Burma Road. That's where it's at. Believe it or not folks, that's where it's at. I know most of you tourists out there don't know what I'm talking about. Well, we're talking bout the Bahamian thing. Yes indeed.<sup>40</sup>

The subject of the monologue is one which is common in many 'native' contexts in the face of 'development' or prosperity. The entertainer is providing a commentary on Bahamians who, having attained some riches, proceed to become avid consumers, eating the food eaten by westerners, and wearing western attire. These sorts of people are a source of amusement for the speaker, who recalls their humble origins, destroying the cloak of their sophistication. On the surface, then, the monologue is a satirical commentary about the ridiculous juxtaposition of the 'native' and the 'modern'—a fairly common theme in conventional thinking about development, tourism and the role of the 'west' in the 'Third World', a theme which is, indeed, a favourite of western anthropologists and local intellectuals alike, who deplore the 'false' assumption of modernity by the 'native'. Despite the apparent 'authenticity' of this meditation, however—symbolised by the dialect in which it is couched, the references to traditional Bahamian experiences, particularly the invocation of the simplicity and the poverty of Bahamian food and clothes—the song is in fact an artifact of the tourist encounter. The creative context of the occasion is, presumably, a tourist-filled room; the singer has made his living by entertaining visitors, and the song preserves the intimate connection between the performer and his audience. Indeed, in its first presentations it would have

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<sup>40</sup>Ronnie and the Ramblers, n.d. This song is a re-release of the original, probably prompted by the recent popularity of the song in a remade form—'Burma Road/In Da Bush' (Bahamen, 1992).

taken place in exactly that context: in a hotel cabaret peopled by foreigners. Yet today the song is appropriated by Bahamians, as it is found on an album, released as an LP during the seventies and again as a CD twenty years later. The singer is widely recognised as the foremost living Bahamian popular musician, the 'grand old man' of Bahamian music. His monologue embodies this tension. It is spoken to the visitor; the tourist is directly addressed in it, and there seems to be a sort of complicity between the performer and the tourist which appears to exclude—even to ridicule—the westernised Bahamian. But it is delivered in dialect, the vocabulary and rhythms of which are semi-intelligible to visitors, and in this regard it may be regarded as directed to Bahamians, who will be the only people who understand it fully.

If this is one level of irony—Bahamian dialect being employed to create a satire about Bahamians *for* non-dialect-speaking tourists—there are others. If we step back from the context of the song and consider the context of the singer, we realise that the performer/author, the 'over-the-hill boy', is in fact a man who lives today in a villa on Paradise Island (an island invented precisely for the tourist). The re-issuing of this song during the 1990s, on CD and tape, then, is as much a reflection of his present prosperity as of his past poverty. Despite his insistence to his audience about his 'bush' origins, his reality is as far removed from those origins as is that of the 'fellas' referred to in the monologue.

The speech takes the irony further still. Its occurrence in a traditional song celebrating the power of the black Bahamian worker appears absurd in itself, and seems to trivialise the symbolism of the Burma Road Riots. In singing the song *to* the visitor, the singer appears blind to the possibility that the successes of the riots are being subordinated in a new disenfranchisement of the Bahamian people, a new dependency—not on native white, but on the white foreign tourist. This certainly is the

reading given to the role of tourism in Bahamian life by intellectuals such as Bethel, Craton, Glinton-Meicholas, Johnson, Saunders, and Strachan.

Yet, like the statues in the square, the situation is by no means that simple. Indeed, to see it in such a light is to employ dichotomies such as 'self' and 'other', 'native' and 'visitor', 'exotic' and 'civilised', and to miss the point of the monologue entirely. It is conceivable that the popular Bahamian conception of the situation is not so rigid. To assume that the speaker's contempt for his friends lasts beyond the performance is to assume fixity in a context where flux predominates. What is significant here is the pragmatic mixing of all elements for a particular effect *in the moment*. In evoking the 'real' Bahamas, perhaps in an effort to create the 'authentic' for the tourist or present the 'exotic/native' to the visitor, the monologue weaves *all* the tales told to the self, together with the attitudes with which they are told, into a song sung for the other. In this it is an inverted precursor to *all* the reconstructions of the 'authentic' Bahamian self which have occurred during the 1990s, starting perhaps most consciously with the 1989 revue *Dis We Tings* (Bethel *et al.*, 1989), which drew heavily on 'traditional' Bahamian songs which were in fact written for performance in nightclubs and other tourist attractions. In their efforts to tell tales to themselves, Bahamian artists and performers have drawn heavily on the tales told to the tourists.

To seek a concrete, unchanging 'authenticity' in a nation whose economic existence rests upon the very fluid resources of the sea, international finance and tourism, is quite possibly futile. It is my argument that to regard *any* event in the Bahamas as capable of standing in some way for the *whole* is false. For in a nation as steeped in tourism as the Bahamas is (from the 1850s to the present day) the *self* is fundamentally inseparable from the *other*, and thus the two tales are in many ways one.

How, then, does one examine Bahamian national identity at all? I shall begin where I began my fieldwork—by examining a village which I believed in the beginning might be used as a symbol of the whole: the village of Fox Hill, New Providence.

## II. Fox Hill, New Providence, Bahamas

My project suggested itself by accident, by a coming together of many threads. I originally set out to study Fox Hill, a settlement on the outskirts of Nassau, the capital. I chose the village as a result of my own sense of the 'Bahamian' identity; as a Bahamian I 'knew' that it was representative of what 'being Bahamian' *means*. My original interest, therefore, was in the community dynamics in Fox Hill, particularly as the village was touted as an example of healthy communal life, a place famed for individualism and self-determination. On the other hand, I recognised a contradiction in the conceptualisation of the place; not only is it extolled as authentically 'Bahamian' but it has also been variously represented as isolated, backward, exotic, and quaint.

On the surface, this appears to fit in with conventional anthropological ideas of 'custom' and 'tradition' (Hobsbawm, 1983)—the identification of quintessential 'national' qualities in things and places that become iconographic, that provide symbols for a homogenising nationalistic enterprise. These are often seized upon by intellectuals and used as building-blocks for national identities, and become codified as historical representations which allow for modernist national constructions. However, the paradox of Fox Hill went deeper. For all its quaint, symbolic presence in the national imagination, its *actual* existence was a little more problematic. On the one hand it was present in Bahamian self-conceptions—from the singer who wants 'a Fox Hill gal when [he] get[s] lonely' to the interest of the national press in the celebration of Fox Hill Day<sup>41</sup> each August. On the other, however, its historical presence was not consciously

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<sup>41</sup>A holiday celebrated on the eighth day after the Emancipation Day holiday (August 1).

inscribed on the ground. Rather than being frozen in time as one might expect, given the considerable national consciousness about it, Fox Hill, like many other Bahamian places, is continually renovated and built up.

I was eager to study the village as it exists today, on the edge of the city, surrounded by housing developments and other suburban features. I was particularly keen to conduct research there because despite its recurrence in Bahamian self-imaginings, it was non-existent in the anthropological record, as ethnographers tended to choose as objects of their study 'isolated' communities on islands distant from the urban centre. Fox Hill, however, seemed to retain its psychic identity even on the edge of the city. As a 'native' anthropologist, I hoped to 'go in deep', and, using Fox Hill as a portal, uncover the structure of Bahamianness.

What I found, however, led me in quite a different direction. Fox Hill, I began to realise, is an *imagined* village; its importance lies more in the Bahamian *understanding* of it as a village, self-contained and symbolic, than its physical village-ness in the present. As I applied standard anthropological techniques to the study—interviews, participant observation, neighbourhood surveys and so on—I became more and more aware of the impossibility of my original task. While Fox Hill may have been a village at one time, isolated from the city and set apart by ethnic, geographical and social barriers from the rest of Bahamian life, it was set apart no longer. Indeed, my interviews led me to question the actual existence of 'Fox Hill' as a single, stable community. The stories I received were so divergent that I found it difficult to reconstitute a unified history. The resulting difficulty in framing the settlement, the lack of many written sources on its history (despite a strong oral tradition)—these directed my view outward, and prompted me to ask questions about the formation of national identity in the Bahamas

as a whole. What was the role of Fox Hill, I asked, in a nation which has built its identity *in the absence of* a strong literate tradition?

In this regard, my own role as 'native' anthropologist was highly ambiguous. While my objective was the collection of data appropriate for the writing of a thesis to satisfy Cambridge examiners, my function was perceived rather differently by the people I spoke to, who saw me as representative of a variety of enterprises, not least of all the recording, and hence the preservation of, 'culture'.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, I was trying to be the detached, impartial observer. On the other, I was placed in the role of the transcriber of identity, the recorder of 'history'. Thus I was faced with two highly confusing situations. The first was trying to make sense of the 'histories' I was being told about the village I had set out to study; the second was trying to balance my own role with the role that others saw me as playing, or wanted me to play. At first, challenged by the ambiguity, I floundered. Then it hit me: what I was experiencing was in fact a weaving of many histories, each of them true, each of them relevant according to the context of the person telling them and the purpose for which they were being told. What I was experiencing was the telling of a living tale. 'History' in Fox Hill, and perhaps in the Bahamas at large, was portrayed less as a codified record of events than as a series of stories told about the past.

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<sup>42</sup>That I was perceived in this way was not unusual. I cannot be divorced from my context; my pre-fieldwork status as a writer, my involvement in the local theatre as a co-creator of revues designed to preserve 'culture', and, almost equally important, my father's work in ethnomusicology (the documentation of Bahamian musical forms) preceded me and shaped my informants' perceptions of my project.

## The Place

The village of Fox Hill is located on the island of New Providence, Bahamas, some five miles east of downtown Nassau. Nestled in a hollow between two low ridges, it is built around a village green, called the parade, which is remarkable for the silk cotton trees that surround it (Fig. 2.1). This parade stands at the junction of the three roads which lead into Fox Hill—Bernard Road from the west; Fox Hill Road north, which connects the village to the coast road; and the continuation of Fox Hill Road, which runs south to the sea, crossing Prince Charles Drive, the main artery serving the eastern end of the island. This area is understood by most people to be Fox Hill proper, and is the historical centre of the village.

The parade itself is an oval of grass and trees around which the roads curve. Situated about the parade are a number of buildings and establishments, among them the compound housing the school, the clinic, the library and the post office. Also nearby are the relatively new National Insurance building; a launderette; the large silk cotton tree under which old men of the community meet, talk, read newspapers, play dominoes and drink rum; the food store; and a nightclub. South of the parade is the neighbourhood 'park',<sup>43</sup> surrounded by a low wall decorated with gang graffiti. This is Freedom Park, where the young men congregate—in the early afternoon to sit on the wall and watch the passers-by and to challenge any young male stranger foolish enough to be in the area without a good reason, and in the evening to 'play ball'. In the late afternoons and on weekends, they will be joined by older women who set up stands and sell fruit and home-made goods. To the west are a church, a boutique and a barber shop.



Fig. 2.1 – Fox Hill Parade, February 1994

The parade is an attractive plot of green in the centre of this. During the early 1990s improvements carried out by the Fox Hill Association, a community group, ensured its appeal. At that time, the public buildings in the compound were renovated, and an impressive stone wall topped with a wrought iron fence was built in front of it. The various entrances to the compound were flanked by imposing pillars, and in the centre was placed a stone sign proclaiming it the Fox Hill Civic Centre (Fig. 2.2). The road between the Civic Centre and the parade was widened on all sides to provide space for bus stops, and benches were erected in the shade of the cotton trees. The parade itself was enclosed with a low wall of a similar design, and concrete paths were laid out crossing it. Flowering bushes were planted inside the wall and along the paths. At the western end of the parade, where the most ancient and massive of the silk-cotton trees stands, a permanent roofed bandstand was built. A raised area equipped with

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<sup>43</sup>In New Providence, many neighbourhoods are equipped with open areas containing paved courts, bleacher seating, and night lights, mostly used by young men for basketball games.

power outlets was erected directly under the tree's branches, and a paved concrete dance floor laid out in front of it (Fig. 2.3). The dance floor was separated from the rest of the parade by a low concrete wall, and the lighting around the parade was improved. The entire exercise gave Fox Hill a strong sense of community life. Indeed, at the edge of the dance floor was placed a monument declaring the settlement a 'Bahamas Historical Site', inscribed with the following 'history':

### FOX HILL OR SANDILANDS VILLAGE

Known as New Guinea or Creek Village in 1750, the land on which it was situated was granted to Samuel Fox in 1801. A large tract of land in the area was granted to Assistant Justice Robert Sandilands in 1845. Four years later he subdivided the land and sold parcels. Following emancipation, the village was divided into several 'towns'.

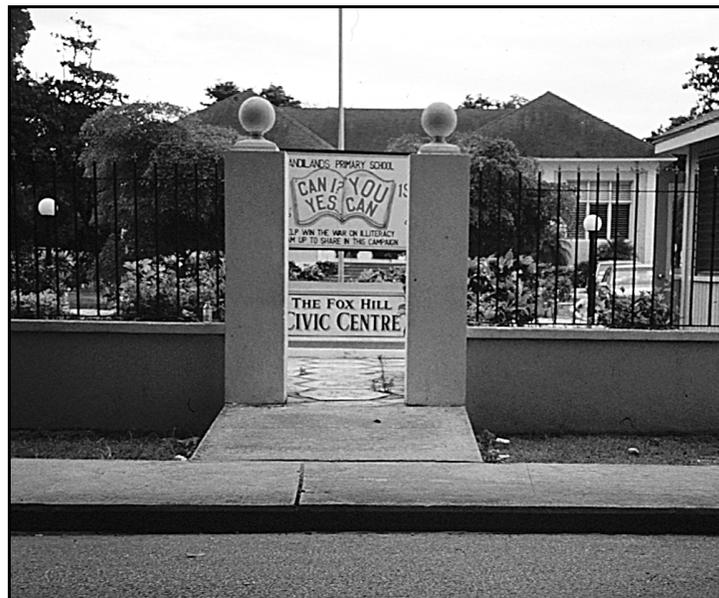


Figure 2.2 – Fox Hill Civic Centre, February 1994

The main roads into the centre of Fox Hill have different functions. The north-south arteries run through primarily residential areas, dotted with churches, a few businesses and some public grounds such as the Fox Hill Cemetery. Bernard Road, by

contrast, is a bustling main street, running between Fox Hill and the Village Road roundabout, which in the last fifteen years has become a busy shopping area. In keeping with this commercial aspect, Bernard Road is lined with countless bars, general stores, inns, schools, mechanics, boutiques, churches and individual homes. As it approaches the parade, one finds on the north side the streets that lead to the ancient 'towns', the oldest residential areas of Fox Hill Village.<sup>44</sup> On the south side are the more recent residential developments, which are built on either side of St Augustine's Monastery, the main landmark.

### **The History**

The inscription on the plaque notwithstanding, documentary sources contend that settlement in the area took three distinct forms (Williams, 1979). On the north coast, spread out along the Eastern Road, was the small village of New Guinea or The Creek, which was already populated in 1776 when a group of American revolutionaries landed there preliminary to their invasion of Nassau.<sup>45</sup> According to oral accounts, Creek land formed a separate community which ended at the northern ridge, and, true to its name, was a coastal settlement. The Fox Hill area proper (that is, the land between the ridges) was first settled around the beginning of the 19th century when a Mr Fox, a free man of colour, developed it as a plantation. Popular legend has it that he willed his land to his slaves and their descendants at his death; and the ruins of his house, built atop the ridge next to the monastery, existed well into living memory. That part of the town

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<sup>44</sup>Congo Town, Nango Town, Joshua Town and Burnside Town. See below for more details. See too Craton and Saunders, 1992; 1998; Eneas, 1988; Norton *et al.*, 1968; Saunders, 1970; Williams, 1979.

<sup>45</sup>Craton and Saunders, 1992: 167.

encompassing the parade and environs were included in an extensive grant of land to Judge Robert Sandilands in 1840. This he developed by laying out the green and building the northern end of Fox Hill Road, which connected his land with the Creek. He settled it by offering small allotments of land (about six acres apiece) to ex-slaves<sup>46</sup> and Liberated Africans,<sup>47</sup> which they paid for by working for him. In 1849 the settlement's name was changed to Sandilands (Williams, 1979).



Figure 2.3 – Dance floor on Fox Hill parade with historical plaque, February 1994

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<sup>46</sup>Emancipation for slaves in the British Empire was granted on August 1, 1834. However, full freedom was not available until 1838, as each slave had to undergo a period of apprenticeship or indentured labour to his or her master for four years.

<sup>47</sup>After the abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807, the British government carried out a policy of capturing slave ships (most of which belonged to their rivals in the Caribbean/Atlantic region—the French, Spanish, Americans and Portuguese) and setting the

Throughout the nineteenth century and until the 1920s, Fox Hill, though not far from Nassau in distance, was isolated by the fact that the only roads that connected it with the town were tracks. The physical separation from the city was symbolically maintained by various governmental practices. During the nineteenth century, the settlement of Liberated Africans in the area confirmed it;<sup>48</sup> one of the tracks into Nassau connected Fox Hill with Bain Town, the other major settlement of freed Yoruba, located just south of the city (Eneas, 1988 [1976]: 34). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the settlement continued to be the dumping ground for the city, as the prison, the juvenile homes and the mental hospital were all moved to isolated grounds just south of the settlement. As a result, common Bahamian references for the prison and the mental hospital are both synonymous with the settlement; to say that someone is 'in Fox Hill' suggests that he is in jail, while to be 'put in Sandilands' is to be driven crazy.

On their side, the people of Fox Hill kept to themselves, travelling to town largely for trade. The area was known as the main fruit-producer of the island, and women also brought their livestock and their straw-work to sell in the market. The journey to and from town was not an easy one. Perhaps the most telling reminder of Fox Hill's isolation from the city is the story, told by Nassauvians, to explain the existence of Fox Hill Day (the second Tuesday in August, eight days after Emancipation Day). According to city legend, Fox Hill Day and Emancipation Day are the same; the slaves in Fox Hill were so isolated from the city that it took eight days for them to get

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Africans on board free in British territories. Some 4,000 were settled in the Bahamas (Adderley, 1998).

<sup>48</sup>The Bahamas Government maintained a policy of settling the Africans in designated areas at some distance away from the town, and several were sent to various remote islands in the archipelago.

the news from Nassau.<sup>49</sup> For their part, the people of Fox Hill maintained their seclusion by viewing Nassau people as ‘foreigners’, and by weaving a reputation as powerful practitioners of *obeah* (magic) to discourage penetration of their boundaries by non-members. This was a reputation which lasted well into the twentieth century, attested to by the following tale told by a former headmaster of the Boys’ Industrial School, a non-resident of Fox Hill; the episode in question took place during the 1940s. One night, after working later than usual, he found himself in Fox Hill past dark. Although he did not like to set out on the track back to town during the night-time, he was even more determined not to spend the night there, and so he began his long walk back. When he reached the boundary of the village, he had a vision of a fiery chariot, created, he assumed, by Fox Hill *obeah* to protect the area.

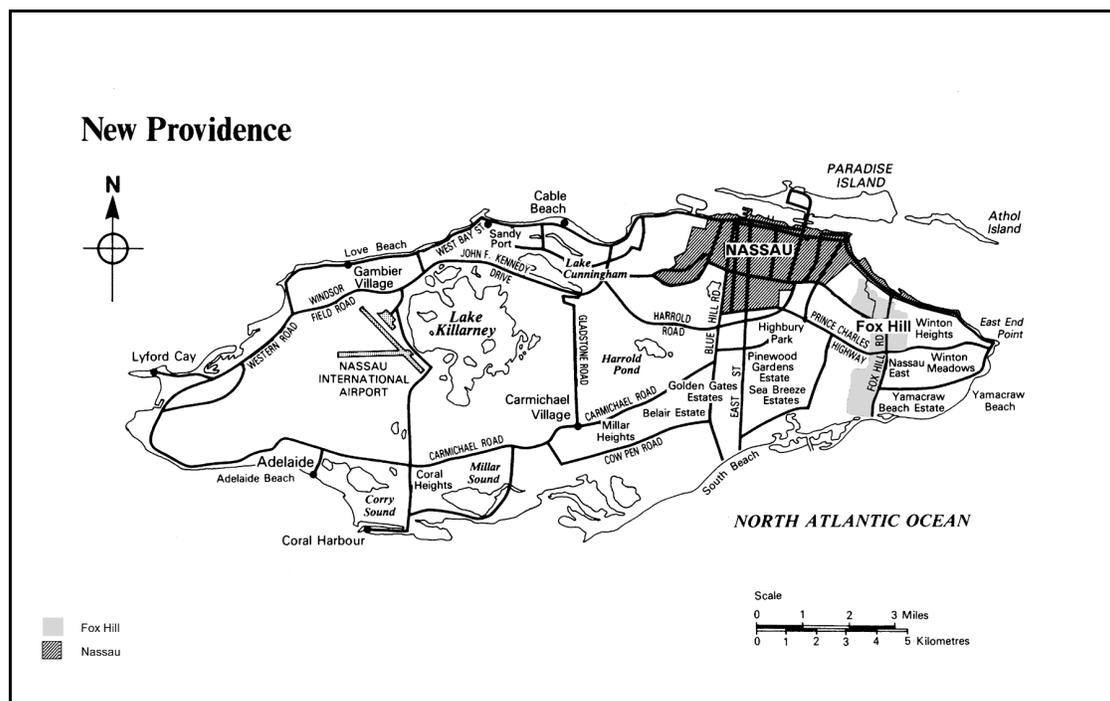


Figure 2.4 – Fox Hill, New Providence

<sup>49</sup>Interestingly, no parallel story is told about any of the outlying islands of the archipelago, which (according to this reasoning) would have heard the news even later than Fox Hill.

In recent decades, however, all this has changed. Contact with the city has grown much easier, with the extension of paved roads and the creation of housing developments all over the island. Today, Fox Hill is surrounded by middle- and upper-middle-class suburbs, and, bar traffic, is five driving minutes away from the limits of the town. Needless to say, the proximity of the prison to these suburbs is a sore point among many residents, and the past fifteen years have witnessed regular calls upon the government to relocate the prison—preferably to a deserted island. What is more, the immigration of various groups to the area has de-homogenised the population: in and around Fox Hill live white Nassauvian businessmen, mixed-race people from other islands, Haitian immigrants, and members of the new middle classes. In Fox Hill proper, a sense of community remains, but it is difficult to consider the people who live there the members of any particular socio-economic group; while many people move away from Fox Hill when they become wealthy, many remain and invest their money in the district.

### **The Problem**

As a village, then, despite appearances, Fox Hill is difficult to define. To begin with, what is now considered Fox Hill Village is a composite of many smaller settlements. Each has its own 'history' and its own symbolic meaning. These 'towns'—Burnside Town, Nango Town, Joshua Town and Congo Town—were apparently areas of segregated settlement in the early days of the village. Nango Town and Congo Town, as their names suggest, were where Liberated Yoruba and 'Congo' (Central African) peoples were settled (Eneas, 1988 [1976]; Williams, 1979). Burnside Town was

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Moreover, the village as it exists today was not developed till the 1840s, a good decade after

populated by Bahamian-born Creoles and (by some accounts) migrants from the Creek Village. It is unclear what the origin of the name 'Joshua Town' is, and who inhabited it. What is more, the 'true' origin of the settlement is disputed. One legend favours the history of Mr Fox's plantation; I was told that the ruin of his house still stands, though I could not find it. That story emphasises Fox's colour (he was a 'black' man by some accounts, a 'coloured' man—implying some European admixture—by others, and a Creek native by still others). However, the village owes its layout to Judge Sandilands, and for roughly a century it was known not as Fox Hill but as Sandilands Village; the primary school (and the mental hospital) still bear his name. Although few people refer to Judge Sandilands today—it is often proudly asserted that Fox Hill is a Liberated African settlement, to be compared with the other African villages on New Providence, but with a greater sense of itself and its unique heritage—it is arguable that the Africans owe their presence in Fox Hill at least in part to Sandilands. To add to the confusion, some inhabitants of the area display a sense of ancient belonging to the land associated with the settlement of the Creek. I was informed that the Eastern Road, now inhabited primarily by wealthy white Bahamians and expatriates, was originally the property of those families who made up the Creek. Pride in the age of that settlement was strong, for the existence of New Guinea as early as the 1730s (as evidenced by St Anne's) would make it second in age only to Nassau itself.

One common thread in all these histories is the ownership of land. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter IV; what is important here is that the village is constructed on what is called in the Bahamas 'generation property'. This kind of land-holding tradition, practised throughout the Caribbean as 'family land', is a system whereby the descendants of slaves were able to have access to land in the lean years

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emancipation.

after Emancipation.<sup>50</sup> Land is held communally by all descendants of a particular family or consortium of ex-slaves, and functions as a trust system; ideally, the land is to be accessible to every member of the group or family, and should be inalienable.

In the case of the Creek, whose land exists today only in memory, the former ownership of some of the most valuable land in the country provides much of the Creek Villagers' sense of identity. To begin with, those villagers use land ownership as a means of separating themselves from the people of Fox Hill: Fox Hill land, they point out, is the inheritance of slaves,<sup>51</sup> while Creek Land was the inheritance of free people—'Ancient, ancient, ancient ... The settlement was a settlement of ancient people.'<sup>52</sup> That notwithstanding, there remain few Creek families on Creek land today, which, like the lands south and west of Fox Hill, was bought up by developers early in the twentieth century. Many Creek families moved to Burnside Town and Johnson Road.<sup>53</sup> Still, they maintained a 'psychological boundary' between themselves and the people of Fox Hill.

As one person insisted:

Fox Hill was bush, really. And persons lived there because a lot of people found refuge in that area. But it was not an organised settlement until Sandilands came along. Whereas the Creek was a village long long before that. And an identifiable, accepted village ... many of the Creek people moved to Johnson Road ... I don't know how they came to be in Johnson

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<sup>50</sup>In this regard, Fox Hill shares some qualities with the Jamaican village of Martha Brae, studied by both Besson, 1987a, and Mintz, 1987.

<sup>51</sup>This argument is seen to hold just as well for the descendants of Liberated Africans as the descendants of Fox's slaves, as Africans and slaves alike got their land from the masters. In fact, it was wondered whether Samuel Fox might have been a Creek man, thus extending the relationship between Fox Hill and the Creek into one of dominance and submission.

<sup>52</sup>One explanation given for the name of the settlement was that it was established by Creek (Cree?) Indians fleeing the southern United States, who came ashore at the tongue of water now known as the Fox Hill Creek. Another reconstructs a history of Lucayan (indigenous Bahamian) Indian settlement in the Creek during the time of Columbus. According to this account, the Lucayans, in their flight from the islands where the Europeans had landed, came to New Providence and settled in the Creek.

<sup>53</sup>Johnson Road holds an ambiguous status in the community. It is always named as a boundary of Fox Hill, but was not always considered part of Fox Hill.

Road, but ... all of them that was there when I was growing up were original Creek people ... and in truth, different from the Fox Hill people. In fact I was amazed though I didn't comment, someone once was saying, 'The people from the Creek never used to fool with the people from Fox Hill.' And I knew he was telling the truth, I just didn't comment, I just let him talk! But he was right. He was right, and vice versa.

It is possible, but not very likely, that some of this land was gained as the result of the land grants made by Judge Sandilands in his development of the area. However, the records of the land he sold to the Africans and slaves indicate that the plots were comparatively small: roughly six acres apiece. The vastness of the land owned by Fox Hill people according to the oral history suggests a different origin.

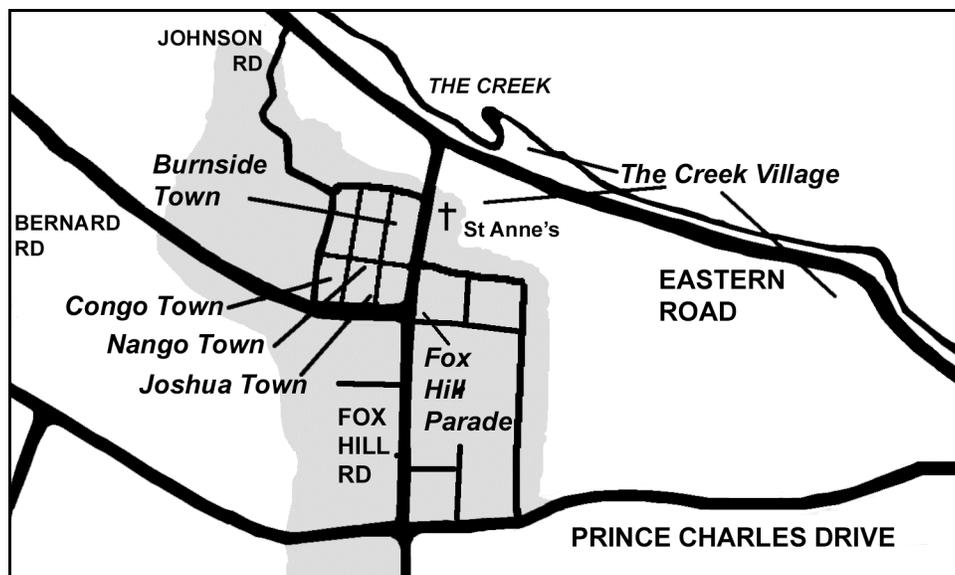


Figure 2.5 – Map of Fox Hill showing the various 'towns'

In this regard the legend of Samuel Fox's will is relevant. In the Bahamas, many descendants of slaves collectively own sizeable pieces of land in the form of 'generation property'. This phenomenon is most common in the outlying islands of the archipelago, where conditions made successful cultivation of cash crops so difficult that

often landowners cut their losses and abandoned their plantations. It was not unusual in these cases for them to leave their slaves in possession of huge tracts of land. With Emancipation, that practice became more prevalent, so that on several of the southeastern islands, up to 90 per cent of the land is held by black Bahamian families (Turnquest, 1990). Sometimes these transactions were formalised in wills; more often, however, they were accomplished by oral decree, or by the emigration or demise of the Europeans. What is common to the system of generation property, though, no matter what its origin, is the fact that all members of a generation—that is, all the descendants of the original owner or of his slaves—have equal right to the land.

In Fox Hill, the myth of Mr Fox's plantation provided the oral legitimacy for the farming of large tracts of land. Certainly, many families who own land that is still attached to the settlement treat that land much as one might treat generation property; every family member has the right to live and work on it, and ideally it should not be sold. On the whole, however, the tradition of generation property in Fox Hill has been honoured more in imagination than in practice. The sprawling housing developments on property formerly considered Fox Hill land provides ample evidence that generation property can indeed be sold, and it is arguable that the general prosperity of the community is partly the result of the selling of family land during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Today, only the acreage in the immediate vicinity of Fox Hill and Bernard Roads remains in the hands of Fox Hill families. Although the fact that Fox Hill inhabitants possessed their own property added to their strong sense of identity, most people I talked to were hazy about the extent of the land originally attached to Fox Hill, and were certain only about those portions closer to the settlement itself.

In fact, many visual aspects that give the area its village-like appearance are recent additions. The complex of public buildings gives the impression that the autonomy of the area has been recognised by the government for a long time. The school, however, is the only government building of any antiquity. The rest—the library, the post office, the phone and electricity stations and the clinic—were established after Independence (1973), rewards for the community's support of the government, or recognition of Fox Hill's symbolic value.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to consider that the tale of Liberated African settlement is one whose official telling post-dates the election in 1967 of a majority black government in the Bahamas. Even the name—Fox Hill—was a reincarnation of the period of black pride; it was at this time that the story of the benevolent coloured planter, Fox, took *official* precedence over the tale of the philanthropic English judge.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, in the various stories about the area one may find different emphases which can provide different inhabitants with their own sense of belonging: for the great-grandchildren of slaves, there is the myth of Fox's plantation; for people of predominantly African descent, the story of the Liberated Africans; and for people of mixed ancestry the tale of the Creek. In all these histories, however, are found the common theme of extensive land ownership, independence from the city, and a strong sense of self. It is even more interesting that, despite some people's insistence on the separateness of the various settlements, the history inscribed on the

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<sup>54</sup>It is equally arguable that sizeable portions of the land were illegitimately appropriated by developers, particularly in those cases where Fox Hill families could produce no documents proving their ownership.

<sup>55</sup>What is more, the recent (1999) closure of the telephone and electricity stations suggests that the symbolic value of Fox Hill within the nation is changing.

<sup>56</sup>Interestingly, in recent years—in the period, that is, following the election in 1992 of a government of mixed racial and ethnic affiliations—the term 'Sandilands Village' is gaining more currency.

pillar on the parade proclaims on the oneness of the three: the Creek, Fox Hill and Sandilands Village are one and the same.

Again, I noticed that when I asked various people to describe the limits of the village, I got various answers—rarely the same one twice. The western boundary, the southern boundary, and even the northern boundary were all disputed.<sup>57</sup> Take, for example, this exchange between myself and two informants. Neither was born in Fox Hill, but Charles was descended on his grandmother's side from a Fox Hill family, and his wife, Margaret, taught at one of the schools in the area for thirty years.

CHARLES: Now. When I think of Fox Hill, there's a main road. I don't know what they call— that's Fox Hill Road.

NB: The one that goes north-south?

CHARLES: Mm-hmm, north and south. That main road. And if you go, coming west up that main [i.e. Bernard] road, all the way back down by L.W. Young School—

MARGARET: Oh, that's Fox Hill?

CHARLES: I would call that Fox Hill.

MARGARET: Oh. I would tend to stop at Johnson Road. I would tend to stop at Johnson Road. I don't know though.

CHARLES: Uh, that environment. Johnson Road included.

NB: Okay. And how far south would you go?

CHARLES: Fox Hill to my mind goes all the way down to Prince Charles Drive.

NB: Okay.

MARGARET: I would take it, I would take it further south than that.  
[Laughter.]

Compare it with this description, given to me by Oliver, a long-time resident and a former MP for the area:

When we speak of Fox Hill, in days gone by, it included really even what is known as the Creek. That was also a part of the Fox Hill area, the Fox Hill Creek, the northern part, yeah. That would have taken in quite a bit of the Eastern Road, and what is known as Burnside Town, that's coming over and taking in St Anne's, coming down the hill, all that section on the

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<sup>57</sup>In all likelihood the eastern boundary was not held up to question because until relatively recently, Fox Hill was the most easterly inland development on New Providence.

eastern side there of Fox Hill Road, and what is known as Burnside Town, that's coming over and taking in St Anne's, coming down the hill, all that section on the eastern side there of Fox Hill Road, taking in Mount Carey, Mount Carey Baptist Church area there, and I think I would say that it took in as far south as ... probably to the beach, South Beach area, to the sea really. And it encompassed on the west of the Fox Hill Road, all the area between Johnson Road and ... Adderley Street, on both sides of Adderley Street would have been called Fox Hill, particularly the eastern side. It would have included west of Adderley Street as far west as Village Road junction there, and encompassing the ... all the area east of the ... all that area where the monastery is—all of that I suppose ... How far west? Now I think it might have come up as far as Bernard Road and might have cut off ... it might have, it might have taken in the whole Danottage area.

These variations proved typical of most of the responses that I got. Older people named roads which, in their youth, had marked the village off from the surrounding land; younger people sometimes referred to the constituency boundaries of Fox Hill, which are subject to the whims of Parliament every five years for readjustment. Most non-Creek people considered the Creek Village part of Fox Hill, often calling it the 'Fox Hill Creek', and claiming that they were unaware of any distinction between its people and people from Fox Hill; descendants of Creek families, on the other hand, were adamant that the two were separate. Of course, the core of the village, which I have described, remained constant. But its limits proved to be flexible.

### **Contested Identities**

When I asked people to describe what it meant to be a 'Fox Hill' person, the answers varied as well. For some, it meant invoking a genealogy and bearing a 'Fox Hill name'—though even here one might get into trouble, for some names belonged both to Fox Hill and to the Creek, and the two families in question, it was insisted, were different. For others, particularly young people, it meant they had been born in the

area, and that included those people who had settled in the subdivisions within and around Fox Hill over the past thirty years. Needless to say, older inhabitants refused to accept the pedigree of these people. Some people recalled the legend of the Fox plantation and the willing of his land to his slaves; others repeated the tale of the Creek and its demise. Still other people referred to what one might term a myth of African purity—the story that the original settlers were Liberated Africans who had never been slaves and who had kept their native culture far longer than many other Africans on New Providence. The Fox Hill traditions of drumming, with which I am familiar, of *obeah*, and of the fire dance, which last two I heard about but did not witness, were invoked as evidence of a distinct African heritage, as was the Fox Hill community's dedication to democratic self-regulation—evinced by the keenly active Fox Hill Association and the communal leadership of the Fox Hill Congoes junkanoo group, a fierce competitor in national Junkanoo parades of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The festival itself is seen as a marker of identity, both in Fox Hill and in the Bahamas at large. However, until well into the 1980s, Junkanoo in Fox Hill was seen as distinct from Junkanoo in the city. The latter was held at Christmas, and evolved from the collision, in the town centre, of young men from various urban districts into a competition among groups whose original neighbourhood affiliation had become subordinate to a creative machine (see Bethel, 1991). The former occurred at the Fox Hill parade during the Emancipation Day-Fox Hill Day period in August, and junkanoos from Fox Hill typically had no formal involvement in the city festival. As such, they developed a unique style of drumming and a specific Fox Hill sound, but invested far less time and effort into the visual aspects of the parade. By 1985, however, Fox Hill had organised its own junkanoo group, the Congoes, which entered the Christmas parades. Despite faring poorly with their costumes, they regularly defeated

more established groups in the music category, and built up a strong following. In 1993 the membership, reasoning that the only thing standing between them and the winning of the parade was the quality of their costumes, invited a leading designer from one of the Nassau groups was to head the Congoes.

This action proved to be instructive. Until this time, the 'typical' Fox Hill commitment to democracy was embodied in the organisation of the Congoes. What was more, they termed themselves a 'community group'.<sup>58</sup> Although part of their purpose was to compete for prizes in the Nassau parade, they said, part of it was also to provide young men with alternatives to involvement in the drug culture, either as addicts or dealers. Rather than being headed by a single charismatic leader, therefore, as was the case with most Junkanoo groups during the 1980s, the Congoes elected an executive board which oversaw administration, and the head of that board, the group leader, was normally elected for a two-year term.

Among the conditions under which the proposed leader, *not* a resident of Fox Hill, agreed to take the position were the following: that he be appointed for a *four*-year term instead of the customary two-year one, and that his authority be paramount over that of the executive board, thus damaging the Congoes' reputation for democracy. His proposal was brought to the group and voted upon, and it passed by a slight majority, carried mainly by young men attracted by the possibility of winning the Junkanoo parades. As a result, the group split. Members who saw the move as selling out the Fox Hill 'spirit' for the sake of cash prizes left and formed another group, Fun Time. The remainder continued to rush with the Congoes. Many of these dissenters regarded the appointment of an outsider as leader of a group embodying 'true' Fox Hill

democratic principles as nothing but trouble; what was more, acquiescence to his rather autocratic demands was evidence, for them, of the growing erosion of Fox Hill 'identity' in the face of big-city glamour. Opting not to follow the city groups' lead in emphasising spectacle over music, Fun Time proceeded to work on creating a strong core group with a solid sound, and entered the Christmas parades as a 'scrap' group—a non-competitor. As for the remaining Congoes, when I visited their shack during the 1993 preparation period for the Junkanoo parades, the group appeared to be vibrant, working enthusiastically with the new leader, invoking the Fox Hill-Africa connection by building costumes such as lions, giraffes and Zulu shields.

The relationship between the new leader and the Congoes, however, did not last long. By the time I interviewed Sterling, one of the executive members in May 1994, the leader had been ousted from the group, ostensibly owing to a disagreement over finances. The leader's supremacy over the executive had had the unintended effect of giving him financial autonomy; thus, when the group attempted to challenge him on his allocation of funds, he refused to be accountable. Unable to tolerate this flouting of the traditional Fox Hill principle of democratic government, the executive ejected him from the position. However, Sterling believed that the leader's removal hinged as much upon the perception of what was 'truly' representative of Fox Hill as upon the fortunes of the group. As he pointed out, many young people in the area, although for all intents and purposes Bahamian, are in fact of Haitian parentage. This fact is widely recognised; several of the people I talked to pointed out that it is virtually impossible to separate those Fox Hill inhabitants of Haitian descent from their Bahamian neighbours, as the Haitian presence in the area is over thirty years old. As Sterling observed, 'You

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<sup>58</sup>See Adderley, 1988. The idea of Junkanoo groups serving their neighbourhoods at the same

don't know who is who! You think a fella walking down the street who you been dealing with for so long, are Bahamian, when you come to think of it, they actually Haitian.<sup>59</sup> So integrated are Haitian-Bahamians into the community, in fact, that several members of the Fox Hill Congoes are of Haitian ancestry. Sterling observed that one of the cardinal sins of the ousted leader of that group was the fact that he had referred to the 'Haitian mentality' of the Congoes in an interview. The group as a whole took offence at that, not (as one might expect) because it found it insulting to be compared to Haitians, but because it felt that the comment was disrespectful to those members who were in fact Haitian-Bahamian. To announce publicly that one supports the dignity of one's Haitian membership in a country where 'Hyshun' (the dialect term for Haitian) is the Bahamian equivalent to the 'nigger' of the southern USA suggests that, in Fox Hill, one's identity as a Fox Hill resident—quintessential *Bahamian* community notwithstanding—supersedes all.

