

**Globalisation and Cultural Identity in Caribbean Society: The Jamaican Case**

**by**

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### **Abstract**

The Caribbean is a region whose very name reverberates from the early effects of globalisation (then called colonialism). The result is that the identity of the region and its people has been significantly shaped by two groups of people; Africans and Europeans. Having moved into a new phase of globalisation, the Caribbean region faces new challenges within its political, economic, social and cultural beliefs and practices. Within the context of this paper, the Caribbean challenge of maintaining its cultural identity in the face of increasingly influential global norms, especially American hegemonic practices, will be assessed. This paper will argue that the Caribbean identity is an unintended consequence of globalisation. As “identity” has many facets, the focus will be on cultural identity, positing that Caribbean cultural identity is a hybrid of various cultures which ‘met’ each other because of the exploitative tendencies of early Europeans. It will go further to explore how the new face of globalisation, specifically American culture, is impacting on the cultural identity of the Caribbean. This will be accomplished by focusing primarily on Jamaica. The paper seeks to answer questions such as: Is the process of synthesis continuing, or is the Caribbean culture being subsumed by that of its more powerful neighbour? Is fluidity an essential aspect of the Caribbean cultural identity, and is it therefore able to adjust to any pressure which it may face? Can the discussion of the Caribbean cultural identity, in the face of globalisation, offer guidelines to other aspects of Caribbean life, for example, economic strategies?

## **Introduction**

This paper explores Caribbean cultural identity within the current dispensation of globalisation. For the purpose of this discussion, “cultural identity” broadly refers to the shared beliefs and behaviours of a group, that form the basis for creating meaning for the persons who count themselves to be a part of the culture. While changes in cultures are ongoing and inevitable, globalisation has facilitated greater transfer of ideas from all areas of the world, and the result has been a more rapid change in cultures than was conceivable before technological developments that have marked the second half of the 1900s. The continuous evolution in technology, medicine, international relations, travel and cultural transmission over especially the last two decades of the twentieth century has resulted in a highly interdependent “global village”, where norms and practices are more easily capable of being shared. These developments have been directly associated with and in fact have defined the concept of globalisation. Culture is arguably the dimension of human practices in which globalisation can be most directly seen and in which persons all over the world experience the globalising process.

These changes in cultures across the world are normally analysed with various levels of optimism or pessimism. On the former outlook, globalisation allows for a constant interplay between cultures and the result is that there are positive developments that occur for both the receiving and sending culture. The pessimistic view is that cultural change is unidirectional, flowing out from Europe and America to other areas of the world, with the aim of strengthening the economic advantage of the sending countries. Whichever position is taken, however, there is no doubt that there are ensuing changes in the cultures. This paper explores the way in which globalisation has been theorised as impacting on cultural practices. The discussion will begin however, by briefly exploring the notion of identity, arguing that identity is a point from which one interprets the world. From there, a discussion of cultural identity and change will lay the framework for discussing cultural identity in the era of rampant globalisation. The final sections of the paper will look specifically at the Caribbean situation and use Jamaica as a case in point for arguing that a specific organising structure in the culture will serve a significant mediating role in how the changes that result from globalisation will occur.

## **Identity**

General discussions of identity within traditional Western philosophy have focused on personal identity, on questions about what it means for a person A to identify herself as A over a period of time. Thus, the most pressing of these questions that Western philosophy has centred around traditionally has been how a person’s identity persists over time. The most interesting response to this question, though there are persons who challenge it nonetheless, is that an individual is identified on a personal level through persistence of experiences, beliefs, memories (Olson, 2002). Experiences occur and beliefs are formed within a social context however, and the social context is generally mediated by cultural norms (Schrag, 1997).

So, in this understanding, it is essentially through a process of interaction with others in a cultural context that one gets an understanding of oneself. This understanding of the self is then used as a basis for further interaction and evolves as new experiences, beliefs and memories are added. It means then that persons also have two aspects of identity: a public and a private, or the lived experience. The lived experience captures how the person lives through that identity, accepting or rejecting it or some position in between. The lived experience may coincide with the public identity to the extent that the person accepts that public identity as her own; or it may not coincide. The individual, through interpretations of the social realm, will negotiate the public identities or private, one so that one does not find oneself in a pathological situation (Fanon, 1986).

Self-identification with the public image, even as a tool for change, means recognising some historical and experiential commonalities between persons who are so identified, and that these identities are seen as being objective locations. These public identities are often linked to specific social groups and so can be classified broadly as social identities. Each human being has a set of social identities which can be assumed, or are inferred by others, depending on the particular context in which the person finds herself. These identities that may be assumed include broad categories such as cultural, gender, sexual, national, ethnic, racial, filial, occupational, recreational and religious (Sen 2006, Bewaji 1997, 2006 and 2008).

