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METHODOLOGICAL POINTS OF REFERENCE IN A LOOSELY STRUCTURED SOCIETY: FIELDWORK IN ANTIGUA, WEST INDIES

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Initial Statement of the Problem

WHAT might be assumed to be a relatively simple task, that of writing a descriptive ethnography of the culture and society of the West Indian island of Antigua, has in fact proved to be not so simple. While contemporary anthropological research is primarily problem-oriented, it is still incumbent on the fieldworker to delineate descriptively the overall social and cultural parameters within which the society operates. My experience in Antigua did not correspond to that of previous work in East Africa and the Middle East, where institutional structures tend to fall into neat, orderly patterns. In attempting to determine the institutional framework of the community, the usual points of reference—family, wider family units, villages, wider political and territorial units—appeared to be somewhat fuzzy and indeterminate. This claim is not an attack on structuralism as a theoretical position in any of its forms, but rather a contention that Antiguan society is relatively loosely structured and, as such, not so amenable to positivistic analysis. At all events, any endeavour in attacking structural-functionalism today is, surely, *passé*. Nonethe-

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less, the study of Antiguan society poses a methodological problem, the focus of this paper, which is elaborated partly with reference to the courts in dispute resolution.

Given the above-mentioned difficulty, even at the most basic descriptive level it should be clear that this same difficulty would impinge on the way that research questions will be asked and answers supplied. Rather than striving for mechanical explanations of social behaviour, the alternative may be to seek an understanding of observed social behaviour on the basis of cognitive categories that are intelligible to both the observer and the actors being observed.

What this paper proposes to do is to take two such cognitive categories, suggested by Peter Wilson (1969, 1973) as applicable to the analysis of West Indian society, and to go a step further by converting them into Weberian 'ideal types'. Wilson's contention was that much of the behaviour of West Indians is motivated by considerations of 'respectability' and 'reputation'. One of Wilson's apparent errors, which earned him much criticism for a basically good idea, was that his categories were far too 'categorical'. That is to say, he labelled patterns of behaviour as exclusively representing either respectability or reputation, without critically examining the specifics of any given set of circumstances. This led to sweeping generalizations to the effect that female behaviour is conditioned by notions of respectability, while male behaviour is governed by considerations of reputation.

One advantage of employing 'ideal-type' categories is the flexibility afforded by the recognition of gradations within the category. This allows for a cognitive map that locates specific and real behaviour on the graduated continuum of the ideal type. Thus, one may assume that, although in certain types of behaviour women are striving to achieve respectability in one form or another, this is not all-embracing: in other situations their behaviour may lean towards the 'reputation' ideal type. This overall theoretical contention will be amplified and exemplified below.

The Empirical Justification for Structural Indeterminacy

One of the reasons for seeing Antiguan society as loosely structured is household composition. In a particular Antiguan village of 133 households, the varying compositions of households were almost as numerous as their actual number. Of course, the basic grouping of mothers and their children was the prime common denominator in all cases. Twenty-one households consisted of a mother and her children plus a single cohabiting male. Of these 21 households only seven of the cohabiting partners were married, and of these seven households, only four had offspring solely from the union of the cohabiting couple. All the remaining 17 households in that group had children from different fathers. In addition, within

the full grouping of the 133 households, children from other mothers were being looked after in several of these households. These children, in turn, might have been born to mothers related to the woman of the household in which they resided, or else be the children of totally unrelated women.

Gordon (1996) has described this phenomenon of child-shifting, which is common in the West Indies, specifically for Antigua. She noted that in her own sample of 49 households, there were 41 examples of child-shifting in 21 cases or 42.9% of the whole sample. Admittedly, child-shifting is an institutionalized phenomenon which could thus be construed as a structural principle. It is indeed an effective adaptive mechanism that enables resources to be acquired for bringing up children. It even classically cross-cuts society, but as an organizational principle it is nonetheless far looser than the predictable structure of the nuclear family, serving its purpose as a child-rearing unit. Several of these households included the maternal grandmother and the brother or brothers of the main procreative woman in the household. This randomness of household composition could paradoxically be described as recurrent, and therefore as a characteristic social phenomenon. But the fluid composition of households hardly lends itself as a structural point of reference within wider social settings. Wider kinship groupings are as ill defined as the most basic household unit. The absence of a peasantry in Antigua also serves to pre-empt the factor of land as a consolidating force for wider kin groupings.

Lazarus-Black has argued (1994: 37) that there has been historical continuity in household structure since the eighteenth century. As evidence she cites the fact that the number of households with female heads today reflects the same number of such households in the eighteenth century. She also indicates that the same variance of composition holds true over time. Continuity, however, is not indicative of structure, and is certainly not to be confused with structure: continuity can also be expressed in a consistent lack of structure. The looseness of the household structure is also highlighted in the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP). Six household types were identified and classified, ranging from two forms of the 'simple-family household' to four forms of 'multiple-family household'. Senior has pointed out that 'the multiple-family household types reveal the almost endless permutations of Caribbean domestic life' (1991: 96). Factors such as trying to determine who was the household head remain unsolved, 'since subjectivity might be involved in reporting the status' (ibid.: 97). Statements such as these are all too indicative of the indeterminacy of the household structure.