What grew more and more interesting for me was the way in which rhetorical concepts of 'real' Bahamian identity and that of Fox Hill were intertwined. Once I recognised that the received image of Fox Hill could be viewed as part of a larger construction of the national character, I became more interested in the wider picture. One explanation for the varying answers to my questions may be that there is virtually no accessible written history of Fox Hill. One of my first endeavours was to visit the community library in search of information about the village. There I was told that not only were the librarians not aware of any book about Fox Hill, but that most of the

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time as providing remarkable artistic endeavours is one that had spread by the mid-1990s into the ranks of even the most cosmopolitan of the 'super-groups'.

<sup>59</sup>This magnanimity towards Haitians extends only to those people who grow up for all intents or purposes as Bahamians. As regarded the obvious Haitians—those who speak with an accent, who 'come off the boat'—residents of Fox Hill showed no compunction about turning them in

documents of which they were aware were not kept in the Fox Hill Library, but in the Central Public Library in town, or at the National Archives.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, my informants were by no means doubtful about the veracity of their answers; each believed himself to be giving me the 'real' story, no matter that it might conflict with someone else's. Even more interesting was the one thing that remained constant. No matter what else might be said, Fox Hill was seen to embody the ideal Bahamian character. Family life was held to be stronger in Fox Hill than elsewhere. A sense of connection to the African past and a greater knowledge of Bahamian culture were considered part of the community 'spirit'. For almost everyone I spoke to, the village had a mythical quality that was symbolic not only of a special culture all its own, but also of the *ideal* Bahamian identity.

### **The symbol: cultural**

The symbolic power of Fox Hill for the society at large was brought home to me when, in August 1994, I attended a Rastafarian celebration of Marcus Garvey's birthday held on the Fox Hill parade. There is no overt connection between Fox Hill and the Rastafarian movement. While there are 'rasta camps' on New Providence, few, if any, of them are in Fox Hill. Most of the Rastafarians who gathered on the parade that night had travelled some distance to get there. During the ceremony, one of the officiants made a point of explaining why they were meeting in Fox Hill. He observed that when Garvey had visited the Bahamas, he had been impressed with Fox Hill. The speaker

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to the authorities during the major campaign of repatriation that occurred during my fieldwork (January-June 1995).

<sup>60</sup>Later I discovered that there were in fact a number of pamphlets or booklets written on the community. However, none of these, at the time of my research, was in circulation, and none of them were known to be kept in the Fox Hill Public Library.

further extended the connection by claiming that the Bahamian captain of one of the ships on Garvey's Black Star Line, Joshua Cockburn, was a Fox Hill man. Although there is a Cockburn Street in the village not far from the parade, which runs, tantalisingly, into the old settlement of Joshua Town, written sources assert that Captain Cockburn was in fact from Grant's Town, just south-west of Nassau.<sup>61</sup> This incident suggested that the reworking of Fox Hill as a place with Rastafarian connections rests more upon its pre-existent place in the Bahamian imagination as symbol of independence and strong African connections—qualities revered by the Rastafarians—than upon any historical connection with Garvey.

Similarly, Fox Hill Day, connected in the public mind with the Emancipation Day holiday,<sup>62</sup> is regularly covered by the national news media. References are made to history—both to the myth of belated Emancipation and to religious leaders' assertions that it is in fact a church-based holiday, stemming from the Fox Hill Baptists' practice of holding concerts on the second Tuesday in August. Indeed, the attitude of many Nassauvians toward the village is almost romantic. Fox Hill is used as a model for other communities throughout the country, in terms of its sense of independence, dignity and pride, in terms of its appearance and its coherence, and, primarily, in terms of its past. In 1998, the traditional 10-day celebrations were extended to three weeks. Banquets and exhibitions were held to honour prominent residents and to commemorate the past. One might regard these events not only as the variant

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<sup>61</sup>Saunders, 1990a: 39, note 66.

<sup>62</sup>See, for example, Eneas, 1988: 39-40: '[Fox Hill Day] usually started off with a celebration of Emancipation Day, which was observed on August first, if it didn't fall on a Sunday. In my memory, the observance of Emancipation Day only took place in Fox Hill, and it was celebrated chiefly by the Yoruba people. There were Thanksgiving services in the churches, and then there was a gathering on the parade, for the making of speeches, and general merry-making. This was only a warm-up rehearsal for Fox Hill Day, which took place a few days later.'

invocation of history, but as a conscious evocation of identity, an example of tales told both to the self and the other. During the celebrations, a banner was strung from trees which overhang Fox Hill Road north, at its junction with the Eastern Road, proclaiming the existence of the Fox Hill Day festival. Because this is the direction from which most visitors to the island might approach Fox Hill, the banner served as an invitation to tourists. At the same time, it represented an opening-up of the Fox Hill Day celebrations to Bahamians at large—a sense that was intensified by the existence of such ‘traditional’ events as climbing the greasy pole and Junkanoo. Finally, it was a conscious re-imagining of Fox Hill for the inhabitants themselves, as the banquet saluting outstanding residents served to reinforce those values considered indigenous to the settlement.

In fact, these activities have a ring of Hobsbawm’s ‘invented traditions’ about them. No longer customary activities—unconsciously practised, fluid, changing with time and context, fully integrated into the daily or annual lives of their practitioners—they have become ‘traditions’, fixed events that are performed in the same way every time, and which are preserved from change by their overt association with a lost or fast-disappearing ‘past’ (1983). The reproduction of ‘typical’ activities associated with Fox Hill Day; the conscious retellings of Fox Hill’s history; the revival of colonial activities such as climbing the greasy pole—all these give the sense that the 1998 festival is part of a very conscious efforts to relive the past. The very opening up of the festival to the public at large suggests that for Fox Hill, the day itself can no longer be considered a ‘custom’ in Hobsbawm’s terms, but has taken on the qualities of ‘tradition’.

All in all, the celebrations might be regarded as an exercise in nostalgia. No longer a bounded, integrated community, Fox Hill appears to be fighting against the encroachment of the city with ritual, commodifying its traditional festival and offering

it as something to be consumed not only by its inhabitants but also by the public at large. While it is tempting to read this instance as an empty attempt to revive the past, a means of obscuring contemporary inequalities in an evocation of past community, I would prefer to regard it as what Battaglia (1995) terms 'practical nostalgia'. Rather than consider occurrences such as the Fox Hill Day festival as purely romantic recreations of the past, she argues that

when indigenous sensibilities are taken into account, nostalgia may appear less fused to nativism and a lack of critical distance on self and the sources of cultural identity than is often presumed. Nostalgia may in fact be a vehicle of knowledge, rather than only a yearning for something lost. It may be *practiced* in diverse ways, where the issues *for users* become, on the one hand, the attachment of appropriate feelings towards their own histories, products, and capabilities, and on the other hand, their detachment from—and active resistance to—disempowering conditions of postcolonial life. (1995: 77)

### **The symbol: political**

The cultural significance of Fox Hill in the national imagination ensures that it is not free from political resonance. For many years, indeed, the community was regarded as representative of the best qualities of the Bahamian self. In part, this was closely linked with the early nationalist enterprise of the PLP government, which, because of its emphasis on the African identity of the Bahamian people, regarded Fox Hill as central to that identity. Accordingly, it appeared to view the fortunes of Fox Hill as linked to its own, and so provided the library, post office, clinic and telephone station for the area after Independence. Fox Hill, on its side, unwaveringly supported the PLP. Until 1997, therefore, the MPs for Fox Hill all had two things in common: they were Fox Hill men, and they were members of the PLP.

In 1992, the political landscape of the country changed. The Afrocentric Progressive Liberal Party, in power since 1967, was defeated at the polls by the more broadly-based Free National Movement, whose rhetoric moved Bahamians away from the racist paternalism of its predecessor and emphasised economic growth, free enterprise and the expansion of the capitalist private sector of the economy. The new governing party, which viewed itself as representing cross-section of the Bahamian public—white and mixed-race Bahamians as well as those of predominantly African descent—was regarded by the PLP and its supporters as being more aligned with the white Bahamian/expatriate interests of the Eastern Road than to those of the ordinary black man. In 1994, therefore, much was made of the new Prime Minister's attendance at the annual Emancipation Day church service in Fox Hill village. The significance of his action was not lost on Bahamians. Not only was it seen as a wooing of the constituency of Fox Hill, but also as a demonstration of his own and his party's commitment to the African-Bahamian heritage—more evidence of Fox Hill's special place in the Bahamian imagination. The significance of his action was not lost, moreover, on the citizens of Fox Hill. In the 1997 election, for the first time, voters in the community elected a candidate who did not represent the PLP; the new MP for the area was a woman and an FNM. In keeping with the more fundamental trend of Fox Hill voting, however, she was a *bona fide* descendant of a long-standing Fox Hill family.

What is perhaps most interesting, however, is that the distancing of the FNM from an *exclusively* African-Bahamian connection has resulted in Fox Hill's loss of currency as the 'ideal' Bahamian community. Since the election of an FNM representative for the area, certain of the services hitherto provided to the community by the former government have been removed. Most significant of these is the closing down of the telephone station in Fox Hill, which took place in June 1999 in preparation

for the privatisation of the telephone company. The occasion was accompanied by much protest on the part of the community, and a demonstration by the opposition PLP candidate for Fox Hill. Though the protests were carried on national television and in the newspapers, the closings went ahead with very little public notice indeed—evidence, perhaps, that the symbolic power of Fox Hill for the Bahamas at large is changing. At the same time, however, the national rhetoric surrounding Fox Hill Day seems to be gaining power, as was apparent in the public outcry over the execution of two prisoners, scheduled to take place on the morning of August 10, 1999. The main objection to the executions, discussed on every radio talk show in the capital at length throughout the first week in August 1999, was not ideological—the vast majority of callers believed that the two prisoners ought indeed to be executed—but cultural. The primary source of outrage was that the executions were to take place at the Fox Hill Prison on the morning of Fox Hill Day—practical nostalgia at its pragmatic height.

### **Past versus present**

When people speak of the 'Fox Hill Spirit' or the strength of the community, they are referring to something they associate with the (often African) past; it is arguable that the image of contemporary Fox Hill has no comparable hold on the national—or local—imagination. Part of the publicity on Fox Hill Day 1994 included the lament by the leading Baptist minister that the holiday was not what it had been, that neither the community nor the wider public observed the holiday in the same manner as before. This feeling was repeated again and again by the people I talked to, and it was reinforced by the fact that the 1994 celebrations were poorly attended during most of the day, only picking up after six p.m. These, moreover, were marred by a gang fight

late in the evening (a fight that was not reported in the press—more evidence, perhaps, of the romanticism that colours Nassauvians' perception of Fox Hill). In fact, the feeling that the modern village of Fox Hill was not the community that it had been was so pervasive that it affected the way that my role was perceived in the community, and consequently directed the path of my fieldwork. People consistently regarded me as a chronicler of the past, a preserver of 'culture'—a culture that was under threat from progress, the uncaring young, and the encroachment of the lifestyles of foreigners—Jamaicans, Americans, Haitians, and Nassauvians—and consequently the information they gave me conformed to this perception.

This presented me with certain problems in the early days of my fieldwork. First, I discovered that although Fox Hill looks like a village, it does not function as a bounded community, but is integrated into the economic activity of the city, rather like a neighbourhood or a suburb.<sup>63</sup> Those people who are employed work outside the area during the week, and are involved in community activities most on Sundays (when they go to church), or on special occasions like Fox Hill Day. Those people who are not obviously employed<sup>64</sup> are predominantly male, or else elderly and thus retired.

What economic activity takes place within the community during the daytime is geared largely toward the schoolchildren and the few business people who may be

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<sup>63</sup>The information in this section is taken from a settlement survey conducted by myself and a group of geography students from one of the high schools in the area. The limits of the survey were narrow; while the whole of Fox Hill Road North was covered, from St Anne's to Prince Charles Drive, Bernard Road was studied only as far as Cockburn Street. Part of this was due to time constraints. Part of it, however, was the result of the students' fear of penetrating too deep into alien territory. Most of the students in question—and indeed many of the students in the school—were not from Fox Hill, and the boys, particularly, were afraid of encountering members of territorial gangs.

<sup>64</sup>Many Bahamians who are not members of the formal work force are in fact 'self-employed'. This term covers a wide variety of endeavours: farming or fishing; various tourist-related activities such as hiring out jet-skis for rides, braiding visitors' hair, or conducting horse-drawn

found in the area. The largest employers in Fox Hill are the schools, of which there are three, two private (church) and one public. These are all within walking distance of the businesses in question—a grocery store, a service station, two or three boutiques (generally open on Saturdays), a take-away food stand, and a hairdresser. Some of the homes near the schools also sell sweets from within. Additionally, government corporations provide employment in the area. These include the two branches of Bahamas Telecommunications Corporation (BaTelCo)—until 1999, a phone station just off the main Fox Hill Road, and the publications office on the northernmost hill of the rise—a library, a post office and a branch of the National Insurance Board established during the early 1990s. Perhaps the most successful private business is the mechanic/body shop near the north-western corner of Fox Hill Road and Prince Charles Drive, which specialises in the repair of bus and truck chassis, and which by its location near the highway draws on a wide clientele. Other businesses in the wider Fox Hill area include several bars and nightclubs, a number of inns, many small ‘bush’ mechanics, a printers, some small general stores, a liquor store or two, and tailors and dressmakers. These are all owned and operated by Fox Hill people. What is remarkable about them, however, is that their business is generated largely in ‘off’ hours—before nine and after five during the week, and on weekends—because the bulk of the employed population commutes to the city for work on weekdays.<sup>65</sup>

In the second place, people were often reluctant to speak about their current activities. One man interviewed during a mini-settlement survey conducted by me and some students from one of the schools refused to answer any questions about himself,

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tours of the city; selling—foodstuffs like fruit and cooked dinners by women, peanuts and vegetables by men; or less legitimate pursuits, from running numbers games to dealing drugs.

<sup>65</sup>This shows a marked contrast with the economic activity of Deadman’s Cay, Long Island, where business is generated throughout the working day.

instead parrying them with his own inquiries: ‘What are you doing this for? Why do you want to know?’ Then he redirected the conversation by recalling his own involvement in a school project when he was a student. Without being unpleasant, he successfully blocked all attempts to elicit personal details.

Third was the idea, predominant among the young, that Fox Hill was part of the city, not something separate from it. These people oriented themselves more towards Nassau than towards Fox Hill, patronising downtown and the shopping centres nearby.<sup>66</sup> The entry of the Fox Hill Congoes into Junkanoo during the 1980s was seen as evidence of this trend. This increasing turning away from Fox Hill and directing of focus to the city supports the young people’s idea that today, Fox Hill is a neighbourhood under the umbrella of the metropolis.

What people were willing to talk about, when asked about Fox Hill, was the past. Implicit, or often explicit, in their conversation was a profound sense of change, of a rupture between what Fox Hill was and what it had become. And indeed, when I compared what was said about Fox Hill’s history and the present, I too recognised a change. First, the Nassauvians’ inclusion of Fox Hill in discussions of national identity, evidenced not only by the annual coverage of Fox Hill Day and the Prime Minister’s attention to the community, but also by the insistence of various other public figures—from radio talk show hosts to lecturers at the college—of Fox Hill’s contribution to the Bahamian character, demonstrates a reversal of the original isolation of the community. Similarly, there was little perceptible modern separation between Fox Hill and Nassau. Most, if not all, of its inhabitants moved freely back and forth between downtown and

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<sup>66</sup>Fox Hill is surrounded by commercial areas, including cinemas, plazas, fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, service stations and banks. Not ten minutes away from Fox Hill by bus is the Marathon Mall—a large covered mall built in the style of South Florida, one of the main shopping centres on the island.

'out east'. Second, the use of land as a marker of Fox Hill identity was no longer applicable to the modern village, for most of that land has now been sold. Third, the Fox Hill Congoes themselves, though originally representing the strengths of Fox Hill Junkanoo (a strong emphasis on music taking precedence over the visual aspect of the group) in the city parade, ultimately succumbed to the powerful levelling force of the festival. The commitment to competition became a commitment to conformity; and the emphasis on costumes that led to the importation of a leader also resulted in the break-up of the group.

Although the older people to whom I spoke were adamant that Fox Hill had in the past been treated as an illegitimate child of the city, the community's present aspect was more that of a suburb of Nassau than of an isolated Liberated African settlement. In the end, the symbolic strength of the image of Fox Hill posed a theoretical problem. How did it fit with the flexibility of the definitions of the village itself? How could I reconcile this symbolic constant with the proliferation of conflicting information about the physical and historical entity which was Fox Hill? Fox Hill seemed to represent all things to all people—and yet there seemed to be no discord among those people about the differences.

### **Fox Hill and the fluidity of identity**

Rather than trying to find objective explanations for these inconsistencies, I found it fruitful to regard them as evidence of the fluid nature of the community. For not only did these stories vary according to speaker, but they also varied according to *context*. The person who identified herself as a descendant of the Creek Villagers to me, and thus a separate breed from the Fox Hill people, also identifies herself as a Fox Hill

woman on Fox Hill Day. People who accepted the divisions of the original village into the settlements of Nango and Congo peoples<sup>67</sup> were not at all distressed at calling themselves Congoes in the context of Junkanoo. Others who invoked the essential Bahamianness of the Fox Hill community also pointed out that uncountable numbers of young Fox Hill people were in fact of Haitian descent. At times, Fox Hill people had no problem in defending that 'foreign' element against Bahamians from outside the community. At other times, however, they would not think twice about directing immigration and police officers to the homes of their Haitian neighbours.

I chose not to view these inconsistencies as examples of classic segmentation—as which, of course, they can be analysed—but rather as evidence of the fluid sense of 'identity' which all Bahamians display, while at the same time often believing that that identity is fixed. The same dissolution of certainties in Fox Hill holds true for the broader Bahamas, as do the fluidity of identity and the malleability of the historical record. What intrigued me most was the ability of the people of Fox Hill, and of Bahamians in general, to adjust their identities, to switch hats, as it were, according to context, without being fully aware of, or perhaps without caring about, the contradictory nature of their actions. Indeed, one may claim that there is no such thing as a 'history' of Fox Hill; there are simply tales told to the self.

At the same time, however, the 'authenticity' of the village, its communal spirit and its uniqueness, are crucial. Every Bahamian comes from a community, and Fox Hill

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<sup>67</sup>For some, the Congoes were a breed apart. As Eneas writes: 'Yorubas are proud and intelligent people ... the people are extremely clannish ... [the New World Yoruba] maintains his identity by referring to any true Yoruba as a N'ongo ... when they found themselves on foreign soil, as in Nassau, these N'ongos manoeuvred it so that they stayed together ... Those slaves who were not Yorubas were called Congos, and looked down upon by the N'ongos ... No N'ongo man would associate with a Congo under any circumstance ...' (1988: 35-36). Moreover, he points out that the location of Congo Town on the outskirts of Fox Hill proper (in 'the bush',

symbolises the ideal community. Perhaps this explains why not one of my informants doubted the veracity of her answers; each believed herself to be giving me the 'real' story, no matter how much it might conflict with her neighbour's. No matter what, Fox Hill is seen to embody the ideal Bahamian character. Family life is stronger in Fox Hill than elsewhere. Fox Hill is more connected to the African past, and a greater knowledge of Bahamian culture imbues its 'spirit'. For almost everyone I spoke to, the village had a mythical quality that was emblematic not only of a special culture all its own, but also of the *ideal* Bahamian identity.

Does it matter, then, that Fox Hill, the immutable symbol of Bahamianness, is ultimately, like the statues in the square or the straw market or the flag, a symbol whose meaning melts when looked at for too long? The questions remain. Is it one village, or three? By which name should we know it? Who really belongs there, and whose history is right? Perhaps the truest answer embraces all possibilities. In the various stories about the area one may find different emphases which can provide each individual inhabitant with his own sense of belonging. For the great-grandchildren of slaves, there is the myth of Fox's plantation; for people of predominantly African descent, the story of the Liberated Africans; and for people of mixed ancestry the tale of the Creek. In all these histories are found the common theme of extensive land ownership, independence from the city, and a strong sense of self. The shape may be different, but the themes remain the same. How interesting it becomes, then, that the history inscribed on the pillar on the parade proclaims the oneness of the three: the Creek, Fox Hill and Sandilands Village are one and the same.

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in his words) is evidence of the Yorubas' tendency to discriminate against those people they called Congoes. (1988: 35).

In the Bahamian imagination, Fox Hill is the ultimate 'typical' place. Yet, in true Bahamian fashion, even pinning identity down to that place proves impossible; for place in the Bahamas is variable in itself. The Bahamas, unlike most of its neighbours, is not a single island, or even a small group of islands; the Bahamian archipelago comprises over 3,000 bits of land sprawled across hundreds of miles of sea. To locate a 'typical community' in one village on one island, therefore, and to hope to find there some understanding of Bahamian identity, is to entertain vain hopes when there are 700 islands from which to choose.

### III. The Archipelago and Fluidity of Identity

Little has been written about the effect of geography on archipelagic nations—states whose borders are broader than the land on which the people live.<sup>68</sup> Part of the reason for this may be that such nations are not terribly common; part of it, though, is that the limits of researchers' paradigms preclude them from considering the question. Certain sets of assumptions view the nation-state as a piece of territory, most commonly one which is continuous with the territory of its neighbours, and separated by politically-defined borders, or else one where land and nation are roughly consonant, as is the case of many 'island states'. Literature about archipelagoes is often subsumed under the latter category, which tends, in ethnography, to take two main forms. On the one hand, it exhibits a set of rather romantic assumptions about islands, which range from ideas of 'paradise' to ideas of absolute isolation—the tropical utopia of Gauguin or Crusoe's desert isle.<sup>69</sup> Pratt, for instance, observes that

Firth reproduces in a remarkably straightforward way a utopian scene of first contact that acquired mythic status in the eighteenth century, and continues with us today in the popular mythology of the South Sea paradise (alias Club Méditerranée/Fantasy Island) ... Malinowski in *Argonauts* introduces a quite different self-image ... unmistakably the image of an old-fashioned castaway (1986: 36-8).

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<sup>68</sup>The primary exceptions address the South Pacific (e.g. Alkire, 1965; 1978; Bayliss-Smith *et al.*, 1988; Foster, 1995b; Otto and Thomas, 1997). Relevant for the Caribbean region are Hannerz, 1974; LaFlamme, 1983.

<sup>69</sup>For a deeper consideration of the concept of 'paradise' in the Bahamas, see Strachan, 1995.

On the other, it draws heavily on writings about core-periphery relations and dependency, and views island-states as inextricably bound up in the machinations of global capital.<sup>70</sup>

The Bahamas does not fit comfortably into any of these models, despite the writing of Craton (1986), whose familiarity with the genre suggests that it might. Describing the archipelago, for instance, he emphasises the romantic beauty of the ocean:

... the jewel-like myriad of colours which are the islands' chief claim to magnificence—the cobalt of the deep ocean and the deep purple of the reefs; the lighter spectra of the banks, turquoise and emerald, gold, yellow and silver with the underlying skeins of sand; the drabber greens and grey of the islands and their surrounding rocks. (1986: 12)

He appears less enthusiastic about the land. Perhaps his disappointment derives from expectations about tropical utopias that he—or his readers—may have. 'From sea level the islands are far less impressive; long, tree-fringed strands almost unrelieved by background hills ... Palm trees, which give some islands a truly "South Sea" air, are not abundant, having been imported into the islands in recent times.' (1986: 12). But the strictures of the convention win him over in the end:

Only in sophisticated Nassau on New Providence and other well-developed settlements in Eleuthera and Grand Bahama, does vegetation luxuriate. Only there can one imagine the Bahamas almost an earthly *paradise*; with whispering web-like casuarinas and *fantastic* silk cotton trees; the rainbow hues of croton and creeping vines; poinciana and poinsettia with their *unreal* reds; bougainvillea in purple and salmon pink and the equally gaudy hibiscus and oleander. In orchards grow a confused abundance of *exotic* fruits; pineapples and grapefruit (once known as 'the forbidden fruit'); sea-grapes, soursop and sapodilla; mangoes, guavas and a hundred others. At night the air is drenched with perfume and by day the trees are alive with humming-birds. Everywhere bright lizards scurry among the sunsoaked rocks and in gentle captivity in

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<sup>70</sup>For example, Bayliss-Smith *et al.*, 1988; Mintz, 1974; Spadoni, 1977.

Nassau and wild in Inagua and South Andros are the pink flamingoes, most beautiful and least functional of birds [*my emphasis*] (1986: 12-13).

For Bahamians, the islands are neither wholly utopian nor entirely isolated. The Bahamas cover some 225,000 square miles (362,100 square km) of one of the most strategic positions in the Atlantic Ocean, stretching from the Florida coast to the north shore of Haiti, bordered on the west by Cuba, straddling the Tropic of Cancer. All told, there are over three thousand islands, totalling approximately 5,500 square miles (8,850 square km) of land. 'Few people have bothered to count [them],' writes Craton, 'but there are said to be 29 islands, 661 cays (pronounced 'keys') and 2,387 rocks' (1986: 11).<sup>71</sup> The entire archipelago is formed of coral limestone, and is consequently very flat; the highest point is 126 feet above the sea. There are no rivers. Fresh water is subterranean, with the exception of certain brackish lakes or ponds, where rainwater floats atop the salt below. None of the islands is very large. Andros, the biggest, comprising approximately 2,300 square miles (3,700 square km) of territory, is almost five times the size of any of the others; Nassau, the capital, inhabited by an estimated 200,000 people, is found on New Providence, a mere 80 square miles (130 square km) of land.<sup>72</sup> The majority of the islands are long and thin, many of them only four or five miles wide at the most (though anywhere from thirty to a hundred miles long). Roughly thirty are

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<sup>71</sup>The difference between island, rock and cay is one of size. Islands are the largest, able to sustain fairly substantial settlement, boasting sizeable fresh-water lenses. Cays are smaller than islands, but may also support limited populations. Most are peripheral to larger neighbouring islands, or else are part of mini-chains within the archipelago. Many are privately owned. Rocks are smaller still, and, with negligible reservoirs of fresh water, are unable to sustain any settlement at all.

<sup>72</sup>These statistics are estimates only. The decennial census, carried out in 1990, reported that the population of the Bahamas had reached 260,000 people. Official census figures are likely to be lower than the actual population, owing to the sizeable numbers of illegal Haitian immigrants on almost every inhabited island in the archipelago, and owing also to the fairly high birth-rate. More recent estimates (e.g. Dupuch Jr, 1997) place the population of the nation at 300,000, about two-thirds of whom reside in the capital.

inhabited and comprise about twenty distinctive administrative and social districts, few of which are limited to a single land-mass.

Not surprisingly, given the relative poverty of agricultural lands (although Bahamian soil is quite fertile, the topsoil is thin and often covers a bed of rock, and fresh water is not always easily retrieved—see chapter IV for details) many ideas about Bahamian identity have been shaped by the sense of oneself in relation to the sea—which is not only beautiful, but treacherous.<sup>73</sup> It is speculated, for instance, that the name of the archipelago is taken from the Spanish *baja mar* (shallow sea),<sup>74</sup> inspired by the extensive banks and reefs that comprise Bahamian waters. These banks and reefs, together with the accompanying shoals and channels which traverse the Bahamas, have played their part in shaping both the history and economy of the islands and the islanders' concept of themselves.

### **The Archipelago: Patterns of Individualism and Fragmentation**

The major difference between the Bahamas and the rest of the Caribbean lies in its fragmented territory, in the geography of the archipelago which renders communications among the islands difficult and made the extensive development of the plantation system impossible. To regard Bahamian social structure as simply a variation of that of neighbouring Caribbean countries is, therefore, inadequate; while the society is similar in some respects, in others it is quite different. It is often forgotten,

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<sup>73</sup>That the sea surrounding the Bahamas is considered an integral part of the nation is discussed briefly by Spadoni, 1977, who points out that the decision to classify the Bahamas as an archipelagic nation was taken specifically to control fishing by neighbouring countries. See too Craton and Saunders, 1992, or Albury, 1975.

<sup>74</sup>Albury, 1975; Craton, 1986; Craton and Saunders, 1992. For an alternative etymology, see Bethel, 1991.

for instance, that in terms of sheer geographical size the Bahamas is the largest country in the region, covering roughly the same area of ocean as the whole of the Lesser Antilles (see Fig. 3.1); for that reason alone patterns of plantation society, social structure and development vary, sometimes significantly, from those of the rest of the West Indies. (Hughes, 1981: 26).

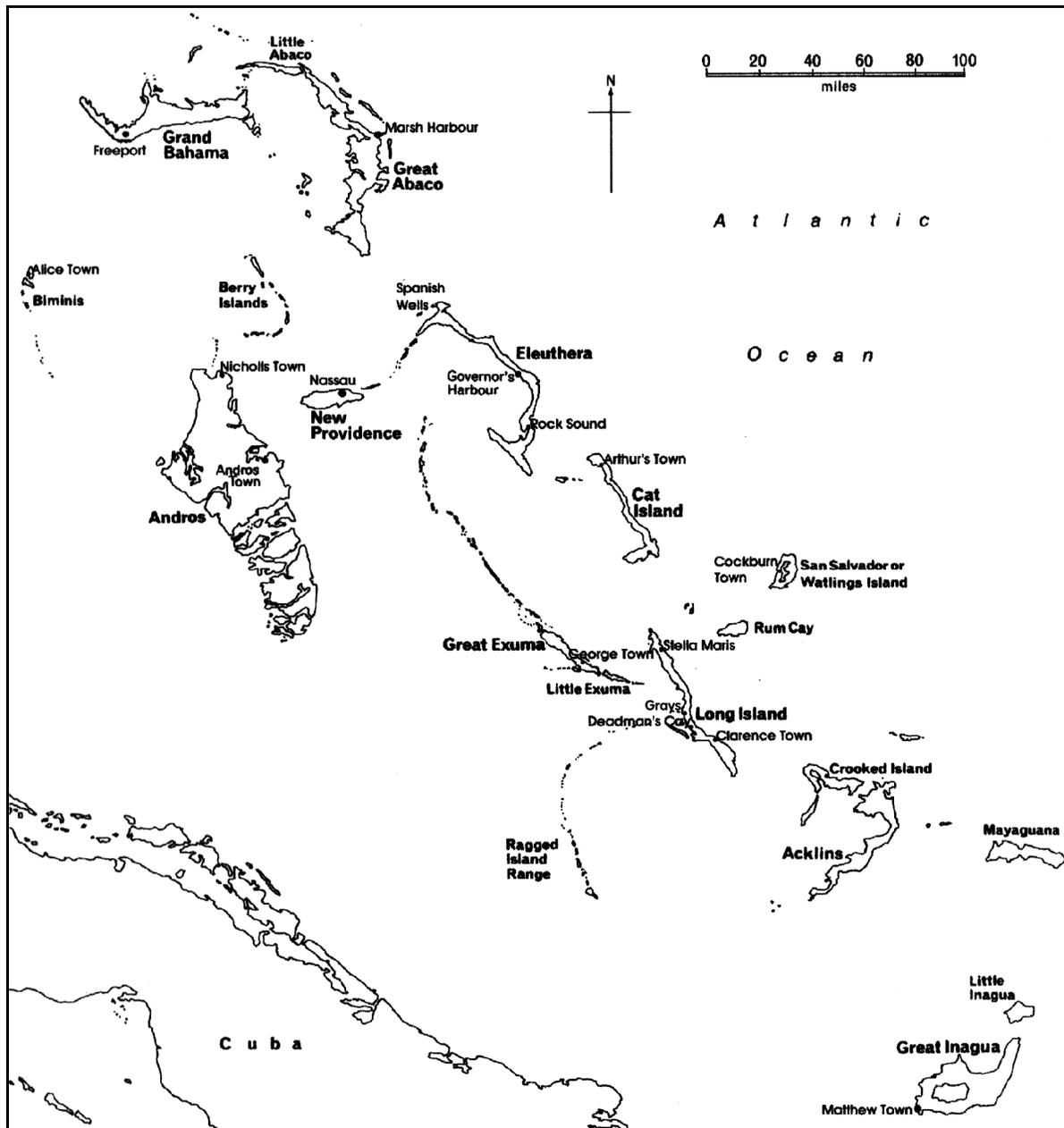


Figure 3.1 - Map of the Bahama Islands (Craton, 1986: 10)

Basing his theory on fieldwork carried out in the Bahamas during the 1970s, LaFlamme makes a case for considering the archipelago state as what he terms 'a societal subtype' (1983: 361).<sup>75</sup> He contends that the nation consisting of many small islands is as much a unique model of state organisation as the bureaucratic, city, or pre-industrial states, and identifies four main attributes of the type. First, and most obvious, the archipelago state comprises many islands; as a result, inter-community contact is difficult and development uneven. Second, these islands are surrounded by what LaFlamme calls the 'internal sea', which the inhabitants regard as national waters, and guard as jealously as other states do their territory. Third, because individual ecosystems are too small to support much more than subsistence agriculture, archipelagoes exhibit weak local and national economies. And finally, the archipelago state displays what he terms a 'centrifugal tendency':

Component islands often possess different technoeconomic adaptations, social systems, and ideologies because of environmental diversity, differential outside contact, and isolation. Such factors militate against strong sociocultural integration ... Poor communication exacerbates this ... Airplane travel is often hard to arrange and is prohibitively expensive. Personal boat travel is limited unless distances are short and seas are calm. This leaves commercial vessels such as ferries and mailboats, if available. Telephone systems are typically poorly developed, and the mail is limited to the literate and the patient. Xenophobic tendencies ... seem to be most common and pronounced in relatively closed and isolated island communities ... one often encounters misconceptions about and fear of even inhabitants of islands only a few miles distant ... (1983: 361).

A quick look at the Bahamian situation seems to indicate the truth of his observation. Geographically, the archipelago may be divided into three, according to latitude, rainfall and the effect of trade winds and ocean currents. In the north, the climate is subtropical, with cool winters and substantial rainfall; the islands themselves

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<sup>75</sup>See also Alkire, 1965; 1978, for similar conclusions based on his work with Pacific Islanders.

are flat and forested with Caribbean pine. The central islands, which lie upon and above the Tropic of Cancer, are warmer, hillier, and almost as wet; these exhibit the most fertile soils and the greatest range of vegetation. The southern islands, however, are extremely flat and dry, and are marked by the existence of desert plants and salinas.<sup>76</sup>

Economies, settlement and subsistence patterns differ throughout the archipelago, as well as history, ethnicity and social structure. For instance, the predominant pockets of white Bahamian settlement are found in the north-eastern and central islands, where there is a noticeable difference between the seasons. These islands are more densely peopled and have older systems of infrastructure than the others.<sup>77</sup> Black and coloured populations tend to be located further south, or in specific settlements on the 'white' islands. Race and colour, as we have seen in the case of Fox Hill, are central components of Bahamian identity; I shall discuss in detail how the geography of the archipelago affects them.

For all but the last forty years of their settlement, the only communication among the islands was effected by boat. Under such conditions distances which seem negligible on land become great chasms, able to be negotiated only by those who have the means and the skill. Although the gradual institution of air travel has increased personal mobility (each settled island now boasts a commercial airstrip), inhabitants of the Bahamas are still dependent on ships for their livelihood. Very little is produced

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<sup>76</sup>See Craton and Saunders, 1992: 10-13. Moreover, on a single island (for example Long Island), climate and geography may vary as well; see Little *et al.*, 1975, for an account.

<sup>77</sup>During the years of white government, these islands received most of Parliament's attention. Not only were roads, electricity and telephones installed early on them, but they were also promoted as areas of foreign investment. Moreover, because their seasons are temperate and their vegetation abundant, they are popular destinations for winter residents and yachtsmen.

locally; almost everything is imported. The outlying islands are even more fully dependent than the capital on the sea. Most commercial airstrips outside the cities are too small to accommodate jets; moreover, they are shut down after dark, as they are not equipped with runway lights. For these islands, the main lines of communication are mailboats, motor vessels which travel between the capital and the outer islands, carrying the produce and handiwork of the islanders to the city and returning to them all manner of merchandise.

During my stay on Long Island (February-April 1995), I became very aware of this reliance on shipping for sustenance. Three vessels provided the primary contact with the 'outside' world: a tanker which supplied gas, diesel and oil, and two mailboats. The mailboats brought cargo of every description to the island—food staples such as rice, meat, dairy products, tinned food, dry goods of all kinds, including household appliances, lumber, cement blocks and cement, cars, and books as well as the mail.<sup>78</sup> Of the two which served the island, the 'upper' boat, the *Aberlin*, called at the capital, Clarence Town, in the south; the 'lower' boat, the *Maya Dean*, docked at two substantial settlements, Simms and Salt Pond, in the north.<sup>79</sup> No major vessel stopped at Deadman's Cay, the largest and most prosperous settlement on the island, primarily because of poor docking facilities. This in itself was a problem, as Deadman's Cay is roughly the same distance from Clarence Town as it is from Salt Pond, and the original

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Owing to a high incidence of rainfall, they support a range of agricultural activities, and the northern islands are the largest exporters of produce in the country.

<sup>78</sup>Rice is a fundamental part of the Bahamian diet, despite the fact that it is not, and never has been, cultivated in the islands. Although Long Island is the major livestock producer in the archipelago, it specialises in goat and sheep mutton; meat imports are primarily beef and pork. Appliances, lumber and cement were particularly important at the time of my fieldwork, as building was increasing in anticipation of the electrification of the island.

<sup>79</sup>In 1998, when revisiting the island for the first time since carrying out my fieldwork, I learned that the *Maya Dean* no longer stops at Long Island; another boat has taken her place. The *Aberlin*, however, still does.

packing house at Simms was three times as far. The situation was rendered even more complex by the machinations of national politics. For years, Long Island returned two representatives to Parliament, one from the north of the island and one from the south. The representative from the north was traditionally a member of the PLP, while the one from the south was FNM. It was no accident, then, that between 1967 and 1992 northern Long Island was equipped with electricity, running water, modern telephone lines, a serviceable road, a dock and packing house, nor that the reliable mailboat called there; it is generally agreed throughout the island that the north received most of the government's attention in reward for its loyalty to the PLP. The more southerly part of the island, on the other hand, was neglected, notwithstanding the fact that the bulk of the population resided there. The irony of the matter is that much of the north consists of poor agricultural land, and its residents subsist primarily off handicrafts, fishing and tourism; Deadman's Cay, on the other hand, blessed with rich pockets of soil and a thick freshwater lens, is the major area of cultivation. While the distance between Salt Pond (just south of the 'border' between constituencies) and Deadman's Cay was kept navigable and the road bearable,<sup>80</sup> the drive to Simms was, for the better part of two decades, nothing of the kind; so for years Long Island farmers lost money and produce through spoilage.

The change of government in 1992 engendered some hope, as the new members of parliament promised improvements for Long Island. Work began immediately to establish a packing house at Clarence Town and the dock there, which had fallen into disrepair, was rebuilt; moreover, work was under way throughout 1994 and 1995 to

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<sup>80</sup>This was primarily because Salt Pond, although technically part of the southern constituency, is the site of the lucrative Long Island Regatta, a boat race and festival held on the Whitsun holiday weekend in the spring. As a result, electric cables, telephone lines and a serviceable

electrify the entire island, to improve the southern telephone lines, and to build a new road. When I arrived in February 1995, however, these promised changes had provided only partial relief;<sup>81</sup> work on the infrastructure was proceeding very slowly, in part because the *Aberlin*, which docked at Clarence Town, was unreliable, as often broken down as it was in service.<sup>82</sup> However, it was this boat which was the most often used for major shipments, as it was in fact a freighter, while the *Maya Dean* was a passenger vessel.