There are two broad approaches that have held sway recently, in exploring social identity; one essentialist, the other postmodernist. The essentialist argument is that the notion of identity is a stable one, based on shared experiences. The postmodernist position is that identity cannot be objective, since it is partial to only the set of experiences that can be shared by all so called identity groups, and identity labels serve to naturalise what are simply constructions that people can choose (Moya, 2000; Mohanty, 1997). Both positions have limitations, with the essentialist position not acknowledging or treating seriously the fact that identity groups are never homogenous and that identities can change at either the collective or individual level. The postmodernist rejection of the reality of identity means that it loses the explanatory power that identity provides in understanding how people operate within specific economic, political and social structures (Moya, 2000).

The stance I will take in this paper is that identity is real, unlike what the postmodernist argues, because identities matter in social constructions and in understanding the self. This position is well borne out in the work by Alcoff (2000, 2006) and Mohanty (1997) who defend a realist account of identity. Mohanty argues that cultural identities are not self evident, where it is expected that this self evidence would arise from similarities in cultural experiences. Identities, rather, can be looked at as real to the extent that they develop from an “objective social location”, one which allows us to read the world in a particular way. Our experiences are mediated by a particular outlook that we have, this outlook being what we call identity, but that this identity itself arises as a product of understanding of the social surroundings of which one is a part. Identities therefore have epistemic significance. Similarly, Alcoff sees identity as a “hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt

to know the world” (Alcoff 2000, 335). This approach involves recognising a “positional consciousness” (Alcoff 2000, 340).

Pulling the discussion of the two aspects of identity together, the inference can be made that a cultural identity is one that develops through a collective set of beliefs, experiences and memories, and that this identity is the organising motif for understanding the world, and for interpreting new experiences. Cultural identity, as a specific social identity, then provides a horizon from which to negotiate meanings. The discussion will now shift to what culture and cultural change entails.

## **Culture**

Culture has been traditionally defined as the way of life of a people, a definition traditionally used by anthropologists. When this definition was developed, it was with the understanding that there are groups of peoples whose lives are not touched by others, and whose whole mode of existence is organised in a communal setting. With more control of the nation, the notion of a national identity developed to try to capture the imagination of its citizens and allow for greater cohesion (Matthews, 2000). The result is that without the presence of a specific ethnic identity, the national identity has generally been the one to create the cultural values from which one will negotiate an understanding of the world.

Whether examined as a phenomenon that emerges within a nation or one that is based in an ethnic identity, culture is created and developed on the collective experiences of a set of people in a particular environment. It then becomes a set of values, norms, behaviours and institutions possessed by a group of people in sustained social interaction, that have been derived historically and experientially as mechanisms that allow a group to maximize benefits to the group in that particular context (Bewaji 2003). It will be useful, for the purposes of this discussion, to limit this definition, which covers all aspects of how people organise their lives and the philosophical stance that may undergird these, to look at what is involved in the “symbolic construction, articulation, and dissemination of meaning” in a particular society or group (Steger, 2003, 69). This definition will be able to adequately capture the main areas that are affected by the process of globalisation. At the same time, however, the areas point to the underlying values and norms that shape the cultural practices that are explicitly discussed.

From this understanding, a culture can therefore be illuminated by focusing especially on areas such as language, the imaginative, visual and performing arts, music, patterns of eating, and images such as dress and conceptions of beauty. Each of these areas provides clues into the set of norms, beliefs and values that form the culture. With respect to language, since it is the way in which we have learnt to form our ideas, language carries with it the pattern of thinking carried in the culture of which the language is a part. It is for this reason that Fanon argues that “A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon, 1986, 18). Performing arts, music and drama are generally grounded in a particular broader worldview that is often linked to religious practices and underlying principles for organising social systems. Patterns of eating are learnt generally over periods of

generations, to reflect the social patterns of the group and also to reflect the resources available where the group is located.

### **Cultural change**

The patterns of behaviour captured by the areas mentioned above may not be explicitly taught to the new members of the culture. However, in order for the group to continue successfully, new members would have to be coached in the ways deemed appropriate by the experiences of the group. The indoctrination then becomes a matter of growing into a set of traditions with minimal resistance to what is being imparted in situations where there are no other significant contending cultural influences. These experiences help the new individual to organise his/her perspective of the world to one most suitable for the self and the group, helping the individual to reconcile his/her position in the group in terms of a set of power and social relations. At a metaphysical level it helps the new emerging member to formulate an identity within institutions and established social experiences. One can envision then that the continuation of the culture without the interruption of outside forces would be on a more or less linear path, with the changes in the culture being based on the interaction between external and internal factors, but these changes are dictated by mechanisms internal to the culture.