In Antigua the household is the effectively functioning day-to-day social grouping at the lowest level of social organization. Little is achieved by abstracting 'only those relationships which pertain to the central females or which derive from them' (Gonzales 1970: 233) and then go on to 'call this analytic structure "matrifocality"'. The household is a domestic unit, and its composition does not necessarily correlate with the concept of a family. R. T. Smith has indeed equated these concepts, and moves freely from one to another,

> we are interested in knowing, firstly, the kind of form taken by these family units in terms of their internal relationships, and, secondly, their relationship to other structures in the society. The latter is, in this case, really another way of asking why the family system takes that particular form. We need not concern ourselves unduly with the fact that the domestic unit meets certain 'needs' such as the need for shelter, for sexual satisfaction or for nourishment....' (1971: 146)

The observable units in Antigua are domestic units or households. They may or may not be family units, and they are, most certainly, striving to meet 'needs'.

A similar degree of 'loose structure' is evident at a higher level of social organization, that of the village. There is little sense that an Antiguan village is anything more than a geographical unit. There is little social cohesiveness: the village does not function as an economic or political unit, and social interactions are rarely institutionalized. There are no village functionaries of any description, and only a church or churches supply any kind of public forum for those people in the village who choose to belong to a church. Many villagers belong to churches situated outside the village. Wilson has stated quite categorically that 'throughout the Caribbean, the church, the school and the political party are institutions external to the village and not therefore organically a part of the social system of the village. Frequently their personnel are alien, and certainly their rules are' (1969: 80). Some solidarity may be expressed for a village cricket or football team. If there is a rum shop in the village, men will gather there for social interaction. A few women have also been observed interacting with the men in rum shops. In the village where I resided, women would gather socially in the few homes that had satellite TV to watch the ongoing soap operas from the United States. As evening approached and there was a cooling breeze, they would gather together outside to discuss, analyze and argue over the latest episode. This was a daily social event.

In the past, villages in Antigua had a formal status, in that a village council was recognized in law and actually had a number of functions. A law of 1945 enabled the establishment of village councils if the villagers requested one. No provisions for elections are stipulated in the law. If the council is approved by the majority of the villagers themselves, and also by the Legislative Council of Antigua, it becomes a corporate body. Its main functions are detailed as the competence to enact by-laws 'for the good rule and government of a village, for promoting and protecting the health of the inhabitants thereof, for the prevention and suppression of nuisances within and for the imposition and recovery of licences, rates, taxes, fees and dues within the village'. Although these monies would be paid into the Treasury, they would 'be placed to the credit of a fund to be called The Village Fund, and the monies paid into the Treasury by any village council shall be applied to the use of that village'.

The village councils were little more than the fledgling political organization established by the indigenous political leadership of the time. The political power

of V. C. Bird against the white plantocracy was wielded through the Antigua Trades and Labour Union, in particular through the dock-workers. But the overall lack of trade skills in the population at large could not result in massive recruitment to the ATLU. So a system was devised whereby villages constituted sections within the umbrella union organization, and the village councils were essentially the representative members of the union establishment. Village councils would make their demands, usually for public works, in the form of resolutions before the union's annual conference. These would either be rejected or else be brought before the Legislative Assembly for potential funding. The records show villages bringing the same resolution before the union's annual conference year after year, but to no avail. When some local village councils balked at this treatment and showed signs of an incipient political challenge to the centralized union authority and the associated Antigua Labour Party, the village councils were gradually phased out.

The political system then moved into a sort of pattern that, in return for the political patronage that dispensed public monies, the clients, i.e. the villages and the districts to which they belonged, would provide electoral support for ALP candidates at elections. Today the situation is such that the village is so insignificant as a political unit, and the government so centralized as a political unit, that individuals approach government ministers directly in order to obtain what they require. This concept of individualism is reflected throughout the contemporary social reality that is Antigua. Antiguans find it very difficult to cooperate with one other in joint economic enterprises. In the past there had been traditional mutual cooperative aid associations, based on the principle of the 'box'. In order to raise capital for some purpose, a group of people would pay regular sums into the 'box', one of the members at a time taking the accumulated capital. All are aware of the local and oft-cited aphorism that 'partnership is a leaky ship'.

Finally, the departing colonial regime left a legacy of a parliamentary democracy and a judicial system. There is also a civil service and a school system that achieves a very high rate of literacy, all of which have to be seen as institutions that function, with varying degrees of proficiency, on an day-to-day basis. There are also voluntary associations, such as churches that span virtually the whole gamut of Christian sectarianism, trade union movements, and political parties. The specific institutions associated with the three Cs—Cricket, Carnival, and Calypso—bind Antiguans together in a certain transient sense of solidarity.