During my stay I became even more sensitive to the difficulties posed by a total reliance on the sea. Early in my fieldwork there, some weeks of heavy weather provoked a variety of minor shortages on the island. The tanker sat offshore for several days because it was too rough to dock, and certain types of gasoline were hard to find; the doctor, for instance, curtailed her home visiting in order to ensure she had enough petrol in her car for an emergency. Fish was scarce, and crawfish, the most lucrative winter catch, was even more so, as the weather not only prevented many fishermen from going out, but also disturbed the lobster pots and drove the crawfish deeper into the reefs. Cash, too, dwindled somewhat, and work on the road and on the electrification was held up owing to the non-arrival of supplies.

The sea, together with the boats which cross it, is crucial to issues of survival; but it is a source of division in more areas than the purely geographical. Issues of identity, for instance, are rendered fluid by the islands' separation from one another, despite the

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road were extended in the early 1990s from northern Long Island to the settlement, and the road from Deadman's Cay—the centre of population—was kept in fair repair.

<sup>81</sup>The road was finished, and the electricity turned on, by the winter of 1995-6; by the middle of 1996 the entire island had been electrified. Satisfied Long Islanders—now a single constituency—returned their member of parliament with a resounding vote of confidence in the national elections of March 1997.

<sup>82</sup>As I was told by the woman with whom I stayed: 'The *Aberlin*? That ain't no boat.'

homogenising efforts of the government in their bid to fashion a nation-state.<sup>83</sup> Take the question of race, foremost among the qualities used by the PLP government to imagine the quintessential Bahamian. Predominant is the concept—current particularly in the capital—that the *true* Bahamian is phenotypically black.<sup>84</sup> Thus it is not uncommon for me, a Bahamian of mixed African, European, East Indian and Native American descent, to be approached by other Bahamians as a foreigner, despite my name (of impeccable Bahamian pedigree) and my accent (which moves back and forth between the registers of standard English and Bahamian dialect).

The actual composition of the Bahamian population, however, is not so cut-and-dried an affair. It is generally accepted that 85% of Bahamians are of African descent, and the other 15% is 'white'. What is not so generally considered is that these ratios vary over space and time; one cannot assume, for instance, that in each island or settlement, or in each season or decade, they are the same. In a seminal study on race and politics, Colin Hughes observes '... within the Bahamas there have been substantial differences among the various islands and even among settlements on particular islands.' (1981). He illustrates these variations in a table (Table 1), which, although useful to demonstrate the geographical discontinuity of the ratios, is also temporally specific. Taken from the last census that included racial categories (1953), his figures are several decades out of date. Migration, internal and external, has altered the spread of

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<sup>83</sup>One such effort was the replacement, at Independence, of the colonial motto, *Expulsis Piratis, Restituta Commercium* (Pirates Expelled, Commerce Restored) with the following creed of unity: *Forward, Upward, Onward, Together*.

<sup>84</sup>Here I am following Colin Hughes' adoption of M. G. Smith's 'five dimensions of the colour concept': appearance, or *phenotypical colour*; biological status and family antecedents, or *genealogical colour*; the colour of one's friends and associates, or *associational colour*; conformity to norms associated with various of 'colour-differentiated groups', or *cultural colour*; and 'An abstract analytical category reflecting the distributions and types of power, authority, knowledge, and wealth, which together define and constitute the social framework', or *structural colour* (1981: 21).

the population. The past four decades have seen a vast movement of white Bahamians from island outposts to the capital and, in some cases, back again. Similarly, a massive influx of Haitian refugees since 1960 has had a major impact on the population of almost every island in the archipelago. Other immigrant groups have also changed racial ratios, particularly East Indians from the southern Caribbean; at the same time, the percentage of long-term immigrants of European descent has decreased. Again, Hughes' figures do not take account of the annual variations that occur. Tourism, which accounts for 50% of the Bahamian GDP,<sup>85</sup> alters considerably the ethnoscaapes of individual islands, creating seasonal populations of outsiders. Even these populations vary; in the cities, for instance, they are often strangers, short-term visitors whose visibility is high but whose contact with ordinary Bahamians is fleeting and mercenary—cruise ship passengers, package tourists, gamblers, spring breakers. On the outlying islands, however, the profile is different. Many are resident throughout the winter, or else are regular sojourners, thus integrating themselves eventually into the population, creating relationships of exchange which go beyond the purely economic. To dismiss the population of the Bahamas in purely numerical terms, then, is to oversimplify the complexities of what actually exists.

Not only do the ratios, but also the *definitions* of colour differ from island to island, settlement to settlement. To begin with, the number of categories of skin colour may vary, sometimes considerably; people see according to the terms they employ, and the terms themselves are diverse. What is more, the Bahamian construction of 'race' is atypical of the Caribbean region as a whole, as political colour falls into two major categories, 'black' and 'white', with little mention being made of the intermediate

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<sup>85</sup>Dupuch Jr, 1997: 287.

group. Indeed, the typical Caribbean race/class pyramid must be adjusted for Bahamians (see Introduction). While the presence of 'coloureds' is recognised as a social or aesthetic group, their political influence cannot easily be separated from either the 'black' majority or the 'white' minority. The reason for this is twofold. First, the presence of native whites ensured a monopoly of political power in their hands which continued for the better part of 250 years; many of these white Bahamians enforced a racial separation akin to that of the southern USA, whereby *any* 'black' ancestry was sufficient to exclude one from positions of power.<sup>86</sup> This distinction was strengthened by the development of American-centred tourism during the early twentieth century, as shops, hotels, restaurants and clubs adopted admission policies exclusive of those Bahamians designated 'non-white'. Second, the self-constructions of these 'non-white' Bahamians took a similar dualistic path. Migration in search of work or education often took them to the USA, and their experience in that racially segregated society, together with the racism they encountered at home, encouraged the identification of all but the fairest of coloureds as 'black'. In such a climate, the position of coloureds—in contrast to their position in the rest of the West Indies—became an infinitely manipulable, fluid one, so that those with darker skins or features normally associated with 'blackness' were absorbed into the disenfranchised majority, while those with fair complexions and European features were able to 'pass' as 'white'.

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<sup>86</sup>Despite *conventional* similarities with the southern USA, the *legal* status of non-white Bahamians was far less contentious. Racial segregation tended to be informal, imposed by private individuals, rather than enshrined in law. This made the situation both more difficult to change (it remained the norm in Nassau until the passage of an anti-discrimination bill in 1956) and more easily manipulated by those Bahamians of mixed ancestry who were fair-skinned enough to be considered 'white'.

*Table 1: (Racial identification of population, 1953, after Hughes, 1981: 25)*

<i>Electoral districts</i>	No. <sup>†</sup>	Black (%)	Mixed(%)	White (%)
New Providence	45,670	70.4	14.9	14.8
Andros, including Berry Is.	7,461	94.7	4.0	1.3
Grand Bahama, including Bimini	5,419	78.4	13.3	8.3
Abaco	3,408	59.8	6.6	33.6
Harbour Island*	1,526	40.1	3.5	56.4
Eleuthera*	6,056	71.5	17.5	10.9
Cat Island	3,201	96.9	2.7	0.4
Exuma	2,919	95.9	2.1	2.0
San Salvador, including Rum Cay	827	88.3	6.2	5.6
Long Island, including Ragged Island	4,076	35.3	50.8	13.8
Crooked Island, including Acklins and Long Cay	2,189	76.2	23.4	0.3
Inagua, including Mayaguana	1,603	90.3	5.9	3.7
* The settlements of Current, Bogue, and Upper and Lower Bluff, which comprised part of the Harbour Island Electoral district until 1968, are here included in Eleuthera. †Excludes 'Mongolian' and 'not stated'.				

This characteristic is notable throughout the archipelago. In certain islands, for instance, particularly those with a high proportion of native whites, the delineation between 'white' and 'black' is fairly rigid, and resembles that of the southern United States in that any admixture of African blood qualifies one as 'black'; in these places, the intermediate group is classified as 'black' as well. In those islands where most of the inhabitants are of African descent, on the other hand, the opposite may happen: fair-skinned people may be designated 'white' no matter what their racial background. Where there are sizeable communities of mixed-race people, the third category is recognised; again, though, what people mean when they refer to 'coloured', 'brown' or 'mixed' people may vary from place to place. It is possible, therefore, for the same person to be considered 'black' in Freeport, 'brown' in Eleuthera or Long Island, and

'white' in Cat Island—and, indeed, for him to identify himself as such in each of the different places. Even with these delineations presented in numerical form, then, one cannot be sure that each term is always used consistently throughout the country to mean the same thing.

It is important not to confuse this fluidity of identification with racial *categories*. The ascription of colour in the Bahamas tends to occur along a continuum, with pure 'black' and pure 'white' ancestry at either end. While one's recognition as white, brown or black may vary throughout the archipelago, the common Bahamian discourse of *race* tends to refer to two groups only: black and white. Where the line is drawn between the two, however, varies—from place to place, and from era to era. Those people who find themselves towards the middle of the continuum are able, by employing a variety of methods, to identify themselves as more 'black' or 'white' according to context.

Eriksen (1992; 1998) describes this activity as finding the 'common denominators' among a diverse group of people.

Agents act intentionally, but they have to act upon social conditions which they have not themselves chosen. When a larger field of shared meaning than that immediately available is required for the accomplishment of a certain task, this is developed through patterns of interaction frequently described as negotiation. In a study of ethnicity in Mauritius, I have ... described such interaction as the search for common denominators, which can be defined as the totality of rules and symbols adequate for a particular kind of interethnic encounter to be meaningful for both parties involved. (1992: para. 9)

By describing the activities of selected individuals in both Mauritius and Trinidad—multi-ethnic societies that require the kind of negotiation about which he writes—he demonstrates his theory. In Mauritius, for instance, a working-class Tamil man may activate several different aspects of his personality according to the context in which he finds himself; while at work, he may choose to emphasise the politico-social, *Tamil* side

of himself, but while visiting the neighbourhood bar in the company of Mauritians of various ethnic backgrounds, he may allow that side of his personality to be subordinated to other facets of his character (1998: 34-39).

Something of the sort is happening in the Bahamian case, but Eriksen's model, developed in the study of two multi-ethnic, agricultural/industrial societies whose ethnic boundaries are at best semi-permeable, and where class affiliations have roots in the economy of the plantation, betrays a dedication to a sort of fixity that is absent in the Bahamas. While the *principle* described by Eriksen holds true—Bahamian identities are indeed multiple, and within each individual resides many 'possible biographies' (1998: 1)—in the Bahamas the realisation of that principle is far more flexible than Eriksen's examples appear to allow.

Within a single settlement, for instance, identity may be fluid, as I discovered in Fox Hill. What is more, ethnic variations occur even within the main sub-groups (i.e. 'white' and 'black') that render the situation more complex still. Bahamians recognise three main ethnic minorities: people of Mediterranean descent, primarily Greek; people of Chinese descent; and people of Haitian descent. While Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese and Jews have been more or less assimilated into the 'white' minority,<sup>87</sup> the fate of the Chinese and the Haitians has been more ambiguous. To begin with, the official status of Haitians, by and large illegal immigrants, is non-existent. The children of Haitians who arrived after Independence in 1973, for instance, are citizens neither of the Bahamas nor of Haiti; their parents, illegal immigrants, have the choice either of

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<sup>87</sup>See Williams, 1996, for more detail. The assimilation process has not been a simple one. Greeks, in particular, have felt themselves excluded from the inner circles of white Bahamian society throughout their history in the Bahamas; it is only in the fourth and fifth generations that commercial success and intermarriage have brought them a fair level of acceptance among the wealthy whites. As a consequence, they have tended not only to aspire to white society but

registering as long-term residents of the Bahamas if they have been living in the country for more than ten years (and thus gaining the right to apply for a \$5,000 residency permit) or being repatriated. Haitians and Haitian-Bahamians are segregated within Bahamian society by reasons of language, religion, and occupation; many black Bahamians regard Haitians as menial workers, fit only to be servants and gardeners. Still, the situation is not entirely simple, for in areas with a long history of Haitian settlement, such as Fox Hill, Haitian-Bahamians may be accepted members of a community. As for the Chinese, their status is more ambiguous still. While I was in Long Island Antonio, the man responsible for showing me around, asked me which group of people, which race, was the most advanced. His answer was the white race; I asked what he thought of the Asian contribution to technology. 'Well, that's white,' he said. In Nassau, another man, recalling the struggle for the abolition of discriminatory laws, pointed out that the court battle was fought not against white businessmen, but against Greek and, in particular, Chinese establishments:

We formed a Citizens' Committee and they appointed me with three men to go to prove discrimination on pigmentation. We went to eighteen hotels, we went to the Mikanos [a restaurant] run by the Greeks, we went by the Peking Duck [a restaurant] run by the Chinese, we got to find out that the Conchy Joes<sup>88</sup> were telling the Chinese and the Greeks to do it, otherwise get out of the business. The two cases came up between the

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to move into the black middle-class as well; the substantial number of black/coloured Bahamians with Greek surnames is a testament to this process.

<sup>88</sup>White Bahamians. This term, like the idea of 'white' itself, shows variable meaning over time and place. A native of the capital, I was raised to understand that the term originally served to distinguish poor whites from rich, and that it represented the fact that poor whites subsisted off conch, as they could afford nothing better. In this context, however, it is used to refer to *any* white Bahamian. In Long Island, it is understood to represent those Long Islanders who categorise themselves as 'white', but who are actually of mixed background; there, someone described it to me by showing me an actual conch, and pointing out that though the meat is white, the foot and the horn of the shellfish are coloured, thus signifying that though the skin of a person is white, his or her ancestry is not fully European. Today in Nassau, the phrase has lost its applicability to Bahamians of sole European descent, but is used to refer to any coloured Bahamians who appear white, or who act 'white', and is used to denigrate people of obviously mixed ancestry who refuse to associate themselves with blacks.

Chinese and the Greeks. So the man asked the Chinaman, say, 'Now. Do you have—Have you ever had many coloured people in your club, in your place?' Mr Chang called a man who was about ninety-nine years old, he can't see and he can't hear. And this man is the one who cleans out the toilets down in the basement. He put a tailcoat suit on him and brought him in there. But the man who was the justice was a no-nonsense man. He got mad, cause he knew that the man was just making a mimic of this court, so he said, 'Mr Chang, you have any other names on your book?' Because in those days when you go into a proprietary club, you had to sign your name, which ensured that you were a bona fide member. He said, 'Yes, I have.' He say, 'You have the book here?' He say, 'Yes, but it is written in Chinese. You read Chinese?' Two days later it was put in the newspaper that anyone having a store on Bay Street that refuse to serve people on pigmentation would lose their licence.

LaFlamme's 'centrifugal tendency', then, appears to go beyond the economic and the socio-cultural to include issues of identity in the Bahamas. Not only do climate and culture vary from island to island, but so do ideas of skin colour and its meaning. The geographical archipelago is paralleled by a cognitive one; Bahamian 'identity' is one which consists—and always has consisted—of multiple identities.

Hannerz's account of the Cayman Islands describes a social structure that mirrors this fluidity. Of the Caymans, Hannerz notes that '... economic margins have never been large enough to allow it to stop looking for new angles' (1974: 30); the same is true of the Bahamas. On the one hand, this state of affairs suggests a precarious existence for the majority of the inhabitants; on the other, however, it creates a climate in which individual autonomy is rewarded, and indeed, is necessary for survival. The Bahamian orientation towards the sea created a society which escaped certain strictures of the plantation system; it also fostered a culture in which individual endeavour generally carried more weight than collective action, whose inhabitants, particularly those living on islands some distance away from the capital, were free to make good for themselves as long as they had access to the appropriate resources (for instance, boats), and for whom the homogenising institutions of other modern nation-states—

information distributed in print form, for instance, standardised systems of education, narrow methods of social advancement—had a limited application. The obvious conclusion of all this is that in the Bahamas one might expect a fragmented ‘national’ identity—as LaFlamme, taking his argument to its logical end, suggests.

### **The Archipelago: Patterns of Interconnection and Dependency**

Yet the situation is not quite so simple. It is true that in the Bahamas, it is not difficult to find examples of LaFlamme’s ‘centrifugal tendency’; it is easy, therefore, to overestimate the divisive nature of what he has dubbed the ‘internal sea’ and exaggerate the isolation of individual islands within the archipelago. As we shall see, however, despite the fragmentation of territory and the heterogeneity of the Bahamian population, it is possible to speak of a ‘Bahamian national identity’. What is most interesting about the Bahamian case are the means by which this national identity is created and maintained, and the various symbols used to recognise, legitimise and incorporate this fragmentation into a consciousness of self. Throughout the history of the Bahamas, inhabitants of the island chain have identified themselves as a single people, despite differences. Here again, we may turn to issues of geography for a clue.

To begin with, it must not be forgotten that this internal sea is just that—*internal*, an intimate part of the country. Bahamian waters are sufficiently different geographically from the ocean surrounding them to give them a unique personality. The central group of islands rise from the shallow seas of the Great Bahama Bank; to the north, the Abacos and Grand Bahama are similarly joined by the Little Bahama Bank, and smaller areas of shallow water, circled around by coral reefs, surround the remaining islands. Each bank, too, is fringed by reefs and separated by stretches of the

Atlantic as difficult to navigate, with its currents and rough water, as the banks. Even before any permanent European settlement had taken place in the archipelago, the Bahamas were being described as being 'so near to one another, as they make those seas very rough, heady and dangerous'.<sup>89</sup> Ironically, Laflamme's 'internal sea' provides the unity that the individual islands lack; the one thing every island produces is expert seamen. The same men who use contrasting methods for planting and reaping on their respective properties must navigate the water in similar ways.

Any conversation with Bahamians will reveal the depth of the islanders' relation to the sea. Whether their contact with the ocean is as intimate as that of the boatbuilders in Mangrove Bush, Long Island, or as superficial as that of the Nassauvian who eats boiled fish on a Saturday morning, it is the one sure thing they share. Navigable only by the most experienced of sailors, the sea, with its dangers and its riches, is as important in uniting Bahamians as it is in keeping them apart.

This centrality of the sea and seafaring in the national consciousness of Bahamians may be seen in the use of certain terminology which defies international (Euro-American-centred) convention. Many Bahamians conceive of north as 'down' and south as 'up'. This usage is particularly prevalent on Long Island, whose many settlements are connected by a single flat, unbranching main road, so that to go south is to go 'up' and to go north is to go 'down', and where the southern tip of the island is the 'top' and the northern the 'bottom'. Examples abound. The mailboat which calls at Clarence Town in the south is the 'upper' boat, and that which serves Salt Pond and Simms further north is the 'lower'. This designation is not current everywhere in the archipelago; I have never used it myself, having been raised and schooled in the city.

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<sup>89</sup>Craton, 1986: 55, citing Castell, 1644.

When I was learning my way around the settlement where I stayed, I would confirm my destinations by asking how far along the road certain places were. One day I asked my hosts how to get to the telephone station, about a mile north of where I lived. I asked if it was ‘fifteen minutes away up the road’. My hostess looked at me and exclaimed in horror: ‘No, *down* the road! If you go *up* you’ll get lost!’ However, it is common usage throughout the central and southern Bahamas. I found this inexplicable until a sailor pointed out that for southerners to sail north—to get to Nassau, for instance—they have to sail *downwind* (the trades being the north-easterlies); to go south again, to get home, they must travel *upwind*. And indeed, Long Islanders, like many other southern islanders, talk of going ‘up home’ and ‘down to Nassau’.<sup>90</sup>

In June 1994, this idea of the unifying nature of the sea was reinforced during the appearance of the Bahamas at the Smithsonian Festival of the Americas (see Chapter V). The exhibit was part of the Smithsonian Institution’s ‘living museum’ which occurs every summer and highlights various cultures of the world, particularly of the Americas; in the Bahamian section were featured ‘folkways’ from every corner of the archipelago. While the artifacts and practices were often startling in their difference—for instance, each island clearly had its own style of straw work, and some islands did not produce it at all—the tradition of boatbuilding was remarkable for its similarities.<sup>91</sup> While details varied according to region—some boats were designed for ocean travel,

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<sup>90</sup>For an account of a similar effect of the landscape and natural direction on people’s geographical orientation see Layton, 1997: 131.

<sup>91</sup>What was most significant about this was the fact that the popular understanding of Bahamian boatbuilders was that they were predominantly white, and that the epitome of the craft was to be found in Abaco in the north of the chain, whose boats were of international renown. Yet at the Festival of the Americas boatbuilders from all over the archipelago appeared, talking about the particularities of their vessels and the methods they used to build them. Even more interesting was that these boatbuilders were of all backgrounds. Those from Abaco were white. But those from Long Island and Ragged Island were of mixed heritage, and those from Andros, Cat Island, Rum Cay, San Salvador, Crooked Island and Inagua were black.

others for the traversing of channels; some were built for racing, others for fishing; some were built with Abaco pine, others with gum elemi wood, and so on—the methods used and the boats built were startlingly alike. This was particularly evident in the joint project that took place over the two weeks of the festival, the construction of a Bahamian sloop onsite, a cooperative task employing the skills and methods of all the boatbuilders present. Not only were styles, materials and methods discovered to be compatible, but the level of efficiency at which all the boatbuilders worked was as well; after the first day, work on the boat had to be curtailed, as it was in all likelihood going to be finished in a considerably shorter time than the two weeks allotted.

It is all too easy to underestimate the interconnectedness of the individual Bahamian islands, to be overwhelmed by the divisions wrought by the sea. But the sea unites individual islands even as it separates them. LaFlamme's conclusion—'apprehension concerning outsiders makes central political administration an almost constant structural weakness in archipelago states' (1983: 361) is only partly true; in reality, scattered geography is countered by strong central government, and the centrifugal force he notes is balanced by an equally strong *centripetal* one. The islands are knit together by an island/mainland relation, which, ignoring the physical insularity of the cities, places them in opposition to the outlying islands of the archipelago. Although this opposition is factually ironic (New Providence, the location of the capital, is one of the smallest islands in the archipelago), the cosmopolitanism of the cities renders them larger than they appear. For most islanders, all things official come through Nassau, and most things leave through it. Plane journeys and even mailboat routes begin and end there, so that a person in Long Island who wishes to visit a relative in Crooked Island (a few minutes away by air, an hour perhaps by boat) will, if using a commercial plane, have to fly to Nassau, an hour away, and then take the next

plane to Landrail Point, which might not leave for a day or two. The vast majority of tourists enter the Bahamas at one of the two cities. The centres of government, justice, medicine and education are located in Nassau, as are the corporations which provide basic infrastructure—telephones, electricity, water. Communications emanate from Nassau outward; newspapers as well as the radio and television stations are based there. There is limited local government, instituted gradually since 1995. What occurs in this case, however, is not a devolution of political power from the centre, but rather a more efficient system of the collection of taxes and maintenance of local infrastructure—a strengthening, if you like, of the central power. Local governments are responsible for the collection of revenues from property, and the issuing of and car licences. All revenues are remitted to the capital, and there re-allocated according to population distribution and need. The central administration in the Bahamas is crucial, for it is the only real administration that exists.<sup>92</sup>

What becomes particularly interesting is the way in which this administration functions. On the surface, the emphasis on central control suggests a bureaucratic machine whose efficacy must be reproduced through extensive documentation. Bureaucracy certainly exists. Upon closer inspection, however, one realises that these centre-urban links are maintained not by the multiplicity of documents but by the proliferation of people. Each island is governed by one or more representatives of the state who have responsibility for all official endeavours. Until 1995, these representatives were commissioners, career civil servants assigned to these posts by the central Ministry of Public Personnel; often these men were not from the islands on

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<sup>92</sup>Perhaps most telling in the maintenance of central control is the refusal of the government to establish a municipal government for the capital. As several Bahamians have remarked, that would result in a weakening of the influence of members of parliament over the majority of the Bahamian people.

which they served. After the introduction of local government in 1995, the post of 'administrator' replaced that of commissioner in some islands. Although these administrators are locally elected, the final authority resides in Nassau.

The administrator's office, along with the mailboat, is the islanders' tie with the capital. When Long Island farmers sell their produce to the packing house, they are reimbursed monthly by public treasury officials who travel from island to island to pay out government cheques, and they must report to the administrator's office to receive these. Old age pensions, similarly, are paid out from there, again by representatives of the appropriate ministry in Nassau. The administrator's office, moreover, is responsible for the collection of taxes and the issuing of licences. Utilities bills are paid there (again to travelling representatives of the different public corporations), and the administrator's office also receives and sorts the post. Moreover, the central government notifies islanders of the times and dates of its representatives' visits by radio; three times a day, after each newscast, the Broadcasting Corporation (which can be picked up not only throughout the archipelago but as far away as Fort Lauderdale, Florida and, on a good day, Barbados) airs a series of 'community announcements', during which times these visits (among other things) are announced.

The day after I arrived in Long Island, one of the most celebrated members of the community died. The man in question was, in addition to being a nationally-recognised educator, also the patriarch of a network of influential families. His survivors were spread across the archipelago. His eldest son, a prominent clergyman, resided in Nassau, along with several of the dead man's siblings, children and grandchildren. Some members of the family had moved to Freeport, the second city. Still others lived in various settlements in Long Island. The old man's death was heralded throughout the island by the tolling of church bells, and his wife and children

set about arranging the funeral. This involved the preparation and laying out of the body for public viewing, the purchasing of a suitable coffin and the arrangement of the funeral service, and, most important, the announcement of his death to the nation. While the first duties were carried out by the family on Long Island, the other details were taken over by the dead man's son in Nassau. According to Bahamian tradition, he placed a death notice in the papers and paid for a spot in the community announcements. However, the two obituaries were not alike. For financial reasons, the printed version was much longer, listing *all* the dead man's surviving relatives; the radio announcement was limited to the dead man's closest family.

What was not taken into consideration by the Nassau relatives was the fact that the newspapers are readily available only in the two cities. Regular bulk delivery of the dailies occurs by mailboat on the islands, and each mailboat serving Long Island stops there once a week. The old man died on a Tuesday, the day of departure of the *Aberlin*, and the day before the arrival of the *Maya Dean*; however, as the journey between Long Island and Nassau takes eighteen hours by sea, the newspapers in question would not have arrived until the following Tuesday (unless delivered by plane). Consequently, the Long Island relatives who were not mentioned in the radio announcement saw themselves as having been excluded from the dead man's family, a grave insult. To add fuel to the fire, the family had some years before been split by religious affiliation; the dead man was born and raised Anglican, but, late in life, had converted to the evangelical denomination in which his eldest son was a minister. As luck would have it, the radio announcement consisted predominantly of the evangelical members of the family, particularly those resident in Nassau. The slight was perceived as both a betrayal of kinship and of religion, and was further interpreted as a rejection of Long Island 'roots', an ignoring of the local values which had made the old man great. So

hurt were the excluded members of the Long Island family that they planned to boycott the funeral.

When it was discovered that the entire family had been mentioned by name in the newspaper obituary, all was forgiven, and two of the nephews who had not been mentioned over the air served as pall bearers for the coffin at the funeral. However, the son did not get off scot free; he was castigated not for slighting the Anglican/Long Island family, but for not taking into account the reality of island life. It was generally agreed that he had made a poor decision in excluding the Long Islanders from the radio announcement. However, even that was overlooked in the interest of economy; the radio announcement would have been very long, if everyone was mentioned, and it would have cost extra money to put it out.

In showing how difficult it is to sustain a national readership in the archipelago, this example demonstrates the fundamental irrelevance to the lives of islanders of the printed media in the Bahamas, and provides a context in which to place the impotence expressed by the would-be nationalistic writers. For Bahamians at large, the *radio* and not the press is the primary bearer of information, the main provider of any kind of central, organised unity in the nation. Geography not only affects the local conceptualisation of identity, but it also counteracts the potentially unifying construction of the kind of national identity that the print media makes possible; the territorial fragmentation of the Bahamas has encouraged the development of a series of semi-independent centres whose individual needs are not easily served by any single over-reaching, literate tradition.

Individual islands, then, are not normally cut off from the capital, although it is arguable that the rural-urban links are physically more tenuous than those in single-territory nations (the communications being at the mercy of the weather and the state of

the sea). The islands, despite occasional talk of secession, are inextricably bound up with the fortunes of the capital, even under the most extreme circumstances. During the passage of hurricanes in 1995, 1998 and 1999, Nassau monitored the strength of the cyclones and the extent of the damage using radio and telephone contact, and the results were broadcast live, thus effectively creating a continuous on-air community. To analyse individual island communities without acknowledging their integration into the wider national whole (as is the case with studies such as those carried out by Otterbein (1965) and Savishinsky (1978)) is to run the risk of misrepresenting the lived reality of the islanders. Similarly, it is a mistake to assume that the islands are isolated from the 'outside' world. In her study Brown, whose fieldwork in Cat Island was originally undertaken to test the boundaries of LaFlamme's archipelago state (1992: 1), discovered that rather than exhibiting a 'centrifugal tendency', Cat Islanders were in fact fully integrated not only into the society of the nation, but of the world at large:

Cat Islanders had a great love for their home island and identified themselves as being from Cat Island to the rest of the world. But, equally obvious, was their identity as Bahamians and their tendency to bring this up to me especially in the presence of someone who was not a Bahamian, such as a person of Jamaican or Haitian origin. They spoke quite plainly of going to Nassau as 'going to town,' thus placing themselves in a rural-urban or center-periphery relationship ... Cat Islanders are conscious of the modern way of doing things. They are not isolated from the world. They come and go both from Nassau and the United States and the world. (1992: 2-3)<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, it is debatable whether the concept of 'outside' with regard to the Bahamas' relation with the world is useful at all. The geographical situation of the Bahamas has ensured its full involvement in the history of the Americas. With the USA fifty miles (80.5 km) away to the north, Cuba roughly the same distance (54 miles/87

km) to the east and Hispaniola seventy-four miles (119 km) off the most southerly coast, the strategic and commercial position of the archipelago has created a population which is often more cosmopolitan than the Westerners who visit it. It is true that the sea cannot be easily crossed, except by those with the boats and skill. But it is equally true that with boats and skill the sea may be crossed in almost any direction one likes. Thus, despite the limitations imposed by the regular links between the islands and the city, for those people who have the means—fishermen and pilots, primarily, and those people who own boats and planes—travel from the islands to any of these countries on Bahamian borders is often quicker and easier than travel to the capital.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, when one considers that the permanent population is one-tenth the size of the annual tourist arrivals, the idea of global isolation loses what little meaning it might have. Hannerz notes much the same thing for the Cayman Islands, whose geographical position makes them even more remote:

When steamship traffic began ... the islands became ... more isolated, at least insofar as there were few visitors. But the Caymanians themselves certainly travelled elsewhere. They sold the coconuts which grew in abundance along Caymanian shores ... they brought rope to Jamaica, made by their women from the tops of the thatch palm. They sold Caymanian cattle to Cuba ... Caymanian sailing ships also traded between other western Caribbean islands, the Central American coast, and the Gulf Coast ports of the United States ... during the prohibition years of the latter country some of them were in the fleet of small vessels running bootleg liquor to American shores [and] many found it more suitable to leave the territory altogether. (1974: 32-3)

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<sup>93</sup>I found exactly the same pattern in Long Island in 1995. In some ways the strong identification with the nation as a whole is more remarkable for Long Islanders than for Cat Islanders, primarily for reasons of skin colour; nevertheless, it was there.

<sup>94</sup>This fact has been duly noted by American institutions as well as the Royal Bahamian Defence Force, whose duty it is to police Bahamian waters (Griffith, 1993). Although widespread monitoring by the DEA and the US Coastguard as well as patrols by the RBDF have substantially reduced the incidence of smuggling in the Bahamas, it has not managed to eradicate it, and smuggling of all sorts—from cocaine to Haitian refugees—is commonplace.

Finally, the continued prosperity of the islands since 1945 has created a population that is well-equipped with the most up-to-date communications technology. Even on the most neglected islands, many individuals own cellular telephones, televisions, VCRs, and satellites; radios are ubiquitous. In the house where I lived in Long Island, as soon as the generator was turned on in the evening, the television picked up the satellite broadcast of the OJ Simpson trial; the question of whether or not he was guilty, or whether or not he would be acquitted, was as much a topic of everyday discussion as when rain would come for the crops, or when the wind would drop so that the fishermen could go out. Similarly, everyone listened to the national news at midday, so that national affairs were discussed even more consistently than in Nassau, where city-dwellers have a multitude of stations to choose from. It is arguable that, while the advent of modern technology has made their involvement in the life of the 'outside' more convenient, it is by no means a new thing for islanders. The concept of isolation is not applicable to a nation of seafarers, and a conversation with any Bahamian, wherever they may be in the archipelago, will reveal that travel and freedom of movement are important parts of their national identity. In the words of one storyteller: 'A Bahamian is a person who believes he has the inalienable right to go to Miami.'

If Bahamians are not isolated, then, if they are able to juggle ideas of insular separation and national incorporation at the same time, what tricks do they employ that make this juggling smooth? Anthony Cohen, in his discussion of individuals as autonomous members of anthropological wholes (1985) argues that most people manipulate symbols which allow them the kind of flexibility to be both individual and corporate beings. This is particularly true of the Bahamas, in which the idea of separate-but-related fostered by territorial realities is expressed quite forcefully in the

idea of *family*.<sup>95</sup> Bahamians are quite at home with the concept of belonging to a group of islands, to separate but related entities; the entire archipelago is imagined in terms of a 'family of islands'. Indeed, between 1968 and 1995, the official term for the outer islands of the archipelago was the 'Family Islands', a name which replaced the colonial title of Out Islands. As Spadoni observes,

The labels 'In' or 'Out' Island mirror many Bahamians' perceptions of themselves. Nassauvians are the 'in crowd' and feel superior to their Family (Out) Island cousins, the 'country bumpkin.' Many Family (Out) Islanders believe they have been forsaken to maintain and increase the grandeur of Nassau and New Providence. Since 1968 Prime Minister Pindling has sought to minimise these status-identity differences conveyed via geographic place names. In that year the use of Family Islands and Family Islanders replaced the traditional Out Islands and Out Islanders in official pronouncements emanating from Nassau. (1977: 27-8)<sup>96</sup>

Perhaps the resonance of the archipelago-as-a-family idea is owed to the fact that although the majority of Bahamians live in Nassau, most of them originate elsewhere in the country. Many still have relatives there, and it is in the islands that their land is located. These island origins are used in the creation and maintenance of personal identities, as is evident in the numerous 'homecoming' celebrations, regattas, and reunions held throughout the year, both in Nassau and on the islands. Individual island traditions survive to this day more or less intact, and may vary considerably.

Any consideration of a Bahamian national identity must therefore take into account these features. The 'internal sea' of the nation fosters the development of a

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<sup>95</sup>That the idea of 'family' provides the a suitable paradigm for such independent interconnectedness is evinced by the following observation of Cat Island households: 'The family constituted a unity, but within that unity each individual had rights that the others could not abrogate ... solidarity and independence are complementary within the family. The assumption that arises from this arrangement is one of equality.' (Brown, 1992: 130)

<sup>96</sup>Brown argues that the change was 'not just a public relations move to boost tourism, but the adoption of a whole new way of looking at the Bahamas as a whole, as a family.' (1992: 14).

variety of separate but interlocking traditions which interact one with another, but which are not *necessarily* replicas of each other—the development, in other words, of a number of centres without margins. In large part because of the archipelagic nature of the country, it is not possible to speak with confidence of any single Bahamian identity (although, of course, such an identity is spoken of); each island has its own history, its own ethnic construction, its own particular relation with the world beyond the Bahamas. At the same time, however, despite drawing on and revelling in difference, all individual islanders conceive of, and value, the idea of being ‘Bahamian’.

#### **IV. Identity and Land in the Bahamas**

Closely bound with the notion of the sea as shaper and sustainer of Bahamian life is the idea of land as a marker of identity. While this may at first seem paradoxical, further investigation demonstrates how it fits neatly into the themes of fragmentation and unity I have explored above. On the one hand, if the sea is to be regarded as a means of uniting the scattered *islands* of the archipelago, bringing them into dialogue with one another and with the capital, land connects *individuals*, creating, through common interests in property, discrete, bounded groups. Where the sea signifies fluidity and movement (routes), land represents rootedness. Yet it is more. The islands, drawn together by their relation to the ocean, are divided by the boundaries that separate one piece of property from another, that delineate land owned by this family, that developer, or the government. In this regard, the sea unites; the land divides.

In this chapter, using case studies, I hope to illustrate the ways in which identity and land are interwoven.

##### **Generation property: symbol of identity**

Land ownership, like the geography of the country, is tightly knitted with the idea of family discussed above. In the first place, the majority of land owned by Bahamians is located on those outlying islands of the archipelago known colloquially (and for years

officially) as the Family Islands. The very name suggests an imagined kinship relation between the centre of the nation (New Providence, the site of the capital) and the peripheral islands. Despite a recent move by the government to replace the designation 'Family Islands' with the more individualistic 'Islands of the Bahamas', many Bahamians continue to use the older term; their implicit refusal to accept the change underscores the resonance of the name.<sup>97</sup> Craton suggests the attachment to the idea of 'Family Islands' may be more than sentimental. In his reading, the reference to family helps restore 'the structures of kinship and community which are fading and being lost' in the whirl of urban life (Craton, 1987: 108). While there is value in this interpretation—almost three-quarters of the Bahamian population now lives in either Nassau or Freeport—there is more to it than a binary opposition between the *anomie* of urbanisation and the imagined face-to-face living of 'traditional' island life. Most urban Bahamians are immigrants from the islands, or descendants of such immigrants, and many still maintain some contact with relatives who remain 'on the island'. These relatives, moreover, often occupy land that is not owned by them alone but collectively by the kin group as a whole. In this regard, then, the 'Family' islands are both where one's family hails from, and where one's family land—one's *generation property*—is found.

In the Bahamas, the concept of *family* is not exhausted by traditional Western roles of mother, father, sibling and child. As in the rest of the West Indies, Bahamian

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<sup>97</sup>It may be argued that the government's decision constitutes an effort to remove the sense of parent-child relation that Nassau has traditionally maintained with the outer islands. Equally, however, the removal of the title 'Family Islands' may be seen as a devalorisation of island origins. In this regard the resistance to the change, which reverses the earlier slowness to give up the appellation 'Out Islands', (Spadoni, 1977) indicates a refusal to accept this devalorisation. Whereas the earlier instance implied a reluctance on the part of city-dwellers to give up their privileged status, the present case suggests a reluctance on the islanders' part to accord the urban centres a continued privilege.

familial relations consist of flexible networks of kin and pseudo-kin which can be activated or dissolved as necessary.<sup>98</sup> 'Family' is constructed in terms of bilateral descent groups. *Any* relation, however distant, if connected with a common ancestor, is considered a kinsman. When one claims one has 'family' on an island, therefore, it does not necessarily mean one has a *close* relation<sup>99</sup> there; what matters is that one has a relative on the island to whom one may be connected by extended genealogical effort. To invoke the title of 'family' is to set in motion a reciprocal relation that benefits both parties;<sup>100</sup> to claim 'family' on an island, therefore, is to claim a sense of belonging and, often, rights to the land there.

That the concept of 'family' is bound up with the system of land tenure is not unusual for the region, in which the Bahamas occupies an uneasy position. Often regarded as being on the margins of Caribbean society, the Bahamas has traditionally been understood in terms of deviance from broader Caribbean norms.<sup>101</sup> I shall argue that although the Bahamas shares certain facts of history with the rest of the Caribbean, it cannot be regarded simply as an aberration, but has an existence in its own right. As such, while a consideration of the Caribbean institution of family land is instructive, it is not the perfect model for the Bahamian experience.

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<sup>98</sup>See, for example, Besson, 1987b. See too the various studies of the Caribbean family that document this flexibility (Clarke, 1966; Rodman, 1971; Smith, 1962; 1966; 1956; 1987; Smith, 1988b; Solien de Gonzalez, 1965; 1969).

<sup>99</sup>Mother, father, grandparent, uncle, aunt, and so on.

<sup>100</sup>The fact that some Bahamians use such terms in casual address reflects the fundamental belief that, as the popular song claims, 'All a we is one family' (Edwards, 1989); see too Brown, 1992; Dahl, 1988; 1995. For comparative evidence, see Wilson, 1973: 47.