The potential exists for a situation where two or more cultures may meet in the same space. When there is such a meeting, the dominant culture is the one that is generally the target culture, that which is to be achieved. It is sometimes the case that a culture is identified as being dominant based on the sheer number of persons who share that culture in a particular social situation; that is, the larger the number of persons who share or purvey that culture, the more likely it is that that culture will be seen as the dominant one in that society. There is also the option that a target culture would be identified as that which is possessed by the minority group (by numbers) but which has the larger share of economic and other resources and therefore power. In this case, the majority of the population would have to adjust their cultural practices in order to benefit from the resources held by the dominant cultural group. There is also the added possibility that the dominant culture may not even be present in a representative sense (in terms of persons who practise that culture in any real sense in that physical space), but because of power, economic, technological and other relations, it is omnipresent and is even more pervasive than the local culture. In this situation, the target culture would be practised in a skewed sense, as the transmittal and indoctrination of the cultural practices will be distorted by the absence of true practitioners of that culture in that shared physical space. This would mean that there would really be only a change of values and norms that relate directly to the specified zones of interaction with the target culture. The essence of the indigenous culture should therefore remain.

Now how is the situation different when a set of cultural practices formulated outside of one's group experiences are introduced by the subjugation of one's society by a more powerful society with a different culture? It will become difficult to reconcile both cultural value systems, especially if they are very intrinsically different. However, if no compliance means death then the result is pseudo-internalisation, which is exhibited

by action without conviction. Behaviours then become rationalised by utility rather than by the intrinsic cultural function they serve for the group. Over time, this orientation could become part of a new cultural movement that extracts behaviours that are more useful to their doers and to the group and therefore produce identities that are diffusely organised about a basic set of values that may be compromised for the use of newer, more beneficial practices. Additionally there are also effects on the sequencing of behaviours, in that, generally, the behaviours stipulated by the dominant culture would be first attempted during a course of action. Should these effects however prove ineffectual, individuals return to more traditional behaviours.

While these procedures are presented as discrete processes which go on only in one direction to effect change, it should be realised that the dominant culture may also undergo changes because of the interaction with the receiving culture. Furthermore, several of these change processes may be occurring simultaneously.

Most if not all cultures have been undergoing changes within the context of the current variety of globalisation, so the likelihood of cultural change within the range of just the culture's needs is quite remote. In the Caribbean, cultures have been exposed to new cultural values and practices from other areas. The conclusion to be drawn is, therefore, that one of these patterns of change, or a combination of these patterns, is operating in the Caribbean situation to explain the cultural changes seen. The question of the specific structure of the change will have to be explored, however, after looking more closely at how the Caribbean's history and experiences have shaped cultural identity and how the cultural dimension of globalisation operates.

### **Globalisation – the Cultural Dimension**

Globalisation is best seen as a process that yields a condition of global connectedness, minimally considered, in areas such as economy, culture, politics, technology (Steger, 2003). The effects of this global connectedness are several, including decisions taken in one region of the world having an impact on a farmer on the other side of the earth; there is a greater amount of interaction between persons and groups in different nation states and cultures meet each other more frequently (Cochrane and Pain, 2004). These effects are viewed with varying levels of apprehension or hope, depending on how the social changes that result are seen to be beneficial or deleterious. These opposing positions can be examined by exploring the cultural dimension. Culture interchange is one of the main areas affected by the developments resulting from and facilitating globalisation. The main tool for the transfer of cultural values from one country or location to another is through various communication channels such as the media, the internet, other telecommunication tools and trade. This is where the presence of developments in technology and liberalisation of markets all over the world have resulted in the exchange of music, films, television shows.

Some pessimists about the cultural dimension of globalisation argue that there has not been much exchange of cultural products. In fact, what one sees is cultural imperialism. The basic thesis of cultural imperialism is that cultural goods move from

the United States of America (USA) or other Western centres to other countries, and these provide the foundation for moving in other Western products to dominate the spaces of the societies of the South. This argument posits that there are dominant cultures, namely American and Western, which threaten more vulnerable cultures (MacKay, 2004). This threat is made stronger by a media system that is ostensibly global, because of its reach, but is primarily owned and operated by American or Western interests (Steger, 2003). Changing patterns in language usage, dietary intake, dress, human image ideals, consumption patterns and sexuality have been greatly affected by the presence of these cultural forces, to the detriment of the receiving, more vulnerable cultures.

