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Race Class 2007; 49; 20
DOI: 10.1177/0306396807082856

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The coloniality of citizenship in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean

AARON KAMUGISHA

Abstract: A common theme to the political crisis of the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean is the denial of full citizenship to many persons in the nation state – not primarily in a legal sense but in the variety of practices, tropes of belonging and identity concerns that frustrate and deny the aspirations of many Caribbean people. This ‘coloniality of citizenship’ is a complex amalgam of elite domination, neoliberalism and the legacy of colonial authoritarianism. Independence from British rule did not bring with it a break from existing forms of citizenship and middle-class nationalism left intact the underlying racial order. The consolidation of elite models of development and their concomitant exploitations can be seen in the Caribbean tourism industry, which demands sexual caricatures of the Caribbean similar to those of the colonial project. It can be observed, also, in the Caribbean state’s patriarchal and heteronormative policing of gender and sexuality, carried out without any apparent awareness of the colonial provenances of such practices.

Keywords: elite domination, heteronormativity, nationalism, patriarchy, postcolonial state, tourism

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Race & Class
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10.1177/0306396807082856 http://rac.sagepub.com
Between 1979 and 1983, there was an extraordinary idealism and enthusiastic boldness of commitment right through the region. Those four years did something to ignite and activate people in all kinds of fields. But the tragedy is that [the Grenada] Revolution took such a fall, it traumatized the left – and we have not yet quite recovered the meaning of that event.¹

Some of you, I have no doubt, are profoundly aware of the savage ferocity of some of the West Indian rulers today to the populations who have put them in power. In 1966, this is appearing in island after island in the Caribbean. What we have to do is to see the origin of this, its early appearance at the very moment when freedom was won.²

It is by now well-acknowledged that political regimes in the Anglophone Caribbean have what Paget Henry has termed ‘high legitimacy deficits’.³ Practically every political theorist in the Anglophone Caribbean has used the language of crisis to describe the socio-political condition of the contemporary Caribbean state, from Brian Meeks’ ‘hegemonic dissolution’, to Holger Henke’s diagnosis of a ‘severe moral and ethical crisis’, Anthony Bogues’ Caribbean ‘postcolony’, Obika Gray’s ‘predation politics’ and Selwyn Ryan’s worry over the sustainability of democratic governance.⁴ In what follows, I will attempt a critique of many aspects of life in the Caribbean, the common theme to all being the persistent denial of full citizenship to many persons in the nation state. My primary concern here will be with the structural features of Caribbean life that act as constraints on contemporary citizenship. What I call the coloniality of citizenship is the complex amalgam of elite domination, neoliberalism and the legacy of colonial authoritarianism, which continue to frustrate and deny the aspirations of many Caribbean people. It is this that lies at the heart of the postcolonial state. By ‘citizenship’, I do not refer to the relatively limited legal definitions that often form the boundaries of its general use; but to a variety of practices, tropes of belonging and identity concerns that Caribbean people experience and the relationship between these and Caribbean institutions. It hardly needs saying, though, that the Caribbean people have often refused brilliantly, and with an amazing cultural inventiveness, many of the hegemonic state practices discussed below. The tension here is, in many ways, between structure and agency, and this essay is primarily concerned with the structural features of Caribbean life that act as constraints on contemporary citizenship, or what Jacqui Alexander terms the ‘intransigence of dominance’ in the postcolonial state.⁵

The contemporary moment of crisis may well be attributed to a series of events in the last two decades of which the 1983 end of the Grenada Revolution stands as a significant landmark. The Grenada
Revolution was principally a movement by the people of that island for self-determination beyond the confines of neocolonialism. It was also the most critical stand made by a regional leftist movement against empire in the post-independence era and activists from all over the region lent their support to its survival. Grenada also engendered a form of internationalism seldom seen in the post-independence Anglophone Caribbean, with activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) visiting, sharing their experiences and declaring their solidarity.6 The end of the Grenada Revolution not only scattered the Caribbean Left back across the region and throughout the Caribbean diaspora but, as Lamming notes, traumatised the Left in a manner not adequately addressed to this day. The collapse of Grenada, coming after the murder of Walter Rodney and the electoral defeat of Michael Manley in 1980, was followed by a decade of structural adjustment imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, and ended with the collapse of authoritarian governments in eastern Europe, soon to be followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Staggering from structural adjustment to neoliberal globalisation in the decade that followed, with a Left transformed or vanished and technocratic governments in place that would have been denounced as apologists for local and global apartheid two decades previously, the Caribbean state’s crisis of legitimacy is not hard to perceive.7 This, then, is the context of our struggle in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean.