Mintz speaks of a 'social detachment that can come from being subject—while recognizing one's own relative lack of power—to rapid, radical, uncontrolled and ongoing change' (1996: 296). One of Antigua's well-known Calypsonians, King Obstinate, mocks his fellow countrymen's 'social detachment' and individualism in bitter terms:

Too much selfishness and greed,
They don't care about who they bleed,
As long as they can succeed.
They don't give two toots for their brother,
They don't give a damn for their mother.
In this country, Everybody
Is all of self and none of thee.
Nobody really cares for you and me.

A recurrent theme of Antiguan calypso is that of the rampant corruption rife on the island. Many of the songs depict the economic, political, and social effects of corruption. Antiguans are the first to recognize how corrupt their society really is. Jamaica Kincaid has graphically illustrated the phenomenon in her critical essay, *A Small Place* (1988). Outside observers, such as Robert Coram (1993), have adequately documented this facet of Antiguan reality. The effects of endemic corruption on the social fabric of Antiguan life will be referred to again below, in discussing the meaning of the term 'class' in Antigua. Suffice it, at this stage, to state that Antigua's Calypsonians strongly reflect the 'social detachment' of which Mintz speaks.

The characteristic lack of a well-formed and distinctive social structure is hardly surprising, given the historical background of Caribbean society. Even though slavery was abolished in the 1830s, the essential format of the plantation system remained intact, certainly in Antigua, until the middle of the twentieth century. And despite the freedoms accorded by emancipation, no significant social change occurred within the domestic domain: for instance, the vast majority of people choosing not to enter into permanent marital relationships.

The Theoretical Claim Elaborated and Discussed

The attempts of the structural-functionalists in their time to mould Caribbean society into their models were neither particularly accurate as a descriptive mechanism, nor insightful for understanding behaviour patterns. As noted at the start, this point was made specifically by Peter Wilson as far back as 1973 (Wilson 1973). He writes quite categorically, 'these groupings and this view of structure prove quite inadequate in accounting for or interpreting human behaviour' (1973: 3). It is not a matter here of setting up a 'straw man'. As already suggested, although the critique of structural-functionalism may be *passé*, for many societies the institutional framework of reference used by structural-functionalists still provides useful reference points for ethnographic description. Other societies are less amenable to being moulded into this frame of reference. What is being argued here is that there is something intrinsic in the contemporary reality of Antigua that resists this type

of description. Beyond that, in attempting to understand the nature of the disputes that take place between Antiguans, both within and outside the court system, the present writer found no structural points of reference that proved to be of much value in comprehending the case material.

Wilson suggests that there are two domains of social behaviour that constitute broad parameters within which specific acts of behaviour can be plausibly understood. He defines them as respectability and reputation. While underlying respectability is the principle of stratification, reputation is based solidly on the principle of equality. According to Wilson, respectability characterizes the world of women, as opposed to reputation, which is the hallmark of men's social existence. Besson (1993, 1998) has challenged this last assertion with much force, pointing out that the actions of women in both past and present belie Wilson's stereotyping. Many others have joined Besson in this criticism of Wilson. In a sense, Wilson set himself up in a trap by emphasizing the polarity, the opposition, the duality between the two concepts: this seems to be the common denominator underlying the responses of all his critics, who justifiably seize on this notion of duality as his argument's main weakness. Thus Sutton (1974), Miller (1994), and Douglass (1992) all focus on the gender issue, questioning the correlation between the dichotomies male/female and reputation/respectability. But Sutton raises another point, attacking Wilson for having made 'values the heart of his analytic model' and for seeing 'value dualism as arising from the bipolar structure that colonialism imposed'. According to her, by leaning heavily on meanings, Wilson has de-emphasized structure. This precludes the study of structural variables as factors influencing changes in 'power and control over economic resources'. Wilson has ignored what Sutton terms 'the external reality of power'. Yelvington develops this critique even further (1995).

What is remarkable, however, is that Wilson's critics have returned to attack him again and again over something like thirty years. Why has so much attention been given to ideas that evoke such strong critical reactions? Perhaps in reality something useful might be salvaged from Wilson's ideas. I would like to argue that if one were to treat Wilson's concepts of respectability and reputation as Weberian ideal types rather than as a bipolar duality, they may acquire some usefulness in both describing and interpreting observed behaviour in Antigua. The fruitlessness of trying to identify nebulous groupings and collectivities in Antigua leaves the observer little choice but to focus on the behaviour of individuals as a point of departure. There is an implicit phenomenological streak in Wilson's line of thought. In referring to the idea of 'community' in his 1969 article, the precursor to *Crab Antics*, he cites both Wagley ('there is a weak sense of community cohesion and local communities are but loosely organized' (1960: 8)), and Mintz ('many research workers in Caribbean societies have been struck by the relative absence of community-based activity in daily life' (1966: 932–3)). However, Wilson is not deterred by this and writes: 'Rather than dismiss the residential commu-

nity as a unit of no sociological importance, I think we should accept its undoubted existence but learn to analyse it more in terms of the way it is viewed by its inhabitants' (1969: 81).