Thus, one finds a situation that Mazrui (1999) describes, where globalisation has two components; homogenisation and hegemonisation. With homogenisation, one sees the world becoming more alike in dress, language, economic structures and communication, but, he also argues that these homogenising tendencies concentrate power in specific centres. It is Western cultural patterns that have been homogenising the rest of the world, thereby hegemonising interaction relations. While at the same time the influence of capitalism and communication is controlled by the USA, there is the economic front being controlled in some Asian, European and American cities.

Other pessimists argue that popular culture around the world is now grounded in the American 'culture industry', which essentially involves the creation of what Benjamin Barber calls a McWorld (Steger, 2003). Miyoshi (1998) has argued that the hegemonic culture of the trans-national corporation world that globalisation aims at creating is consumerism. He argues that this can be evidenced by the fact that all Hollywood movies are analysed not in terms of quality but in terms of gross profits and whether they are blockbusters; novels are also being treated in a similar way, with best sellers lists rather than books of quality; protest art and underground art movements such as graffiti and rap have been commercialised. Even "high culture", he argues, is now commercialised with museums seen as a business and he cites the example of competition between museums in Philadelphia and New York for customers, marketing 'eye-catching' exhibitions that are backed by business interests. He makes the interesting point also that less counterculture development can flourish because business interests are quick to see the opportunity and incorporate it into the mainstream consumer driven culture.

Another pessimistic position that could be taken is to argue that cultural globalisation can be seen as what Alcoff calls "the war on identity" (Alcoff, 2006, 16). On this reasoning, for both liberal thinkers and postmodernists, identities are often seen as the root of conflicts, dissonance and discord. A liberal view of the world, such as that of John Rawls, is one where persons act rationally in facilitating social cooperation and one where persons are individuals, where their membership in a group is voluntary or politically irrelevant (Graham, 2000). On this conception, presence in a social group has the potential to cause one to act irrationally.

As Schlesinger argued with respect to ethnicity, but which can be expanded to cultural identity, identity “exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonism... the end-game is self-pity and self ghettoization” (Alcoff, 2006, 17). With the homogenisation of cultures, the differences that we would see between various groups would begin to become less distinct. Consider also that many of the cultural products from the Western culture have embedded within them a liberal ideology which often argues that the recognition of differences is destructive. But as argued above, identities serve important functions in helping persons in developing a sense of their personal identity, and cultural identity is quite significant as an enabling tool for understanding the self and the world. Consequently, a dramatically quick erosion of this identity can only cause psychological and ontological trauma.

There are however more positive views of the impact of the cultural dimension of globalisation. Enhanced travel and communication opportunities can be seen as allowing for people to see and experience other cultures, which helps in the appreciation of differences and people may then work to enhance the chance of survival of these cultures. Through television and movies, one is able to appreciate also the diversity of cultures across the world, since persons are sometimes exposed to programming from outside of the dominant Western European and American landscape. Additionally, Euro-American movie and television producers may try to incorporate other cultural ideas into their productions. The result of these will be truly a entertainment ‘global village’.

One theorist who supports the more optimistic view of globalisation is Roland Roberston, who argues that there is a process of ‘glocalisation’ that is taking place, where the global is adopted in the local (Delanty, 2003). This adoption creates hybrid cultures at the local level, and so one cannot speak of a simple hegemonic homogenisation of cultures in most parts of the world, especially in the Caribbean. Another important aspect of globalisation is the facilitation of further South-South interaction, which was not very economically feasible to pursue, especially on an individual level, before the recent developments in telecommunication. The link is such that Nigerian movies are now quite popular in Jamaica and the type of music heard in market places in many parts of Nigeria is Reggae.

The internet has been identified as an important tool for the exchange of ideas. This medium has been fostering democracy and free dialogue where media houses are run for profit, which limits what they can report. The advent of ‘blogging’, face book, web chats, web logs or web diaries, has created a space for groups to interact over the internet and share ideas. Also quite important is that blogs provide commentary on news, and even provides news; the result being that media houses have changed their use of the internet to welcome more ideas from readers.

There are other persons who are not pessimistic about globalisation, because they argue that the reach that globalisation has in the cultural dimension is overstated. The argument posited is that national media houses still provide most of the news and programming that persons consume. Furthermore, many households all over the world do not have television sets and, if they do, they do not have cable, to feel the effect of the

powerful media conglomerates. Furthermore, technological developments that have been enabled and been enhanced by globalisation may help to deepen intra-cultural interaction, rather than eroding cultural identities, by enabling further access to cheaper communication and cultural exchange strategies. In the Jamaican case, there has been the opportunity for more local movie and television programmes to be produced. Additionally, persons in the Jamaican Diaspora can maintain the connection with their homeland through access to online versions of the daily newspapers and live streaming of radio programmes over the internet.