That political independence effected a noteworthy break in the forms of citizenship present in the Anglophone Caribbean during the colonial period can hardly be disputed.8 As travestied and incomplete as one might declare the independence experience to be, it did usher in new ways of conceiving of selfhood and identity among Caribbean people and resulted in a substantial shift in the ‘rules of the game’, with respect to relations of government to governed and claims to, and about, national culture and identity. A claim that independence effected a radical break with previously existing forms of citizenship is certainly far more disputable. Instead, there has been a coalescence of a form of rule that has resulted in a series of counter-discourses to post-independence elite domination, most notably the Black Power movement, the New World movement and the Caribbean Marxist tradition. My aim here is not to review the well-trod ground of the successes and failures of these movements but, keeping them all in mind, to try to uncover what might be some of the distinctive features of the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean postcolony, a generation after the implosion of the radical attempts to remake the region. I will do this via a reflection on three sites which I believe to be essential to any critique of the coloniality of Caribbean citizenship. These are elite domination in the contemporary Caribbean, the nature of the

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tourism industry and the gendered and heteronormative gaze of the Caribbean state.

Elite domination in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean

To speak of petty bourgeois dictatorship in the English-speaking Caribbean is no play with words.9

In the last decade, the work of the political sociologist Percy Hintzen has provided one of the most comprehensive retellings of the nature of nationalism, elite domination and the postcolonial state in the Anglophone Caribbean. Hintzen’s central concerns are expressed in two questions: ‘Why are relations of domination and conditions of economic exploitation that are little different, and sometimes more severe, than those suffered under colonialism understood and interpreted differently in the postcolonial era? What explains the universal predisposition of those who engaged in and supported anticolonial struggles to accept the conditions of postcolonial repression and exploitation?’10

Hintzen’s work is an attempt to understand why Caribbean nationalist discourse not only was not a ‘narrative of liberation’ but also resulted in ‘even more egregious forms of domination, super-exploitation, and dependency’.11 This reading of the postcolonial Caribbean suggests it cannot be understood without an appreciation of the interplay between cultural and political frames of reference, identity and legitimacy constructs.

The recounting of pre-independence Anglophone Caribbean nationalism is crucial in any attempt to formulate a history of the present, for the class ideologies established in this period, the bases of their legitimacy constructs and the forms of regimentation introduced at that time still haunt the Caribbean today. Here, a distinction should be noted between anti-colonial thought and struggle – a sentiment present in the masses and the radicalised intelligentsia – and ‘Afro-creole nationalism’, the mobilising ideology of the Caribbean middle classes. Afro-creole nationalism is here seen as a convoluted mixture of early-century Garveyism and black consciousness, Fabian socialism, twentieth-century trade unionism and recognition of the shifting relationship between the colonising power of Britain and the new superpower, the United States; all filtering into the ideology of the black middle classes.12 The middle-class participation in the nationalist movement, complicated and influenced from a variety of sources as it was, was also, in large part, a response to colonialism’s inability to maintain power and fully accommodate the material and self-governing demands of this class. The critique of colonialism by the middle class was a contestation over whites’ right to rule and its nationalist claim in the Caribbean became that ‘the colonial condition of
inequality and white superiority was artificial and imposed. Once removed, a “natural state” of equality would assert itself. Anti-colonial nationalism, a broad-based sentiment encompassing large parts of the population, must thus be distinguished from Afro-creole nationalism, the ideology of the middle classes. By Hintzen’s reckoning, “anticolonial nationalism was, first and foremost, an expression of the general will for equality. This expression was transformed by petit-bourgeois ideology into demands for sovereignty and development.” The poverty of creole nationalism is that it “left intact the racial order underpinning colonialism while providing the ideological basis for national “coherence”. It left unchallenged notions of a “natural” racial hierarchy.”