Respectability and reputation, then, will be treated as ideal types reflected in the behaviour patterns of Antiguans. Weber's definition of the ideal type is as follows:

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct'. (1949: 90)

Further, Kasler suggests that the 'ideal type serves as a heuristic means to guide empirical research...the usefulness of an ideal-type construction is measured by its "success" in helping understanding' (1988: 183). This is the approach taken by the present paper, in the light of the facts acquired through fieldwork in Antigua: it is certainly not an attempt to enter the debate between Weberian and Durkheimian sociologists.

Wilson thus argues that if there is any structure to Caribbean social life, it is in

> the dialectical relation between the two principles, respectability and reputation. This is what is being expressed by the more observable features of social relations and social behaviour; but in the end I would argue that all levels of the structure are explicable as products of reputation, respectability and the dialectical relation between them. (1973: 9).

He also argues that while the 'equality' of reputation has its origins in the historical background of slavery, within which male slaves were truly equal in their subordination, class differentiation was created by women being elevated to positions of concubinage, and by the privileges accorded to that role.

> Respectability has its roots in the external colonizing...society, though in any given instance its reality depends on the integral role of the colonizing society in the social system of the colony. Reputation, on the other hand, is 'indigenous' to the colony...and is both an authentic structural principle and a counter-principle. (Ibid.)

Wilson also drew somewhat contemptuously on V. S. Naipaul's idea of 'mimic men' as characterizing the 'respectable' élite of Caribbean society, the adoption of alien behaviour patterns from European and American cultures. If these are the trappings of respectability and the associated stratification, then the counter-culture of reputation is its opposite. The title of Wilson's book, *Crab Antics*, indicates the exact mechanism whereby the equality underlying male reputa-

tion is maintained. Just as in a barrel full of crabs, all of which are trying to climb up the sides to get out, when one approaches the rim all the others will pull it down, so too any West Indian male who attempts to increase his status *vis-à-vis* his peer group will meet with their opprobrium and most probably ostracism. But Besson's critique of Wilson, discussed earlier, is sound: women engage in 'crab antics' no less than men, and in some instances even more intensely and viciously. Men, conversely, as they grow older, often look for the trappings of respectability.

It should be becoming clear, therefore, just how Wilson's idea can be given added impetus by treating the categories of respectability and reputation as Weberian ideal types. In many situations, different variations of the values expressed in these categories are brought into play rather than oppositional dualities. These categories may involve either men or women, exclusively or together, in their interactions with each other. The nature of certain categories of dispute becomes understandable when perceived within the parameters of respectability and reputation. These values are also reflected in differences of income and status. The phenomenon of 'shadism' in skin colour, relationships with religious associations, and the extent of relationships with the outside world are just some of the examples in respect of which the concepts of reputation and respectability can assist our understanding of observed behaviour.

The emphasis is indeed on the word 'understanding' or *Verstehen*, as understood by Weber. Hekman has written:

> A number of modern scholars have argued that Weber understood the 'subjective meanings' of social actions to be publicly available data. They assert that Weber did not use verstehen to refer to the process of uncovering a hidden mental operation, but to the intersubjective meanings or socially constituted rules which define the meaning of action within a given society. (1983: 46)

Wilson's intuition has unwittingly produced two ideal types that not only indicate the 'socially constituted rules', thus providing us with analytical tools, but also supply us with the perceptions of the actors themselves in the way they see their own society.

The Application of the Theoretical Framework of Reference to Case Material

My research interest in Antigua is oriented towards the anthropological study of law. The study of disputes and their resolution, both within and outside of the courts' domain, reveals just how relevant these two parameters of Wilson's are in providing an understanding of such situations. A very high incidence of cases

brought before the courts fall under what is known as the Small Charges Act—Abuse and Bad Language. This Act was originally passed, among other things, to prosecute slaves who had verbally abused plantation owners. The law, as it stands today, states:

> Any person who makes use of any abusive, blasphemous, indecent, insulting, profane or threatening language in any public place; or in any place to the annoyance of the public; or tending to a breach of the peace; shall be liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month.

It is used today primarily as a means of harassment in the furtherance of disputes. It is not clear why the police enable so many of these cases to come on to the roster of the magistrates' court, but it may be because they wish to maintain a constant stream of criminal cases in the absence of, or reduction in the frequency of other types of criminal case. Alternatively, any person can lodge a complaint under the terms of this Act, and by so doing bring the matter to court. Some of the less scrupulous lawyers encourage their clients to lodge a complaint under this provision. The court then becomes an arena for impugning the status of a person rather than a means of obtaining compensation. Most examples of this type of case are brought by the complainant mainly in order to damage the respectability of the adversary publicly or, equally, to protect his or her own respectability. Occasionally, the issue may, indirectly, be one of reputation for the parties involved (as noted in one of the cases cited below).