<sup>101</sup>Indeed, many histories and social studies of the Caribbean region either exclude Bahamian material completely or treat it as a marginal territory. See, for example, Lewis, 1968; Mintz, 1974; Sherlock, 1973. It is only in very recent years—during the 1990s—that some accounts have begun including material on the Bahamas (Patullo, 1996; Richardson, 1992; Watts, 1987). See Besson, 1987b: 16-18 for a review of the literature on land tenure.

For Jean Besson, land ownership patterns in the Caribbean constitute an active resistance to slavery and its aftermath.

[F]amily land is a dynamic Afro-Caribbean cultural creation by the peasantries themselves in response and resistance to the plantation system. For both in origin and persistence the institution may be seen as a strategy for maximizing freehold rights in the face of plantation engendered land scarcity. In this context land rights provide the peasantries with some security and independence, and symbolize personhood, freedom and prestige. Family land also symbolizes the identity of family lines, the significance of which can only be fully understood in the context of the history of former, kinless, slaves. The unrestricted descent system at the heart of family land maximizes both freehold rights and the size of these family lines.<sup>102</sup>

Ideas about 'family land', then, furnish the means by which ex-slaves constructed an identity for themselves, both in terms of locating themselves in a world where they had previously been chattel (the construction of identity through the creation of unrestricted descent groups), and providing themselves with the symbolic and economic means of maintaining their independence (the acquisition of land). Family and land are inextricably linked; '[t]he estate is ... the spatial dimension of the family line, reflecting its continuity and identity.' (Besson, 1987a: 103). What is more, the custom exhibits a paradoxical combination of the physical scarcity of land and individuals' unlimited right to it.<sup>103</sup> Although, owing to the small size of family plots, most cannot make use of the land they own, for Caribbean peasants that land becomes a symbolic resource to be held onto and manipulated in the face of an oppression that continues years after the abolition of slavery.

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<sup>102</sup>Besson, 1987a: 105. See too 1979; Besson, 1987b; 1995; Craton, 1987; Mintz, 1987; Olwig, 1995; Olwig and Hastrup, 1997; Wilson, 1973.

<sup>103</sup>Besson, 1987a; 1987b; 1995; Olwig, 1997.

Family land exists in a political environment that even today is potentially fragile. Besson notes for Jamaica that

legal freeholds ... are validated by legal documents, and acquired through purchase, deed of gift or testate inheritance. Intestacy was traditionally defined in Jamaican law on the basis of legitimacy, male precedence, primogeniture and legal marriage. Legal freeholds are private property, alienable, and marketable in the national capitalist economy, and houses on such land are part of the real estate. Land use is governed by the capitalist values of maximizing profits and production. (1987a: 103-4)

Family land, on the other hand,

contrasts in all respects ... Rights to such land are essentially validated through oral tradition and ... are customarily transmitted through intestacy as defined by the legal code. The definition of intestate heirs also differs from the traditional legal system: being based on unrestricted cognatic descent by all children and their descendants in perpetuity are considered heirs regardless of legitimacy, birth order, residence or sex. Marriage is not regarded as a basis for inheritance. (1987a: 103-4)

This non-reliance on the legal code, this enshrining of rights to family land in the oral tradition, are at once both the weakness of the custom and its strength. By not relying on the legal codes of the powerful, the dispossessed descendants of slaves are able to carve for themselves their own moral and customary world in which they, and they alone, are the arbiters. However, the fact that this world is not separate from, but is a part of, the larger society of the Caribbean makes the tradition vulnerable. Indeed, one might argue (as indeed, Besson seems to imply) that it is only the smallness and relative poverty of the lands in question that permits them to be governed thus, as the properties have no value for outsiders. Even so, it is possible for individual family members to manipulate the literate/legal system in order to gain total possession of the plots (Besson, 1987a).

In the Bahamas, the tradition of *generation property* echoes many of these broader Afro-Caribbean themes, and the convention is responsible for vast land holdings

throughout the archipelago. Particularly on those islands settled by Loyalist planters at the turn of the nineteenth century,<sup>104</sup> groups of kin lay claim to large estates. Such property is held in trust for the use of all descendants of the kin group forever—‘while grass grow and spring flow’, I was told on Long Island. Although individual family members may farm it, or live on it, it may never be sold. Like their counterparts further south, Bahamians use the convention of generation property to solidify identity, to provide themselves with some subsistence, and to unite groups of kin. As with the rest of the Caribbean, too, Bahamians’ access to land is fraught with contradiction. It is, however, a contradiction of a different kind. Although the ‘paradox’ Besson notes—a real shortage of land combined with unlimited symbolic access to it—certainly exists, it is not the rule; indeed, her explanation of its origins and function, developed within the narrow confines of plantation societies whose members must fit into rigidly maintained, closely defined groups, does not ring true here. Bahamian estates are generally large enough to accommodate all who are entitled to them. If one is a member of a land-owning kin group, one will always have a place on which to live and from which to get food. *Access* to land, however, is problematic: the land is not the sole possession of any one member of the kin group, and it may not easily be converted into cash. In contemporary Bahamian society, where the majority of the population resides in the city, the practical uses of generation property are limited—the right to settle on and farm the land holds little significance for individuals living two hundred miles away. On the other hand, the land bears a rich symbolic meaning. For those island emigrants living in the cities their property becomes a unifying emblem of the kin group as a whole.

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<sup>104</sup>For example Acklins, Cat Island, Crooked Island, Exuma, Long Island, Rum Cay and San

For Karen Fog Olwig (1997), the tendency to possess land in a location far removed from one's dwelling, together with the persistent reference by the migrant to a fixed point or 'home', is quite usual in the Caribbean. She regards the contemporary Caribbean context as one incorporating fluid global and local ties; nevertheless, she does not regard the condition of diaspora—shared by many of the people she studies—as one of rootlessness. Rather, as she points out,

it is ... necessary to study the role of both fixed places and changeable and ever-expanding global networks of social relations. I suggest that a useful concept in such studies may be found in the notion of 'cultural sites,' cultural institutions which have developed in the interrelationship between global and local ties. These cultural sites attain their significance because they are identified with particular places, at the same time as they accommodate the global conditions of life which have long characterized the West Indies. (1997: 17)

In a study of Nevisians in four locations<sup>105</sup> she examines the use of family land in this manner. After Emancipation, the former slaves invested their cultural and financial capital in small plots of land which they called 'home', and which they passed on to all their descendants. Despite the limited size of these lots (often no more than two acres big) and massive migration north, Nevisians maintain their interests in their property even today. For many of them, the 'land' is little more than a family house and a small subsistence garden (1997: 27-32). Nevertheless these places serve as anchors for the construction of Nevisians' identity, and provide migrants with a sense of rootedness that persists despite distance in both space and time. In some cases, the symbols of 'home' and 'family' are more important than actual connections with family land. For kinship ties to be maintained, migrants must continue to supply economic support for those family members left behind. However, '[a]s this home is modernized through the

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Salvador.

migrants' remittances and changes through time, it becomes more and more of an imagined place' (1997: 31); the reality of its existence is replaced with a nostalgia for the past and 'home' that is exploited in Culturama, a summer festival in which 'music, dance, cooking, handicrafts, and other expressive cultural forms of pre-1960s village life' are celebrated (1997: 31).

In the Bahamas, the role of generation property for migrating islanders bears some resemblances to that of Nevis family plots. Like family land in Olwig's study, 'generation property' provides city-dwellers with a rootedness they might otherwise lack. The right to claim land on an island far away can provide them with a sense of who they *are* that life in the city may not make explicit. Moreover, it creates an understanding of who they are *not*; in permitting urban dwellers to identify with a particular place (an island or settlement beyond the city), it delimits their identification with another (another island or settlement, or the city itself). A Long Islander is not a Cat Islander; someone from Deals is not the same as someone from Gordons. Like Nevisians, too, it appears that the more distant in time that some urban Bahamians become from their land, the more closely they begin to identify with it. Thus, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, city-dwellers began recognising the symbolic value of their island 'roots' more and more frequently through the institution of regattas, 'homecomings', and various food festivals. These festivals serve a variety of purposes. For the emigrants they provide a means of locating and identifying with 'home'. For government officials, they are a valid source of tourist income; the Ministry of Tourism promotes them as vigorously as any other attraction.<sup>106</sup> For the inhabitants of the

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<sup>105</sup>Nevis, Leeds, New Haven, Connecticut and St Thomas, USVI.

<sup>106</sup>See Geographia Travel Services, 1997a for a (tourist-aimed) list of these events.

island communities they bring both work and profit, providing a sure, annual injection of capital into the island economies.

To illustrate: when I was first in Long Island, the settlements of Deadman's Cay, Thompson's Bay and Salt Pond were all buzzing with preparations for the approaching regatta. Individuals who were normally self-employed (primarily farmers and fishermen) were working regular long hours at the regatta site in Salt Pond, clearing it, constructing stages, putting up poles, and attending to the minor repairs that a year's disuse had brought. As I have outlined above, Salt Pond was until recently anomalous in southern Long Island, having received many of the same infrastructural developments that the north had got during the PLP regime. These improvements—a decent road, electricity, running water and street lights—were by no means rewards for decades of voter support; they were specifically aimed at providing appropriate amenities come regatta time.

One might equally consider these 'homecomings' as a sort of 'practical nostalgia', a large-scale invocation of 'home' not dissimilar to the Trobriand Yam Festival studied by Battaglia. The aim of this latter event was 'to unite the dispersed urban population, giving Trobrianders [in the city] an opportunity to feel productive in their own [urban] backyards, as well as in their own cultural terms' (1995: 79). The Bahamian festivals provide opportunities for displaced islanders to come together and remember 'home'. In some cases, as with the American descendants of Nevisian emigrants studied by Olwig (1997: 31-2), taking part in these homecomings is enough to remind urban Bahamians of who they 'are'. In others, however, particularly in cases where generation property is concerned, a more practical strategy is used. Smaller groups of relations hold family reunions which serve many of the same purposes as the regattas, but with a number of crucial differences. These reunions are mobile, and may be held anywhere

that members of the family reside. Rather than being dependent on an official calendar, they may be held at times which best suit the family members; tourists and other strangers are excluded from them, and—not least of their attractions—they provide kin groups with a time during which real business may be conducted: the negotiation of family rights to land.

For if Bahamian generation property parallels Nevisian family land in providing a means whereby mobile individuals may establish symbolic cultural capital, it has a considerably different significance both economically and politically; the vastness of Bahamian holdings are a very real resource. The origin of Bahamian lands and those of other West Indians, moreover, is different. In most of the communities on which Besson bases her theory, the lands were obtained by the purchase of small holdings by ex-slaves during the post-emancipation period. The holdings are therefore, naturally, small. In the Bahamas, the majority of generation property consists of the original estates themselves. While these may or may not be agriculturally productive, they are certainly large enough to provide value in a number of different ways. Land holdings on the Family Islands are often quite large, particularly in those islands in the southern part of the Bahamian chain where land prices are only beginning to be inflated by considerable foreign investment. My hosts in Long Island, for instance, lived on property that was designated by them as 'private land'—Mr Roderigo, my host, had bought it himself, and held the title outright. His wife, Mrs Beatrice, in describing it to me, remarked that it was 'only 200 acres', compared with the more extensive tracts of generation property they had occupied for most of their married life. Besson's comment—'it is the entitlement to freehold land which is the crucial aspect of family land, rather than the activation of such rights' (1987b: 15)—is only partially applicable in the Bahamian case. 'Bahamians,' according to one historian, 'are millionaires'; they

are land-rich (Moncur, 1992). It is the rare Bahamian citizen who cannot go somewhere in the archipelago and find himself or herself at home on the land. In fact, many Bahamians suffer from the opposite problem, a physical overabundance of common property combined with the inability of individual family members to make use of it.

Indeed, the most common concern about generation property that I found was not which member of the family was entitled to inhabit it (as seems to be typical of other Caribbean islands (Besson, 1995; Olwig, 1997)), but how the generation could conceivably profit from the land. One man, outlining the various complications to do with his family property, which was so 'tied up' that no one could use it for any profitable purpose, expressed great relief at my interest; his main hope was that my writing about the system would 'get government to find some way of working this thing out.'

Ironically, what functions as a unifying factor for kin groups may also serve as a fragmenting element for individuals. Urbanisation has, not unnaturally, been accompanied by marriage between people from different islands, so that Bahamians born in the capital may be members of a variety of kin groups, and thus may have claims on several pieces of property throughout the archipelago.<sup>107</sup> What is more, these groups are often composed of members of different social and even ethnic backgrounds. As intermarriage continues through the generations, one's right to land multiplies. Consider the following examples of Bahamians who have been born of diverse parentage in Nassau. Together with her two sisters, Theresa, a 28-year-old

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<sup>107</sup>The same is true, but not always to such a dramatic degree, of people living on the islands. Each individual has the *potential* right to make multiple claims on property, depending on his family connections; however, residence proves to be a deciding factor in determining one's *practical* ability to claim. With migrants, however, the issue is nowhere near so simple, particularly in cases (and there are many) where the land in question has been totally abandoned for some time.

Nassauvian of mixed African and European heritage, inherits through her mother rights to live on two separate estates in Eleuthera, and through her father diverse pieces of property on New Providence. Melissa, 35, for all intents and purposes 'white', shares with *her* siblings customary interests in two highly contested territories: Harbour Island and Paradise Island.<sup>108</sup> Fifty-three-year-old Daniel, a black Bahamian, provides perhaps the most interesting case of all. He shares interests in Cat Island, which he acquired through his father, and Inagua, through his mother's mother. In the case of the latter, he shares his rights to the land with his maternal grandmother's first family, who are white. What is more, because the rights to generation property do not dissolve with time, the longer the members of a family have lived away from the property (that is, the longer they have been unable to establish superior rights to the land through residence), the more complex their rights to land become. For example, my brother and I (at least theoretically) have customary access to land on three different islands: on Crooked Island, through our mother's maternal grandmother, and on Andros and New Providence, through our father's mother and father respectively.

The Bahamian significance of generation property, then, while holding some of the political resonance ascribed by Besson to family land elsewhere in the Caribbean, is multivocal. Generation property unites groups of relatives not only by serving as a symbolic connection to the land, but also by providing them with what is potentially a very real source of capital, profit, and power. At the same time, it serves as a flexible

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<sup>108</sup>In her case the situation is particularly difficult. Both islands in question are very small in size, and are, moreover, highly valuable pieces of real estate. Harbour Island is world-famous as a location for the winter homes of rich Americans and various artists—a Bahamian Key West. As such, land there not explicitly claimed is in high demand for these immigrants. Paradise Island, just across the harbour from Nassau, is even more valuable as a tourist destination. In spite of customary claims made on it by this woman's family, the majority of its property has been sold (or leased by the government) to a number of developers and operators of upscale resorts. See Craton and Saunders, 1998, for an account of Paradise Island land claims.

resource to be manipulated as necessary by individuals, each of whom may make multiple claims on different pieces of land. *How* individuals exercise this power is a crucial question, and one to which I will return below; for the time being, however, Bahamian generation property is not only a symbolic resource, a cultural site, but also a potential provider of economic, social and political wealth.

### **Generation property: a cultural site**

In May 1994, I made the first of three visits to Long Island.<sup>109</sup> My purpose for going at that time was to investigate further the custom of generation property, which I had first come across in my fieldwork in Fox Hill. My fiancé and I went together, as his mother's family held rights to a considerable stretch of generation property there, and I thought that his situation would be a good place to begin my research.

Long Island runs roughly 95 miles (153 km) NNW to SSE.<sup>110</sup> However, like most Bahamian islands, it is narrow, spanning seven miles (11 km) at its widest point and no more than a mile (1.6 km) at its narrowest (see Figure 4.1). Located in the south-central Bahamas, it straddles the Tropic of Cancer. Despite considerable natural beauty, it is relatively untouched by the tourist trade,<sup>111</sup> receiving most of its income from small-

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<sup>109</sup>This was a brief stay; the second visit was more extensive, lasting for seven weeks between February and April 1995. In July 1998 I returned for a week, to touch base with the people with whom I had worked, and to see the changes brought by electricity, telephone and the new road.

<sup>110</sup>Like many things about the island, its length is contested. This is the length that I was told by people there. I have heard or read, variously, the following lengths: 102, 70 and 60 miles (165, 113 and 97 km) long. That 95 or 96 miles is most likely lies in the fact that the road, which I measured by odometer in 1998, is about 90 miles (145 km) long.

<sup>111</sup>Compared with its near neighbour, Exuma, which had 213, Long Island had 47 hotel rooms in 1988. Contrast this, too, with the cities (Nassau had 4968 hotel rooms then, and Freeport 3640), and with the northern islands—Andros 184; Abaco 621; Eleuthera 939 (Sealey, 1990: 75). Considering, moreover, that Long Island's population in 1990 numbered around 3,100, the ratio of tourists to inhabitants is, for the Bahamas, remarkably low.

scale agriculture; Long Island farmers are among the primary Bahamian suppliers of vegetables and meat to the capital (Sealey, 1990). On the whole, Long Island is drier and hotter than New Providence,<sup>112</sup> as the trade winds which bring rain to the archipelago blow across the island quickly; yet its position in both the tropical and sub-tropical zones provides a considerably varied landscape. Bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the west by the waters of the Great Bahama Bank, it is notable for its two distinct coastlines, 'one with soft-white, broad beaches and the other rocky headlands that descend suddenly into the roiling sea'.<sup>113</sup> The former, known locally as the South Side, is useful for its quiet harbours, calm seas and the sandflats that attract bonefish; the latter, the North Side, I was told, is the best place for finding salvage, as ships travelling south towards the Panama Canal use the Crooked Island Passage to the south-east.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike many islands, where coastal settlement underscores islanders' reliance on the sea, most Long Island villages are located inland. Many, though by no means all, of the settlements stretch out along the King's Road, a thoroughfare which runs the length of the island. When I first visited the island I was struck by the names of these settlements, the significance of which would become clear to me later. As my fieldnotes point out,

... each settlement seems to be named, with some exceptions, after family names: Dunmore, Gordons, Roses, Simms, Knowles, Buckleys, Glintons, Grays ... other islands tend to name places after various things—things

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<sup>112</sup>Average mean temperature: 25.9°C in Long Island, 20°C in New Providence; average annual rainfall: 718 mm in Long Island, 1234 mm in New Providence (Sealey, 1994).

<sup>113</sup>Geographia Travel Services, 1997b.

<sup>114</sup>The names 'South' and 'North' Side are somewhat misleading in Long Island, whose coastline abuts the Great Bahama Bank to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Thus the South Side generally refers to the western coastline and the North Side the eastern one. I suspect the terms 'North' and 'South' Sides come from Clarence Town, the capital, where the island turns and the coastlines actually face north and south for a few miles.

related to the sea, the landscape, or the identity or desires of the settlers: Green Turtle Cay, Rock Sound, Governor's Harbour, Hope Town, Palmetto Point, Cherokee Sound. In Long Island, when the names of places are not names of families, they make references to (I assume) historical events: Hard Bargain, Burnt Ground, Deadman's Cay.<sup>115</sup>

The extreme north of the island is rocky, covered in rough scrub and coastal vegetation. Although receiving more rain than the south, it is not very well suited for agriculture, as the land consists primarily of limestone rock on which neither soil nor water collects. The extreme south, on the other hand, is too dry to be of much value for crops, and has traditionally been used for pasturing animals and, owing to the existence of a number of salinas, raking salt. The central areas of the island offer the best farmland. Here the island is at its widest; gently rolling hills provide for a relatively thick fresh-water lens, and naturally-occurring pot-holes in the rock reveal deep beds of black soil ideal for subsistence farming. Moreover, it is around this area that patches of red loam occur, thus making the land suitable also for pineapple cultivation.<sup>116</sup>

The generation property in question, the Wells Estate, is located in the north-central area of the island (see Figure 4.2). It is a particularly large estate, the entire property running for eight miles between Grays and Deadman's Cay. Before going, we discussed the project with my fiancé's mother to find out where the property was, and where her interest was located. Her directions went as follows:

NB: Where is the land exactly?  
LC: On the north side of the road.  
NB: How far in?

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<sup>115</sup>This regular occurrence of family names in the titles of settlements, I later learned, was evidence of a widespread tradition of generation property on the island.

<sup>116</sup>Sealey (1990: 3-4), describes three types of soil that occur in the Bahamas: organic, called 'black' soil after its colour, occurring most commonly in forested regions; residual, which are best for farming, known locally as 'red' loam; and the sedimentary soil found on sand dunes, colloquially referred to as 'salt-and-pepper' owing to its high content of sand.

LC: The land goes from the road to the sea. From the road to the North Side. But it is coursed off. When I was a girl we used to live up on the hill, but we had to move out to the road because it was too hard to get water up there. To get water up there we had to walk down the hill to the road where the well was and carry the water all the way back up the hill home. We lived in a wooden house near to the old house, where Grandpa Stephen used to live, and in our yard there were these two big red rocks. And my mother used to make us clean that house, get down on our knees and scrub the floor till you could eat off it, and then we had to go back down to the road and bring up more water and wash those rocks. So finally we moved down to the road where we ended up living, where your grandmother was living, because of the water.

NB: So where is your land?

LC: Now the land was coursed off. You know where that road is that goes to the North Side? Well, our land is up from there. You find a bush road and follow it up, and the first thing you come to is Uncle Robert Wells' land, and then you come to our land. Now that is coursed off too. And my mother divided her piece up between her children, Annie has a piece, Desiree has a piece, Ivy has a piece, Myrtle has a piece, Denise has a piece, Jennifer has a piece and Raymond, Stephen and I all have a piece. Raymond and Stephen have the homestead and the Carroll land on the south side of the road.

The conversation raised several points. Most obvious was that no reference was made to any documentary representation of the land. Its location was not marked on any map beyond that carried by its owners in their heads.<sup>117</sup> Second, the land itself was not abstracted from everyday experience; it reconstructed itself in memory—of childhood, of carrying water up the hill, of scrubbing the floor, of washing the rocks. There was no way for a stranger, even one of the owners of the land, to know its boundaries without experiencing them. The speaker's appreciation of the land was dynamic, and boundaries emerge only through her memory of her childhood, through movement in space, through the evocation of kin. Indeed, the land seems almost to

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<sup>117</sup>In fact, I learned later that a map of the property exists. However, in all my conversations about it, it was not invoked.

have a personality. In her discussion of the property, my fiancé's mother suggested that we really ought to talk to the local historian, Abel, who had married her cousin.

It soon became that finding the land would be synonymous with finding the people who knew where the land was and to whom it belonged. Our search began with the recommended visit to Abel. We met him collecting eggs from his henhouse, not far from his home—both of them located on his wife's part of the estate. Our original intention was to set up an appointment with him on the following day, as it was getting dark and we had half the island to drive to our lodging; however, he invited us inside, summoned his wife, and began to talk. What ensued kept us there till well after dark, well after the generator had been started and the lights turned on.

He began with the history of the land, going back to the 'beginning'—the coming of the Loyalist planters—and following the tale of the original grant of the property, listing its owners till he came to the relatives he had known in his lifetime. His history, in summary, went as follows:

During the 1780s a grant was made to one Bruce Fitzsimmons of a tract of land, presumably for the planting of cotton, on Long Island. Fitzsimmons moved to the area, but before he could do much with it, he caught yellow fever and died. His son returned to England, where he sold the title.

The buyer was John Woods, who moved to Long Island and began building a plantation. When the plantation house was complete and the estate almost ready to begin production—of what, our informant was not sure, but probably of cotton—Woods snagged his leg on a bush Long Islanders call 'fire bush' (or 'brush'). The wound turned to cancer and Woods returned to England, where he sold the title.

The next buyer was one Jackson Wells, who moved out 'with 300 slaves' and settled at the property already known as Woods Hill, after the previous owner. He began to make it produce, and apparently succeeded. When he died his eldest son remained in the plantation house and worked the entire estate. This son, by some accounts, remained in the homestead until 1905, when my fiancé's grandmother was born. Slavery being abolished in the British territories in 1834 (full manumission was not attained till 1838), this son was the last of the owners to keep slaves. After manumission, however, the estate became impossible to keep going intact, and by 1905 the land had been divided.

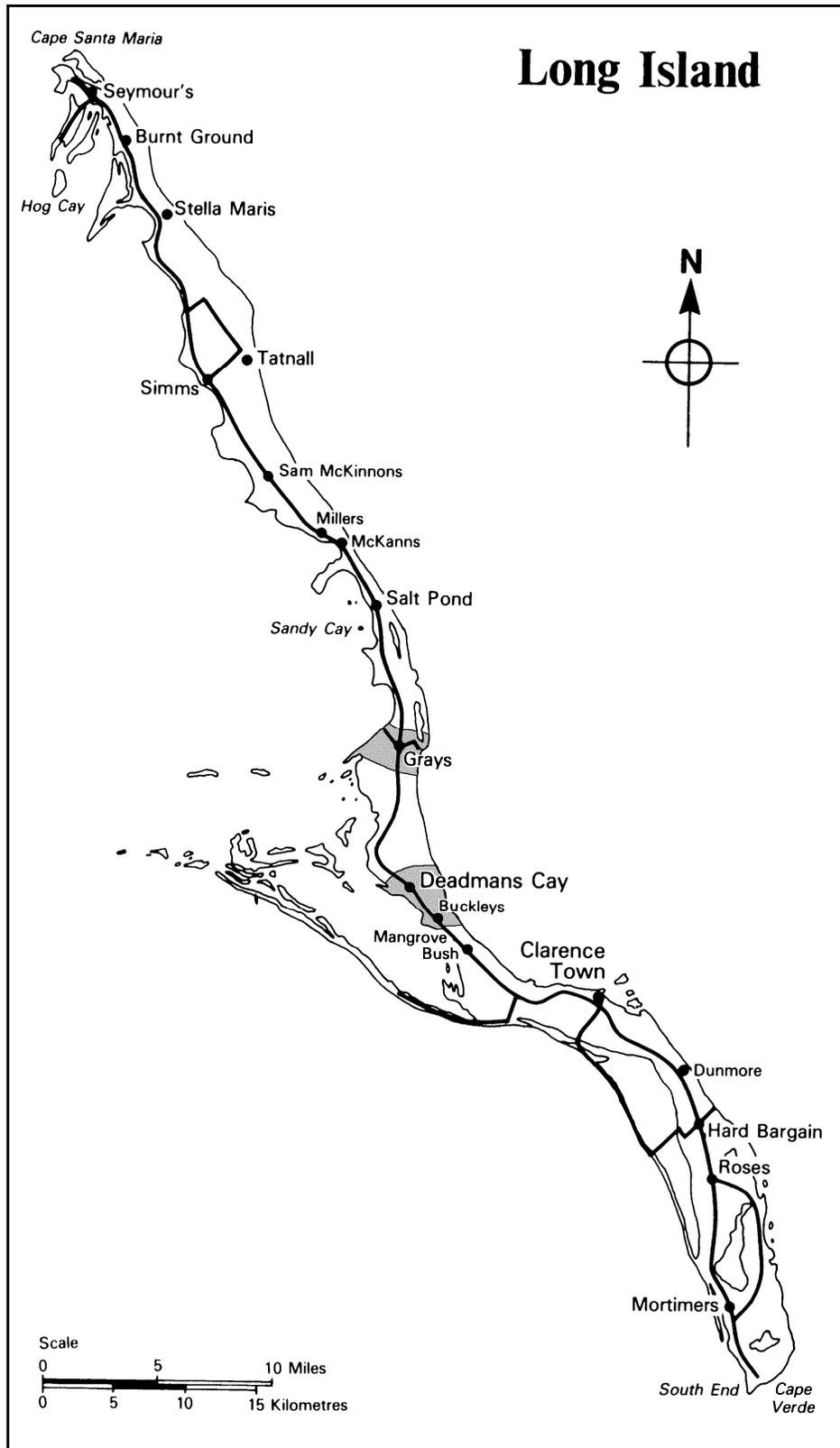


Figure 4.1 – Long Island, Bahamas

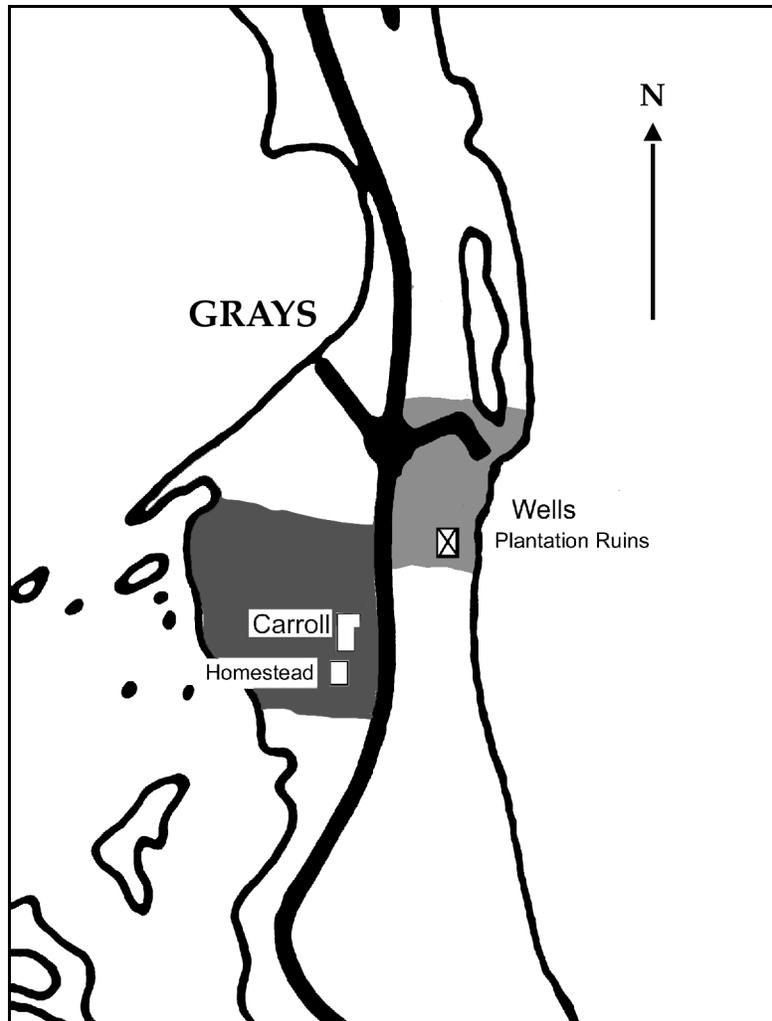


Figure 4.2 – Wells and Carroll land, Grays, Long Island

The emphasis here, as in the first description of the property, was that a Long Islander's relationship with the land is a difficult one, requiring hard work and character to succeed. Such a sense is common throughout Long Island; island life is regarded, on the one hand, as something only the initiated can bear, and on the other, far better than life in the city, as I shall show below. Moreover, there is a strong sense of the history of the land contained in the description; the estate, as much as, or perhaps more than, its owners, has a genealogy.

Once past this history of the land, we tried to ascertain the geography of it.

Again, the answer to this was vague:

NB: How big is the Wells property?

AC: All this land, from down by [here he named a spot that was not to be found on any map, being the name of someone's field] all the way up to Lower Deadman's Cay, was Wells property ... and it went from sea to sea. When you stood up on the hill where the house was, all the land as far as the eye could see was Wells property. From sea to sea.

NB: That's big.

AC: You could put the whole of Nassau in it and it would disappear!

Further inquiries made it clear that each individual's entitlement to the land was not quite so extensive. While in principle the land belonged to all the descendants of Jackson Wells, regardless of sex, residence or birth status, in practice it had been divided into different areas in which different branches of the family held influence. As the old man had had several children, and as most of them had apparently remained on the land, each had taken a different section of the property and bequeathed that part to their descendants. These, in turn, acted similarly, so that the land itself was mapped out almost as a kinship diagram might be. The northern end of the property, for instance, is controlled by those descendants who bear the name Wells; the southern end is inhabited by Carrolls, and the middle is shared by people with a variety of surnames. In this we can see one of the fundamental principles of generation property at work: the variety of surnames indicates that the land devolved at the old man's death upon all his children, male and female alike.

Indeed, the proliferation of different surnames across the land indicates the flexibility of the generation property pattern. In Long Island, where land holdings are extensive, but where the quality of the land is widely variable (see Little *et al.*, 1975, for details), residence is ambilocal. It is common in many cases for husbands to move to

live on their wives' estates. The Wells estate, incorporating some of the prime farmland on the island, as well as having access to both coasts, proved to be a popular place for husbands to settle. At first, the patriarch in question would designate to these men a particular area of land, to be held by them as well as by their wives, and to be passed on through them to their children and other descendants. To the extreme south of the property, for example, on the borders of the settlement of Deadman's Cay, lies the estate of Turnquests, originally part of the Wells estate, but granted to a Scandinavian settler who married one of the Wells women.<sup>118</sup> In this case, there is a strong distinction drawn between the Turnquest descendants of Jackson Wells and the others, thus emphasizing the flexibility (in the Bahamas) of the system.<sup>119</sup>

In the beginning of settlement, it was possible for men to marry into the Wells family and thus acquire their own generation property.<sup>120</sup> During the twentieth century, however, husbands who married into the family, while given the right to work the land in support of their offspring (who were considered Wellses), could not claim any intrinsic right to the land. Should they separate from their wives they are obliged to move off the property; should their wives die, the same principle applies, although their children and grandchildren may grant them permission to stay. This was brought

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<sup>118</sup>This was the site of much of my later fieldwork in Long Island, conducted in early 1995. It is worth noting that the system of inheritance on the Turnquest estate is somewhat unique for Long Island and for the Family Islands in general; the model it follows is similar to a classic patrilineage, as only *males* may inherit rights to land.

<sup>119</sup>Next to Turnquests is the Carroll property, disposed of in much the same way to a pair of brothers who married into the clan, but administered in a more traditional fashion, with open right of inheritance. Nevertheless, the disposal of the land is overseen by an unofficial group of 'elders', generally the oldest living members of the generation.

<sup>120</sup>It may be significant that the men in question were landless immigrants of European descent—a great asset in the post-Emancipation years. The original Turnquest was a Norwegian sailor by all accounts, and the original Carroll brothers were considered 'Englishmen'. In more recent years, spouses have been drawn from other parts of Long Island, and are not only themselves co-owners of generation property elsewhere, but are less likely to be of pure European blood.

home to us during a conversation with my fiancé's uncle, Luke, the husband of my fiancé's maternal aunt. Despite the fact that the Carroll property on which he lived was farmed by him and administered by his wife, he had no customary rights in it which could extend beyond her death. To compensate him for this handicap, his father-in-law had settled on him the piece of property on which his house was situated (a sizeable plot of land at the road); what was more, Luke had negotiated with his mother-in-law to be given a tract of land to use for his own farm. He was given the land he had chosen, a low-lying patch on the north (Wells) side of the road, apparently poor for cultivation because of its boggy nature. This he painstakingly reclaimed, and he now uses it successfully to grow bananas. However, he told us that this field is his only for his lifetime, and it was handed over in recognition of his commitment to the estate; at his death it should revert to the Wells descendant on whose land it is found.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, Abel is a Long Islander from further south. Although he has chosen to live on his wife's land, he retains an interest in his own property. However, as he told us, he is unlikely to develop that interest, as the land is less well suited to his taste. Nevertheless, his children retain the right not only to the land on which they had been raised (and all the land surrounding it as well, as far as their branch was entitled) but also to his family's property. He explained the flexibility of the administration of generation property in terms of the vastness of the land and the need to see it worked. Not all property functioned in the same way, he pointed out, though he was quick to

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<sup>121</sup>The same applies to women who marry into the family. I was told by the widow of one of the Carroll men, herself a Long Islander from further south with her own rights to family land, that her brothers-in-law had assured her of a permanent place on their property for as long as she lived, despite the fact that she has since remarried. This is in itself fairly unusual, and marks the degree of acceptance which she received in the family (earned, no doubt, by her care of her first husband during his illness); the right to remain on the land is something that no spouse today may take for granted after the end of their marriage through death or divorce.

add that the difference was usually one of practicality. The ability of husbands to settle on their wives' land underscores one of the key elements of generation property: traditionally all members of a generation have rights to the land, even if female.

Sometimes, the rights to land overlap. In my fiancé's case the Wells property comes through two sources, the Wells line (from his maternal grandmother) and the Carroll line (from his maternal grandfather). Figure 4.2 provides a rough sketch-map of the family's interests on the ground; Figure 4.3 outlines the family connections. The properties in question face each other on either side of the road—the Wells to the north and the Carrolls to the south. In the past, I was told, the land had been one, but early in its history the property on the 'south side' of the main road had been granted by one of the Wells patriarchs (either Jackson or a son of his) to the Carroll family.<sup>122</sup> On the 'north side', in the centre of which can be found the ruins of the original plantation building, the descendants of Jackson Wells retained control. Over the course of a century, the land was divided and reunited through intermarriage. Two descendants of Jackson Wells, George and Jack, each forged kin ties with the Carrolls, thus giving *their* descendants blood rights to land on both sides of the road—'from sea to sea' in Abel's words. George's daughter, Antoinette, married Marcel Carroll, and the couple settled on the property on the south side of the road, henceforth known as the Carroll property. Jack married Ivy Carroll, the daughter of Peter Carroll Jr., and they settled on the Wells property, either in or near the plantation house. Ultimately, these rights were further consolidated in the union of my fiancé's grandparents, as follows. Antoinette bore

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<sup>122</sup>The details of this grant are somewhat unclear. By some accounts, the property in Greys was given to a Peter Carroll, who had two sons, Peter and Marcel; however, the fact that the Carrolls own generation property further south on the Wells Estate makes this unlikely. What is more probable is that *this* land was granted by the Wells to Marcel Carroll upon his marriage to Antoinette Wells—a pattern which fits neatly with the system of handing over land to the men who marry Wells women.

several children, among them John Carroll, my fiancé’s grandfather; similarly, Jack and Ivy Wells produced several offspring, among them his grandmother Rebecca. In time, John married Rebecca, thus uniting the family land on either side of the road once more.

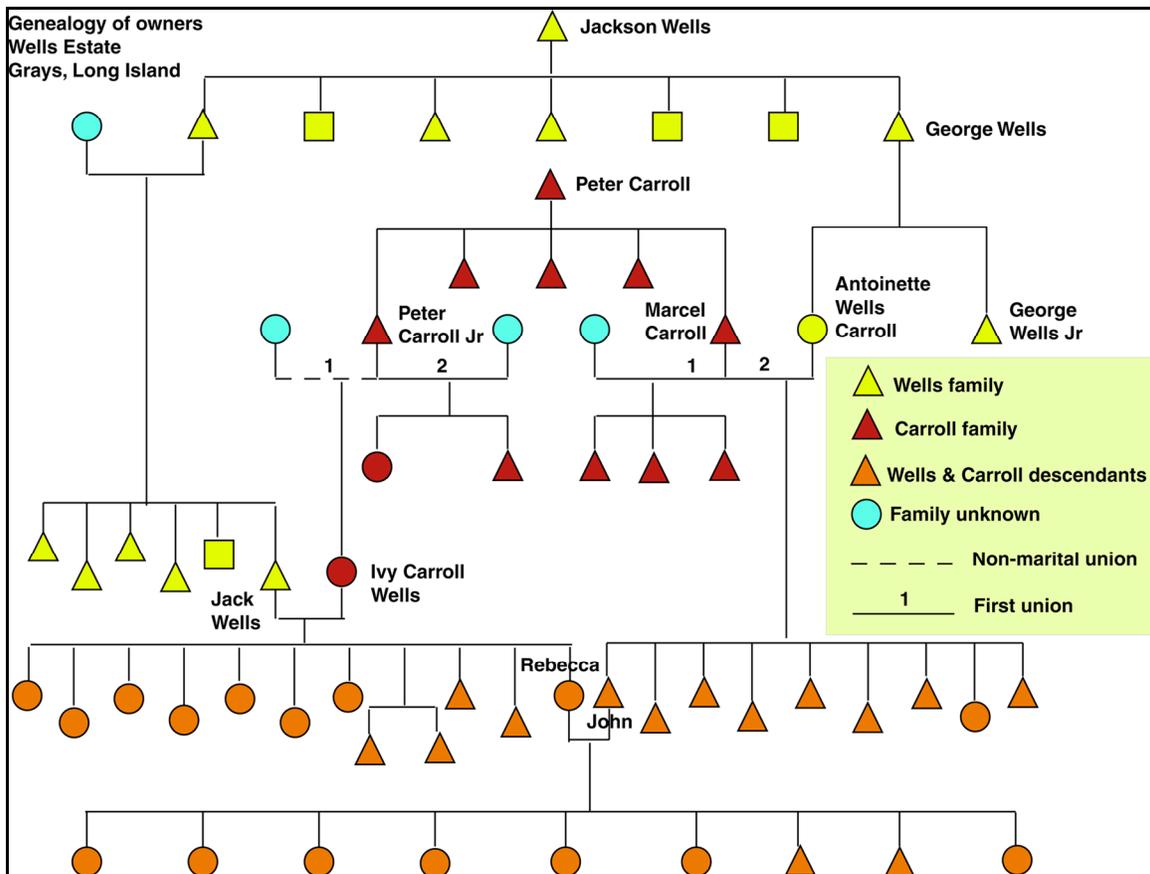


Figure 4.3 – Wells/Carroll genealogy

Through a complex system of kin rights and inheritance, then, my fiancé should have an interest, at least in theory, to an extensive piece of property. During the twentieth century, however, these rights were simplified somewhat by the custom of ‘coursing off’ the land, a custom started by the elder Jack Wells. According to this practice, different children were given the primary rights after his death to different pieces of the property; for instance, the land on which the ruins of the old house are found was passed on to the family of Jack Wells Jr. Despite this apparent contravention of the traditional system of generation property, certain traits were kept: every child

got property of equal size, daughters were not excluded, and above all, the land could never be sold. The right to land was, for the most part, inalienable, no matter what. One of the daughters of Jack and Ivy Wells, Ruth, was mentally disabled ('simple'), and so she remained at home with her parents for all her life; after their death, although she was unable to inhabit or make much use of her property, it nevertheless remained hers. On the other hand, the elders who administered the property could sometimes choose to exclude a descendant for misconduct. One of Ruth's sisters, Esther, disgraced the family by becoming pregnant out of wedlock; consequently, she was left out of the apportioning.