Regardless of the position taken in the debate about the extent to which globalisation has positive or negative effects on local cultures, persons on both sides agree that there is change that inevitably occurs as a result of the globalising process. However, the way in which the process occurs would be mediated by the type of culture that one is observing. So from the discussion in the previous section, one would expect that previously subjugated cultures would be more susceptible to the effects of globalisation. This would be only to the extent that benefits readily accrue to the individual or set of individuals, that is, artefacts produced by other cultures will be readily accepted as long as they are predicted to provide the individual or group with behaviours that are in keeping with those desired by the subjugating culture. However artefacts should be perceived to be superior in some relevant respect to what is required by the conquering culture and also superior to that of the subjugated culture.

### **The Caribbean Situation**

When one examines the Caribbean region, there is a clear recognition that the classification of its culture would be that of a subjugated culture, this as a result of the historical development of the region. The region developed purely as a tool for the production of wealth for Europe, through the labour of enslaved and subjugated peoples: Tainos and Caribs, Africans, Indians and Chinese. The formation itself of the Caribbean region as it is known today, through a process called colonialism, was in fact one phase of globalisation, with its political and economic components. As it relates to the political aspect, the foremost reason identified for exploration was the expansion of the kingdoms of Portugal, Italy and Spain in the initial phase. Having identified and acquired land in the region, though it was already owned by the inhabitants of the islands, these countries had to determine the best use for these new properties. Hence, the economic development in terms of agricultural production of the lands began. It should be noted that the cultural dimension was not present at this time, given that the conception of culture as we use it today is a relatively new idea, developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Matthews, 2000). More important at the time was religious ideology.

During this era of globalisation, which has escalated from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until this new era of globalisation began, civilisations were destroyed; genocide on the widest scale occurred; riches gleaned from the natural resources of expropriated societies countries were taken from those countries to enrich Europe, enormous numbers of Africans were forcibly taken from their homeland to be enslaved in the region; cutting them off from their ancestral homes and way of life; racism of its most reprehensible

powerful form was developed as a ‘scientific theory’. I say into its most reprehensible powerful form as racism existed before, but certainly not to the degree exhibited during this period. That which existed before was strongly linked to class, for example, in Africa and Europe, and did not result in de-personhood of the peoples who were conquered or subjugated by external powers.

Specifically in the case of the English colonies, the ‘societies’ (and I use that word guardedly in this sense) that were developed during this period were there solely for agricultural production. There was no attempt to create a real community of persons, a society. The enslaved communities, coming from various ethnic groups from the African continent, created a cultural space through negotiations between themselves in order to be able to negotiate the challenges they faced, while trying to maintain some aspects of the cultures from which they had been removed. Those Europeans who lived in Jamaica and other English Caribbean colonies were primarily persons from the lower strata of societies running away from stewardships in the motherland, serving in such positions as bookkeepers and overseers. Additionally, these persons would have been coming from various subgroups in their countries. What this meant was that a somewhat bastardised form of the European culture was transferred to the region, as these Europeans would themselves have been aiming to achieve the culture of the dominant groups in their society, the wealthy. So while there was an attempt to indoctrinate the Caribbean peoples and Africans into the European culture, this was problematic, given a lack of cohesion and consistency on the part of the Europeans themselves. At the same time, however, there were controls that forced conformities to set practices, such as conversion to Christianity.

### **Globalisation, Identity and Culture in the Caribbean**

It is, therefore, not surprising then that two cultures could be seen to be operating in the Caribbean colonies. Using Jamaica as the main source from which to analyse, the historical factors created a situation where the identification of “Two Jamaicas” was possible (Chevannes, 2006). There was the clear presence of the Eurocentric values, which are seen in how the society is organised at the political and legal level, but also in the cultural realm where greater value is placed on cultural products that are markedly European. These standards are set by a small group of persons however and are deemed the developed way to approach life. Many of these values were and are inculcated at school and at church.

On the other hand, there was the presence of the culture of the typical Jamaican, who is the vast majority of the population, with cultural beliefs and practices that are strongly African in their orientation. However, the subordinate culture had to find strategies to accommodate the dominant culture, while maintaining a sense of identity through grounding it in its own ontology. Nettleford has argued that survival was possible only through the subjugated group’s use of its ‘creative imagination’ (Nettleford, 2003). With the end of colonialism and becoming an independent state, the gap between the “Two Jamaicas” has been reduced, but is still present in many aspects.

Given the tension between the Eurocentric and the African in the culture (though it should be noted that the typical Jamaican who lives this culture will often not recognise the cultural practices as having strong African roots), it is therefore not surprising that there are contested views about what counts as a Jamaican identity. To use the conception identified earlier, however, one can refer to the idea of shared experiences to identify the base for a social identity. To the extent that most Jamaicans have had this shared experience of slavery and colonialism (and in the case of Indians and Chinese, indentureship), the Jamaican identity must be grounded here since this is the objective understanding of the Jamaican. There may be persons who do not fall neatly into this category, but the dominant understanding of the country is what has been outlined.