Colonial and postcolonial bureaucratic formations are of considerable import here, as the wresting of control of these away from the coloniser in the immediate pre-independence period opened up pathways for post-independence regime consolidation. The transfer of this bureaucratic structure, with little interrogation of its underlying premises, allowed the Caribbean state to gain control over revenue-generating activities, the surpluses of which were now under its direction and which grew with postcolonial state expansion. State bureaucracies (and potential state largesse) also expanded further with the new responsibility for defence and foreign affairs, which allowed governing elites ‘violent coercive retaliation against those challenging their authority and legitimacy . . . [and] . . . direct access to international resources necessary for regime survival’ respectively.

The middle classes’ basis of power in unions and political parties after the 1930s rebellions and the social and cultural capital they possessed facilitated their ascendancy to the head of the nationalist movements. In Hintzen’s reading, ‘by the time adult suffrage was introduced . . . the lower class was firmly organized into political and labor bureaucracies dominated by middle-class leadership. Where they were not, Britain showed extreme reluctance to move the constitutional process along to full independence.’ The Anglophone Caribbean postcolonial state was, in part, a gift of the British to the Caribbean middle class, who were seen as possessing the social and cultural capital which made them fit to rule.

The collapse of the Caribbean Federation resulted in the advent of independence in the 1960s for a number of the territories within the Anglophone Caribbean and the arrival of associated statehood for others. The moment of independence was simultaneously a moment of recolonisation, as ‘all the leaders who came to power during the sixties did so while announcing their commitment to a moderate ideological position and to a pro-capitalist program of development for their respective countries’. The postcolonial elite demand for ‘sovereignty and development’, allied to an ‘industrialization by invita-
...developmental strategy, led to discourses of modernisation taking centre stage in debates about the future of the Caribbean state. Nationalism demanded the local utilisation of surpluses previously appropriated by metropolitan imperialism. Its leaders’ disinterest in linking colonial abjection to capitalism meant that development programmes predicated upon capitalist modernisation could gain hegemony without a contest. The decline of the radical movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, which contested this post-independence neocolonial condition, and the rise of an even more predatory neoliberal globalisation has meant that the postcolonial elite’s dream of equality of nation states and its liberal ideal of the equality of citizens within Caribbean nation states looks more like a nightmare than anything else:

Once the condition of equality becomes asserted in the postcolonial context, everything associated with postcolonial inequality is rendered irrelevant and subject to different interpretations, irrespective of the objective conditions. What once was exploitation becomes sacrifice. What was domination becomes functional organization. What was privilege becomes reward. What was discrimination becomes strategic allocation. These transformations are explained by the logic of equality embedded in the meaning of nationalism. Presuppositions of postcolonial equality become the force driving predispositions toward the acceptance of conditions of extreme inequality.20

The concepts of ‘the modern’ and of modernisation were fused in a calculus which regarded a Euro-American ‘modern’ and modernisation as the only future for the region. Quite simply, ‘to be “modern” was to be “equal”’.21 In the terms of a Caribbean elite that sought to define itself on the standards of a global bourgeois class, this meant adopting the consumption patterns of the West and acquiring its cultural capital.22 That the consumption patterns of the middle classes of the Anglophone Caribbean are incompatible with the economies of the Caribbean is a point that has been made incessantly by Caribbean scholars like George Beckford and Rex Nettleford. Moreover, to critique the desire for those tastes from a cultural nationalist position quickly risks being fruitless, as ‘such tastes are no longer understood as “foreign”, “white” or “colonial”. They are the “styles” and “tastes” of development, and modernity’s prerequisites for equality.’23

What, then, does this mean for attempts to theorise the Anglophone Caribbean postcolonial state? To trace the rise of the Afro-creole elites, as Hintzen does, is to pose serious questions about the nature of democracy and citizenship in polities still structured in dominance. It reveals again the deep limitations of the ‘cultural citizenship’ offered (often hesitantly) to the postcolonial masses by the middle-class elites, a citizenship often bereft of the revolutionary potential of anti-colonial
nationalism after it has gone through the organisational rationalities of the middle class. Like all of the most pervasive systems of power, which operate through rendering their guises invisible, ‘creole culture serves to hide a racialized division of labor and a racialized allocation of power and privilege’.24 Race, colour and culture, and the bifurcations they cause in class formations in the postcolony, suggest that the Caribbean postcolonial state is a racial state as much as it is simultaneously a state that expresses its political-economic interests based on the hegemony of a global elite’s norms and values.25