In the Wells case, the practice of 'coursing off' the land (utilised, in all probability, because the property in question was so large) was one method of modifying the universal right of access to generation property. This practice, while not uncommon on Long Island, is not typical of the rest of the Bahamas. Another, more common, tradition is delimited by residence on the land. Although in principle every member of the blood-line has the right to use generation property, in practice those rights are not themselves equal, and are determined by patterns of residence. In the Bahamian islands, where work was scarce and cash-flow uncertain for most of their history, migration to various metropolitan centres—most commonly Nassau, any number of cities in the eastern USA, and, more recently, Freeport—is the rule. Thus not only are Bahamian estates large, but they are also underpopulated. Those members of a generation who stayed on their land were, therefore, rewarded for their commitment to the island and to the property by being accorded the best land on the estate—the most developed farmland, the most productive orchards, the areas with the best roads. In Long Island, the expectation is often that the youngest child should remain on the land to care for the parents in their old age, and to maintain the property; where this has

happened, that child often inherited the family home as well, and is regarded as the person with the most authority to speak on the disposal of the land.

In my fiancé's case, his grandmother, Rebecca, was the child who remained behind. Despite having married a Carroll, she continued to live on the Wells property to care for her aging parents; this was why my fiancé's mother, Rebecca's second daughter, could remember living 'up on the hill'.<sup>123</sup> According to tradition, then, she was entitled to inherit the choicest course of land, as she herself had contributed to its maintenance and upkeep. Moreover, because she looked after not only her parents but also her ailing sister Ruth, it was generally accepted that she was the rightful heir to her sister's property as well. Finally, her position on the land made her, in time, the ultimate administrator of the family property, enabling her to dispose of it in the manner that her father and grandfather had before her. This permitted her to see to various matters. For instance, her twin brothers, having decided to settle permanently outside the Bahamas, bequeathed their courses of land to her; in her turn, Rebecca gave that a part of that property to Esther, her disinherited sister, thus drawing her back into the family network. Further, she inherited Ruth's property; this, however, she left out of the division of the property when it came her turn to provide for her own children. And finally, she was solely responsible for the registering of her own title, and the 'coursing out' of her own piece of property in name and on paper.

In some ways, the Wells case is typical of the institution of generation property in the Bahamas—in its embracing of all descendants, whether male or female, and in the fact that sale was forbidden—even those men who had received a grant of land from one of the patriarchs upon their marriage adhered to a strict system of passing the land

to blood relatives. In others, however, it is atypical. To begin with, it has been administered in a more structured fashion than is customary throughout the Bahamas as a whole, though it is fairly common on Long Island; the divisions of the land into areas for different groups of descendants, while practical, has also had the effect of reducing the area of property available to each individual. In this case, the reduction is a welcome one—it is estimated, for instance, that the total land available to Rebecca's nine children may cover 900 acres.<sup>124</sup> Its very vastness is troublesome. All but one of its present owners live beyond Long Island, although most of them regard the property very much as a familial or cultural site; thus neither the land (which requires intensive labour to be worked) nor the children (who cannot easily sell the property) may benefit greatly from the size. And the fact that it exists, that it incorporates many acres of valuable land, most of it lying fallow, is far more than symbolic; the property is a very real, and a very difficult, economic resource.

### **Generation property: a practical resource**

Often regarded as 'poor' farmland, Bahamian estates have traditionally been shunned by large-scale agricultural concerns, thus leaving them in the hands of the families who lay claim to them.

Because of the universal extent of the limestone, and the fact that limestone dissolves in rainwater and leaves very little residue, the soils throughout The Bahamas are extremely thin and patchy. In fact many places have virtually no soil at all, notably where there is very little vegetation. The south-eastern islands and small cays are usually too dry or too exposed for vegetation to develop a thick cover. (Sealey, 1990: 3)

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<sup>123</sup>The move 'out to the road' was a move to her father's land, located on the opposite side of the road.

<sup>124</sup>In other cases, however, where the initial grant was relatively modest, or where the land is barren or unproductive, it is a crucial obstacle to overcome.

Yet while these estates may not be suitable for industrial-style agriculture, they nevertheless provide those people who remain on them with many different resources. The rocky hills of Long Island's North Side, for instance, though unfit for farming to the unschooled eye, were nevertheless the preferred area of cultivation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They had two main virtues: they are the most reliable location for 'pot-holes' (see below), and they are often underlain by caves. The former are favoured for the planting of different crops, although their yield is hampered by the irregularity of their occurrence over the land, their difficulty to get to, and their distance from the road; the latter provide safe havens for humans and livestock alike during hurricanes, and are the source of 'cave earth', an excellent fertiliser.<sup>125</sup> There is considerable disagreement between Long Islanders who live on the land and observers about its fertility. Consider, for instance, the following description of the area around Deadman's Cay, taken from a report on the suitability for agricultural development of the area:

The dry flatland in the Deadmans Cay [*sic*] area is unfortunately not of tillage quality, for despite the patchy veneer of brown soils, these are rarely integrated with the rock profile below, but remain separated from it, often by a hardened cap rock surface; alternatively, the soils fail to penetrate the thickly bedded limestone. Consequently, there is little possibility for roots to find their way into the moist capillary zone of the upper parts of the rock profile ...<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>'Cave earth', or bat guano, is highly prized by Long Island farmers, and in past years was a major export to other agricultural islands (Little *et al.*, 1975). It is found in many of the dry caves on the island, which are inhabited by the bats which produce it.

<sup>126</sup>Little *et al.*, 1975: 33; the underlining is theirs. Despite their misgivings, I was told that the land around Deadman's Cay was precisely some of the island's best farmland, as it had the most bountiful water supply for miles.

Compare it with the following description, taken from my journal, of land in the same region: 'Antonio's farm grows bananas, papayas, cassava, corn, two types of limes, sours, plantain, hog bananas, dill, peas, pear, grapefruit, gooseberries, cherries, guava.'<sup>127</sup>

From the indigenous point of view, what is important about a property's value is not necessarily how much of a single crop it can yield, but how many different things may be produced. Traditional farming methods are consistent with those employed wherever extensive cultivation is practised: the 'bush' is periodically cleared, using slash-and-burn techniques, and a rotation of crops planted there. Eventually the land is abandoned and left to regenerate. Family Island Bahamians are generally uninterested in widespread intensive cultivation of their land, as the difficulties entailed in the endeavour often outweigh the returns. The vastness of Bahamian estates, therefore, is vital to their adequate exploitation.

Access to land is of primary concern throughout the archipelago. First, the land provides food. Particularly in rural areas, the imports that arrive on the mailboats must be supplemented by subsistence activities. Family Island food is considerably different from what is eaten in Nassau, where most of the food is imported from outside the country, and Long Islanders use this knowledge to underscore the superiority of island to urban life. I discovered this one evening, when my hostess had prepared steamed fish and grits for my dinner. Grits, a staple of the Bahamian diet, is a dish made from

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<sup>127</sup>The two types of limes are Persian limes, a cash crop, and the 'native' or Key lime, primarily for home consumption. Sours (sour oranges) are, according to Sealey (1990: 41), '[t]he most common citrus plant ... [a]s they are so common they are never sold, but they are undoubtedly a major crop.' Hog bananas are starchy bananas that cook like plantains. Pigeon peas, or gunga beans, are grown for home consumption, as the government prices for them are too low to justify their export to Nassau. 'Pear' refers to avocado; gooseberries in the Bahamas are small, hard, green fruit with a sharp taste; they are unrelated to the northern fruit of the same name.

ground guinea corn. There are two main types: 'Quaker Grits', mass-produced and imported from the USA, and 'native grits', the locally-grown, home-ground variety. As a symbol, the dish works on several levels. It represents first a unique national identity; grits are eaten in both the Bahamas and the Southern USA, but not in the rest of the Caribbean. Moreover, it unites *all* Bahamians, no matter what their ethnicity, as it is a staple in all households. On the other hand, as this case makes clear, it serves as a marker of internal differences, as the *type* of grits one eats sets city-dwellers apart from islanders—for urban Bahamians, imported Quaker Grits are standard; for islanders, who maintain their relationship with the land, native grits are preferred. My hosts' grandson entered while I was eating, asked me whether I had any trouble digesting the food, remarking that city people had no stomach for native grits. This led to a monologue on the virtues of island cooking compared with the insipid nature of city food which did not stop until Mrs Beatrice informed him that she had been cooking Long Island grits for me since my arrival and I had yet to be ill.

Second, land provides links with the commercial economy of the Bahamas. The creation and management of Long Island banana pits provide one case in point. Long Island terrain, like most Bahamian land, is difficult to cultivate. The soil is fertile but thin,<sup>128</sup> and fresh water is precious, generally obtained from wells sunk into the water table that may lie beneath the rock. Islanders are, therefore, continually on the look-out for the best ways to exploit their land. The earliest solution to these obstacles was to

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Similarly, Bahamian cherries are different from the northern fruit, apart from a vague resemblance on the tree—Bahamian cherries range from red to purple.

<sup>128</sup>While noting the limitations of Bahamian soils, Sealey nevertheless recognises the land's possibilities for subsistence farming: 'Despite this lack of traditional mature soils there is a surprisingly good scope for agriculture. This is partly the result of various soil development techniques that break up the limestone surface to create an artificial soil that can be irrigated or fertilised, and partly due to the climate. The climate is excellent for certain fruit and salad

plant crops in pot-holes, in which the soil collected to an adequate depth, and where access to the water table was straightforward (see diagram). The largest holes were partially cleared of their vegetation and used for the planting of corn and cotton, and the smaller ones were often used to plant fruit trees. This system, though adequate, had its drawbacks. Because of the location of the pot-holes along the ridges and rocklands of Long Island's North Side, settlement often took place there; this meant that individual households lived some distance away from the King's Road. Naturally-occurring pot-holes limited the size of fields. This, coupled with the difficulty of getting produce from the fields to the road, much less to the market, meant that cash-cropping in earlier times was limited. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, when the Bahamian economy rested, albeit precariously, on the production of various crops—pineapples, sisal and tomatoes—Long Island farmers sought ways to adapt the traditional method of pot-hole farming to the demands of the cash economy. The earliest innovators took to dynamiting their land to create man-made holes nearer to the road; however, this practice was somewhat unpredictable, as one could blast straight through the freshwater lens to the salt water that lay below, or else uncover a cave or a blue hole.<sup>129</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, however, tractors were introduced to the outlying Bahamian islands. Their main purpose was to break up the rock, digging down to the water table, then filling the hole with a mixture of soil, crushed rock, plant trash and fertiliser (see Figure). As a result, many farming families were thus able to 'move out to the road'. Owing to the high cash value of bananas, these fields, or pits,

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crops, and good for many others, so that once a medium to contain the plant roots has been found, it is only necessary to supply food and water to the plants.' (1990: 4).

<sup>129</sup>A blue hole is a water-filled sinkhole. Often these have subterranean access to the sea. See Sealey, 1994: 63-67.

are most often the sites of banana groves, and on present-day Long Island they represent some of the only areas of permanent cultivation.



Figure 4.4 – A freshly-planted pit, Long Island, February 1995

Commercial agriculture is not the only way in which generation property may bring cash to its owners. Land which is not good for farming may still be considered productive, as many items required for daily life are still made by the islanders themselves. In particular, Long Island straw work is renowned throughout the archipelago not only for its quality, but also for its utility; in addition to a sizeable industry that caters to the urban market,<sup>130</sup> Long Islanders use a variety of straw items in everyday living.<sup>131</sup> Most common are articles made from plait, a strong, mat-like weave, created in long strips of straw which could be sewn together to make a variety

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<sup>130</sup>In Simms, a small factory exists whose products in the late 1970s revolutionised the demand for straw work in the capital. Its founder garnered business by producing items which served not only tourists but also the growing business sector of the urban population; as well as making the requisite straw hats, place mats and baskets, her factory also produced notepad holders, file folders and briefcases for Bahamian professionals. Although the blindness and eventual death of the founder led to the closure of the factory, Simms is by no means bereft of straw workers; today, some of the finest mat-weave may be found in the settlement.

<sup>131</sup>Primary among these are 'karikoo' baskets used to transport grain and crabs to or from the field, field hats, fish pots, 'fanners' (wide flat baskets used for winnowing the ground corn) and brooms. For more on Bahamian straw work, see Outten and Turner, 1994.

of goods or sold in rolls to designers elsewhere on the island or in the capital.<sup>132</sup> Less common, but equally high in value, are pots and baskets made out of ‘Haitian’ weave. The material for both sorts of articles is gathered from the top of the palmetto, several species of which grow in a number of areas unsuitable for cultivation.<sup>133</sup> For this reason, those people whose property is bad for farming but rich in ‘top’ are able to use their property to integrate themselves into the cash economy of the nation. Other types of land are valued as well. Some estates incorporate sizeable salinas from which salt can be collected; others make good pasture land for the livestock which Long Islanders still keep. Still others are valued for what lies *beneath* the land; in Lower Deadman’s Cay, for example, a settlement some miles north of Turnquests, a vast network of caves underlying the Burrows estate was for decades the major producer of cave earth.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, and most problematically, land on Long Island is potentially priceless as real estate. Much of the land which is useless for farming is nevertheless physically splendid in a rugged fashion. The Darville property, nestled among the hills of the North Side between Deadman’s Cay and Clarence Town, is a case in point. Barren as farmland (there is a real shortage of fresh water—even to live there is a challenge, requiring rain collection tanks and intensive irrigation schemes), it is breathtakingly

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<sup>132</sup>Here again, the differences between Nassau and Long Island are made clear. Island straw work is well made; because Long Islanders themselves use the articles, straw workers’ reputations—and to some extent their business—rest in their being able to fulfil the expectations of their fellows. In the city, on the other hand, straw work is a commodity produced primarily for the tourist; consequently, quality is often not a priority.

<sup>133</sup>The three most common, I was told, were the silvertop, which grows in dry, sandy areas not good for farming (used for the finest and strongest plait); the pond top, which is found around swamps (weaker than the silvertop, it is used less frequently, and is reserved for items whose longevity or appearance is not valued, like lunch baskets); and the thatch top, found primarily on sandy cays where there is little water.

<sup>134</sup>The productivity of this particular cave was attested by Mrs Beatrice, my hostess, who remembered a time when ‘they used to send donkeys in the cave and they would come out loaded down with cave earth’.

beautiful, with vistas of rolling greenery giving onto the sea. Similarly, the land around Deans and Bonnacourt, again poor farmland owing to low rainfall and limited amounts of fresh water, nevertheless incorporates some of the most spectacular beachfront property in the archipelago. The beach at Bonnacourt (see Fig A) is a tourist-brochurist's dream; that at Deans incorporates the deepest blue hole ever measured in the world, and a treasure for scientists and resort developers alike (see Fig B). However, the difficulties of developing the land by selling it as a commodity are real; converting generation property into cash is no easy matter, and may be politically precarious. Despite the fact that the arrival of electricity, telephone and roads to Long Island in the mid-1990s potentially opened the island up for investment, both local and foreign, the fact that the land is primarily generation property provides a very real obstacle to 'development'.

Ideally, the land is prohibited from being sold. However, Bahamians are nothing if not practical; most are quick to admit the absurdity of vast stretches of collectively-owned land lying fallow on the islands coupled with hundreds of cash-poor kin eking out a living in the city. As such, a variety of accommodations have been made throughout the archipelago between tradition and profit. In the most blatant cases, individuals have sold the title of the land, thereby depriving their relatives of any share in the sale *and* of the right to the property. During the land boom of the inter-war years, for instance, many islanders found themselves considered trespassers on their own lands, as real estate developers and unscrupulous family members laid claim to extensive tracts of generation property for the purposes of resale. More commonly, however, groups of relatives negotiate collectively the terms of a sale, and share the profits. In many cases, this is the business that underlies the many family reunions that have taken place in recent years.



Figure 4.5 – The beach at Bonnetcourt, Long Island, April 1995



Figure 4.6 – Deans Blue Hole, Long Island, April 1995

The corporate sale of generation property, while an acceptable adaptation of the traditional prohibition on land transfers, is by no means an easy option. Several obstacles must be overcome for a satisfactory sale to take place. If, for example, land is held collectively by a family and there is no deed at all to be found, the right to that land must be formalised. This is generally done through appealing to the Quieting of Titles Act 1959.<sup>135</sup> As Knowles observes:

... there is no doubt that, due to a general lack of sophistication in these islands in the past, the Act has served a very useful purpose, particularly in regard to lands in the Out Islands. Section 3 of the Act provides as follows:

'Any person who claims to have any estate or interest in land may apply to the court to have his title to such land investigated and the nature and extent thereof determined and declared in a certificate of title to be granted by the court in accordance with the provisions of this Act.'

(1989: 69)

Although an improvement on earlier standards, the quieting of a title presents several difficulties. First of all, the land must be surveyed so that its dimensions may be recorded; however, private surveyors are expensive to hire as their fee includes a percentage of the value of the property. As far as generation lands are concerned, which often require the mapping of hundreds of metres of boundary, surveyors' services are particularly dear. Second, once the land has been mapped and its papers drawn up, it must be officially claimed by the family. In order to qualify for the right to quiet land, members of the family are obliged to offer proof of their continuous occupation or use of the land over a period of several years—twenty in the case of

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<sup>135</sup>This Act has been used extensively to cure some technical defect in or add respectability to, a title which has been acquired by adverse possession ... by allowing a land claimant to apply

private property, and sixty for crown land (Turnquest, 1990). This done, the family is obliged to advertise their claim on the property in the newspapers for a specified length of time, another costly enterprise, but one which is crucial; as Knowles points out,

[t]he advertisement in the newspapers for the filing of a Petition under the Act is a most vital part of the procedure, because this gives to persons who consider that they have an adverse claim in respect of the land an opportunity of bringing their claims before the Court. This, however, must be done within a specified time which is prescribed by the Court, and is stated in the advertised Notice. (1989: 69)

Once all of this has been completed, the courts will review the case and award legal title to the family in question; at this point, the title must be registered. Not until all these stages have been passed through can any sale of the land be considered.

Where there is a legal title, as is the case with many pieces of property on Long Island, no sale can take place until that title has been registered. Owning an unregistered title deed is not only inconvenient; it is often a liability, as unregistered titles are vulnerable to other claimants who want to quiet portions of one's generation lands. I was told more than once of people who had carefully kept the deeds to their generation property in strong-boxes under beds, only to discover that their rights to the land could be challenged successfully by individuals who not only claimed adverse possession, but had had the foresight to register their claim in Nassau. In such cases the owners of the original deeds were often considered by law to be illegitimate occupants of the property.

Even if the title is successfully registered, however, several obstacles remain. If the land is not coursed off, then *all* interested members of the managing generation have to agree on the sale of the land, in whole or in part, if it is to happen. What is

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to the court to have the title investigated, with a subsequent formal determination of the individual's rights to the particular property.' (Turnquest, 1990: 23-4)

more, whatever payment is obtained from the sale of the land must be shared out equally among the members of the generation, another potential source of conflict. The fact that the land is often thus 'tied up' has frequently acted as a deterrent for the commercial development of Long Island.

Just how complex Long Islanders' uses of land may be is illustrated by the following material—adapted from my field notes—on one man's relationship to his property.

### **Turnquests, Long Island: land and lived reality**

I first met Antonio, a Long Island man in his fifties, at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (Chapter V), where he was part of a band that performed traditional Bahamian dance music. When I expressed an interest in conducting fieldwork on Long Island, he offered to provide me with whatever I might need. He made all the arrangements for my lodging, and accompanied me wherever I went; we became close friends. Despite his role in the festival, he was not a full-time musician when I knew him, but a farmer. He had not always been a farmer, either. For many years he worked at BaTelCo (the telecommunications corporation); earlier, he helped build the first paved road to run the length of the island, drove a taxi for a while, and had several bands, playing in the resorts in the north of the island. In 1993 he quit BaTelCo to farm full-time on his course of the Turnquest property.

I asked him what he grows on the land. 'A little of everything,' he told me. Part of his annual yield is for subsistence; the rest—primarily bananas, root crops, gourds and citrus—he exports to Nassau. His cash income is supplemented by the salary earned by his wife, Monica, who works as a supervisor for BaTelCo; and he adds to his subsistence activities fishing and crabbing. At the same time, however, he is an entrepreneur, always on the look-out for a new idea to make or market. In his band he built his own drums out of goat or sheepskin; while I was in Long Island, the group was preparing to travel to New Orleans to perform during the Jazz Festival. His present goal—in keeping with his habit of building his own drums—was to make his own maracas for that performance. To this end, he spent many afternoons scouring his land and others' in search of the right wood for the handles, the best material for the filling, and the most effective outer shell.

In his discussions of his own land, he explained that his right to the generation property on which he lived was a multi-faceted thing, and incorporated a number of rights and obligations. The area in which he

lived, Turnquests, which abutted the town of Deadman's Cay, had originally been part of the Wells estate; however, a considerable tract of land had been accorded to the family patriarch, an Norwegian settler, sometime in the nineteenth century. Upon the old man's death, it was passed on, like most of the land in Long Island, to his descendants, who would have the right to live on the land and farm it for the rest of time. In this case, however, rights to inheritance, although in some ways fairly typical of the convention in terms of its being open to a whole generation, departed from the norm in significant particulars. First, unlike the majority of generation holdings, women are not permitted to inherit; Turnquest property is owned jointly by all *male* descendants. Second, it has been neatly 'coursed off', or divided up, so that different branches of descendants have settled on different parts of the land. Finally, the heirs' interest in the property can be forfeited if they do not adhere to certain standards of behaviour outlined in the will; I was told that there have been instances of male descendants being 'thrown off the land' for licentious behaviour or social deviance.

I was given a good idea of the uses to which this land was put. Antonio lives on the site of the old homestead, where both he and his father were born. Because he was the youngest child, he remained on Long Island to take care of the property and his parents, and in reward inherited the family home. Antonio and his wife Monica live in the newer family home beside the original homestead; both buildings, although visible from the main road, stand some way away from it, atop a small ridge. Antonio's house is a good-sized structure built of concrete blocks. It is contemporary in style, a bungalow incorporating three spacious bedrooms, two bathrooms, a parlour and an indoor kitchen. Outside the kitchen door, which is the one most frequently used, is the yard,<sup>136</sup> a paved area where are located various tables for the cleaning of fish and meat as well as tubs for washing clothes and a clothesline. To the back of the yard is Antonio's workshop, a smaller building of roughly the same age as the new house, where he keeps his tools and fishing tackle. Just south of this house, along the same ridge, is the homestead, a smaller building of much older construction. It is built in the traditional style, with stones and mortar, and the outer wall is covered with lime. The roof, originally of thatch, has been rebuilt and covered with tar paper. Inside the two rooms are used mainly for the storage of Antonio's instruments—a broad selection of drums of his own design and making, and other instruments.<sup>137</sup> Behind this house is yet another building, smaller still. This is the original outside kitchen, the locus of all social activity in past years; now it is a storehouse for all kinds of collectibles, most of them old utensils and farm implements. Again, the yard between the homestead

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<sup>136</sup>For a more detailed discussion of Bahamian yards, or house gardens, see Wilkie, 1996, who examines the gardens as domains which help constitute *female* identity. Of interest here, however, is that the yard in question is as much a place for Antonio's work as for Monica's.

<sup>137</sup>When I returned in 1998, I found that the homestead had been converted into a small apartment which Antonio rented out to visitors.

and the old kitchen is paved. Close to the road, opposite the most recently-dug pit, is another structure, a rental house. This is the newest of all the buildings on the property, and belongs to Antonio's son Hartford. Because Hartford, like most Long Islanders under forty, lives in Nassau, Antonio manages the building, and when I was there had rented it to a Jamaican woman who taught at the high school a mile or so up the road.

Between the main houses and the road lies Antonio's farm. Adjacent to the main road are the man-made pits, and Antonio explained how they were constructed. First a tractor comes and clears the land. Then it digs out a pit, long and shallow, to the level of the ground water. Then the farmer replaces some of the soil—this has to be done by someone who knows what he is doing, I was warned, because too much soil counteracts the effect of the water. Eight inches to a foot of soil are sufficient to make a productive pit. Then the farmer plants the crop—corn, or bananas, or papayas, or melons or whatever one decides. Antonio observed that ideally, the crop should be planted in rows, but if it means using the land efficiently (the pits themselves are often unevenly dug) sometimes he goes out of line.

Further up the hill, in front of and beside the house, are his tree crops: two types of limes, sour oranges, grapefruit, cassava, guava, cherries and gooseberries (of which Antonio is particularly proud, as they flourish better in the northern Bahamas), breadfruit and mangoes. Around the kitchen yard are planted hot peppers, sweet peppers, dill, pigeon peas, avacado, a variety of fruits, and a number of medicinal plants—aloes, sage bush, and a cactus that Antonio called 'skerchineal'. Some of these he sells to the produce exchange in Nassau; the rest he grows for his own consumption. Skerchineal, for instance, is a plant with many uses. Its flowers, red when young and purple as they mature, can be used as dyes; its meat of the cactus is boiled as medicine, or is used as a shampoo; rastas still use it, Antonio told me, though most Long Islanders of other persuasions have turned to using commercial products.

Behind the old kitchen Antonio has pens in which he keeps sheep. He has kept goats as well, but 'only to keep the yard clean'. Both sheep and goats are raised by Long Islanders; sheep tend to be penned, as in this case, or tied, but goats, like fowl, are generally let loose to run wild in the bush; when one wants goat mutton, the animals are hunted and caught. These sheep pens mark the limits of the land used for cash crops and intensive farming; beyond them, the land is bush, and appears to be wild.

The house in front, which belongs to Hartford, represents the investment made by Antonio's son in his generation land. Because of his long residence on the land, Antonio is the curator and elder of the property, and as such is able to make major decisions on its administration. The rest of his male kin live close by. Next door, on the course to the south of him, is the land belonging to his brother Gilbert. Across the road is the course belonging to the sons of another brother, Sebastian; this land is inhabited by Sebastian's widow, who acts as manager for her sons, who live in the city. A mile or two down the road is the property of his eldest brother, Wellington.

Antonio's versatility, and his dependence on a variety of resources, were demonstrated throughout my stay on Long Island. He rose with the sun and tended his fields and his animals in the mild temperatures of the morning. By eleven, at which time I would visit him, he had finished most of his farm-work, and he would retire to the kitchen where he would take his tea, offer me lunch, and plan his afternoon. A variety of activities filled our afternoons. While I was there he used that time to do business that was not necessarily related to his farm. One afternoon we drove out to the North Side and combed the rocky shore for salvage; we spent another afternoon driving to the packing house at Clarence Town to follow up on the van he was expecting from Nassau; a third was devoted to visiting the clinic, a fourth to the building of a drum from a fresh goatskin, and another saw us combing his land and others' for the appropriate materials for the maracas.

On two main occasions, the afternoons were devoted to the tours Antonio gave me of his property. The first was a walk to the back of his 'course'. Behind the sheep pens is a rough path—a 'bush road'—which leads to the North Side, or what Antonio calls the 'back of the land'. One day, in search of old coconuts for the maracas, we followed the road in a north-easterly direction until Antonio turned off it and headed for a hollow in which coconut trees grew. This hollow was one of his father's old fields; because it was not used regularly, many of the coconuts which fell were not harvested but left to dry out. Antonio's reasoning was that these would provide ideal bodies for the maracas. Coconuts that had dried out already would take little effort to clean—all that would be necessary would be to bore a hole in the bottom (between the eyes), scrape out all the dried meat, fill with 'shakers'<sup>138</sup> and then stop the hole with handles. As we approached the hollow, the tops of the coconut trees became visible, but the first sight of them challenged the perspective, as they were no higher than the surrounding coppice. Nearer still, it became apparent that they were actually very tall trees; the hollow was quite deep in places, and coconut trees grew at many angles within it. At the foot of the hollow were many dried coconuts and younger trees.

Antonio climbed down into the hollow, but forbade me to follow him, as he said there was a trick to the descent. He filled his sack with a number of carefully-selected nuts, and then he began to dig in the ground nearby, explaining that also growing in the hollow were yams and cassava trees. All of these plants had been set there by his father, and many of them were very old. He dug up two ripe yams, a red one and a white one, placed them in the sack as well, and then we returned to the house. The yams would reappear later, for lunch, in various forms—roasted one day, steamed with salt beef or fish on other occasions.

Some time later, I accompanied Antonio on a trek to the family cave. The purpose of the journey was twofold. Antonio had planned to visit the cave to stock up on cave earth; in answer to my many questions about the generation property, he invited me to join him to gain some idea of the

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<sup>138</sup>'Shakers' are the dried seeds that come from any number of pods or gourds.

size of the original grant, and the ways in which it had been exploited. The cave in question lies on Antonio's family's land—not his personal course, but on the land behind it which was shared by all the male descendants of his grandfather. However, in order to get to it, Antonio took a roundabout way, with the purpose of showing me how and where farming used to be carried out before tractors came to Long Island—to show me the 'holes' in the rock which gave access to rich patches of dark earth.

To get to the roads which would take us to the back of the land, we had to leave Antonio's course. This we did by climbing over a number of the low stone walls that are used to separate one course from another—a familiar sight on Long Island and other islands like it. I asked how walls could be permitted on generation property, where people theoretically had open access to common land. Antonio answered by reminding me of the Turnquest habit of coursing off the land, and then added that any dividing markers were built entirely without foundations; one could erect walls or fences on the surface of the land, but one could not dig into the ground to place them in any way to make them permanent. In the beginning of the walk, the land was primarily bare rock, with very few patches of soil, and the coppice around was short. The rock was broken in places by shallow depressions that reminded me of tidepools—owing to the recent rains, water had collected in them, and in some places someone had placed a large flat rock over them to keep the water cool. These pools, Antonio told me, were originally guarded jealously as a good source of drinking water; after the rains his relatives would seek out the deepest ones, clean them out, and cover them with large rocks to keep them cool. Even today, he noted, wild goats and other animals used them as waterholes, and his relatives came to them to collect battery water.

Once past the rocky patch, we proceeded through a number of bush roads until we passed nearby the ruins of a small house. That, Antonio explained, was the original homestead, where the patriarch of the clan had originally lived. This and other houses were small stone ruins, and were set further back on the land than the present homes, which are out near the road. These were, of course, closer to the fields; as most of the farming was done for subsistence, the only purpose for the King's road would have been for the most crucial of inter-settlement communication—mail, visits to the commissioner, trips to school. The bush roads would have had much more practical uses. The houses we passed were very small, and Antonio remarked that most had been the home for eight or more people; but, because people used to live outside, they would not have seemed crowded. You would just sleep in the house, he said; all other activities took place in the open, in the fields, or in the kitchens.

Behind the original homestead the bush roads led past a number of sinkholes of considerable size. Some were shallow, and in these people would plant their fields—corn, peas, potatoes, and the like. Some were impossible to climb into without equipment, and here people would plant fruit trees—sometimes simply by throwing the seeds down and waiting for the tree to grow to the level of the rock before the fruit could be harvested. Many of the deeper holes had trees growing in them, and

several had rough stone walls erected around them. These walls are called 'Spanish walls' because they are built of a single thickness of stone, as opposed to the English-style stone walls which are used to course off properties. Most stones were large and flat. Many of these holes were on Antonio's family's course—'You see how my father and grandfather were blessed?' he observed.

As we neared the back land, Antonio pointed out the difference in the bush around us. Here it grew taller than it did nearer the road. The ground was richer here, he pointed out, and you could tell from the size of the trees and shrubs. There is a song which says 'The taller the tree, the sweeter the berry'; Antonio quoted that to me as he explained, adding, 'the richer the earth, the taller the tree,' and leaving me to make the connection for myself. There are no working fields left, and the road we were on—a succession of rocky patches winding through the trees, interspersed with some earthy bits—was overgrown. Antonio had brought a machete with which he cleared the bush on the path. Most irritating was the tree he called wild lime—a tree with many small thorns on its branches, and the scent of lime in its bark, but which doesn't bear fruit; 'that's why they call it wild lime,' Antonio said, 'only tame lime bears.' Eventually we came to one hole which was larger than the rest—a small gully more than a hole really. This was the one which, in past years, had contained the most productive well around. The water is still there, although the well itself has been filled in, over time, with earth; it was not a cemented or bricked-in well, but more of a spring at the deep end of the gully, sheltered by a cliff face. Antonio told me that this gully was used by wild goats which came to it for shelter, and that one could trap the goats in it by placing a wire across their access. A fig tree grew on the other side of the gully, its roots reaching down into it for water. Beneath that point was a shallow recess in the rock, where Antonio showed me the goats would shelter from rain or whatever, marked by their droppings. He took me to the place where the well used to be, and, digging his cutlass into the earth, brought it up dripping. 'A good day's work and that would be a well again,' he said. It always had water, he added; during droughts people would come from all over. 'See the blessing?' he remarked.

From there we proceeded to another gully, not as deep as the first, which also possessed a fig tree, and a series of small, broad-leafed dark-green trees which Antonio ordered me to take photographs of. 'You know what kind of tree that is?' he asked me. 'No,' I said. 'Guess,' he said. 'You don't see many of those now. Special.' 'They look like fig trees,' I said, referring to the big, fruit-producing figs I know from Nassau, with their large leaves—but though the leaves of the trees in question were similar, they appeared different in texture, these looking waxy like the leaves of a seagrape tree. 'No. They look like figs but they ain't figs.' 'They look a little like almond trees as well, but they ain't almond trees,' I said. 'No. You know what they are? Mammy.' Which I had thought of, but hadn't said, having never seen a mammy tree or a mammy fruit, having only had them described to me by people who had seen them. Antonio's description of the fruit was different from the one I'd heard

already. I'd heard that they were like large sapodillas. He told me they looked like coconuts from the outside, but that they ate like—what?—potatoes? From that I presumed they were starchy, like breadfruit.

The hole with the cave was not far from this gully—just beyond a stone wall. Several trees grew up out of it, and another fig tree stood at its edge, the roots stretching down into it. This hole was about eleven or twelve feet deep. Someone had built a cairn of flat stones which provided a pillar on which to stand to get in or out of the hole, but even that was too deep for me to reach, so I climbed down with the aid of the tree trunks. At the foot of the hole the earth was black and rich, and the rock face receded until the lip of the hole became an overhang which concealed the entrance of the cave from above. This cave, Antonio explained, had several rooms. It was also the home of ledderin [leatherwing?] bats, which meant that it was a good source of the natural fertiliser called cave earth—a product of bat dung and earth which is considered gold by farmers. Antonio led me through a series of passages into the three rooms he frequented most in his mining of the cave earth. In the middle room he stopped to instruct me in the testing of the earth, to see how rich it was: you scoop up a handful of the earth (it looks just like soil) and touch the tip of your tongue to it. If it is peppery, it is good. If not, if it tastes just like regular soil, it is poor. (That is also the test Antonio uses for the barracudas he catches. Barracudas are notorious transmitters of mercury poisoning, and because of that few people eat them. Antonio, who likes the meat, tests them in much the same way. When cleaning the barracuda, he tastes the blood. If it is peppery like cave earth, he throws the fish away—it is poisoned. If it is plain, he eats the fish.)

At the mouth of the cave were bags, a set of plates, a bucket and a rope, all of which various people had left behind. One of the plates, enamel with a cover, Antonio had left behind himself for the collection of cave earth, as he had done with the bags. The plate is used to scoop up the earth, and the bag is used to place the earth in. When it is mined it is heavy. It is placed in the bag and that is dragged behind the miner (the passages are low, and it is necessary to crawl, and in a few cases, to wriggle, to get through them; the rooms, however, are higher, and one can crouch, and on occasion stand, in them). At the mouth of the cave Antonio placed the bag, with his cutlass and the flashlights we brought, on the climbing pillar, explaining that the earth was so heavy because it had never seen the light of the sun, but that it would grow lighter once exposed. Then he returned into the cave to show me the other entrance.

This was gained by crawling through a passage into another room, into which light shone through an entrance much smaller than the first. As we crawled through that, it was apparent that the cave exited into the gully with the fig and mammy trees. I looked behind me at the mouth of the cave, and realised that it was hidden from this direction, looking like little more than a small hole in the rock.

The cave, Antonio told me, had other uses than a source of fertiliser. During hurricanes, this was where people came for shelter. It was big enough to accommodate up to twenty or more, and was well sheltered from wind and water. 'If this flood,' Antonio said, 'then the rest of the

island flood.' Moreover, because it had two entrances—one on his grandfather's property and one on his cousins' land—it was shared by more than one group of descendants. We left the cave by a road that led past the hole with the coconut trees and yams and arrived eventually at the back of Antonio's house.

Antonio and his brothers, who are all now settled on their courses, employ their lands in a variety of ways, many of them traditional. Of them all, Antonio is the most at home on the land, as he has lived there the longest; the others have all retired to their property in Long Island, and make less extensive use of their portions. However, the traditional relation to generation property is changing. Most of the Turnquest men who live on and work the land are in their fifties and sixties; the majority of their sons and younger cousins are more interested in generating cash from their land.<sup>139</sup> Migration to the cities has had the advantage of providing economic and social gains for young people, but it severs their contact with their generation property; many, including Hartford, are concerned with the opportunities for the commercial development of their interests. At the moment, constructing houses for rental provides the most common solution.

One possible exception in Turnquests to this trend is the situation of one of Antonio's cousins, a man in his forties who works as a surveyor in Nassau, who was preparing to sell a part of his property while I was there. In preparation for putting the land on the market he was surveying it himself in stages, and this action was the source of much discussion further up the road. Antonio and Gilbert, in discussions of the merits and morals of the situation, observed that the integrity of this man's course had already been challenged, as an earlier administrator of the property had sold a strip of land to the government for the erection of a doctor's residence. What was more, as the course in question was large and the numbers sharing it were small, it was agreed that selling a part of the land might be a sensible economic move; and finally, they concluded that they could not judge their cousin, as they had no interest whatsoever in the property; the rigid division of the land into courses had the effect of limiting one relative's right to govern another's course. Antonio, however, told me later that he would never consider doing the same with his. As he pointed out, 'If my own sisters and daughters can't get none of it, how I could sell it to strangers?'