What is identified as Jamaican culture now can be viewed as what Brathwaite (1971) calls a Creole society, where many cultural practices have been fused to create a new culture. This Creole culture started, however, from a dominant African structure, which may now be labelled the subjugated culture of the majority population, while the European culture was the target culture. From what was noted previously about the process of cultural change in a context such as this, actions will be chosen based on their ability to meet the ends of the individuals or group. This brings in what I will call the notion of cultural fluidity, the idea that an important organising motif for what defines the Jamaican culture is precisely the facilitation by the culture of its members' ability to shift, morph and change behaviour patterns as seen fit to meet some particular needs.

Cultural fluidity may be viewed as the methodology that mediates what is appropriated in the Jamaican culture, providing the basis for the ability to try out new behaviours. All cultures will have some degree of fluidity to the extent that new cultures can influence the local culture since cultures are not static, and are comprised of individuals who will welcome new experiences. However, given Jamaica's particular history, this is more deeply embedded in the way in which the culture operates. The level of value that a specific behaviour has will help to determine if the new behaviour will be included in the culture. Different values would also be tested and a new aspect of meaning creation or new interpretation will be adopted, based on the value that it offers to the core cultural values and experiences. This idea is drawn from justification using epistemological foundationalism, which at its most basic formulation argues that there is "at least one non-inferentially justified belief", which provides the justification for other justified beliefs (Audi, 2002, 30). Using this conception, one can argue that the foundational values of the culture are used as the basis for developing other values that are derived from these underlying values.

The position advocated is that the understanding of the cultural identity posited allows for globalisation to be used as a positive tool for Jamaican cultural development. The grounding of this position is the cultural fluidity that, as already noted, may be treated as the methodology that mediates what is appropriated in the Jamaican culture. Given the grounding of its particular set of experiences as outlined above, however, the Jamaican cultural identity is one that is more open to change. However, that change will be one that will occur not by wholesale acceptance of any idea, but through taking an area that has utility and using it, and this will be a continuing process. This idea can be

explained by looking at the discussion of code-switching in the Jamaican context, as presented by Chevannes (2006). He argues that persons code switch between languages; that is, there is a switch from English to Creole as the situation deems it fit. This is also done in other areas such as land ownership, marriage and religious practice; this is done so as to meet two sets of needs, one expected by the state, the other self fulfilment. This ability to make this switch, which has been practised in many areas by the majority of Jamaicans, allows for new ideas to be used, but only if they have instrumental value. So the fluidity allows one to negotiate tricky situations by morphing into the character most suited for the context. It serves as the foundation for the vantage point from which the Jamaican cultural identity can assign meaning and value to specific products or experience, so as to determine which will be beneficial to the culture.

This is a practice that has been going on in the Jamaican culture, where different aspects of different cultures were synthesised to create the Jamaican culture. This was done with language, religion, music, food, performing arts. One can see evidence where this continues today. The dancehall and the pantomime, for example, are two areas that were taken from America and England, but which now have their very distinctive Jamaican cultural expressions. The Pentecostal church in Jamaica is one that was appropriated by Jamaicans who had themselves recognised that the way of worship of the traditional churches did not capture their whole spiritual being, and the Pentecostal church provided them with the opportunity to merge two aspects of their lives; the European and the African (Chevannes, 2006). Jamaicans have certainly embraced the idea of fast food, with the presence of KFC and Burger King in all major towns and even in rural communities. But, the presence of very successful indigenous Jamaican fast food franchises, such as Island Grill and Juici Patties, which serve authentic Jamaican food, catering for the fast food delivery to various business and community functions, and which are therefore tailored to the Jamaican lifestyle, means that the process of 'glocalisation' is occurring, whereby what is typically a Western cultural pattern is domesticated and adapted within the cultural patter of the Jamaican society.

These examples allow one to see that the Jamaican situation is one where ideas are taken from other cultures and used in a way that coheres with the Jamaican culture. The idea that the Jamaican cultural identity, and by extension the Jamaican's understanding of the self, may be lost by the presence of globalising forces can be resisted by recognising that there is an appropriation process that occurs and that this process has an underlying instrumental methodology. This instrumental methodology will not generally let ideas anathema to the culture, or ideas and practices that may not be detrimental but are not helpful, to be taken in and become a part of the culture, even if they are sometimes used. One can use as a case in point the hip hop culture that has supposedly been spread to other parts of the world. While in Jamaica, young people listen to the music and may assume the dress and even some of the slang, the need to emulate every aspect of the hip hop lifestyle does not serve the Jamaican culture, because there is already a cultural sphere that captures the youth culture that hip hop is supposed to capture. Dancehall then may appropriate some specific components of the hip hop culture and blend them in, but one does not see the production of hip hop music in the country on any significant level.