Here, the intimacy of the Caribbean polity must be examined, as both fundamental to domination in the present and, paradoxically, to fashioning resistance. The extraordinarily close relationship between governed and government in some of the smallest independent states in the world cannot be glossed over, as it affects strategies of political mobilisation, bases of authority and the techniques of domination used to manufacture consent and legitimacy. Unlike other regimes in the West, the Caribbean state cannot ignore the vote of significant parts of the population. Hence, in its more ugly manifestations, it resorts to rigging elections (Guyana under Forbes Burnham), buying the vote through ridiculously open forms of patronage (Antigua under the Birds) or creating such an atmosphere of violence, patronage and intimidation in areas popularly known as ‘garrison communities’ that votes are assured (Jamaica in the 1970s and 1980s under both major parties).26 In times in which the necessity of regime survival is less directly under threat, elections can still descend into a cult of personality and a tasteless consumerism financed by white elites, while nationalist slogans are chanted from political platforms (Barbados’ elections of 2003). It is not often necessary to resort to assassination as a technique of power to control recalcitrant leftists, though occasionally it is utilised, most notably in the murder of Walter Rodney by agents of the Burnham regime in Guyana. The small size of the populations and the ease of isolating or co-opting individual radicals mean that power can be sure of itself without allying with practices that might damage its international human rights record. Jobs can be denied, professional advancement stymied, rumours engineered and personal lives destroyed, leaving many with the choice that the Trinidadian installation artist Chris Cozier once referred to as ‘Migrate or Medal/Meddle’.27

For Hintzen, creole nationalism, as outlined earlier, is the cultural ideology that legitimates middle-class domination in the Anglophone Caribbean. Claims to belonging and citizenship in the Caribbean state turn on arguments about creolisation. ‘To be “Caribbean” is to be “creolized” and within this space are accommodated all who, at any one time, constitute a (semi)-permanent core of Caribbean society.’28 Creole identity, far from being a harmonious space of mixed identities, is one thoroughly and unashamedly colonial:
Creole discourse has been the bonding agent of Caribbean society. It has functioned in the interest of the powerful, whether represented by a colonialist or nationalist elite. It is the identifier glue that bonds the different, competing, and otherwise mutually exclusive interests contained within Caribbean society. It paved the way for accommodation of racialized discourses of difference upon which rested the legitimacy of colonial power and exploitation.

The colonial provenances of ‘creoleness’ are not only to be found in the power relations it reinscribes but in the centrality of European and African culture to its frame of reference. Thus:

The combination of racial and cultural hybridity determines location in between the extremes. For the European, this pertains to the degree of cultural and racial pollution. It implies a descent from civilization. For the African, creolization implies ascent made possible by the acquisition of European cultural forms and by racial miscegenation whose extensiveness is signified by color. This, in essence, is the meaning of creolization. It is a process that stands at the center of constructs of Caribbean identity.

Here we see again the limitations of the criticism of colonialism fashioned by the Caribbean nationalist elites. At times, Africa occupied a significant space in their thoughts but this was invariably ‘associated with the freedom and transcendence denied the colonized’ rather than a repudiation of its image as a ‘space for exploitation and for the exercise of paternalism’. The reproduction of domination on to those now considered to be black, namely the poor, or in Jamaican parlance ‘the sufferers’, who are the newly condemned of the Caribbean, could thus be facilitated without contradiction by the postcolonial Afro-creole elites.

Tourism and the postcolony

Look at an island, say, like Montserrat, or the others. If their governments could be persuaded to sell land for retirement homes for wealthy Americans, the place could be another Monte Carlo! The ones [Montserrat citizens] who stay would have higher incomes. But they don’t want to do it. They regard the land as some sort of birthright.

The national bourgeoisie organizes centres of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry . . . the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of
manager for western enterprise, and will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe.33

The main re-inscription of colonial tropes in the contemporary Caribbean has come via the economic/developmental policies adopted by its nation states since independence. In the last couple of decades, with the decline of a number of movements that took a radical perspective on Caribbean development, notably in Jamaica, Guyana and Grenada, the general theme has been a development strategy which posits itself as non-ideological, as simply a professional and technocratic response to changing global and local configurations.34 In many cases, even this ‘social democratic capitalism’ has given way to a fairly untrammelled neoliberalism. Such a concept of development in countries exploited for their wealth has resulted in the power of this exploitative potential being transferred to governments and the upper-middle class, who have perpetuated a legacy of underdevelopment. This can best be seen in the rise of the tourist industry, which demands caricatures of the Caribbean similar to those of the colonial project.35 But my reflections about tourism are not identical with its association, in some radical quarters, with slavery or a purely unmediated form of colonialism, arguments that have been made many times in the past. What I wish to think about are the ways in which tourism configures Caribbean people’s citizenship in the post-independence Caribbean, thus allowing for a more thoroughgoing critique of it as a total enterprise.