The Case of the Cuckolded Taxi-driver

A typical example was a case heard before the Parham magistrates' court on 18 May 1994. The president of the Taxi Drivers' Association at V. C. Bird International Airport accused one of the drivers of having used abusive language against him. This particular driver had 'jumped the line' of taxis waiting to pick up passengers. None of the other drivers there had reacted to the defendant's action. The defendant also claimed that, at the time, the complainant had done nothing to prevent him from moving out of line to pick up a passenger, and only took him to task as he began to load passengers. But this did not really seem to be the main issue. The president of the Association claimed that, as the argument progressed, the errant driver had loudly proclaimed, 'Just as you are not boss at home, so are you not de boss here at work'. To add additional insult, he also yelled out that the plaintiff's wife was 'a fucking whore, carrying on with other men'.

As in most of these cases, the magistrate dismissed the charges, saying that the complainant 'should have laughed the matter off'. But these are not laughing matters for the parties involved, since, as in this particular case, a man's respectability and, perhaps to a lesser degree, his reputation were both being challenged at one

and the same time. Reputation, as already mentioned, is closely linked to equality. In the absence of complaints by the other taxi drivers, the president of the Association gratuitously took the initiative in berating the errant taxi driver. It was more an act designed to enhance his status than to maintain order, and it was therefore necessary to 'pull him down' to the general level of his peer group. The strategy of attacking him with reference to his relationship with his wife was doubly effective. First it highlighted the president's aspirations towards upward mobility in so far as he was married, in contrast to most of his other colleagues. But the second and more specific insult was directed against the president's reputation—his inability to keep either his wife or his job under control, in addition to an even more direct assertion that his 'respectable' wife was cuckolding him. Bringing the case to court was also a tactical error, since it merely served to publicize the incident, much to everybody's amusement.

The plethora of cases being brought to the courts under the Small Charges Act—Abuse and Bad Language, can be well understood in terms of the ideal types of respectability and reputation. This holds true especially for the fact that no clear pattern can be discerned as to the actual statuses of the adversaries. What is at issue are perceived statuses, and these cases cross-cut all levels of the society. No damages are awarded, since the charge is a criminal one. What characterizes these cases is that they seem invariably to be prosecuted by the person who considers that his or her respectability has been impugned by the abusive language.

As I have already remarked, following Besson in her criticism of Wilson, the domains of reputation and respectability cannot simply be correlated with males and females respectively. Females are equally involved in disputes that involve both of these ideal types: indeed, there are probably as many Abuse and Bad Language cases in the courts involving women as there are involving men.

The Case of the Traded Insults

The following case was heard at the Parham Court on 6 July 1994. It was brought by Isola Willel against Ashby Benjamin and her daughter Betty Andrews. The charge was 'using insulting language' and 'causing a breach of the peace'. Isola was a desk clerk at the Swift Courier Service. She herself had been married for fifteen years and knew the defendants, who were neighbours of hers in Piggots village, the distance between the houses being not more than fifty yards. The events leading up to the case took place on 10 January 1993. According to the complainant, the second defendant, Betty Andrews, had come to her home and told her bad things that her mother had been saying against her and her husband. Among other things, Betty told her that her husband had had sexual relations with an 'antiman' (homosexual) from Sealy's. She went outside her house, very upset, and as she stood outside the first defendant, Ashby Benjamin, yelled to her across the space between the two houses to take down her laundry, because it was 'dirty

and mildewed'. Women regard this as a very direct insult. For good measure, she also pointedly asked Isola: 'Baby juice tastes good?' and to leave no element of doubt as to the point of that apparently cryptic remark, she added, 'The pickenee you have belongs to a married man and looks different'.

The point underlying these apparently unconnected remarks is the veiled accusation that Isola has a child from another man. This man provides for the child, among other things by supplying fruit juice in substantial quantities. Isola secretly drinks this fruit juice in order that her husband will not become aware of this other man. In her testimony, the complainant said that not only had these things shamed her and made her feel bad, but that she also felt that the first defendant was trying to ruin her marriage. These events were merely the latest in a series of public insults over time, the defendant having regularly repeated publicly, 'Your mother doesn't love you; you're a whore'.