The many uses to which the land was put, and Antonio's versatility in relation to it, illustrate vividly the economic potential of the system of generation property. It provides insight into more as well. Like the Wells property, the Turnquest land has

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<sup>139</sup>One notable exception is Gabriel, the son of Wellington Turnquest, who, after having been schooled in Nassau has returned to the land to farm it.

been mapped out genealogically on the ground, making it difficult to define. Precise boundaries are rarely mentioned although they certainly exist; many estates throughout the southern Bahamas are surrounded by the sorts of stone walls we passed on our trek through the bush. Similarly, like the Turnquests, many families own the wills or deeds that legitimate their possession of the land. However, the significance of these walls and wills is not what one might expect. The walls do not serve to carve up territory into one piece of property after another, but rather to delimit, for those people who live on the land, the edges of their rights; these walls have little use for outsiders. They are not, generally, marked on any map, and can be found only by people who have a working knowledge of particular areas. They also have a limited function for insiders, other than to remind them of where the family land stops; as Antonio explained, divisions within any estate are forbidden by tradition to take permanent forms. Moreover, on large estates, it is quite unlikely for any one individual to be familiar with the actual location of more than one or two of these walls, for each person has his or own knowledge of the land, defined by the use that he or she makes of it. Nor are the documents relating to the land usually employed in everyday engagement with the land, even where the land-owners live away from the property. In the case of Turnquests, unlike the Wells estate, the genealogical mapping corresponds to living people; between Gilbert's house at the upper (southern) end of the estate and Wellington's property at the lower (northern) end, the land is both owned and occupied by Turnquests.

Indeed, the above account illuminates the living reality that may surround the convention of generation property. The flexible use of the land—Turnquest land is residential, commercial, horticultural, industrial and historical when necessary, or all at once, if need be—and the interweaving of the land with history and identity, stand in

sharp contrast to the sharp delineations of land usage preferred by bureaucrats (see Jackson, 1995, for an account of city zoning, for instance). One can compare the journey through the back of the land, past the ruins and the overgrown fields of former generations, with Küchler's account of the abandoned villages and gardens of dead ancestors in New Ireland (1993). Similarly, the uses and significance of the cave, shared by not one, but several branches of Turnquests, may be likened to some of the uses of Australian land documented by Morphy for the indigenous people (1995); the 'back of the land' may be seen as the place of the ancestors, and the cave as a gathering place for *all* kin. Long Islanders' relationship with the land is dynamic, one which adjusts itself over time, and yet there is a fundamental sense of partnership which underlies the changes; the marriage of pot-hole farming with contemporary machinery and technology, as opposed to a wholesale abandonment of traditional methods in favour of more 'developed' techniques is evidence of this. Similarly, the willingness on the part of Long Islanders and other Bahamians to consider the sale of supposedly inalienable lands strengthens this dynamic relationship—and the determination of the managers of generation property not to 'steal' from their relatives, but to honour the spirit of the tradition in the sale, strengthens it even more.

All in all, the Long Island case demonstrates that family land is land essentially held in common, and the rights of individuals, while negotiable, are ideally subordinated to the rights of the group. These rights, moreover, are fluid; individuals often exercise their rights according to need, which can change from year to year, generation to generation. In a sense, one might say that the kin group does not own the land, but the land owns (or is) the group. Generation property is ultimately inalienable; if there is no boundary between the land and the kin group, if the two are inseparable (Besson, 1979), then it is inconceivable (ideally) that the two can be separated by

exchange or sale. Generation property is not defined by lines and boundaries; it is located in the memory of people, in their actions, their histories and their work.

### **Generation property and the oral tradition**

As far as generation property/family land is concerned, then, the Bahamas cannot be judged simply as a variant of the Caribbean model. Land is symbolic, it is true, and in some cases its symbolism echoes that of family land in the rest of the West Indies. Yet unlike the plots of family land available to other West Indians, which are too small to provide economic returns for all of their owners, Bahamian generation property tantalises its holders by its sheer size. Besson chooses to regard the Bahamas as an exception that proves a rule: 'Bahamian ex-slaves had more room to manoeuvre', she argues, as 'the Bahamas were at the margins of Caribbean plantation society, with an attenuated cotton, rather than sugar, plantation system.' (1995: 82). Yet in the Bahamas rights to generation property are not limited to the descendants of slaves.<sup>140</sup> Unlike family land, which appears to lie exclusively in the hands of ex-slaves and their families, Bahamian generation property may be owned by white Bahamians, by 'coloured' Bahamians who are the product of the mixing of masters and slaves, by free black and 'coloured' populations, and by the descendants of slaves. The Wells estate provides a case in point. Among the descendants of the Wells family living on the estate in 1995 were people fair enough to be categorised as 'white' in Long Island, several of them blond-haired and light-eyed; people obviously of mixed ancestry, with a variety of skin colours and hair textures, some resembling light-skinned blacks, others

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<sup>140</sup>The persistence of the custom throughout Long Island, where generation property accounts for 80 - 90% of land tenure, and whose population, overwhelmingly of mixed ancestry, refuses almost categorically to acknowledge its slave past, is evidence of this.

looking like native Americans; and people who claimed direct descent from Jackson Wells's slaves, who lived on their own courses towards the south of the estate.

Typically, explanations for the existence of family land have been sought in a number of theoretical positions. For Besson it is a strategy employed by the dispossessed; she does not seek the origins of the practice, but regards it as a means used employed in the here-and-now to counteract oppression. For others, however, it is either an unremarkable feature of a plural society (Clarke, 1966 [1957]; Smith, 1965), or an adaptation of African customs (Sealey, 1990). Craton, addressing the problem directly in an article on the subject, attempts a synthesis of the two points of view. 'It can be argued,' he writes, 'that popular customs and concepts—particularly those of "common" and "generational" land—stem from African roots, whereas all more formal legal concepts—including squatters' rights and sharecropping as well as leasehold and freehold tenures—derive from Europe.' (1987: 88). For him, the distinction between the legal and customary creates 'an unbridgeable dichotomy' that, far from according the dispossessed with a source of power, is in fact a source of dispossession in itself. As the dichotomy parallels the division between 'white' and 'black' Bahamians, the conflict that results from the coexistence of legal and customary land tenure practices is symbolic of the power relations between white and black Bahamians (1987).

While there is some weight to this argument, its primary weakness lies in the fact that not all families who hold fast to the tradition of generation property are black. A more satisfactory explanation of the tradition is that it provides a flexible method of organising one's relation to land. This flexibility may be further linked to the land's oral administration; Craton's identification of the line of fission between land tenure practices as customary and legal is therefore correct, but does not go far enough. Goody remarks of the 'legal' and the 'customary' that 'the distinction between law and

custom is ultimately based on what was written and what was not.' (1986: 129-30). It is arguable, therefore, that the convention of generation property provides Bahamians who live on the bureaucratic margins of the archipelago with access to land that they might otherwise not have, as the vast majority of such holdings are located on the outlying islands of the archipelago, whose separation from Nassau by miles of ocean has rendered them both physically and administratively remote. In practice, the administrators's offices are often the ultimate authorities on the islands, and in each settlement, local affairs are managed (according to the size and remoteness of the settlement) by the local equivalent of the Papua New Guinean 'big men'—individuals whose authority is derived from their occupations or reputations, as well as from their employment by or relation to the national government.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, the absence of a practical devolution of administration—*all* legitimate papers relating to the registration of land ownership, births, deaths and so on reside in the Registry Office in Nassau, not on the islands in question—makes the documentation of practice in the Family Islands a nuisance, something that is only done when absolutely necessary. The oral tradition provides a pragmatic solution to this state of affairs.

### **Urban Identity: land and junkanoo**

Throughout the Bahamas, then, identity is provided by land. Three forms of land tenure are recognised by Bahamians: generation property, crown land, and private property. In contrast with generation property, crown land, owned by the government, emphasises the authority of the state over the rights of individuals. Private land

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<sup>141</sup>These people may be the local policemen, priests, catechists, teachers, doctors, rich farmers, storeowners and so on. In some cases they may also be the local 'general', or chief supporter of the Member of Parliament for the area.

ownership implies the possession of a legal title for a parcel of land, generally by one specific person; legal title confirms that land is a commodity that may be disposed of or developed in any manner the owner wishes. It is possible to draw a rough geographical correlation between the three. Generation property is located on islands in the more remote areas of the archipelago; crown land is found everywhere; but private property governs the method of land tenure in those areas which are the most populated, and which find themselves closest to the capital.

On New Providence, particularly within the city of Nassau, access to land is tightly controlled by powerful elites, most of whom, throughout Bahamian history, were white. Black Nassauvians who owned land could be—and sometimes were—dispossessed of their property, particularly where, as in the case of the Creek Village of the Fox Hill area, their land tenure took the form of generation property. Black Nassauvians are therefore often identifiable by their *lack* of extensive land ownership. For the urban Bahamian, the strategies of identification employed by those on the islands—most often embodied in generation property—have often been replaced by other collectivities. In many cases, particularly those involving island migrants to the capital, the neighbourhood serves many of the social purposes that generation property served for Family Islanders without providing the complementary economic benefits. In the next chapter, I shall show how annual participation in the festival of Junkanoo provided the means of organising one's neighbourhood ties into social and political units in many ways comparable to the kin ties embodied by family land.

### **V. Tales Told to Self and Other: Junkanoo<sup>142</sup> in the Bahamas**

Junkanoo, for Bahamians, is the ultimate national symbol. A street festival held at Christmastime, it represents poverty and wealth, discipline and rebellion, competition and cooperation, creative genius and physical prowess. It is simultaneously viewed as the quintessential Bahamian self-conception and the best face turned to the visitor. Like street festivals everywhere, it can be classified as a ritual of rebellion (Gluckman, 1956), a politico-cultural movement (Cohen, 1992), or an annual invocation of the liminal (Turner, 1982a; 1987a). As a marker of identity, however, it provides Bahamians with a means of reflecting on current issues and criticising social ills, while at the same time offering to tourists a spectacle full of colour, movement and sound; and it encompasses the ideals of family, neighbourhood and social commitment while accommodating individual self-expression.

In many respects, Junkanoo is similar to Carnival in Trinidad and elsewhere. Like Carnival, it is a street parade in which groups compete for prizes, with distinctive music and attire.<sup>143</sup> These groups are judged on their costumes, music and

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<sup>142</sup>Standard morphology for the word 'junkanoo' has not yet occurred. In this thesis, I will use the capitalised 'Junkanoo' to refer to the parades and the festival as a whole, and the lower-case 'junkanoo' to refer to participants in the parade, or to act as an adjective, as in 'junkanoo drums'.

<sup>143</sup>Junkanoo music is primarily rhythmical, the central instruments being the goatskin (goombay) drum and the Bahamian cowbell. Melodic lines embellish the rhythms set by the bells and the drums. Junkanoo costumes are constructed from cardboard, crepe paper and glue. Cardboard is bent over skeletons of wire, piping or wood to create a figure. Over this are glued

performance; participants *rush* (parade) along the two main thoroughfares of the capital, Bay Street and Shirley Street, following a circular route roughly 2.5 miles long (see map). In recent years the majority of those who take part have belonged to one of approximately fifteen groups, about six of whom compete fiercely for cash prizes;<sup>144</sup> these organise their presentations according to central themes, around which all the elements that they bring to the parade cohere. The rest, both individual competitors and small groups, participate for the fun of it.

For Bahamians, however, Junkanoo is *not* Carnival. Unlike Carnival, Junkanoo occurs at Christmas, and not in the pre-Lenten season; as such, it is not part of, but stands against, the religious festivities that are connected with it. Junkanoo parades take place twice during the season, on December 26 and January 1. Unlike Carnival, the heart of Junkanoo is not calypso, or indeed any other melodic form of music, but a driving percussive beat set by goatskin drums, cowbells, and horns; rhythm is elemental. Finally, unlike Carnival, which stretches out over a bureaucratically-sanctioned two days, occurring by both day and night and finishing at midnight on Pancake Tuesday, Junkanoo occurs primarily at night, during stolen windows of time—eight hours each on Boxing and New Year’s mornings during which the Street Nuisances Act of 1899 is suspended and revellers are permitted to fill the streets.

Parades start after midnight and finish at nine a.m.,<sup>145</sup> and may be attended by thousands of people at a time. Spectators are separated from the junkanoos by

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strips of coloured crepe paper referred to as ‘fringe’ because they are expertly frayed along one side with clippers or shears to create texture when attached to the costume. This process is known as ‘pasting’, and is a technique requiring some skill.

<sup>144</sup>The total annual prize money for the competition is B\$50,000, which is divided among various awards.

<sup>145</sup>The times are constantly being adjusted to accommodate the size of the groups and their desire to complete the parade route twice before the announcement of the winners. For many

barricades, unless they have purchased tickets, in which case they may sit on bleacher stands set up on the sides of the road. For those who do not wish, or are unable, to attend, television cameras are set up in Rawson/Parliament Squares, and the parade is broadcast—live, for people who are willing to stay awake to see it, and at various times throughout the holidays.

Junkanoo may be regarded as the culmination of the tales of identification told to the self (Bahamians) and to the other (tourists and other foreigners). In what follows, I will examine each set of 'tales' in an effort to elucidate the essence of its 'Bahamianness' for Bahamians. The first set, those told to the self, will examine Junkanoo in its most familiar form, the parades at Christmas, and consider the centrality of the festival to the active construction of Bahamian identity. This discussion will encompass a wide range of themes, as Junkanoo is simultaneously the central symbol of black Bahamians' development, a metaphor for national progress, an affirmation of Bahamian creativity, an arena for social commentary and a ready tool for the education of the young. Perhaps the most enduring element of Junkanoo is found in the competition at the heart of the parade, a rivalry whose roots lie in the territories from which the groups originate. Here questions of place, land and identity are embodied in the practice of Junkanoo.

The second set of tales, those told to the other, are less commonly invoked by Bahamians as conscious markers of identity, as the tale of Junkanoo is far more commonly told to other Bahamians than to outsiders. However, some of the ways in which Junkanoo may be used to identify the Bahamas to strangers were uncovered during the Bahamas' preparation for the 1994 Smithsonian Festival of American

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years, the parades took place between the hours of four and nine a.m. (Bethel, 1991). Since Independence (1973), however, the start of the parade has been steadily moving closer and

Folklife. For the first time, the entire Bahamian identity was to be placed on display *beyond* the borders of the nation, and accordingly national self-constructions, hitherto governed by local politics and commercial concerns, had to be aligned with a new perspective, that of the anthropological gaze. As the nation's central symbol, the place of Junkanoo was hotly contested, and the tensions that arose from the event were themselves illuminating.

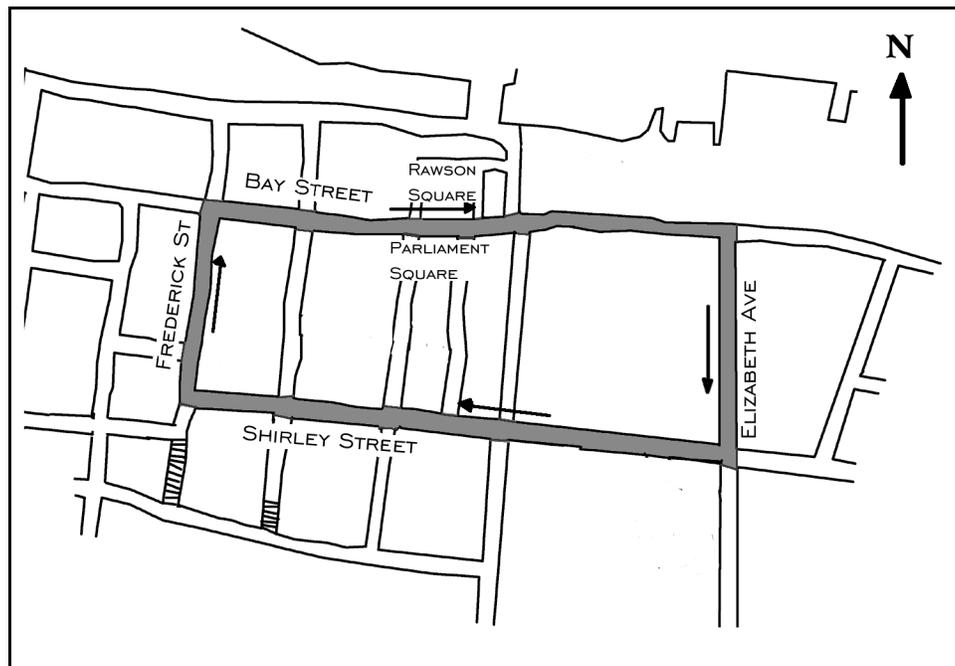


Figure 5.1 – Junkanoo route, Nassau 1999

I shall begin by looking at three of the tales told to the self. The first of these will be the very conscious political role played by Junkanoo in the building of national identity, through its reclamation of history and its alignment with the black working and middle classes. The second will be the significance of Junkanoo's occurrence during the Christmas season; and the third will be an examination of its role in perpetuating the identification of Bahamians with territory in a fashion acceptable in an urban setting.

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closer to Christmas Day. In 1996, it was set at 1 a.m.

## Tales told to the Self: Junkanoo and Bahamian identity

### *Masquerade politics: the occupation of the street*

Of all the 'national symbols' in the Bahamas, it is Junkanoo that receives the most attention. Throughout history, it has acted as a force for the construction of many different Bahamian identities. During the early 1800s it united slaves in Christmas celebrations; during the middle of that century it was adopted by Liberated Africans as a focus for their displacement; at the beginning of the twentieth century it provided members of the working class with a forum for their grievances; and later in the century it functioned both as an emblem of race and of masculine activity (Bethel, 1991). Since Independence in 1973, it has become more and more integral to conceptions of the nation. Iconised, it now appears on stamps, customs stickers and five-dollar bills; restaurants bear its name, much of contemporary popular music follows its beat, and both an art gallery/cultural centre and the national beer are onomatopaeically named after the sound of drum and cowbells. Additionally, Junkanoo is promoted to tourists as the 'quintessential' cultural event. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it remains primarily an occurrence produced by Bahamians for Bahamians. It is possible to argue that Bahamians regard Junkanoo as something that is fundamentally theirs, and that its function as a tourist attraction is secondary, as indeed, Patullo does:

...the parade[s] ... have flourished and have become a magnificent, home-grown attraction created for and performed by groups of Bahamians for themselves. The groups represent communities with a strong sense of belonging and collective identity; in this way, tourists are almost entirely excluded from participation ... (1996: 186)

Like many other festivals throughout the Caribbean, Junkanoo's roots are believed to lie in slavery and the African heritage. It is one of a group of Christmas celebrations that occurred from the Carolinas to Belize during the slave era, the most elaborate of which, according to Bettelheim (1988), was the Jamaican Jonkonnu masquerade which flourished until the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike these festivals, however, Bahamian Junkanoo did not disappear during the post-emancipation era, but rather grew, as did Trinidad's Carnival, into the present extravaganza. I have argued elsewhere (Bethel, 1991; 1994a) that the survival of Bahamian Junkanoo is owed in part to the relative poverty of the Bahamas during slavery, and in part to the influx, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, of Liberated Africans into Nassau. Unlike their Jamaican counterparts, Bahamian slaves never grew dependent on their masters for the financing of their festivities, and so the parades were able to continue after Emancipation. Moreover, just as the parades seemed about to be subsumed by European-style festivities during the 1850s—contemporary writers began to note the appearance of marching brass bands at Christmastime rather than gangs of goombay drums and cowbells—large numbers of Liberated Africans were being settled in Nassau and elsewhere, and the influence of these may be seen in the restoration of percussion instruments to the centre of the festival (Bethel, 1991). Not unnaturally, then, Junkanoo is appropriated by many Bahamians as a symbol of the African past, as well as an integral component of national identity.

Paradoxically, its historical connection with slavery is invoked by the leaders of Junkanoo groups not as an indication of the former oppression of black Bahamians, but as a symbol of freedom; 'Bahamians were never slaves,' I was told, because of Junkanoo.

[Y]ou know the only analogy I can think of is Mandela. Mandela being enslaved for twenty-seven years and being tortured and they tried to brainwash him and at the end of that twenty-seven years he comes out with his shoulders back. That's not the image projected by Hollywood and it's not the image projected by even the history books. You know? But Junkanoo expresses that same spirit that is Mandela's. And that is that in spite of the condition known as slavery, despite all of the negative experiences, the spirit and the dignity is intact and there's no sign that the spirit was ever broken ... You can see something in the music—because the music is a ... An accumulation, you know? of everything that happened in history, you know? It couldn't have got to this point without going through all of the pain ...

Although Junkanoo in the Bahamas is at least two hundred years old—the crowning of a 'John Canoe king' occurred as early as 1801 in Nassau (Bethel, 1991)—the active incorporation of the festival into Bahamian identity-building has occurred only during the past few decades. Indeed, the development of Junkanoo parallels quite closely the development of black Bahamians' own consciousness (Bethel, 1991; Wisdom, 1985). Van Koningsbruggen's study of Trinidad Carnival (1997) and its role in nation-building, which traces that event's history from its occurrence as a dual celebration of both masters and slaves during plantation times to its current place as Trinidad's foremost national symbol, has many resonances for the Bahamian case. What began in Port-of-Spain as a spontaneous expression of slaves and working-class blacks was taken over and appropriated during the post-Independence era by the Creole middle classes who now rule Trinidad, and is becoming increasingly a vehicle for the expression of middle-class tastes and values. In the same way that Carnival mirrored the fate of the black working classes of Port-of-Spain, Junkanoo is valued for its significance to the equivalent group of people in Nassau. During the early years of the twentieth century, when the slippery fortunes of the Bahamian colony moved it from depression to prosperity and back again, the parades, then the domain of the urban working classes, reflected the socio-economic condition of its participants (see Bethel, 1991). In hard

times Junkanoo was rough, disorderly and satirical, often erupting into brawls that landed their perpetrators in jail; van Koningsbruggen documents much the same for the Jamet carnivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Trinidad (1997). During boom periods—the most significant of which, before the institution of a more permanent prosperity after the Second World War, occurred during the bootlegging years of American Prohibition (1919-1932)—the festival was treated by the elites as an exotic entertainment to be promoted to tourists, and the parades assumed a different form: colourful, performative, visually spectacular. Similarly, just as the Trinidad festival has been appropriated by the Creole middle classes as their own during the post-Independence period, much the same has happened to Junkanoo. Once the domain of the outcast, the drunken and the unemployed, the Junkanoo of the late 1990s is led by middle-class professionals who wield considerable social and political clout.

For many of these leaders, considerable significance is given to the role of the parade as resistance to the conditions of the black masses. One man regards it as a symbolic struggle on the part of black working-class Bahamians against their oppression by whites:

All of a sudden black people can come over the hill and take over Bay Street and carry-on bad down the main street and do what ever they wanted to do; it was usually the strongest, the healthiest, the most revolutionary spirit of the over-the-hill people. It wasn't the people who were the closest to the big house of the massa. (J. Burnside, in Bain, 1996: 55)

In this regard Junkanoo has the quality of an occupation, an invasion of the centres of authority; it occurs at the heart of the commercial power of the white Bahamian elite.<sup>146</sup> This symbolism is still implicit in the parades. Although today they follow a circular route, Bahamians still refer metonymously to the act of attending or participating in the parades as 'going to Bay Street'—the focus of anti-black discrimination, the site of legislation, and the heart of commerce—and until 1998 the subversion of the everyday state of affairs was emphasised by the fact that the Junkanoo parades ran counter to the normal one-way traffic system of the downtown area.<sup>147</sup>

For many black Bahamians, then, Junkanoo embodies their best response to the dehumanisation of slavery and its aftermath.

When discovered by the so called master, folks (the junkanoos) would create the mimicry, the mime, the buffoonery that suggested that they were making fools of themselves; and which was instead affirming their manhood; affirming their humanity; establishing a sense of dignity for a people whose dignity and whole humanity had been artificially taken away from them ... (J. Burnside, in Bain, 1996: 54-5)

In his study of London's Notting Hill Carnival (1980; 1982; 1992), Abner Cohen outlines a theory of 'masquerade politics' that echoes these emic perceptions of Junkanoo. For him, Carnival 'is always political, intimately and dynamically related to the political order and to the struggle for power with in it.' (1992: 4). Carnivals are movements, volatile arenas in which the political and the cultural mesh and where, as a result, contests for political and economic dominance are conducted. Predominantly

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<sup>146</sup>For years, only white Bahamians could own stores or houses on Bay Street, and those stores that served blacks segregated their serving areas. To this day, the white mercantile elite who controlled the country both financially and politically are known as the 'Bay Street Boys'.

<sup>147</sup>That is, Junkanoo groups paraded east on Bay Street and west on Shirley Street, while normal traffic proceeded west on Bay Street and east on Shirley. In May 1998, however, the direction of traffic was reversed, so that now both the parades and the traffic move in the same direction.

urban occurrences, their function as celebrations of temporary freedom from care among the dispossessed may permit them to act as safety valves that benefit the dominant social structure. However, Cohen moves beyond the static model of the ritual of rebellion by emphasising the state of flux in which carnivals exist; he notes that though that model may work for a while, street festivals 'unavoidably ... [become] a security problem' to the state. Often, the *illusion* of freedom provided by such occurrences becomes an opportunity for the otherwise oppressed to make their own grab at real liberation. Street festivals often carry in them the seeds of revolt. In response, the governments that permit their existence for the purposes of steam-letting may do one of two things, or, often, both: they may tighten the restrictions surrounding the festivals, or, alternatively, they 'may attempt to co-opt [them], thus, in effect, politicising [them] on a higher level for [the government's] own benefit.' (1992: 154)

Elsewhere, I have made much the same argument for the development of Junkanoo, pointing out that the parade has been used by both the elites and the disadvantaged for their own purposes; the same festival that was banned in 1942 following the race and labour riots of the summer was heralded five years later as a tourist attraction unique to the Bahamas (1991; 1994a). The argument has been further advanced by Bain, who regards the co-optation of Junkanoo by the state as evidence of the continued oppression of the masses (1996). Similarly Wisdom, while concentrating on the symbolic aspects of the parades, supports the notion of Junkanoo's serving the needs of the rising black middle classes during the 1950s (1985). Thus, for the Bahamian, whether participant or scholar, Junkanoo is not only a symbol of current national identity, but it is also the embodiment of a history constructed by and for the Afro-Bahamian population.

*Saturnalia and Kalends: Junkanoo, Carnival, and Christmas*

Central to the belief in Junkanoo as a unique manifestation of Bahamian culture is the fact that Junkanoo, unlike most other major street festivals in the Americas, takes place at Christmas. For Bahamians, this provides not only its fundamental distinctiveness, but is also another marker of proof that Junkanoo was an integral feature of black Bahamians' resistance to their oppression.

That this distinction is not merely a pedantic one, but may have some theoretical weight, is evinced by Miller's theory of Christmas, and his application of that theory to Trinidad. In his account of modernity and material culture in Trinidad, Miller (1994) points out that for Trinidadians, there are *two*, and not one, major festivals in a year; Christmas and Carnival represent two opposing forces which together provide Trinidadian society with a duality, a tension that is fundamental to Trinidadian culture. Trinidad is not alone in this duality, moreover. Miller's theory of Christmas (1993b) discusses the 'twin peaked' nature of the event. Beginning with the Roman holidays of Saturnalia and Kalends, one of which represented a reversal of the normal order of life, the other an affirmation of that order, he makes a strong case for seeing Christmas as often, if not always, woven into a similar opposition. If the modern European Christmas, as he argues, may be regarded as "'purified" of [its] carnivalesque elements,' and if in Trinidad 'we see the emergence of first a dualism and then a clear split between the celebration of carnival and Christmas' (1993b: 28), then the Bahamas offers an instance where the two are not separated, but where they coincide in a manner that makes a discussion of both ambiguous. According to Miller's account, which draws on Wilson's theory of a dual value system in the Caribbean (Wilson, 1969; 1973), Trinidad sublimates that tension by separating the 'respectability' of Christmas from the

'rudeness' of Carnival by holding the two festivals two months apart (Miller, 1993a; 1994). Unlike Lenten celebrations, however, Junkanoo does not provide for such an easy separation. Rather, it compresses the celebration of family and the national ritual of inversion into the *same* holiday, thus increasing tension. Junkanoo costumes, like Carnival fantasies, require months of work to create. For junkanoo artists they necessitate long hours spent in the 'shack',<sup>148</sup> a predominantly male enclave far away from the family. The most intense period of work, moreover, occurs on Christmas Day itself, the Boxing Day parade being regarded as the primary competition. On that day costumes are fresh, having been prepared over a period of months; ideas are radical, innovations prized. The group that wins the Boxing Day parade is the group that receives the most prestige within the Junkanoo world.

Owing largely to its association with Christmas, Junkanoo is placed in opposition both to the culture of the masters and to the practice of Carnival elsewhere in the Caribbean. Carnival is viewed by Bahamians as a sort of accommodation between master and slave in the areas where it exists; as it fits appropriately into the Catholic calendar, Bahamians consider it to be an indigenisation of an (imposed) European festival. Junkanoo, on the other hand, because placed in direct opposition to European religious festivities, is seen as resistance to domination. Christmas is theoretically a time of peace, both physical and aural; Junkanoo, a celebration of sound (those who oppose it denounce it, even today, as 'noise'), is also a time of disorder, of fights. Carnival ends as Lent begins; traditional Junkanoo, however, held on Christmas Day

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<sup>148</sup>The place where costumes are built and stored. Originally, these were constructed in literal shacks, rough wooden buildings that might be located in the neighbourhoods and yards of their makers. More and more today, costumes are built in warehouses, unused store-spaces in shopping plazas, or even buildings specially constructed for the purpose.

itself, *challenged* Christmas, providing a counterpoint for church services, giving the working classes a chance to counter the status quo.

Despite these conceptions of Carnival, however, Junkanoo maintains an uneasy relation with it. Since 1982, junkanoo leaders and committee members have been attending Carnival in Trinidad annually, and it is certain that many innovations in the Bahamian parade have been inspired by those visits. Indeed, junkanoo leaders are divided on just what the relationship between Junkanoo and Carnival should be. For many, the facts that Junkanoo occurs at night, and remains in the heart of the city, are fundamental to its character; for these leaders, all else may change, but these form the core, the 'spirit', of Junkanoo, and must remain the same. Accordingly, costumes and performances are designed for just that setting, and created to be at their best under the unreal glow of street lights, rather than the too-revealing light of full day. This view is fundamentally political; for these leaders Junkanoo is most significant not only in its Afrocentricity but in its role in resistance, its unruly history, and its challenge of the status quo. The leaders who hold this view, which I shall call 'essentialist', tend also to stress the primacy of drums and cowbells on the parade, as well as favouring the use of indigenous Bahamian junkanoo materials such as crepe paper and cardboard in the making of costumes. Anything else is 'Carnival', and regarded with suspicion.

For others, however, whom I shall term 'progressives', neither nighttime nor Bay Street are fundamental to the parade; rather, Junkanoo's meaning lies in its visual artistry. The past is less central to these leaders than the future (the 'evolution' or 'development') of Junkanoo. Inspired by the Trinidadian festival, these advocate a relocation of Junkanoo to the national stadium and a moving of the judging to daylight hours, when skill in costuming might be best appreciated. These leaders were not at all averse to incorporating brass sections, long considered taboo by traditionalists, into

their groups during the early 1990s, and were among the first to sanction the use of melody as a means of illuminating their theme; today, they focus less on the traditional polyrhythms of junkanoo music, but insist rather on creating a quick beat that shows off the mobility of their costumes to its best advantage and makes the crowds dance. However, even these leaders regard Junkanoo as fundamentally different from Carnival, although they see the distinction as lying in the nature, rather than the form, of the Bahamian festival. As one of them pointed out, Junkanoo, unlike Carnival, retains the connection between artist and performer. In Trinidad, it is possible to have nothing to do with the design or production of Carnival costumes during the year, and yet still take part in the parades; indeed, all of the bands in Trinidad recruit many of their members by selling costumes to the public. In Junkanoo, however, such a situation does not exist. Although it is not uncommon for a musician or a dancer to commission a builder to make a costume, it is still largely impossible for members of the general public to buy junkanoo costumes, thus emphasising, for this man, the authenticity of the Bahamian parade.

Junkanoo is markedly different from Trinidadian Carnival in at least one other respect as well. Modern Trinidadian Carnival is renowned for having been 'taken over' by women (see Alleyne, 1998; Miller, 1991; 1994; Sampath, 1997; van Koningsbruggen, 1997). Junkanoo, however, remains almost exclusively a *male* endeavour. Despite the fact that many women participate in various ways, from the peripherally sexy appearances of the choreographed dancers to the comparatively few women carrying dancer or beller costumes or appearing as free dancers (see below), it is generally understood that Junkanoo is a man's festival. All but one of the major leaders, designers and musicians are men, as are all the important free dancers in Junkanoo. What is more, although the choreographed dancers are popular with the crowds,

among junkanoos themselves they are often seen as window-dressing, little more—hooks to attract judges so that they can be captured more readily by the intricacies of theme, costume and music. My position as a researcher of Junkanoo was made both more peripheral and less threatening by the fact that I was female; as recently as the 25th Independence celebration in July 1998, which was to be culminated by a celebratory Junkanoo parade, although I was given the task of announcing to the junkanoos that it was time for them to enter the arena, that responsibility was taken away from me by the musical director of the show, a junkanoo himself, because ‘these guys funny, they might not listen to a woman’.

**Society’s subjunctive mood:**

*Junkanoo, communitas and flow*

The role of carnivals and the carnivalesque in constructions of collective identity is well documented (see, for instance, Alleyne, 1998; Cohen, 1992; Turner, 1982b; 1987b; van Koningsbruggen, 1997). It is possible to examine Junkanoo in the same manner; Wisdom, following Turner, sees in Junkanoo examples of both *communitas*, the mystical unity of discrete individuals that occurs spontaneously during liminal periods, and *flow*, a similar state frequently achieved in sports or play through adhering to a certain structure or set of rules. By examining the development of the festival from the 1940s to the 1980s, he finds in its evolution evidence of a conscious building of a collective identity, as well as a powerful social drama. He traces the growth of Junkanoo from its position as an annual site of public disorder during the 1940s to its reformation as a spectacular public celebration during the 1980s, and employs the concepts of *communitas* and *flow* as opposing pairs in an attempt to uncover its

significance for Bahamian society at large. He finds that significance in the dialectic between the two major sorts of entrants in the parades.



Figure 5.2 – Free dancer, Smithsonian Festival of the Americas, 1994

Contemporary Junkanoo is characterised by the participation of the large groups, who compete for prizes, and smaller, far less organised constellations of people who enter the parade simply to *rush*. The former are highly structured blocs of competitors whose presentations follow themes members research and plan well in advance. The pieces they carry, the costumes they wear, the music they play, and the performances that take place before the VIP stand in Rawson/Parliament Squares all serve to enhance these themes and thereby collect the points necessary to win the competition. To ensure success, these groups' memberships are highly specialised, each individual being assigned to a particular section of the group and a particular task.

The typical division of a large group is as follows. The group is heralded by a *banner* announcing its name and theme; this banner, judged separately from the rest of the competition, is governed by a unique set of rules and as such is the focus of much innovation. Before and behind the banner come *free* and *naked dancers*, individual performers of both genders and men with bare backs, often attired in cloth costumes and not the requisite crepe paper fringe, which permits them considerable freedom of movement. Behind these dancers come a cadre of *choreographed dancers*, most of them female, who execute in unison a series of moves which have been carefully rehearsed and which are frequently sexually titillating. There is a widespread notion that such moves are a Trinidadian contamination of Junkanoo, borrowed from Carnival by group leaders who visit Port-of-Spain for inspiration; and in recent years there has been a tendency for these dancers to present more ‘traditional’, less sexually explicit junkanoo steps. The choreographed dancers are followed by a number of *lead costumes*, large mobile sculptures that, because they must be carried along the route by one man without the assistance of wheels, are an engineering challenge to build. Behind these come an assortment of people: more free dancers; individuals bearing lighter, more mobile ‘*off-the-shoulder*’ and *dancer* costumes; and finally the musicians, arranged in ranks.<sup>149</sup> At the front of the music lines are placed the band, people who play the main melodies on brass instruments. Behind these, after a suitable space, are placed the cowbellers, whose costumes are frequently as elaborate and breathtaking as off-the-shoulder pieces; and following them is the driving heartbeat of the parade—ranks of

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<sup>149</sup>Recently, the larger groups have begun to intersperse smaller bands of musicians throughout the procession, as a major source of both the judges’ and the spectators’ dissatisfaction with Junkanoo presentations has been the inability of the first sets of dancers to hear, and thus to perform in time to, their own music; all too often the banner bearers move to the beat of the group before them.

drummers. After the musicians often come one or two more large pieces, bringing up the rear.



Figure 5.3 – Lead costume, Bay Street, 1998/9 Junkanoo season

In stark contrast to this ecstasy of almost military precision, the remainder of the entrants, who include both individual competitors as well as groups of varying sizes and levels of preparation, participate for the fun of it. Many are attired in rudimentary costumes, and carry basic instruments. The groups, commonly known as ‘scrap’ groups, may themselves take two main forms. In one case, as with Fox Hill’s Fun Time, they mimic the discipline of the large groups; thus, while not abandoning their commitment to playing junkanoo music and expressing themselves spontaneously, they maintain some semblance of order and respectability, often wearing crepe paper uniforms and proceeding in tightly-knit bands along the parade route (see Fig X). In the other, however, the gangs are made up of collections of individual performers, many attired in costumes pasted the night before; these exhibit a level of individualism and spontaneity that is otherwise absent from the parade.



Figure 5.4 – Beller costumes, Bay Street, 1998/9 Junkanoo season

Wisdom characterises these two forms of group organisation as belonging to ‘groupers’ and ‘scrappers’,<sup>150</sup> and differentiates them according to *flow* and *communitas*. Following Turner, he argues that ‘[w]hereas *communitas* involves the discovery of a link with other people in the context of “metaphorically liminal” inverted values, *flow* involves immersion in a process involving disciplined action’ (1985: 88). The large groups represent *flow* and the scrap gangs *communitas*. For him, then, Junkanoo highlights the organisations and hierarchy of everyday society by mimicking them—evident in the participation of the large groups, highly organised, often hierarchical, and led by middle-class men—and by turning them on their head, as is the case with the persistent presence of the smaller, sometimes unruly, scrap gangs. Thus Junkanoo

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<sup>150</sup>More recently (Wisdom, 1994), after protests from junkanoo leaders, he has abandoned the former term, as it happens to be the name of a Bahamian fish, which, though central to the Bahamian diet, is also notorious for its ugliness. The latter term, however, coming from the categorisation of these non-organised groups as ‘scrap groups’, seems to have provoked less outcry.

involves a 'dialectic between structure and anti-structure, between flow and communitas, between grouper and scrapper, between government and freedom' (1985: 111).



Figure 5.5 – Dancer costume, Bay Street, 1998/9 Junkanoo season

Recent developments in Junkanoo have seen the intensification of communal participation in the parade. The late 1990s have brought with them a reclassification of groups into two categories, and the awarding of prizes in each. As a result, the pride of place on the parade has been given to the larger, organised groups who compete for the biggest prizes. The participation of scrap and individual performers, although still perceptible, has dwindled commensurably. Thus while Junkanoo of the 1980s could be

described by Wisdom as incorporating both *communitas* and *flow*, this duality may no longer be considered central to Junkanoo. I shall focus more closely on another, perhaps more critical, opposition, one which has its roots in land and territory: the rivalry between the two principal Junkanoo groups.



Figure 5.6 – Fun Time scrap group, Bay Street, 1994/5 Junkanoo season

## Junkanoo and the neighbourhood

### *Competition, land and identity*

Modern Junkanoo has been dominated since the mid-1960s by two enduring groups, the Saxons Superstars and the Valley Boys. Although the territorial aspects of their rivalry have never publicly been analysed, their links with the neighbourhoods on either side of a landmark of considerable political significance—the Collins Wall—may not be inconsequential in the maintenance of this competition.

Land tenure in the form of generation property provides many Bahamians, particularly those with roots in the Family Islands, with a source of their identity. However, as I have observed, generation property is not the only form of land tenure that is important. In order to comprehend the full significance of land in the building of power structures in the Bahamas, we must return to the historical context outlined at the beginning of this thesis.

As I have summarised in Chapter I, from 1729 until the 1960s political and economic power in the Bahamas rested in the hands of a dominant white mercantile elite. For many of these years, their superiority was largely symbolic, derived primarily from their supposed descent from ‘civilised’ Europeans, and modified considerably by the economic depressions that often afflicted the islands. During the 1920s, however, this group were able to manipulate their access to private property to gain economic wealth, and thus consolidate their power.