## **Challenges to the optimistic view**

The position advocated is more optimistic in its orientation, but the earlier discussion highlighted two opposing positions regarding the outcome of cultural globalisation. Several pessimistic arguments were outlined in the paper: (1) the creation of a cultural imperialism (2) all cultures becoming part of the Western culture industry, which sells a culture of consumerism, and (3) globalisation will cause erosion of cultural identity, which can have significant deleterious effects on personal identity.

Additionally, specific concerns for the Jamaican context need to be introduced; (4) western cultural globalisation has inherent anti-black racism, (5) neo-colonialism is the effect of globalisation with all its attendant problems, and (6) inhibition of the 'creative imagination' of the people. The vision of a homogenous Western culture which this presentation of the impact of globalisation raises serious concerns at the level of issues of racial identity, which is often linked to issues of cultural identity such as in the Caribbean, where what is recognisably Caribbean is also at its base recognisably black. As argued quite effectively by D. A. Masolo (1994) and Charles Mills (1997), anti-black racism is embedded in "great" Western ideas, and in the very culture of the West. So when we find a situation where that culture is being mass produced and made into entertainment, which tends to be consumed without the recognition that we are often unconsciously receiving these ideas, it can only lead to Caribbean person suffering from what has been labelled "mental paralysis" by Nettleford (Nettleford, 2003,156).

There is also the case of the still fragile development of Jamaica as an independent state, with the attendant recognition and celebration of its culture. Globalisation has and will continue to stymie the development of appreciation of the uniquely Jamaican culture, and will, through its flashy media images, impose external standards anew. This will be akin to a neo-colonialism, but one which does not seem imposed and is therefore harder to resist. Jamaica will simply be "a continuing echo of what occurs elsewhere" (Nettleford, 2003, 165). The result will be practices like skin bleaching, which is now rampant among both men and women, especially in the urban centres, because Euro-American standards are being transmitted and self-hatred is the result. Another view would be that globalisation will inhibit the 'creative imagination' of the people, out of which protest, struggle for recognition and a positive personal and cultural identify will arise. It is the artist, argues Nettleford, who has made the greatest contribution to the Jamaican and Caribbean sense of identity (Nettleford, 2003), and if that creative process is lost, as it may well be as a result of packaged culture coming into the country and being taken on wholesale, there is the danger that this role of the artist will be lost and with it the hope for the country to move beyond the stage at which it now finds itself.

## **Responding to the challenges**

With respect to the first concern, it should be remembered first that change occurs in both directions and, in the case of Jamaica, the culture has strongly influenced others. This has helped to actually strengthen cultural identity, since there is an objective

understanding of some dominant aspects of the Jamaican culture, such as its music, dance and food, and this generally coincides with the Jamaican's personal experience of her cultural identity. This has helped to strengthen a feeling of ownership and pride in this indigenous culture. To that extent, Jamaican culture and the Jamaican cultural identity have benefited from the globalisation process in one way, in that it allowed for a greater spread of the Jamaican culture. Jamaica's cultural identity is also less likely to be weakened significantly even if the aim is cultural imperialism, because this is a culture that developed in a subjugated historical situation and the result is that it is more fluid in negotiating the use of any cultural product with which it interacts, whether that culture is seeking to dominate or not.

As it relates to the concern about consumerism, it is undoubtedly the case that there are more products that Jamaicans have been made aware of through the powerful media of cable, movies and the internet. It is also the case that cultural products, especially the performing arts, are seen more at the local level in light of their saleability and how they can break into the American market. Most of the top Jamaican musical artists are signed to foreign, more specifically American, labels. The latter development could be seen as positive to the extent to which it provides for economic development and the greater exposure of the Jamaican culture and strengthening of an identity grounded in this culture. The consumption of products is present, but one can ask whether reasons for some aspects of this consumerism are not present in the value system that one has. For example, Jamaicans spend great sums of money on clothing and general grooming, but this urge may have been there but is now more blatant, especially with the increase in cheaper clothing. Gordon argues that oppressed people have the urge to "fix themselves", citing Foucault, who argued that oppressed people have their souls imprisoned by their bodies (Gordon, 2006). This was the case when Jamaica's underlying cultural values were developing and it may be argued that in some important respects, the typical Jamaican is still oppressed by a global structure of anti-black racism.