The defendants' lawyer argued that the second defendant was now siding with her mother. In this case the complainant had usurped the role of the mother. The daughter, Betty, was constantly at Isola's house, eating there, wearing Isola's clothes, and doing all the housework. The first defendant, Ashby, was called to testify. She denied that she had ever cursed, but told the magistrate that she resented the influence that her neighbour had over her daughter. In his summing up, the magistrate indicated that he did not believe everything he had heard from both sides and that the truth would never be known for lack of any corroborative evidence. Nonetheless, he bound the defendants over to keep the peace for the next eighteen months. Discussing this case with informants after its conclusion, I learned that the fifteen-year-old Betty had a baby and that, in all probability, the father was Isola's husband. This item of information had not been raised in the court proceedings, or even alluded to.

This is just a typical example of scores of similar cases that come up before the magistrates' courts in Antigua every year. As mentioned above, these are criminal proceedings and the motivation is not to obtain compensatory damages. Instead, the court becomes an arena for the resolution of a dispute concerning the impugned respectability of the person bringing the charge. In this particular case, the lukewarm outcome handed down by the magistrate was interpreted as a minor victory for the complainant. It is important to note that neither side raised the issue of the putative father of Betty's baby, even though this must have been a severe bone of contention between the two households. The whole strategy behind the abusive language was to bring into question the respectability of a hard-working married woman. This is different from the case of the men, where the intention is to bring 'back into line' someone who is adopting a manner or life-style that places him above the other members of his peer group.

Unmarried Mothers and Putative Fathers

In the magistrate's court there is a second domain involving the principles of reputation and respectability, the domain of the civil actions taken by unmarried mothers against the putative fathers of their children for maintenance or for arrears in the payment of maintenance. A study conducted by Lazarus-Black (1991) indicated that the magistrate's court has become an arena for poor rather than well-off women. This was a reasonable assumption, given that at the time she collected her data, the maximum award of maintenance per child was EC$15 per week. Even for poor women this was a paltry amount and not a very strong incentive for going to court. Lazarus-Black further argues that, when the maximum award was increased from EC$7 to EC$15 in 1982, there was no increase in the number of cases brought to court. In 1993 an amendment to the Magistrate's Code of Procedure enabled a maximum award of EC$30 to be made, with the added proviso that 'he [the magistrate] may, having regard to the means of both father and all the circumstances, order a sum of money more than thirty dollars if he considers such increase just and reasonable'.

In fact, since 1993 magistrates have been giving awards far in excess of the stipulated maximum. One lawyer told me that she had achieved a record award for her client, EC$800 per week for a child. Given this new financial incentive, one might have expected that there would have been a significant increase in the frequency of maintenance suits in the courts. But this has not been the case. The number of maintenance and arrears cases brought before all the magistrates' courts in 1996 amounted to 1236, in comparison with the figures given by Lazarus-Black of 1492 in 1984 and 1287 in 1985. This would appear to indicate that the higher awards are not motivating women to litigate in increasing numbers. Instead, Lazarus-Black argues that in the absence of financial incentives, women are hauling men into court to give them a 'ritual shaming'. While this is probably an exaggeration, there is nonetheless an element of trying to impugn a man's respectability by dragging him into court. This would be true only for those cases in which a woman who has children by several men will target a man for court proceedings if he is holding down a respectable job, as opposed to the other fathers of her children, who fall short of this degree of respectability. This form of 'targeting' is often motivated by spite, frequently in response to a man transferring his affections to another woman. Rarely is the motivation exclusively economic, a contention borne out by several interviews with both lawyers and magistrates.

The Application of the Categories in Other Domains

As mentioned above, the title of Wilson's book, *Crab Antics*, is a metaphor derived from the behaviour of crabs that have been thrown into a barrel: they will all attempt to climb to the top and escape, but as one shows signs of succeeding, the

others will pull it down. This reminds one of peasant society behaviour as described by Foster (1965). Trouillot provides an appropriate definition of peasants: 'Peasants are part-economies not in any empirical sense but inasmuch as the type of work they engage in characterizes only a distinct level of a socio-economic structure, that is the labor process' (1988: 288). In his coining of the concept of the Image of Limited Good, Foster was referring to a world-view that assumes the scarcity of all that is good in life, as well as a need to ensure that nobody takes a grossly unfair share of that limited portion of good.

Antigua is not a peasant society in the classic sense of a rural hinterland linked to a dominant urban élite. There are no more than seven cash-crop farmers on the island producing a substantial commercial surplus. Henry demonstrates how V. C. Bird actively discouraged the growth of an agricultural sector in Antigua by stopping the redistribution of ex-plantation land (1984: 106), since independent farmers would not necessarily be dependent on the trade union movement of which Bird was the leader.

Today, Antigua has a 'one-crop' economy based on tourism. With little economic diversification, Antiguans are subject to the fluctuations of the world tourist trade. But the availability of jobs is not only a function of the state of the world's advanced economies: it is also conditioned by the seasonal nature of the tourist trade. This means that many Antiguans are out of work for several months during the course of the year. Jobs are intensively sought after, and given the small scale of Antiguan society (a total population of some 67,000), people are very much aware of the job statuses of many other people. The competition is severe, and the sentiments expressed in the stanza from the calypso cited above are rife.