### *Land Boom: 1920s and 1930s*

The 1920s in the Bahamas have been regarded by historians and others as a watershed in the social and economic life of the islands for a variety of reasons. Foremost among these was the outlawing of alcohol production and consumption in the USA between 1919 and 1932. The Bahamas, a British territory, profited from ‘dry’ America not only through the ‘re-exportation’ of liquor—a practice which filled the coffers of the Treasury—but also by being the nearest ‘wet’ tropical paradise to the USA. The tourist industry, hitherto focused on the health-conscious European market, discovered the American traveller; Nassau, in particular, benefitted from the boom. In addition to widespread municipal improvements provided by the alcohol revenue, the

commodification of land was an extension of this industry. Bahamian speculators, recognising that land previously considered worthless had all of a sudden gained commercial value, moved to acquire, and then sell, as much property as possible (Craton and Saunders, 1998; Saunders, 1985b). At the same time, however, the outlying islands continued to languish in the poverty that had become total after the outbreak of war in 1914; as a result, hundreds of islanders migrated to the capital in search of employment.

During the nineteenth century, the bulk of New Providence's population was concentrated in and around the city. Laid out in the 1700s, the old town lay between East Street and West Street, bounded on the north by the coastline, and on the south by the more northerly of the two island-long ridges. The greatest houses were built atop this hill, with Government House in the centre, flanked by the homes of the richer whites. By 1900, the town had expanded to include the communities of ex-slaves and freemen who lived in the depression between the ridges (known colloquially as Over-the-Hill), in easy reach of employment. Located in this area were the most populous of the Free African settlements, Bain Town and Grant's Town; and on the southerly slope of the northern ridge lived the well-to-do of the black and coloured society.

Initially, the land boom focused on these areas, and most development took place in and around the city of Nassau. In the valley known as Over-the-Hill, speculators purchased tracts of land west and south of the existing settlements to create sub-developments for the floods of island immigrants. The descendants of slaves and freed Africans who lived there were small-scale landowners, as their plots were generally no bigger than 1/4 acre in size (Saunders, 1990b: 162). These were not unlike the family plots discussed by Olwig (1997). During the 1920s, moreover, the pressure on land ownership in and around the capital was exacerbated by the widespread

migration of out islanders to Nassau. For these incomers, access to land was very limited. A few were able to purchase plots of land outright; but often families would rent plots of land from land developers in the new sub-divisions and build houses, often capable of being moved, to place on them. To own one's house was one thing, but to own the land on which one's house stood was a greater dream.

Unlike land tenure on the islands, then, the ownership and distribution of land in the capital underscored issues of power. Not only was the town segregated, but it was small, the poorest living only walking distance away from the richest, and often working for them. What was more, it reflected the identities that migrants to the city brought with them. Many immigrants from the out islands tended to settle near one another, thus increasing the close-knit nature of the new neighbourhoods springing up around the city during the 1930s. Together with the older Over-the-Hill settlements of Grant's and Bain Towns, many of the sub-developments created during the land boom of the 1920s became the loci of neighbourhood loyalties. In the urban setting, then, neighbourhoods, and not the land itself, provided markers of identity.

The earliest Junkanoo groups, or gangs, were formed in association with territory, and provided for their members many of the social aspects of identification that generation property did on the out islands. However, the urban setting brought another dynamic to the inter-group relations; throughout much of the twentieth century the Junkanoo parades were arenas for competition (or warfare) among these gangs. The older groups who enter even today are still associated, in fact or in name, with various districts of the city, although physical confrontations have long been replaced by a fierce competition for prizes. Both the Valley Boys and the Saxons Superstars were founded by current or former residents of two neighbourhoods that exist side by side,

but whose development, owing to the existence of a twelve-foot wall between them, sharply illustrates questions of race, class and locality.

*Territory and power: the Collins wall*

During the 1930s, a tract of land just east of Nassau was acquired by Ralph G Collins, a millionaire investor, who built a colonial-style mansion on the site and planted the estate with fruit trees. The purpose of Collins' development is unclear, but has been much debated in light of the subsequent symbolism of his estate. Collins was an American whose residence in the Bahamas was in large part due to the absence of taxation in the colony. His decision to create a fruit plantation and surround it with a large wall during the job-scarce years of the depression was viewed benignly by the government of the day, as the construction of the estate provided jobs which helped alleviate contemporary economic suffering. On the other hand, the wall, twelve feet high and topped with broken glass, rough-edged shells and upturned nails, served to divide the settlement to the west of it from that to its east.<sup>151</sup> Many of the Over-the-Hill sub-divisions were developed in the shadow of this wall; at the same time, those recent migrants from the out islands who found employment working on the construction of the Collins estate settled south of the site, in an area properly called Culmersville but colloquially termed 'Death Valley'—later simply *the Valley*—'because of the dampness.' (Saunders, 1985b: 415).<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Saunders, discussing the consequences of the wall, notes: 'Collins' motives were not necessarily racist, but property separated from the black sections in the west and south, appreciated in value.' (1985b: 414).

<sup>152</sup>For complete details, see Craton and Saunders, 1998: ; Saunders, 1985a: 414-415. The Valley Boys describe their territory as lying 'between three hills, Centreville, Hawkins and Sears Addition hills' (1998). Each of these hills was settled by white and light-skinned Bahamians.

Collins' estate endured only a decade. By the 1940s the area had been acquired by developers, who proceeded to build a series of suburban residential estates, collectively known as 'Centreville', on the grounds of what had been Collins' plantation. A road—Collins Avenue—was cut north to south through the estate; the land west of it was sold to people considered 'respectable' members of the black and coloured population—skilled labourers, artisans, small business owners, entertainers, civil servants and the like—and to the east, lots were sold to white immigrants from the islands. The remainder of the land was turned into Palmdale, Nassau's first shopping plaza.

These developments, more spacious than any west of the wall, were bought by the germ of a new middle class, many of them migrants from northern islands whose bourgeois manners often qualified them for plots as much as their pocketbooks. Crucial to the sale of these properties was the existence of the wall, which remained intact in many places along the southern border of the property, and absolutely unbroken to the west. Almost immediately, therefore, the wall came to symbolise the segregation of Nassau, providing a physical barrier between people considered 'respectable' by the society at large (many of them white and 'coloured') and others of 'suspicious' pedigree (the majority of them black).

By the 1950s the western wall of Collins' former estate had become emblematic of the racism and oppression in Bahamian society of the time, so much so that it provided one of the first battlegrounds on which black Bahamians struggled for equal political representation. As middle-class families moved into Centreville, they began to hire servants from the neighbourhoods to the west of the wall. This, together with the attractions offered by the shopping centres to the east, meant that cross-wall traffic became more and more common. Rather than travel around the wall (which would

entail walking a considerable distance out of one's way to reach a point perhaps only some yards from one's home) individuals who lived to the west of it placed ladders against it and climbed over. The glass bottles and nails remained at the top, which made the journey a hazardous one, and the matter came to a head when a pregnant woman suffered a miscarriage after a fall, and a boy broke a leg in a similar accident. In 1955, then, a petition on behalf of the neighbourhoods west of the wall was presented to the House of Assembly requesting the opening of gates. A counter-petition, this one from Centreville residents, was produced, asking 'that the wall be retained unbroken, [as] there was no occasion for access to the thickly populated areas of the wall.' In consequence, the wall 'was not fully breached until 1959.' (Hughes, 1981: 41-2).

To this day, much of the wall remains, a symbol of past injustices; roads run from one side of it to the other through the passages cut in it. The spatial layout of the neighbourhoods east and west of the wall continues to underscore those differences, some of which are not so far abolished as many Bahamians would like to believe. The neighbourhoods on either side of the wall constitute considerably different territories—territories whose expressions of identity took shape, and to some degree still do so, in the form of Junkanoo.

*Saxons and Valley Boys: two territories, two Junkanoo groups*

Before highlighting the differences between the Saxons Superstars and the Valley Boys, it is imperative to point out that the two have much in common. Both have their origins in the early years of 'modern' Junkanoo. Both are associated with their respective leaders, each of whom has become a Bahamian cult hero. Each of these groups is responsible, in its own way, for the face of the contemporary parade, and the other

major groups are almost all breakaways from one of these two. But perhaps most significant for my discussion is the association, even today, of each group with its respective neighbourhood—an association which runs so deep that politicians running as the representatives of the neighbourhoods in question must seek endorsement from the Junkanoo groups before they have any chance of winning their seats.<sup>153</sup>

That said, the differences are illuminating. The Saxons locate themselves in Mason's Addition, immediately to the west of the Collins wall, while the Valley Boys originate from Centreville. As I have suggested, the two areas, although side by side, developed different characters owing primarily to the existence of the wall. Although many of the inhabitants of *both* sides of the wall were in fact members of the Bahamian *petit-bourgeoisie*, those people who lived to the east of the wall were inclined to regard themselves—and were regarded by society—as a breed apart from those who lived to the west of it. The Saxons and Valley Boys, as Junkanoo groups, have developed separate images in the popular mind—images which, perhaps not accidentally, tend to underscore the different characters of the two areas.

Wilson (1969; 1973), attempting to define specific structural principles for Caribbean society, argues that there are two fundamental models for Caribbean behaviour: *reputation*, which he associates with men, street society, individualism and personal charisma, the last demonstrated often by one's ability to best others in drinking, talking and fighting; and *respectability*, which he links with women, the home, the kin group and personal responsibility. While Wilson's model may be challenged on

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<sup>153</sup>The current representative for Centreville (who is the leader of the opposition) has not only held that seat for the past twenty or more years, but is also a prominent member of the Valley Boys.

many levels,<sup>154</sup> and while it has only limited application in a country like the Bahamas, where dichotomies of any kind collapse under the particularly fluid nature of social affairs, it has particular resonance in a study of the Saxons and the Valley Boys Junkanoo groups. Despite the transformation that has taken place within both groups during the 1990s as Junkanoo has become more and more accepted into mainstream society as a symbol of Bahamian national identity, the underlying philosophies of the two groups and their leaders are illuminated by considering them in the light of Wilson's dialectic.

Until the late 1940s and early 1950s, despite the growing attractiveness of the costuming and the relative coherence of the competing groups, Junkanoo remained an activity that was not supported or patronised by many 'respectable' members of society. Primarily a lower-class event, it was considered the domain of the lawless, the drunken, the immoral and the mad by members of the middle classes of all colours. Moreover, the majority of these participants possessed a rudimentary education, as the only secondary school open to black and coloured Bahamians until the late 1940s was the Government High School, whose stringent academic entrance requirements left it accessible only to the intellectual elites. Virtually the only members of society who could maintain some semblance of respectability after participating in the parades were the entertainers—morally ambiguous figures at the best of times.

During the 1950s, however, in response to a post-war emphasis on tourism, the festival received much attention from a government intent on attracting visitors to the Bahamas. It did not take long for awareness of this new perspective to penetrate the middle classes, and in 1958, the Junkanoo parades saw the participation of a group of

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<sup>154</sup>To begin with, although his categorising of men's worlds holds some merit, his assumption

young men whose origins, education and religious affiliation would change the face of Junkanoo. The Valley Boys, as they called themselves, came from the southern regions of Centreville—members of the lower middle classes whose parents had migrated to Nassau from islands like Abaco, Eleuthera and Andros in the decades before. The founders of the group were high school students, members of the senior classes at the newly-established St John's College, an Anglican institution which provided for the education of young men. In contradiction to the general stereotype of the typical 'junkanoo' these young men were all practising Anglicans, whose affiliation with the parish church of St George's, the church serving Centreville, would continue throughout their forty-year career. In 1958, they received a consolation prize for their organisation and in 1960, they won the parade.

With this victory, the group had changed the face of Junkanoo forever by cementing in the minds of competitors and judges alike the theme concept in Junkanoo, the artistic nature of crepe paper,<sup>155</sup> and dance and performance movements, never before witnessed on the parade route. (The Valley Boys Junkanoo Group, 1998: 1)

The participation of the Valley Boys, and their increasing success in the competition throughout the early 1960s, inspired the entry into Junkanoo of similar groups of young men whose membership in the middle classes would have prohibited their participation just ten years before. Like the scrap gangs before them, these groups were neighbourhood-based; however, unlike their predecessors, the primary intention of these young men was not to fight on Bay Street, but to compete for prizes. The 1960s saw the participation of another memorable group: the Saxons, based in Mason's Addition just west of the Collins Wall. This group, named after their first theme, grew

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that West Indian women are exclusively, or even dominantly, associated with the 'home' leaves much to be desired. See, for example, Besson, 1993.

in importance until by the end of the 1960s they were providing the Valley Boys with formidable competition, winning as many parades as they entered, and producing fabulous costumes. Like the Valley Boys, they have managed to survive the ensuing decades and are a major competitor in the parades of the 1990s, and indeed, have provided the Valley Boys with their fiercest competition since their inception.

A closer examination of the connection between the Saxons, the Valley Boys and their territories will illustrate the role of Junkanoo in the creation and maintenance of identities. Perhaps not accidentally, the home neighbourhoods of the two groups are not physically distant from one another, but are located in areas on either side of the Collins Wall—the Saxons' neighbourhood, Mason's Addition, incorporated into Over-the-Hill, and the Valley Boys based in Centreville. Perhaps not accidentally either, the ethos of each group replicates the stereotypical characteristics of the inhabitants of either side of the Wall.

The Saxons promote themselves as a closely-knit collection of working-class men who have made good. Their group is actively associated with their territory. Their main 'shacks' are located throughout Mason's Addition. During the 1990s, each July has witnessed a festival in the central park of the host neighbourhood, known as Saxorama. The leader of the group, Percy 'Vola' Francis, is a self-made man, an employee in the tourist industry whose roots lie in the city itself. Like many 'grass-roots' Bahamians, he is a Baptist—his father was, indeed, a Baptist minister—and his early participation in Junkanoo so contravened the morality of his household that he had to build his costumes in secret and compete in the parades fully masked. His style is essentialist; it rests on what he describes as 'traditional' Junkanoo principles—the

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<sup>155</sup>Until the Valley Boys' victory, most junkanoo costumes were made with coloured tissue

element of drama, raw energy, a strong core drum rhythm and a carefully nurtured personality cult. The heart of the group's performance on Bay Street lies in the dancing of Francis himself, the self-proclaimed 'King' of Junkanoo. His movements, he explains, are inspired by those performed by the leading junkanoo dancer of the 1950s and the grimaces of jungle animals; in this they embody what he freely identifies as 'the Junkanoo spirit'. Altogether, the Saxons project an image which suggests those qualities often identified with Wilson's 'reputation'—spontaneity, drama, and emotion.

The Valley Boys, on the other hand, evoke definite qualities of 'respectability'. Although their name firmly places their origin in Centreville, otherwise known as the 'Valley', their headquarters have recently moved from the original shacks in the neighbourhood to more upscale locations in the suburban areas of the city. The leader of this group, Winston 'Gus' Cooper, may be considered the original Junkanoo progressive. He is a college-educated public servant whose family migrated from Abaco to New Providence during the early half of the twentieth century to settle in the area east of the Collins Wall. The membership of his group consists, in large part, of the descendants of other Family Islanders, many of whom aggressively pursued academic educations that permitted them to enter the ranks of the middle class. What is more, the mandate of the group, by Cooper's own admission, has always been to 'clean up' Junkanoo. In the group's organisation as well as in its thematic presentations discipline, together with a commitment to home and family, are emphasised far more than a strict adherence to traditional practices—witness the group's insistence that their leader is the 'Father' (or, more recently, the 'Grandfather') of modern Junkanoo. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Valley Boys have traditionally shown a tendency to seek inspiration in the development of its presentations in the fantasies of Trinidad's Carnival, eagerly

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paper rather than the more versatile and durable crepe paper.

adopting the use of brass instruments in their performance, willingly subordinating the texture of the traditional junkanoo drumbeat to thematic melodies if necessary, and open to innovation in the materials from which costumes are made. Finally, in contrast to the religious affiliations of their rivals from Mason's Addition, the Valley Boys are unashamedly Anglican, even going so far as to have had their presentations blessed by the Anglican Bishop. Their lifelong association with the Anglican church places them, for Bahamians, firmly in the ranks of the middle classes; although many Family Islanders are Anglican by default, the public perception of Anglicans is that they are upwardly mobile Bahamians whose aspirations, like their religion, are Eurocentric.

Thus Wilson's dichotomy of *reputation* and *respectability* is replicated in Junkanoo, both in the territorial origins of the two major groups, and in the philosophies governing both those groups and their breakaway cousins. As I have observed above in my discussion of Junkanoo's relation to Carnival, two main approaches may be identified: an essentialist attitude, which borrows judiciously from Carnival, and tends to create innovations in Junkanoo which stand in opposition to Trinidadian innovation. This perspective, which emphasises Junkanoo's historical roots, its spontaneity, its polyrhythmic texture and its 'spirit', may fruitfully be aligned with the philosophy of the Saxons and their splinter-groups, whom I have characterised as reminiscent of Wilson's concept of reputation. Indeed, it is the groups who have the closest affiliations with the Saxons who take this sort of stand; for them, Bay Street is central to the performance of Junkanoo, as it is the site of all the resistance, disorder and satire of past parades. When one speaks to members of these groups, the political past is romanticised; for the leaders of these groups, Junkanoo is the ultimate resistance of the slaves.

The other approach, which I have called progressive, is best associated with the Valley Boys. The entry of that group into the parades of the 1950 was part of a very conscious effort on the part of its leaders to invest Junkanoo with a measure of respectability; small wonder, then, that the Valley Boys and their breakaway groups are far less preoccupied with maintaining some sort of historical integrity in the parade than with the broadest expression of their artistry. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the Valley Boys are most fully responsible for the current recognition of Junkanoo as a central expression of Bahamian national identity, for their zeal to claim the parade on behalf of *all* Bahamians, and not just social outcasts, has resulted in an evangelical desire to expunge all the unsavoury associations of Junkanoo from the minds of Bahamians.

The opposition between these two perspectives might be most fruitfully illustrated by the following incident that occurred during the preparation for the Smithsonian Festival of the Americas in 1994. I was asked by the Junkanoo Leaders' Association to write an article on Junkanoo for the programme that accompanied the Bahamian exhibit, and, in close collaboration with the leaders, I did so. However, the following passage proved contentious:

[Junkanoo] ... is traditionally a celebration of 'drunks, vagabonds, bums, derelicts, jailbirds' and general outcasts of all kinds ... In Junkanoo, everyone has a place—the politician, the doctor and the lawyer rush side by side with the drug addict, the thief and the layabout. (1994b)

This emphasis on the disorderly aspects of the parades was taken directly from a statement made by the Vola Francis, who, in keeping with the ethos of his group, wanted to stress the inversion of the social order that occurs in Junkanoo. However, Cooper, whose ultimate purpose was to underscore the evolution of the parade from

the disorderly to the disciplined, objected strenuously to the reference to drunks and derelicts, and asked that it be removed.

Although Junkanoo's contemporary association with neighbourhoods has waned, owing to the entry into the parade of groups whose significance lies more in the constellations of individuals they bring together than in the neighbourhoods they represent, the linking of group with territory remains. Even today, when Junkanoo is being carefully commodified, groomed simultaneously into a repository of cultural heritage, a major tourist attraction, a potential business and a fundamental marker of national identity, to hold membership in certain groups still identifies one with one's childhood neighbourhood. Consider, for instance, the following exchange which occurred on a radio talk show following the 1997-8 Junkanoo season. During this exchange, which followed a pair of contentious parades, the detachment of the Chairman of the National Junkanoo Committee is challenged according to both his group affiliation and his neighbourhood allegiance:

CALLER: Let me ask you a personal question, Mr. Chairman. What group do you belong to?

CHAIRMAN: I founded the Mighty Vikings.

HOST: So you're a Chippingham boy?

CHAIRMAN: I'm a Nassau Street boy, yes.

The significance of this exchange is considerable. The caller's question is predicated on the assumption that the chairman's neutrality is suspect owing to his membership in one group or another; as the Saxons had won this particular parade, it is likely that the caller was hoping to reveal to the radio audience that the chairman was in fact a Saxons sympathiser. (The outcome of every Junkanoo parade is a highly contested issue, and the most common cry after the announcement of the winners of parades is the chant

'They rob us!'). The chairman's response serves to distance himself from any suspicion of cheating, as the Mighty Vikings, though a formidable force during the parades of the 1960s, have not won any parade since then, and indeed were, until the mid-1990s, virtually extinct. However, he cannot obscure his neighbourhood affiliation. There is an immediate location on the part of the host (a woman in her late 30s) of the group in question, and an immediate identification of the Junkanoo Committee Chairman (a man in his 60s) with that neighbourhood. Most remarkably, she is not wrong. While such an association might prove far less reliable with group members *under 30*, or even with certain groups, the fact that it can still be made with some accuracy is an indicator of the resonance of the territorial aspect of Junkanoo groups.

### **Tales told to the Other:**

#### *Junkanoo and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife*

The indigenous significance of Junkanoo, I have argued above, lies in its association with a revolutionary past, its rootedness in territory, the competition that occurs in every parade, and the artistry it engenders. Junkanoo is produced for and consumed by Bahamians; unlike many other Bahamian possessions—the climate, the beaches, the ocean, the food—it is not shared willingly with visitors. Indeed, the place of Junkanoo in the tourist endeavour is an uneasy one. While it is perfectly acceptable for junkanoo performers and groups to take part in hotel floor-shows, and while it is not at all uncommon for social directors at the various hotels to build into their schedules a 'Junkanoo' parade of some sort, these affairs are *not* considered to be authentic, or even believed to be representative of the real thing. The men and women who engage in them do them as part of a job; they are paid to appear, and as such do so without real

regard to the essence or the evolution of the festival. Costumes are mass-produced, often gaudy, swiftly pasted and generically designed; the music is commercialised, destined for the untutored tourist ear; the dances are consciously tailored to giving the visitors what they expect. The presence of the tourist in these performances is crucial; however, that presence serves to refashion Junkanoo into something that Bahamians themselves find risible. *Real* Junkanoo is produced at a specific time (Christmas), in a specific place (Bay Street), and for a specific purpose—a competition that is akin to an aesthetic war.

During the summer of 1994, however, the Bahamas was featured at the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife. This event, an annual occurrence in the American capital, is a large fair in which representatives of various nations and peoples display their cultures. The festival is constructed and arranged in a peculiarly anthropological fashion—the participating cultures are displayed in various areas of the Mall in Washington, and are described in ethnological terms in an accompanying programme. The Bahamas' invitation to participate, therefore, required a considerably different depiction of the self than normally occurs. I have suggested above that the repertoire of tales told to the other about the Bahamas is somewhat limited; either they take the form of typical tourist brochure literature, invoking concepts of paradise, 'nativeness' and hedonism, or else they portray, for the foreign investor, images of the Bahamas as contemporary, westernised, and cosmopolitan. In neither case is there much room for the sort of portrayal of identity as was expected by the Smithsonian, which conformed rather startlingly to Clifford's (1988b) characterisation of collectors and collection. Preparations for the Smithsonian Festival therefore forced a completely new perspective onto Bahamian conceptions of the self, and required a considerable adjustment of ways of looking at Bahamianness. Nowhere

were the effects of this new perspective more directly felt than in the presentation of Junkanoo.

### **Museum without walls:**

#### *Collection and the Smithsonian Festival of Folklife*

Before proceeding with an account of Junkanoo's participation in the Festival of Folklife, a few words about the event itself are warranted. The festival resembles nothing so much as a museum in the open air, where cultures which have been 'collected' by the Smithsonian are placed on display for the widest possible audience. Rather than functioning metonymously, however—objects and artifacts representing people and cultures—the festival collects both artifacts and the people who make and use them; in fact, it is the people and their 'living' cultures who are the real exhibits.

Participation in the festival may take various forms, the most elaborate being an invitation to appear as a featured culture, the most simple being to take part as a single 'act'. The 1994 festival placed the Bahamas and Thailand at centre stage, with various other representatives of 'folklife' around them. Again, one may regard this as one approaches a museum; while other types of 'folklife' may be seen in the same light as permanent, familiar displays—many of them were from the continental United States, or at least from its sphere of influence, and many were appearing for the third or fourth time—the Bahamian and Thai presentations were more like travelling exhibits, on show only for a limited time. As a result, Bahamians were required to mount a display that featured the widest possible variety of indigenous cultural activities, or 'lifeways'. These were drawn from a number of different areas, and representatives of each were sent to Washington for the two-week period to place their traditions on show.

The parallel with the museum is a conscious one. The festival is described in the accompanying booklet as a ‘living museum ... without walls’ (Babbit, 1994: 5); the presentations that appear at the festival are known as ‘exhibits’, and the people responsible for arranging their appearances ‘curators’. Researchers/presenters are often Smithsonian employees or affiliates; these people codify and ‘collect’ the traditional cultures to which they have been assigned, find individuals and groups who best support these traditions, and prepare them for live representation. By transporting these ‘tradition-bearers’ to Washington for a fortnight to show off what they do and how they do it, the presenters function as ethnologists—they explain, they clarify, they present their subjects to their audiences, and in so doing place themselves squarely in the position of anthropologists explaining foreign cultures to their peers.

Clifford, elaborating on his concept of collecting, points out that

[a]nthropological culture collectors have typically gathered what seems ‘traditional’—what by definition is opposed to modernity. From a complex historical reality (which includes current ethnographic encounters) they select what gives form, structure, and continuity to a world. What is hybrid or ‘historical’ in an emergent sense has been less commonly collected and presented as a system of authenticity. (1988b: 231)

The Smithsonian’s approach to the Folklife Festival was no exception to this. The following extract from the introduction to the Bahamian ‘exhibit’ at the festival is a case in point:

Nassau, capital of The Bahamas on the island of New Providence, is a bustling city of banking, business, and tourism ... In Nassau can be found many layers of what constitutes Bahamian cultural life. It has well-stocked supermarkets, as well as fruit and vegetable vendors selling green-and-white pumpkins, hand-ground island grits, goat peppers, green pigeon peas, dried conch, sugar apples, caged land crabs, and bottled tomatoes. Nassau has cut stone and timber buildings that date back to the 18th century, old-money homes, new-money homes, homes that you can lift off their concrete- or cement-block bases and move to a better neighbourhood when you can afford it. Nassau is a city of

neighbourhoods, from the White-owned Bay Street business district to the Black 'Over the Hill' communities. It also has churches of every denomination.

*Traditional Bahamian culture coexists with the modern and popular in Nassau, but it is sometimes difficult to discern. One must go to the Family Islands, or Out Islands, as they are still sometimes called, where the pace is less hectic and the distractions fewer, to meet many esteemed tradition bearers in their own element.* (Franklin, 1994: 59, my emphasis)

While certain aspects of Bahamian culture were acceptable for display in Washington, then, others—more commonly used when showing off 'Bahamian culture' to the other—were eschewed as 'modern' and unauthentic. The Bahamas National Youth Choir, for example, was prohibited from participating, as its repertoire was classical and popular; the Royal Bahamas Police Force Band, long presented to outsiders as a symbol of Bahamian culture, was ignored; contemporary professional performers were excluded. In their place were chosen 'tradition bearers', groups and individuals from predominantly rural areas, whose presentations, ideally, were unpolished, apparently unconscious of performativity (Rostas, 1998), and thus representative of 'authentic', 'traditional' Bahamian culture.

The festival holds its own anthropological significance. It stands very plausibly in the modernist tradition of exhibitions and expositions, importing representatives of other cultures to go on show for the capital of America. It may be regarded, in fact, as a physical reversal of the nineteenth century anthropological effort of the 'modern' visiting the 'savage'; rather than the anthropologist going to the field and describing/translating it for his home audience, the festival brings the field to the audience (Kurin, 1994: 7). It is no longer good enough, however, to regard the contact expressed in ethnological displays as unidirectional; as Clifford shows, museums are *contact zones*, places where 'geographically and historically separated groups establish ongoing relations' (1997a: 194). These relations, although not necessarily equal, are

reciprocal, a fact that is being recognised more and more by collecting institutions; neither the collected culture nor the collector emerges from the exercise unchanged. In 1985, when India was featured at the festival, for instance, the exhibition was used by the participants as an arena for the expression of various political concerns:

Kurin details many ways the artisans and street performers [involved] shaped and stretched their 'exhibition' settings. He also explores the event's different political interests—for the Smithsonian Institution, the Indian government, and the street performers from India. The last-named used the recognition afforded by the trip to Washington to raise their impoverished status at home, to induce politicians to reconsider harsh beggary laws applied to folk artists, and in some cases to acquire title to land. Kurin's complex account of the happenings on the Mall suggests a utopian space of interaction and performative improvisation, hedged around by caste and class politics in India and by the commodification of 'folk' traditions and 'culture' in the geopolitical marketplace of national 'festivals'. (Clifford, 1997a: 197)

For the Bahamas, involvement in the festival had the effect of changing significantly the way in which the nation constructed its identity. On one level, it provided a transformation in the way the nation was presented to outsiders; indeed, this transformation was a source of conflict during the pre-festival period, as will be shown below. On another, it changed the tales Bahamians told themselves. On a more personal level, it provided me with a watershed in my fieldwork, following on from my early Fox Hill experience, and enacting in detail the various contradictions I was already recording.

### **New Tales:**

#### *Junkanoo and the Festival of Folklife*

Beginning in mid-1993, administrators from the Smithsonian visited the Bahamas and met with various representatives of government to identify areas which should be

featured as part of the cultural overview. It soon became apparent that certain methods of operation would have to be adjusted for the endeavour. Normally, the Festival Committee oversaw the planning and organising of particular exhibitions, with input from indigenous experts. In the Bahamian situation, however, Smithsonian officials found an unexpected resistance to the project; one member of the government, for instance, complained apocryphally that he saw no reason for Bahamians to go and perform in some 'mall' in Washington, as there were plenty of malls in Nassau. As a concession to the Bahamians, then, and perhaps in an effort to make certain the exhibition came off, Bahamians were recruited to help design the project. An indigenous organising committee was established, whose job it was to carry out all the preparations on the Bahamian side, and the Smithsonian officials coordinated the project in Washington. Thus as it unfolded, the display took on a post-modern aspect, with Bahamians and anthropologists *consciously* engaged in polyvocal communication.

For their part the Bahamas government, together with some support from the Smithsonian Institution, oversaw financial arrangements, and ensured that the participants made it to Washington for the festival. The administration of the project was fourfold. First, the Ministry of Tourism spearheaded the event, assuming responsibility for the dispensing of money. Second, a research team, appointed jointly by the cabinet and the Smithsonian, was created to determine the content of the festival. Third, the Ministry of Youth and Culture claimed a right to sponsor the festival, as the exhibition was a cultural one; as this ministry was not particularly rich, and as most of the researchers had been drawn from different areas, not from within that ministry itself, Culture's influence was primarily rhetorical. Last, determined to see the project succeed, the Bahamas government, represented by the twin bodies of the cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office, made all final decisions.

This division of the spoils did not make for a smooth administration. To begin with, the Ministry of Tourism, arguably one of the most powerful bodies in the country, resented having had the project thrust upon it as the result of a joint decision by the Smithsonian and the cabinet, and initially attempted to persuade the Prime Minister to break the commitment to the Smithsonian. Moreover, conflicting goals often served to slow matters down, such as when the Ministry of Tourism made a decision that ran counter to the desires of the Ministry of Culture, or when the aims of the research team did not coincide with the aims of the participants themselves, as was the case with Junkanoo. After several months of debate, however—during which the Bahamas' participation in the event was threatened with cancellation more than once—work began.

A committee was formed in Nassau of prominent intellectuals and artists, whose job it was to appoint researchers to the project. These were dispatched in teams, or 'clusters', to comb the archipelago, selecting appropriate traditional arts and ways of life and identifying roughly one hundred 'tradition-bearers' to put these customs on display in Washington. Their areas were Junkanoo; music and dance; narration; crafts; and cuisine. The research took place between October 1993 and early February 1994. In February, the tradition bearers were to be selected, but the process went on into March, not least because of various objections to individuals on party—or other—political grounds.

My own involvement in the project was as a researcher for Junkanoo. As the editor of a book on the subject and a student of anthropology, I had been invited by the Bahamian organisers to serve as a researcher and presenter, and in the winter of 1993-4 had carried out my investigation of the Fox Hill Congoes as well as a study on the New Year's parade held on one of the outlying islands. This role not only gave me the

opportunity to observe conditions at close quarters, but also embroiled me in a conflict that proved to be instructive with regard to the ways in which Bahamians view themselves, their identity and their symbols. As I was based primarily in Cambridge until March 1994, however, my contribution was limited. This had its advantages as well as its disadvantages. On one hand, I was handicapped by my lack of familiarity with the latest politics in the situation, and at times was placed in an easy position to be manipulated. On the other, however, my distance from the affair gave me a certain disinterestedness, which placed me in a position of advantage in the end. Not only did the role give me the opportunity to observe firsthand the transformation of identity initiated by the festival; but it also highlighted the politics involved in the construction of national identity, and the tensions between indigenous and foreign representations of culture. The Smithsonian Festival, for me, at once blew apart my preconceptions of what my research would be, and provided me with new direction.

My return from Cambridge to Nassau in March 1994 landed me in the midst of the most intense planning for the festival, and my assignment to the junkanoo cluster placed me in a position that, because it was highly politicised, was both very uncomfortable (for a short period of time) and extremely profitable. At this point a brief background about the conflicts inhering in Junkanoo is necessary. Its adoption as the single most important symbol of what it means to be Bahamian is not uncontested. Consider the exchange that took place during a 1989 taping of a television talk show on the theme of 'Bahamian culture'. Involved in the debate were Winston Saunders, the chairman of the capital's only repertory theatre, a lawyer, playwright and musician, and a spokesman for the performing arts, and Gus Cooper, the founder-leader of the Valley Boys, 'the father of modern Junkanoo'. Saunders, in defining 'Bahamian culture', argued that it was *not*, as was generally supposed, Junkanoo, but the sum total of

everything that Bahamians did, whether traditional, indigenous, or copied. In response, Cooper proposed that in the popular understanding of culture, Junkanoo was the central Bahamian symbol:

SAUNDERS: You can walk out on the street and ask people, ‘What is Bahamian culture?’ and they will not be able to tell you ... Junkanoo is an *exhibition* of our cultural heritage but it is not that heritage.

COOPER: I would agree with Mr Saunders’ definition of culture in a sociological, or academic sense ... [But w]hen we use ‘culture’ in the normal sense here in the Bahamas [Junkanoo] is what we mean. If you are talking in the academic sense [his] definition is acceptable ...<sup>156</sup>

The conflict between the two men was not only ideological, but political as well. Saunders was reacting to the increasing attention being given by both the government and the private sector to the finance and development of Junkanoo, compared with the relative obscurity of the other performing arts in the country; Cooper’s position was rooted in the decades of his struggle to have Junkanoo reach the central place in the Bahamian national consciousness, and he was guarding its primacy jealously. The conflict may also be expressed in other terms; while Saunders spoke about the need to create national institutions such as a National Dance Company, an National Theatre, a National Choir, a National Orchestra and a National Museum,<sup>157</sup> Cooper categorised these suggestions as elitist and stressed that only Junkanoo served the interests of the ‘ordinary’ people. These conflicting conceptions played no small part in the preparations for the Folklife Festival in 1994; of the different areas to be represented in

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<sup>156</sup>Bartlett, 1989. Indeed, this particular show was actively involved in the defining of a ‘national character’; as Bartlett stated in her introduction, ‘The national character is developed through the culture’.

<sup>157</sup>Four of the five were in fact created in 1992 in commemoration of the quincentenary of the landfall of the Europeans in the Bahamas; the theatre, already in existence, maintained its independence.

Washington, the Junkanoo delegation was the most plagued with strife. Of particular concern was the selection of representatives for Junkanoo. On the one hand, organisers were under pressure from the Smithsonian to ensure that certain academic criteria were met in the selection of these people. Junkanoo was to be incorporated into the festival as *one* of the expressions of Bahamian culture, and as such it should be represented by ‘tradition bearers’ of the same sort as in the other areas. In practical terms, this suggested that emphasis should be placed on elderly people, generally members of the working classes, whose lifelong involvement in Junkanoo linked them with a dying past uncontaminated by the forces of change and cosmopolitanism affecting the capital. To this end, the junkanoo cluster was headed by Michael, a Bahamian academic who had written his thesis on Junkanoo and who was, for the Smithsonian at least, the foremost theoretician in the subject. The cluster was composed of three people: Michael; Louis, one of the Junkanoo leaders; and myself.

Contemporary Junkanoo, however, whose roots lie in the post-war era, is the product of the effort of a number of still-vibrant men, middle-aged and middle class, who regard themselves as the conscious *shapers* of tradition. Unlike the stereotypical ‘tradition bearers’, these men are, like Cooper, well-educated, articulate, and above all conscious of their power as the creators of the primary Bahamian symbol. Unlike other ‘tradition bearers’, too, one of their number, Tony, a trained artist and the curator of the Junkanoo Expo (see Chapter I), was an influential member of the organising committee. For these, cosmopolitanism and change—‘progress’, to use their terminology—are essential in Junkanoo; and as far as they were concerned Junkanoo should be presented in Washington as the *central* expression of Bahamian culture.

As the Smithsonian festival neared, the junkanoo cluster separated itself into two distinct groups, each emphasising one of these two approaches, and each backed by one

of the major administrators of the festival. In brief, the junkanoo participants ranged themselves in opposition to Michael and the researchers, arguing that theorists had no authority to decide who had the right to represent Junkanoo, and that the final decision should be the provenance of the people who contributed directly to the survival of the festival. Michael retaliated with the claim that participants were too close to the activity to be able to formulate any reliable theory about it, and could not therefore provide the appropriate sociological background necessary for the Folklife Festival. Michael's position was complicated by party politics. By coincidence, he was the brother of a prominent member of the old PLP government, which had been defeated in 1992. Any objections raised by the junkanoo leaders about his conduct found sympathetic ears in the ministries responsible for funding the enterprise. Not surprisingly, therefore, the conflict came to a head in May 1994, as final preparations for the exhibit were being made.

*The conflict: Junkanoo versus the Smithsonian*

Fieldwork for the project, as I have said, took place from October 1993 to February 1994. Together with its sister teams in the other areas going to Washington, the junkanoo cluster was dispatched throughout the islands to identify traditions and people to send to the festival. Owing to the awkward timing for both Louis and me, Michael carried out the bulk of the research; Louis was busy preparing for the parade, and I was in Cambridge preparing for my own fieldwork. We were both assured by Michael and the Smithsonian representatives of our full involvement in the enterprise, however. Louis undertook to cover certain areas of study once the parades were over, and I participated in two expeditions during my return to Nassau at Christmas. Each of us was

responsible for writing a report and submitting it to Michael, who in turn had the task of compiling the research and making official recommendations about the traditions and tradition bearers who ought to represent Junkanoo in Washington.

The resulting recommendations, however, were ultimately the source of the conflict. In keeping with the Smithsonian's approach to Junkanoo—as one aspect of Bahamian culture, nothing more—and owing to budgetary constraints, which provided for the participation of no more than one hundred 'tradition bearers' for the whole contingent, Michael's report emphasised the participation of representatives not only from the major Nassau groups, but also from other islands on which a Junkanoo parade of any kind took place. As such, it did not see any need for the holding of a major Junkanoo parade; the conception of the presentations on Junkanoo was that they would be theoretical and descriptive, with photographs and videotapes providing a taste of the actual event. Arrangements were also made for small 'rush-outs', during which the 'tradition bearers' would form bands and give spectators the feel of junkanoo music. Tony, on the other hand, together with the the other junkanoo leaders, was involved in negotiations with the Smithsonian and the Prime Minister's Office to try and ensure that a 'full' Junkanoo contingent comprised of core members of every major Nassau group (a total of well over over one hundred people) would be sent to Washington to stage a celebratory parade, complete with costumes, on the Mall. Michael submitted his report directly to the Smithsonian co-curator of the festival, thus bypassing the Bahamian organising committee.

Below are excerpts from my field notes detailing the unfolding of the conflict.

When I returned to Nassau [in March 1994], I discovered that all was not well between Michael and the junkanoo leaders—the result of a disagreement he had had with Tony, a member of the organising committee over who was to go to Washington to represent Junkanoo. According to Michael the committee was undermining his authority as

head researcher by disregarding his recommendations. His impression was that the trouble came from the conflict of interest which was inevitable for Tony. In his capacity as a member of the Junkanoo Leaders' Association (JLA), Tony was able to make separate recommendations to the ministers responsible for the project, and was in a position to get them implemented. When they didn't like Michael's recommendations, for instance, the JLA had approached the ministers responsible for the project and threatened not to participate in the Smithsonian festival at all if the recommendations were not changed—and the government agreed to make separate plans. What was more, members of the JLA (and not the research team) were flown to Washington to look over the site of the festival.