The third concern about globalisation concerns its impact on cultural identity. It should be noted first that cultural identities do not change dramatically even in situations where there is great upheaval such as the uprooting of persons in order to enslave them. Further, the cultural identity of the typical Jamaican allows her to try out new experiences, to switch between different types of behaviour while still maintaining and recognising one's cultural identity. In the Jamaican context, the problems that may be faced regarding psychological trauma will not be due to the current phase of globalisation, but would be the result of a lack of reconciliation of the historical experiences and the continued discontinuities that exist between the more Afrocentric and more Eurocentric aspects of the societal structure.

The two previous concerns have made linkages to the penultimate issues, those of anti-black racism and neo-colonialism, which often work together. Does cultural globalisation offer the opportunity for one to advance the process that Fanon advocates, of moving beyond black and white to the human, and for the removal of the notion of centres and peripheries or satellites? This is a challenge that required confrontation prior to the ongoing period of globalisation, and is not easily answered. Cultural tools,

however, have been used in the past to effectively highlight these problems, heightening people's consciousness and motivating action to change the structure. This is especially the case in the Caribbean region generally with literature and music. The problem is the extent to which the current group of authors and musicians are effectively continuing the process of education. This can be tied into the concern that artists may not be able to carry out this essential social role. As stated earlier, however, there has not been a wholesale acceptance of cultural products from outside of Jamaica, and the 'creative imagination' has not been lost, as is evidenced by excellent musical, dance and other cultural productions regularly evolved in Jamaica. However, the need for these resources to be more effectively harnessed and transferred is crucial. Gordon (2006) argues that an essential aspect of New World black thought is its cultural production, which gives expression to black ideas. He suggests that there is a need to also be "epistemologically imaginative" in developing theories for understanding and responding to problems faced by oppressed and non-white peoples globally.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding, the main thrust of the argument has been that the Jamaican cultural identity is one that is less likely to be severely negatively impacted by globalisation because of its historical background, which has provided for a mechanism that has been called fluidity. This fluidity creates the space for external values and behaviours to be adopted, based on their instrumental value and the extent to which they are coherent within the context of the foundational values and behaviours of the culture. Given the crucial role that culture plays in one's personal identity, there is not likely to be psychological trauma resulting in the person's lived experience.

The reader may wonder if the position is being advocated is too optimistic in its evaluation of the Jamaican situation. It must be remembered however that the focus has been on cultural identity and the impact of cultural globalisation. However, there are changes that are occurring in the culture which are the result of other factors, including the continued tension between the two cultures that have most heavily influenced the Jamaican culture, along with political and economic factors. I would suggest that the issues related to the privileging of the Euro-American view that still pervades the way in which the more educated and powerful members of the society try to organise social structures, this is not an issue linked directly to globalisation but an issue of not embracing the culture that is Jamaican. When persons, especially those who have been exposed to Western education, through the process of that education, internalise these values, and then transmit these, this perpetuates the idea of the "Two Jamaicas". Globalisation does not create this problem, but the ability to respond effectively to globalisation will be more difficult for these persons because of their epistemological orientation. This problem is more acute because these are the persons who control the economic and political systems in the country.

It is for this reason that the optimism felt at the cultural level regarding globalisation is not present at the economic and political levels. The foundation of the Jamaican culture is a variant of an African cosmology, and what mediates the process of

adopting new practices is facilitated by fluidity. However, these two structures are not present at the level of the economic and the political, especially at the level of global interactions, and this means that economic and political globalisation cannot be negotiated in a similar manner. External economic dependence and the lack of competitive advantage in the world market places Jamaica at great risk as the world economy comes increasingly under the control of transnational corporations and their lobbyists, and the countries in the Group of Eight, where all of these corporations are located. The economic and the political are closely linked, with Jamaica having to tread very lightly in its political positions at the international level, for fear of losing the favour of its debtors, primarily the USA.

Henry advocates that in this current phase of globalisation, there needs to be a turn towards the Caribbean's indigenous products; "our music, our food, land, beaches, territorial space, capacities for learning and creative self-transformation" (Henry, 2000, p.270). The extent to which this will be feasible may be difficult to ascertain, success depending heavily on the structures that such industries would take and their mode of relationships with transnational corporations, though Henry stresses the importance of strengthening local ownership. However, what should be taken from the suggestion and built on is that the culture of the Caribbean is important for sustained locally based economic development. His suggestion underscores the need in the Jamaican case that the structure and operation of the cultural identity, which represents the strength of the Jamaican people and which have seen the creation of icons such as Miss Lou (Louise Bennett-Coverly), Bob Marley and Charles Hyatt, be taken seriously and used as a tool, not just for cultural strength, but also political and economic development.

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