Antiguans, like peasants, are individualistic. Foster could easily be writing about Antiguans when he states that the struggle over scarce resources 'encourages suspicion and mutual distrust...and it also encourages a male self-image as a valiant person, one who commands respect, since he will be less attractive as a target than a weakling' (1965: 302). But there are limits to self-aggrandizement beyond which society is no longer tolerant. There appears to be a clear linkage between the equality demanded by the 'limited good' concept and the equality of reputation. This may be seen, for example, in the marketing practices of women in the St John's fruit-and-vegetable market.

With some slight variation for quality, fruit and vegetables are sold throughout the market at the same price. Even towards the end of the day, when vendors are still left with stock, prices remain the same, and there is no price-cutting in order to get rid of the produce. Many vendors told me that they would bring the stock back home and burn it rather than sell it more cheaply. The normal economies of supply and demand do not operate in this market. Nobody is prepared to compete with their fellow vendors in order to achieve an advantage over them and make more money. Anyone doing so would be bad-mouthed and possibly shunned. Reputation

is inextricably linked with a principle of 'equalizing', as distinct from the more ideological implications of equality. Nearly all the market vendors are women.

The idea of class distinctions on Antigua is also misleading and constitutes another pitfall. While there are different socio-economic strata, it is difficult to see them as classes. Raymond Smith has stressed the difficulty of defining an upper class in the modern West Indies:

> the relative clarity of class relations in colonial society, with Government House as the centre of social life, where English culture, speech and manners were a mark of social striving—if not acceptance—has blurred into a pattern of conflicting claims by different elites, claims increasingly contested in the political arena. (1988: 166)

The black middle class of the late colonial era and possibly the immediate post-colonial period was indeed as Smith described it: a conscious effort to emulate English behaviour patterns and culture. Nostalgic articles occasionally appear in the newspapers describing this phenomenon, and Jamaica Kincaid's novels also reflect it. But today this class is no longer an important force, either economically or culturally. What Lowes (1993) has described for the period between 1834 and 1940 with reference to the Antiguan middle class is not reflected in the contemporary social reality of Antigua.

Tim Hector, one of the leaders of the parliamentary opposition in Antigua, a radical and perceptive social commentator and editor of the major opposition newspaper in the country, stated in an interview with me:

> When I was growing up, when I was young, the respectable classes lived between Long Street and Nevis Street. You had the Macdonalds, the Henrys, the Langtons...those were the families. Now it struck me very forcefully that the Macdonalds still live in St. Mary's Street. But they have reached the stage where the old colonial mansion they still own couldn't be repaired any more. They don't have the means to keep it running. And so they have become almost fuzzy-like, and that's because they didn't have the economic base with which to provide for their children. And as you know, an élite depends upon education in a situation like this.

A new well-to-do social stratum has emerged. The Antiguan government has almost total control over the tourist-based economy. There are no productive industries in Antigua, and agriculture is minimal, some people growing a small surplus for the market, and a few farmers cultivating a relatively small acreage of fruit and vegetables for sale to the hotel sector. The cycle of the tourist season affects the whole economy, including agricultural production. There is no peasant farming class in Antigua that forms a constituency in its own right, either economically or politically. The service industry in tourism is labour-intensive and provides many jobs, mostly menial, but, to the extent that it is capital-intensive, the profits go

mainly to foreign investors outside Antigua. The government itself, together with its allied trade union movement, is the largest single employer in the country, and the public service sector is disproportionately large. Expatriates or Antiguans close to governmental circles or Antiguans of foreign origin, such as the Hadeed family from Syria, own the more profitable ventures in the commercial sector.

In short, the upper-income echelons of Antiguan society have been artificially created by the government of Antigua over a very short period of time and are not a function of the slow, normal evolution of a middle class. There are some small, exclusive enclaves of wealthy white expatriates, some living on the island, others owning property in which they live for only part of the year. But the indigenous Antiguans who have become rich overnight are a nouveau riche group, ostentatious in their patterns of conspicuous consumption, and making no pretence whatsoever to aspiring to cultural values beyond the objects of material culture. The behaviour patterns that Smith (1965) found to characterize classes in Grenada are non-existent in Antigua. Thus, the acquisition of objects of material culture becomes an important component of behaviour governed by the standards of reputation. Brand new models of expensive Japanese cars are seen parked outside houses that range from the very ordinary to the most decrepit shacks. State-of-the-art stereo electronic equipment, bought more often than not on credit, blare out from both the cars and the houses. Young men and women dress in expensive designer clothes, prominently displaying the labels of well-known international firms. Practices of conspicuous consumption are the main way of acquiring a reputation. Respectability, on the other hand, is not necessarily the hallmark of behaviour for the higher-income echelons of Antiguan society.