According to other members of the organising committee, however, Tony's position was in many ways reasonable—he had simply pointed out to Michael that the researchers' duty was to make recommendations, and that there was no guarantee that the people recommended to go would actually go, as the final decisions lay with the organising committee, and with the ministries who were footing the bill.

Not long after, I ran into Tony who asked if we could meet at some point and talk about the project. We did, on May 2, and at that meeting I was told that he was very disappointed in Michael. In the first place, he said, Michael had not consulted the junkanoo leaders while doing his research, and his recommendations were uncorroborated. Beyond that, he said, Michael had not used the research reports turned in by Louis and myself, so that his recommendations were based solely on his own research. Moreover, those recommendations had not been submitted to the Bahamian organising committee at all, but directly to the Smithsonian (the implication was that as Clive, a representative from the Smithsonian, was a personal friend of Michael's such a move was made possible), and it was not until the Smithsonian had ratified them and sent them back to the organising committee that Tony and the junkanoo leaders had even seen them.

He pointed out that the recommendations of the JLA were equally valid, if not more so, as the leaders represented those people who actually made the parade happen, and as they were far more qualified than Michael to know, in practical terms, who would be the best people to take. He felt, moreover, that Michael's maverick attitude showed a lack of respect for the participants in Junkanoo, who were experts in the field (the junkanoo *artists*) and for the leaders, and that as a Bahamian Michael had a duty to treat his own people fairly. When I suggested that as an academic Michael was probably simply being protective of his ideas, Tony replied that as a *Bahamian* his responsibility was not to his academics but to his people, and that his ideas were not his property alone, but primarily that of his informants—the junkanoo participants themselves. I suggested that perhaps Michael's position was reasonable for that of an observer. Tony countered that Michael's role should not be that of an observer; that was a role for foreigners. It should be more that of an advocate.

His strongest objection to Michael stemmed from the fact that in interacting directly with the Smithsonian and ignoring the junkanoo

participants Michael was assuming—in Tony’s eyes wrongly—the status of an expert on Junkanoo. In Tony’s opinion, experts on Junkanoo could not by definition come from outside the festival. The real experts were the junkanoo artists. Both Michael and Clive, the Smithsonian representative he worked most closely with, were considered guilty of patronising the people who made Junkanoo happen, and it was the function of the JLA to make sure that such attitudes were discouraged.

On Wednesday May 4th, I got a call from Tony asking me to come to a meeting of the JLA. The leaders had decided that the article written by Michael was unsuitable for inclusion in the programme, and they had expressed their dissatisfaction to the ministers and to the organising committee. It was suggested that another article, one which was more representative of the junkanoo participants, be written, and it had been suggested that I write it. I was to go to the meeting to receive the views of the JLA and write the article.

I went to the meeting. Until then I was not sure who the members of the JLA were; but when I arrived, I found out that there were four of them, from three of the top four groups.<sup>158</sup> Among the members are the two most influential men in modern Junkanoo, the leaders of the Valley Boys and the Saxons. What they objected to most about the offending article was its abstraction. They had a copy of the article with them, which they showed me. ‘It has no spirit,’ said Tony. The two group leaders pointed out that the voice of the participants in the parade was absent, and that the theoretical aspect was overwhelming. Their main concern was that the article would be published in an international booklet which many people (not merely academics) would read, and that it would therefore be seen as the definitive word on Junkanoo. What they wanted, in its place, was a piece which would be more accessible to the junkanoo artists, more relevant to the experience of people who took part in Junkanoo. There were no *people* in the article as it stood.

Another concern was the way in which the article had been written. Michael, they felt, had gone ahead and produced it without consultation with the leaders. As a result they felt his research was suspect. In addition, they objected to the terminology he used when describing the participants in the parade, and pointed out that the words he chose betrayed his distance from and lack of understanding for the festival he was writing about. What they wanted me to do in my article was to be a mouthpiece for the junkanoo artists, to write what they wanted to say in a manner which captured the ‘spirit’ of Junkanoo. In the interview which followed, I was told briefly about the history and development of the festival over the last thirty years. I was asked to mention the *feeling* of entering the parade, the sense of danger which used to come from participation, the stigma which was attached to people who took part, the lack of respect for junkanoo artists which persists even until today.

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<sup>158</sup>The four leading groups in 1994 were the Valley Boys, the Saxons, One Family and Roots. The men with whom I dealt as part of the Junkanoo Leaders’ Association included two members of the Valley Boys, and one each from the Saxons and One Family. Roots were not represented.

(Michael's article, and the way in which it was received by the Smithsonian, they felt, embodied this lack of respect.) They pointed out that although Louis, the JLA member who had been part of the research team, had done his work and submitted his report, none of his research had been incorporated in the final report to the Smithsonian—more evidence of the disregard for junkanoo artists.

With regard to my article, they had spoken to the representatives of the Smithsonian, to the ministers, and to the project organising committee, and it had been decided that the parallel article I was to write would be included in the programme together with the original. What we decided, therefore, was that I would write a very concrete, descriptive article, incorporating the voices of the leaders to complement the theoretical approach taken by Michael. Once the interview was finished the leaders noted that it was not so much what was included in Michael's article that they objected to (aside from the terminology he used) but what had been omitted, and once that omission had been rectified (by the inclusion of my article) they were more inclined to accept his. It was agreed that I would write the article and have it ready by Friday May 6th, at which time I would pass it on to the JLA and have them read it. We would then meet on the weekend to make any corrections necessary and the article would be sent off on Monday.

By Friday the first draft of the article was finished and passed on to the leaders. That night I was contacted by telephone and it was decided that we would meet on Sunday and revise the article, which would then be faxed to Washington on Monday morning. This we did, and I dropped the finished article off to Tony's house on Sunday evening. At about 8:00 Monday morning I received a phonecall from the leaders—it was a conference call, and three of the four were on the line—who still had a few amendments to make on the piece. These I dictated—as the physical effort of revising the article, printing it out, and taking a copy to one of the leaders (all of whom had fax machines) would have delayed the article to well past the deadline (which was 9 a.m. on Monday)—and left the matter there. The next day I was to go to Long Island to carry out an initial investigation for my fieldwork.

On the Friday before, I had contacted Michael to let him know what was happening—that the JLA had not liked his article, and that they had asked me to write another. He was hurt and frustrated—as he had been hired by the organising committee as head researcher, he felt that his authority in the project had been compromised. On Monday afternoon I visited him at his house, taking with me a copy of the finished article, with that morning's corrections, and letting him know the final outcome. He was still frustrated, as he felt that the JLA were continuing to undermine his authority. I pointed out that it seemed to me that the JLA did not recognise his authority in Junkanoo as he was an observer, not a participant, and an academic observer at that, and that they seemed to perceive a fundamental opposition between academics and theory and the practical business of creating junkanoo art. Indeed, they seemed to regard the activity of studying the parade as something unfit for a Bahamian to do, as they viewed Junkanoo as a fundamental expression of the

Bahamian spirit. In Michael, then, they seemed to see little more than an academic opportunist (it must be remembered that Michael's PhD came from the study of Junkanoo—a study which obviously benefitted *him* without visibly affecting the junkanoo artists) whose work exploited the very people who made it possible.

Michael agreed with my assessment, and added that his further disadvantage, particularly in the eyes of the cabinet ministers who were acting as the JLA's allies, was his family's connection with the former government. As a result, he told me he was considering dropping out of the project altogether, as he felt that his position with regard to the JLA and the junkanoo participants themselves was untenable. I recommended that he phone the JLA, as they had seemed satisfied, now that they had presented their views, to work *with* him—though not under his authority. This he promised to do.

On Tuesday I went to Long Island. When I got back I met a message on my answering machine from Michael telling me that the Smithsonian wanted a combined article—a compilation of his and mine—and that he had met with the JLA to undertake the project, but that he did not feel comfortable revising my article in my absence. What was perhaps most disheartening was that the corrections were due by noon the next day (Friday). As I was tired and had my notes from the Long Island trip to write up, I told him that if he was uncomfortable with making any changes, and if the Smithsonian had indeed decided to go with the JLA article rather than his (which was the impression I got from his account), to ask the editorial committee in Washington to make the changes.

I tried to reach Tony at home to find out what the JLA wanted, but was told he was out at a meeting of the JLA. When I finally talked to Tony (at nearly midnight) I was told that the article we had sent on Monday had been edited out of all recognition. The leaders, once again feeling slighted, had informed the Smithsonian that the article was still unsatisfactory, and had negotiated another deal—to get Michael and me to combine the two articles. The editorial committee of the Smithsonian agreed, with the condition that they would go with the article already set up—Michael's—if a revision was not faxed to them by Friday. By that time it was too late to make the revision. Michael's article stood.

On Wednesday May 18th I was invited to a meeting of researchers and presenters regarding the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. I attended. The various sections of Bahamian culture which were all going were represented by their respective researchers, all of whom were considered experts in their fields. Junkanoo, on the other hand, was represented by people chosen by two separate bodies. Michael, an anthropologist, was the section leader; I was a researcher, and represented the academic world by my position as a research student, the administrative world of the Junkanoo parades by my history as a former member of the National Junkanoo Committee (1987-1992) and a former judge, and the world of the participant, by my floating membership in one of the oldest and smallest groups. The third presenter was a senior member of one of the major Junkanoo groups—a different person from the one who had done research. Michael and I had been selected by the organising committee to

do research and to present. The third man, Alvin, was the choice of the junkanoo leaders.

Present also were two senior members of the Smithsonian, both of whom were longtime organisers of the Folklife Festival. One was the fieldworker who had become fast friends with Michael, and the other was the festival's director. During the general presenters' meeting, which lasted from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., she had little to say, letting her colleague give the necessary information. Most of the discussion was irrelevant to those of us in the junkanoo cluster, as it stressed that the duty of the presenter was to speak for the tradition-bearers, present their traditions to the world—the exact opposite of what the Junkanoo Leaders' Association envisioned for their presenters.

At 2 p.m. there followed a meeting with the JLA, the Smithsonian and the presenters. In this case again we presenters—including the group member—felt a little redundant, as most of the decisions were being made by the JLA regarding presentations and so on; what they saw was the junkanoo artists themselves giving most of the workshops and lectures (as after all *they* were the true experts) and the academics moderating panel discussions and giving brief overviews of Junkanoo's history. As the JLA members—all four of them—entered the room, the muted hostility was evident; although they spoke to Michael, there was a coolness which we all felt. The next two hours were taken up with administrative affairs regarding the Junkanoo parades being planned by the Smithsonian, the presentations, and the availability of storage equipment. The presenters, particularly Michael, were specifically excluded from the discussions. At one point, when one of the director of the festival mentioned that the purpose of presentations was to make the tradition-bearers shine, one of the leaders asked her to repeat what she had said—obviously (and painfully so) for the benefit of Michael and his contact in the Smithsonian. At another point, when a question arose regarding one of the scheduled panel discussions (a point at which it might have been fair to ask Michael for his opinion, as the JLA had already told him that they felt his duties would be the arrangement and presentation of the panel discussions in Washington) his opinion was not asked for, and the JLA discussed among themselves. For my part, I was told 'you with us' and 'you with me' by the Junkanoo artists, thus effectively isolating Michael completely.

Afterwards, Michael, fully aware of his ostracism, told me that he saw no point in his going to Washington. At that point I felt very much the same way. The next day, therefore, I phoned Tony and told him of my discomfort with the situation. He told me that while he personally recognised the role to be played by theoreticians and students of Junkanoo, his colleagues had been offended again by Michael's lack of respect for them—this time evidenced by his 'victory' with the article, and that while he was working and hoping for a reconciliation, it was up to Michael to apologise to the leaders. Unless he did so, Tony said, he saw little hope for a positive working relationship.

The conflict was eventually resolved in the following way. Tony and the JLA succeeded in persuading the Prime Minister's Office of the necessity of holding a full Junkanoo parade on the Mall. The parade was scheduled for July 4th, American Independence Day, and was promoted as a 'birthday gift' from the Bahamian people to the Americans. Because the Smithsonian had not budgeted for extra participants, the Bahamian government paid to send an additional one hundred and fifty junkanoos to Washington for the holiday weekend.

As he had promised me in the meeting, Michael withdrew as head of the junkanoo cluster. Almost immediately, overtures were made by the representatives of the JLA, primarily Tony, to have him return as a presenter. It was made very clear to him (and me), however, that although there was room for the academic presentation of Junkanoo, it was not, by any means, the only way, or even a very important way, of presenting the festival to the Americans. Although Michael and I were needed to round out the presentation, we were not to feel that we were the definers or the controllers of Junkanoo. Unlike the other clusters, the researchers in the junkanoo cluster were by no means in charge of their area. Michael, forgiven for his arrogance, was invited to participate in the 'rush-out' as a parader; his credibility was restored (or founded) among the junkanoos by his decision to learn to build a line costume from scratch, and how to shake cowbells. When the time came, he was fully involved in the Fourth of July Junkanoo parade, rushing near the front of the group, his costume built and pasted by him, under the stern eye of Tony and the other leaders, and decorated by one of the master 'finishers'.

**Tales told to Self and Other:**

*Junkanoo, the state, and Bahamian self-consciousness*

The humiliation and subsequent redemption of Michael by the junkanoo leaders is instructive. To begin with, these actions underscore the leaders' conviction that Junkanoo is *fundamental*, not incidental, to Bahamian identity. Their success in getting away with their actions indicates, perhaps, that the state appears to agree with them. Certainly for the government, the power of the Junkanoo Leaders' Association was incontrovertible; as such, in the conflict, the ministers supported the JLA and ensured that its demands were met. While it is indisputable that Michael's connection with the former government provided him with very little recourse, it is equally undeniable that the new FNM government took official steps to institutionalise the primacy of Junkanoo in the national consciousness. From the establishment of the Junkanoo Expo to the creation of a Junkanoo unit under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Culture, the government's commitment to satisfying the JLA is unequivocal. Rather than accepting the argument that Junkanoo is only one of a range of Bahamian cultural expressions, the state seems to accept the idea that it is the *most important* national symbol.

Further, Cooper's insistence that Junkanoo is representative of *all* Bahamians was upheld for both Michael and me (members of the academic elite) as well as for everyone else during the Smithsonian parade; when the parade occurred on Monday July 4, all elements of Bahamian society were represented. In that parade, distinctions were abolished. On the second lap of the rush, the marshalls forming a barrier between the crowds and the participants joined in, as did several of the spectators. Group leader followed group leader, and boundaries between Saxons and Valley Boys, junkanoo and researcher, spectator and participant, Bahamian and American, collapsed.

In this regard, one can see the fundamental Bahamian conception of Junkanoo at work—the festival’s ability to take anything into itself and remake it. One of the most popular and persistent folk etymologies of the festival’s name describes this quality effectively: the name, it is said, comes from the taking of *junk* and making it *anew* (National Junkanoo Committee, 1988). In Tony’s words:

[Junkanoo] has everything in it. That’s the amazing thing about Junkanoo, that once a costume goes to Bay Street it becomes a part of Junkanoo. Once a rhythm goes to Bay Street it becomes a part of Junkanoo. And nothing is ever thrown away. I think that that’s the whole spirit of it.

In the process of being turned from a tale told exclusively to the self into one designed to be told to others, then, Junkanoo became a site of contestation. Perhaps in keeping with Cooper’s sense that Junkanoo is the ultimate expression of Bahamian identity, the leaders were active in resisting definition from the outside; they regarded the strictures of the Smithsonian with suspicion, and chose rather to tell the tale from their own perspective. For them, Michael assumed the status of a collaborator, a betrayer of his culture; the leaders were particularly sensitive to the fact that, as the chosen representative for the Smithsonian, Michael’s focus was on the perspective of the ‘other’; thus, for them, the ‘outsider’ was a Bahamian. As Tony explained:

Well, here’s what I told Michael, right? I told Michael that while the Smithsonian has its format and its restrictions, I believe that that format was designed to allow the European academic to explain the tribes in New Guinea, and you need to be very conscious that that is the format that they are fitting you into. And here, I told him, he had a situation where he’s talking about his people. His heritage and his blood and the blood that he saw spilled in the streets by these people who are his brothers and sisters and there’s no feeling that there is any identification with that, you know. And I believe that ... the way to attract attention is to shake people up, and to fit, I told him, fit right into that mold that the Smithsonian provides, they’re gonna fall asleep on you, you know? Not gonna be impressed. They want something to, to criticise, they want something to argue against, they want something that breaks ground, and something that causes a little debate, you know, they want to have meetings on what you

write, you know what I mean? And they they can—because you really, you really know the language, you really qualify to communicate at that level. So when you shake em up, you get an opportunity to further develop the ideas of them, you know?

Clifford, writing of reciprocity in museum contact zones, observes that during the 1985 participation of India as a featured culture at the Smithsonian Festival of Folklife,

the sponsoring museum was obliged to modify its objectifying modes of display to accommodate visitors who thought of the occasion as just another fair, this time on the Mall in Washington, D.C. As organizer of the event, Kurin was caught between the needs of the performance and those of institutional order. His daily exhortations to the monkey-men of Mela to get out of the trees, with threats of possible arrest by park police, 'were taken neither as official warnings nor as stage directions but as straight lines to be incorporated into the performance routine for the enjoyment of the audience'. (Clifford, 1997a: 197)

Perhaps even more than the Indian presentation, the Bahamian exhibit refashioned the Smithsonian's objectification to suit itself. The timing of the festival was adjusted to accommodate both American Independence (July 4th) and Bahamian Independence (July 10th. Normally, the festival begins in the last week of June and ends on the holiday weekend, but for the Bahamians' sake it began a week later, so that the Fourth of July occurred during the first weekend. Security and festival dynamics had to be rethought in order to stage the Junkanoo parade; the costumes for the event, built offsite in Nassau, necessitated the navigation of American shipping and customs regulations; even the internal hierarchy of the festival had to be modified to accommodate the junkanoos.

In the same essay, Clifford balances his account of reciprocity with exhortations to be wary of the 'exploitations' that occur in museum contact zones. As he argues,

[a]n ongoing ideological matrix governs the understanding of 'primitive' people in 'civilized' places. As Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña

discovered when they performed a broad satire in which 'undiscovered' Amerindians were confined in a golden cage, more than a few visitors took them literally. Fusco ... discerns an 'other history' of intercultural performance, which runs from Columbus' kidnapped Arawacs [sic] and Montaigne's 'cannibals', to populated 'villages' and 'streets' at world exhibitions ... She extrapolates the history to include all more or less coerced performances of identity: the spectacularization of 'natives' in documentary films or the collection of 'authentic' Third World art (and artists) for exhibitions ... A growing body of writing has begun to provide details of this quite extensive and continuous history of exhibitionary contacts ... It reveals the racism, or at best the paternalist condescension, of spectacles which offered up mute, exoticized specimens for curious and titillated crowds. (Clifford, 1997a: 197-8)

It is undeniable that the Festival of American Folklife may be slotted into this tradition, and that the public that attends the festival is perfectly capable of taking satire produced by Third World people literally. Indeed, an exchange that occurred between one of the visitors to the festival and a Bahamian illustrates this. In the hours leading up to the Junkanoo parade on the Mall, the drummers built a fire out of cardboard and newspaper, and gathered around it with their drums. The purpose of the fire was, quite simply, to heat the drums, which, made out of goats' skins stretched tightly over metal barrels, needed to be 'tuned' before the parade. When placed by the fire the metal barrels expand, stretching the skins even tighter and producing a ringing tone that is valued in junkanoo music. A young woman, observing this activity, asked a Bahamian bystander if it was some sort of exotic sacred ritual; he answered that it was. Although his remark was sarcastic, the woman took it literally, especially after another Bahamian, this time a junkanoo, added enthusiastically that *each* Junkanoo group had its *own* set of fire-rituals that it performed before every parade.

Perhaps the most tangible example of exploitation on the Mall lay in the prohibition placed on the selling of goods anywhere but in specially-sanctioned festival shops. All artifacts produced by the 'tradition bearers' were for display only; if

individuals wished to sell their work, they had to do so through the Smithsonian, which imposed a considerable price mark-up on the goods. Many Bahamians, for whom sale of artifacts to tourists was a daily part of their livelihood, complained about this regulation.

Yet to presume that the Bahamian participation in the festival was subject to cultural exploitation is merely to scratch the surface. Bahamians, engaged in tourist-inspired cultural brokerage for the better part of a century and a half, are nothing if not at home with the gaze of the 'other'. So at ease are they with their role as the object of white people's attention that many of the elderly 'tradition bearers' insisted upon referring to the Americans who attended the festival at the Mall as 'tourists', although it was the Bahamians who were in fact stranger/tourists in the American capital. Moreover, many of the artisans simply ignored the prohibition on selling their work directly to visitors, and at least one of them went home to Nassau richer than he had left. As such, the question of exploitation, together with the expected flow of power relations, must be adjusted if one is to understand the Bahamas' appearance on the Mall.

Perhaps it is only fitting that Junkanoo should be regarded by the state as the ultimate Bahamian national symbol, for it embodies the fluidity and change that lie at the heart of Bahamian national identity. In Washington, Junkanoo took on a new aspect, while at the same time appearing to remain unchanged. Junkanoo in this context was different from both the touristic Junkanoo sold to others and the Junkanoo performed for Bahamians. In the parade on the Mall, neighbourhood affiliation was not relevant; the solidarity of the junkanoos was far more important than their differences. Nevertheless, these differences were never entirely obscured, but were simply subsumed by the need to create a unified parade for American eyes; in the Junkanoo

tent it surfaced in numerous small ways, from discussions about the design and building of costumes to the rushing of delegates in conclaves arranged according to group. Unlike the boatbuilders elsewhere in the Bahamian 'exhibit', who all built the same boat, each group provided its own lead costume; moreover, it was possible to discern a hierarchical, almost evolutionary distinction between the Nassauvians, the people from Freeport (considered almost as good as Nassauvians) and people from elsewhere in the archipelago.

In the wake of the Smithsonian Festival of Folklife, then, it is possible to see the long-term effect of these tales told to the other on the tales told to the self. To begin with, the Junkanoo Leaders' Association has gained official status, and is now firmly entrenched in the day-to-day administration of Junkanoo. It is represented on the National Junkanoo Committee, now reincarnated as a Junkanoo Commission led jointly by administrators of the parade and junkanoo leaders, and at least two leaders are employed in the Ministry of Youth and Culture as permanent Junkanoo consultants.

In a broader perspective, the state has adjusted somewhat its presentation of the self to the other. 'Tradition' has been accorded a place in this presentation, as evinced by the erection, just outside Nassau, of a permanent 'heritage park' modelled on the Smithsonian Festival site. Here a variety of touristic/cultural events take place. The park, fully appropriated by Bahamians, has itself become a contact zone; throughout the year it is the site of the weekend 'fish-fry', where tourists and Bahamians alike gather to eat fish and conch prepared in the traditional manner, and to listen to Bahamian performers. Similarly, the Bahamian music and crafts industry experienced a revival of varying degrees as a result of the participation in the festival. Junkanoo artifacts and Bahamian straw work (recognised in Washington by American

experts as being among the finest in the world) may now be bought on Bay Street, and Bahamian musicians are more popular among Bahamians than before the festival.

Nevertheless, the status of intellectuals in the creation of tales told to the self remains peripheral. As such, their frustration continues to be expressed through organisation such as the Bahamian Association for Cultural Studies (BACUS). The tales told to both self and other are communal tales that resist reification by the academic elites; they are fluid, contextual, and above all, they are commodifiable. Like the sea itself, Bahamian identity belongs to, and is defined by, *all* Bahamians, and all Bahamians must chart their own courses through the possibilities that exist.

## Conclusion

### *Navigations: negotiating the self in the Bahamian nation*

National identity in the Bahamas, I have argued throughout this thesis, is a fluid phenomenon, difficult to investigate in expected ways. I have tried to navigate an account of Bahamian identity around four elements that I contend are central to the self-identification of most Bahamians: the 'ideal community', symbolised by Fox Hill; the archipelago itself, which mirrors geographically the fragmentation and unity of Bahamians' identities; the embodiment of family links and genealogical ties in land; and the very conscious imagination of self that occurs each year in Junkanoo.

Stefano Harney (1996), manoeuvring his own account of Trinidadian national identity through literature, concludes his work by comparing that identity to a particular manifestation of carnival known as 'mud mas'.

Mud mas is played on jouvert morning, really the middle of the night before Carnival Monday. The carnival celebrants march the streets covered in mud, oil and only a few clothes, and carrying signs mocking politics or recalling mythological figures of the Carnival. Covered in mud and oil, who is who, from what class, race and religion, nobody can guess. Even the gusto of the gyrations of the celebrants cannot hint at class or race. The celebrants are quick to point out that sometimes the most raucous dancers come from money up on the hill. Among the play of metaphors I have picked up and discarded wandering through the imaginations of the Trinidadian nation, the image of the mud mas stays with me as the most enduring. (1996: 193)

The parallels between 'mud mas' and Junkanoo, particularly between the chaotic appearance of the revellers in the former and the scrap groups in the latter, are tempting to follow. It would be easy to conclude, as junkanoos themselves assert, that all of Bahamian identity may be collapsed into the festival, and is played out each Christmas.

However, to end there would be too simple. Junkanoo, although adopted by the state as the central symbol of Bahamianness, is (I have argued) too rooted in place, class and colour to stand for the whole Bahamas, where identification is various and selfhood fluid.

Moreover, to end by seeking a comprehensive metaphor for Bahamian identity without simultaneously incorporating myself into that identity would be incomplete. My position as researcher and writer in this dissertation is problematic. I am both 'observer' and 'informant'; my past roles as writer, teacher and junkanoo worker enabled the people I 'studied' to interact with me in ways that were quite different from the ways in which they might have done with an anthropologist who was not Bahamian. My membership in my society, both as an intellectual and a representative of a certain family, affected my fieldwork.

To end this thesis conventionally, summarising my arguments as though they were not the result of my very personal engagement with my subject, would be false. However, it would be equally misleading to categorise my role merely as that of 'native anthropologist'—a concept that is complicated at the best of times. As such, I shall engage a theory of autoethnography that will seek to place myself in the discourse of identity that I have invoked throughout this work. If Bahamian national identity is a fluid, contextual thing, and if all Bahamians must navigate their own courses within that identity, then this dissertation itself is both an account of that process *and* one example of such a course. I began by observing that Bahamian intellectuals are often dubious of the idea of the Bahamas' having a national identity. Yet I am one of these intellectuals, and I am writing *not merely* as a detached anthropological observer, but also as a Bahamian. I want to conclude with a brief consideration of the implications of that fact.

### **Anthropology 'at home': self, other, and being in between**

It has become routine to regard the conduct of ethnography not as a detached, objective exercise, but as a collaboration between the student and the studied, the creation of a meaningful 'fiction' (Clifford, 1986a; Geertz, 1993 [1973]) that recognises the creative activity of both the ethnographer and the subject (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Watson, 1999). Not quite so common is the recognition that many current ethnographers are studying 'at home'; moreover, often when the recognition is made, the implied 'home' is part of what Lavie and Swedenburg have termed 'the Eurocenter' (see Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Passaro, 1997). More and more often, however, ethnographers are 'natives' who are studying their own societies *on the periphery*—a fact which brings with it a considerable number of questions to be answered.

In an article on her own problems of auto-ethnography, Motzafi-Haller (1997) raises some of these questions in ways that are deeply resonant for me.

Will ... writing about my inner conflicts, the personal and epistemological questions that underlie the project of doing an autoethnography, help me resolve and work through the long and agonizing process of writing the book? Can I indulge myself, or even feel comfortable, in such fashionable postmodern 'navel gazing'? Or is there a more valuable, theoretically relevant interest in these reflections? (1997: 197-8)

Like myself, she undertakes to study 'her own' society.<sup>159</sup> Like myself too, she has been living in what she calls 'academic exile' (1997: 197) for a number of years, and finds the prospect of engaging with her 'own' society profoundly unsettling. Her article probes the sources of that uneasiness in ways that find fundamental echoes in my own

experience—for example, the problem of separating what she terms the ‘academic/critical voices’ in her head from the ‘authentic voice’ which is supposed to be her own. She recognises that even her reflexivity is ‘fragmented’:

I needed to examine my own dual experience as ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ anthropologist/scholar ... I also realized that my earlier explorations of my dilemma framed only as those of a ‘native scholar’ were partial, incomplete, and ultimately distorting. (1997: 198-9)

Yet writing in the standard academic mode is unsatisfying to her. As she points out, “‘academic’ writing should be ... detached, objectified, ‘rational’ ... statements that [express] anger and visceral feelings of rage should be censored out of any calm ‘academic’ conclusion.” (1997: 201). Her position within Israeli society limits her ability to be thus disinterested (1997: 207). Thus she makes a case for incorporating her personal position into her work, arguing that that position affects what she chooses to study.

In my situation, my own identity as a Bahamian influenced fundamentally my initial thinking about the broader national identity. Having observed, as a teacher of English, a wide gap between the spoken and written expressions of even the most able of my students, my first argument proceeded from the idea that Bahamian society is an *oral* rather than a *literate* one, and that nationalism is created and perpetuated not in written form, but in many other, often orally-communicated, media. Having read Goody’s accounts of orality and the organisation of society (1977; 1986; 1987), I saw everywhere evidence that the Bahamas was a contemporary, postcolonial example of an

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<sup>159</sup>That is, the Mizrahim of Israel, who, being Jews of Arab, rather than European, extraction, are problematic in questions of Israeli national identity.

oral society. The first draft of this dissertation was constructed around my attempt to demonstrate the relevance of Goody's ideas to the making of the Bahamian nation.

As I wrote the thesis, however, the rigid binarism of the theories behind my original thinking was challenged by the fluid nature of my society. While I believe even now that many of the observations about 'literate' and 'oral' cultures may retain heuristic resonance for the Bahamian situation, the distinction is by no means adequate. Bahamians speak, but they also write. Intellectuals exist, and are taken to task as impractical dreamers, or ignored; nevertheless, papers are written, theses produced, and conferences held. Generation property changes hands, but land remains paramount to self-conceptions; Bahamians still view their identities as inscribed on the ground. National identity is promoted to both self and other in a hundred different ways, but Junkanoo remains a constant marker of Bahamianness.

Throughout all this, I remain incorporated into this account of Bahamian identity as a researcher and a Bahamian all at once. This fact proved problematic for the professors reviewing my research proposal in 1994. My desire to study Fox Hill, which was where the fieldwork began, was looked at askance by them, as they seemed to feel that my investigating a community some five minutes distant from my own home was fraught with difficulties, not least of which was the compromising of my ability to be 'objective'. It was their suggestion that I conduct a parallel study of a more traditional kind—hence my two-month stay on Long Island. Following the conditional acceptance of my proposal, I too regarded my focus on Fox Hill as potentially suspect—not so much because I would be studying 'my' own community (as I have argued, I can in no way be considered a 'Fox Hill person', despite the proximity of my parents' home to the community), but because in *anthropological* terms I appeared 'too' engaged in my subject. I spent the first months of my fieldwork anxiously seeking a legitimate topic,

an authentic 'place' upon which to focus my attention—something to exoticise my subject enough to make my thesis acceptable to Cambridge.

In the 'field', my research was equally fraught with the tension generated by my position as both researcher and Bahamian. I happened upon the question of national identity by accident. Ironically, it was my initial close focus on Fox Hill that drew my attention outward, together with another 'accident'—my rather guilty participation in the Smithsonian enterprise. As a researcher and student, I doubted the direct relevance of that involvement to my ethnographic project, and worried that the time it necessitated 'away from the field' would hurt my research. Yet as a Bahamian, there was no way I was going to miss an opportunity to participate in the Festival of the Americas. As it happened, my involvement in that event provided the turning point for my research—connecting me with the man I have called Antonio, showing me the disjuncture between the 'pure' anthropological representation of 'authentic' Bahamians and our own national realities, revealing the very conscious machinations of state officials to try and make *their* view of Bahamian identity 'fit' with the view that the American anthropologists held of it.

At first, I took comfort in the fact that, as an anthropologist trained in Cambridge, I was both 'Bahamian' and 'other'. Indeed, as Strathern pointed out in 1987, not even the local anthropologist can be fully 'at home' in her community when undertaking the anthropological project.

The ethnographic text [is] hardly contiguous with indigenous narrative form; one [is] not rendering back to the residents of the village an account immediately contiguous with those they had given, as social history or as biography might be regarded. It is clear that simply being a 'member' of the overarching culture or society in question does not mean that the anthropologist will adopt appropriate local cultural genres. On the contrary he/she may well produce something quite unrecognizable. Commonsense descriptions are set aside. Indigenous reflection is

incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so there is always a discontinuity between the indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself. These derive from a specific theoretical focus which may make intelligible the anthropologist's behaviour but not necessarily what he/she writes. Attempts to make such accounts more accessible rest either on educating the audience anthropologically, or on abandoning the traditional ethnographic genre in favour of a popular one—a history or a report. (1987: 18)

Initially, it seemed as though her contention described admirably my paradox. My thesis originally addressed the scarcity of concrete (literate) evidence of that identity, and chose, somewhat randomly, four 'tales' of selfhood that might be studied instead. At the same time, however, I was painfully aware that the study itself took the very literate, concrete form of a text intended for doctoral submission. Moreover, I was conscious at all times that it was intended ultimately (and in my mind most importantly) for publication in the Bahamas to serve as a nationalistic building-block. I am a Bahamian writer, after all, and this endeavour has always been informed by my own consciousness of the role of this work in (to coin the BACUS phrase) *uncovering the Bahamian self*. Strathern's suggestion—that the local anthropologist, when studying her society, 'may well produce something quite unrecognizable'—was therefore particularly resonant for me.

Yet Strathern's argument ultimately proved too static for my purposes, too buried in the idea that *place* and *person* are fixed categories, and that the anthropological project is one whose task is the description of the *other*. In her reading, the anthropological exercise is one whose commitment to *describing* and *translating* the 'other' exoticises even the most familiar. In my case, however, the complexities of my position as both 'self' and 'other' are many. I am both Bahamian and absent from the Bahamas, having written the vast majority of this thesis in Cambridge and Canada. All

my known ancestors, and most of my kin, reside in the Bahamas, and yet, owing to my own fair complexion, when I walk down Bay Street I am almost always taken for a tourist. I am the person who, depending on which island I visit, am classified (by my fellow-Bahamians) as 'white', 'brown' or 'black'; moreover, I am a woman investigating the very male enclave of Junkanoo. During my own research I slipped constantly between roles of 'cousin' and 'stranger', 'self' and 'other', balanced precariously between the requirements of Cambridge to be 'objective' and the admonition of my cousin Tony to remember always that what I am studying is '[my] heritage and [my] blood and the blood ... spilled in the streets by these people who are [my] brothers and sisters.' Moreover, my dilemma is growing more and more common in anthropology as a whole as members of groups formerly the objects of anthropological study become anthropologists themselves. Motzafi-Haller frames it thus:

... one's positioning within marginalized communities—of ethnic, race, religion or gender—shapes not only one's research interest and the epistemologies one chooses in developing such research, it also sensitizes one in conscious and/or unconscious ways to look at practices of exclusion and perhaps to write in ways that do not accept the status quo. I say 'perhaps' because it is clearly a more entangled subject. ... The point here is not one's indigenous qualifications but rather the connection that is always there between the researcher's positioning in society and history and the kind of research agenda and understanding such personal background shapes. (1997: 216-217)

*Multi-siting: writing the self into the text*

How, then to end this paradox? I have chosen throughout this thesis to affect a stance that is in keeping with the requirements of 'objectivity' outlined for me in 1994; I have elected *not* to engage more broadly in reflexivity. Yet to end without some self-consideration would be dishonest. As such, I shall turn to Marcus' (1998a) concept of a 'multi-sited' ethnography.

Taking his cue from the same developments in global culture as Clifford does in *Routes*, Marcus critiques the standard ethnographic process, arguing that although theories have adapted to the current global fluidity, the *methods* espoused by anthropologists have by and large remained the same. These methods, designed for the functionalist project, are largely unsuited for the study of what Marcus acknowledges are 'cultures ... increasingly in circulation' (1998a : 5). What is needed is a new approach to the conduct of fieldwork, a devising of new methods of approaching the field.

Marcus' solution is the 'multi-sited research imaginary', which meets several requirements at once. The idea of the western anthropologist studying the exotic 'other' is growing increasingly artificial in a world of collapsing geographical boundaries; not only are isolated subjects difficult to locate, but the likelihood of the ethnographer herself *not* being 'other' is shrinking. Without doing away with the centrality of ethnography in anthropology, Marcus proposes a complete rethinking of the process of *doing* ethnography, one which merges the fluidity of both subjects and ethnographer, and which uses this fluidity in the design and conduct of the fieldwork.

Particularly relevant to my predicament—the so-called 'native' anthropologist engaging with the familiar—is Marcus' concept of embodying the personal within anthropological research. Far from accepting the idea, current for years in many traditional approaches to ethnography (and implicit in the Cambridge research committee's uneasiness about my initial project), that the ideal ethnographic stance is one of academic detachment—that 'ethnography that begins with the self is suspect as leading to a kind of digression from the proper subject of research' (1998a: 15)—he advocates an *incorporation* of the personal into the ethnographic project. It is from one's

own engagement with the material under investigation that gives that material its power. Indeed,

[t]he projection of these affinities from the realm of the more personal to the delineation of more generic socio-cultural problems and issues is the key move which gives a project substance and force, and also more legitimacy in the mainstream tradition of social science writing. (1998a: 15)

As such, in this conclusion, I hope to show that my own identity is as fluid and changeable as the identity I claim is national. In closing, some questions stand out: would another Bahamian, not so ambiguously situated as I, have read their own identity as one of mutability? Is the archipelago as fundamental a symbol of self as I argue? And what would a foreign anthropologist have found? This dissertation is as much a product of my own situation as it is anything else.

### **Riotous identity in the Bahamas**

That said, I shall resume my argument. ‘Immutable’ symbols of Bahamianness, ‘quintessential’ elements of our national spirit, ultimately, like the statues in the square or the straw market or the flag, melt when you look at them too long. The questions remain. Is Fox Hill one village, or three? Does Junkanoo stand for us all, and if so, which is more central—the grandeur of the big groups, or the spirit of scrap, our own ‘mud mas’? Who really belongs here, and whose history is right? We do not have the answers. But do we need them?

Perhaps the truest answer embraces all possibilities. In the various tales about Bahamian national identity one may find different emphases which can provide each individual inhabitant with her own sense of belonging. In all these histories are found the common theme of extensive land ownership, independence from the city, and a strong sense of self. How interesting it becomes, then, that the history inscribed on the

pillar on the parade proclaims the oneness of the three: The Creek, Fox Hill and Sandilands Village are one and the same.

And that brings me to my final thought. If travel and movement are natural activities in our archipelagic nation, then perhaps the migration of identities is natural as well. Clifford asks the crucial question: 'what would happen ... if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences?' (Clifford, 1997c : 2-3)

What would happen, indeed, is what happens in the Bahamas. When travel is untethered, collective life is recognised to be made up of many different routes. Identity can freely be regarded not as a garden planted with trees, but as a sea spotted with islands, and one's own reality as a series of migrations among them. If touchstones change, so what? Landmarks look different when seen from the ocean. The physical archipelago is mirrored by a cognitive one, an archipelago in the minds of Bahamians that allows us to accept our multiple realities as easily as we accept the idea of many islands, one nation. We know not one identity but several, and we navigate among them, landing now here, now there, as it suits us. We prefer to emphasise flux over fixity, change over stagnation, the reshaping of the present in spite of, or perhaps to spite, the past. If we seek to imagine our national identity as some sort of cultural botany, therefore, we are bound to be disappointed. If we see ourselves instead as migrants, we sail closer to the truth.

Bahamian identity is an archipelago inscribed on the mind. The multiplicity of tales about Fox Hill, the wide-ranging possibilities of identification according to one's geographic location in the Bahamian archipelago, the varying symbolism of land and Junkanoo, all bear witness to this fact. In a country where radio talk show hosts determine the decisions taken by government officials and analytical texts are relegated

to college classrooms or embattled conclaves of academics, the validity of a tale resides in its telling. Roots are made up of many journeys, of individuals charting courses among a range of possibilities. Bahamian identities are constructed from navigations through hundreds of possible destinations; roots are planted throughout these destinations, and the routes taken determine what is 'home'.

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