While reputation seems to be a dominant motivating force for behaviour among younger males, respectability achieves its most outspoken expression among middle-aged and older women. Reiterating the main point of this paper, that Wilson's concepts of respectability and reputation should be treated as ideal types, it must be stressed that reputation, as a motivating force for behaviour, is not found exclusively among younger males, nor is respectability the exclusive characteristic of older women. Rather, we are dealing with the poles of a continuum, along which there are differential influences of either pole in different real-life situations.

Age is certainly a factor. Among his peers, a stereotypic younger man will exhibit boastful behaviour about his sexual prowess, maintain visiting relationships with several girls, and have a number of children by them. He will attempt to impress these women by a lavish display of material acquisitions. His ability to 'sweet-talk' women is a talent that accords him reputation, as does his proficiency in dancing and in sport. As he grows older, he may move on to cohabit with a particular woman, or successive women, over a period of time. The construction of a house for a woman and her children is indicative of the man's intention to have a more permanent and settled relationship with that woman. It is rare for a couple to

marry until they have a house they can live in. This overall pattern has been observed in Jamaica and has been commented on by LeFranc (1994). It seems to be equally applicable to Antigua. This means that the average 'marrying age' in Antigua and other West Indian societies is quite high. Even the construction of a house does not automatically involve marriage, and a high percentage of couples continue to cohabit together, even if they have a house. For women, 'marriage' conveys the idea of security as much as respectability. Many of the legal squabbles over property when a cohabiting couple break up become quite complex. The application of English Common Law accords a distinct advantage to the married woman in obtaining a financial settlement in comparison with a merely cohabiting partner.

At this end of the continuum, the 'respectability' pole, married women may aspire to be even greater pillars of respectability by becoming very active and devout members of the church. This enables them not only to attain a highly respectable status within the local community, but also to censure others who fall short of the standards demanded by the church. The public 'reading out' of transgressions by others, the withdrawal of privileges in performing ritual, liturgical, and musical functions, and possible relegation to the back pews of the church are sanctions designed to enforce a high level of compliance to the required standards of moral respectability. Church congregations are usually seventy to eighty percent female participants. The church is a location in which mainly women interact with each other over shared understandings about respectability. The domain of the church is not exclusive to women of higher socio-economic standing but permeates the whole society and constitutes an arena for the exercise and display of respectability at all levels of society. Conversely, the place where men mostly gather to interact over matters of reputation is the 'rum shop'. These are two very distinct worlds, although a numerical minority of men participate in church activities, and individual women can be found in rum shops, vying on equal terms with men in the macho banter of the place. But there is comparatively little social interaction between the sexes on what might be termed neutral territory.

Wilson points out many times that another expression of respectability is its associative links with the British colonial culture of the past. For years, the educational system was geared towards instilling good manners and well-spoken English among children. It was forbidden to speak the dialect of creolized English on the school premises, let alone in the classroom. Until a few years ago, the curriculum reflected the curricula taught in English schools. The high value placed on everything 'White' in origin has also produced a phenomenon known as 'shadism', whereby persons with lighter coloured skins attain higher status and regard. Henry has called shadism 'an elaborate construction that labelled and attributed social status to a large number of shades between black and white...it oriented them towards whites and away from blacks' (1984: 66). A person with a lighter skin is not

only aesthetically more pleasing but also tends to be more socially advantaged by the respectability this accords.

Conclusion

What I am trying to argue, then, is that a standard descriptive technique in anthropology, describing the institutional structure of the society, proved to be of little value in Antigua, and even had a negative value in trying to understand behaviour patterns. Transposing Wilson's concepts of reputation and respectability into categories of ideal types, they enable behaviour to be seen in meaningful terms. This could lead to inaccuracies of the sort that Besson has pointed out. But these inaccuracies were more a product of Wilson's attempt to provide a historical justification for the categories: they do not detract from the actual usefulness of the categories themselves. This provides a piecemeal rather than an all-inclusive model of society. As Parkin has pointed out,

> Weber acknowledges that the selection of elements that go to make up ideal-types is a somewhat arbitrary affair. What is picked out and accentuated, and what is played down, will to some extent be influenced by the kinds of problems being investigated and the questions being posed. It would thus not make much sense to speak of an ideal-type being correct or incorrect. For one type of enquiry it might be best to select one constellation of elements, for another type of enquiry a quite different set of elements might be more appropriate. (1997: 28)

The method takes the behaviour of individuals as a point of departure and tries to ascribe meaning to these individual behaviours. The meanings are implicitly understood by the actors themselves. They know the 'rules of the game' that enable them to sense the situations in which respectability and reputation become relevant motives for behaviour. The researcher also has an analytical tool at his disposal that enables him to study systems of concepts, as Weber advocated. Whether this is case-specific to Antigua and Providencia (where Wilson conducted his fieldwork), and also reported by Abrahams for St Vincent (1983), or whether it has wider implications for the Caribbean area as a whole, remains an open question.

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