One feature of the purest versions of the ‘tourism economy’ is that far more people enter the island as visitors annually than there are citizens in the country.36 This seemingly innocuous observation, a figure subjected to little analysis within the Caribbean and, indeed, trumpeted by tourism managers, is noteworthy as it problematises understandings of who constitutes the citizen within the tourist economy. The dependence of the tourist economy on visitors means that production within the island is geared with them in mind. This production may take the form of food (often imported at a profit by the elites who control the distributive sector), entertainment, cultural performances and a whole variety of goods and services both legal and illegal. Landscapes are rigorously reconfigured to present a vision that the tourist might enjoy, a process that may mean the production of a fictionalised history, the enclosure of desirable spaces along the shoreline and the rehabilitation of capital cities and towns to more closely approximate models to be found in the urban north Atlantic. Local projects as apparently straightforward as the replacement of a statue or the introduction of breathalyser tests must first be thought of in terms of tourists’ tastes and their effect on the tourism industry and scuttled if, on reflection, deemed inappropriate.37 Movements for black economic enfranchisement or any radical redress of structural socio-economic
inequalities must pass the same scrutiny. That the typical visitor is a white westerner means that, again, the West consumes the Caribbean by means not noticeably distinguishable from the colonial period.

What is perhaps even more disturbing is what all these seemingly unconnected events mean for the status of the tourist. Tourists occupy a space which we might term ‘extra-territorial citizenship’. Their desires are analysed before they arrive; indeed, before the thought of even visiting the country has entered their minds. Their time spent in the country is carefully orchestrated in such a way that a country is not just created as mythical (as in the advertisements that draw them to it) but is materially constructed to suit their desires with a tremendous amount of epistemic (and occasionally physical) violence done to its permanent residents. After their departure, efforts are continually made to make them return. If this same effort was made to assess the needs and aspirations of Caribbean citizens, the Caribbean might, as the old cliché goes, actually be a better place to live. As it is, despite state managers’ frequent efforts to deny or silence popular dissent, Caribbean citizens often feel ‘like an alien in we own land’.

Let us look a little more closely at the images of the Caribbean that are created for western consumption. For Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, not only do Caribbean tourism advertisements negotiate ‘communal tensions about the meaning and interpretation of history’ but contrast strongly with, for example, advertisements for tourism in Greece, the purpose of which is to summon up a glorious past:

[T]his [western] narrative of origins is itself specular and narcissistic: Europe looks in the mirror and is dazzled by its own beauty. Ads for the equally crystalline waters of the Caribbean, by contrast, appeal not to historical origins but to ‘get-away-from-it-all’ sensuality, evincing little interest in the indigenous myths and history of the region. While the Greek ads are about remembering and reflecting, the Caribbean ads are about reawakening the dormant senses and, implicitly, about forgetting history. The former forges links to a European past, the latter obscures historical connections.

Shohat and Stam’s observations speak to the reality of the Caribbean’s marketing of itself. Advertisements aimed at potential foreign owners of real estate in Barbados present a historical timeline where black Barbadians do not exist, or they attempt to create a colonial reality for the European imagination, an ‘atmosphere of plantation gentility and charm’. Caribbean state managers’ complicity in reproducing these understandings can further be seen in their desire to use educational programmes to mould servile populations, suited to the tourist’s tastes. There is no better example than the comment made by Jean Holder, a former long-serving secretary-general of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, that a number of employees in the tourism sector in
the Caribbean are unable ‘to distinguish between service and servitude’. Or, as one state-sponsored advertisement in Dominica put it, ‘SMILE. You are a walking tourist attraction.’

This phrase – ‘a walking tourist attraction’ – is especially poignant because of its (unconscious?) association with the sex tourism industry. Sex tourism is perhaps the feature of contemporary Caribbean life in which the coloniality of race, class, gender and sexuality is exhibited in its most pathological manner. This critical issue has been given long overdue attention in the collection by Kamala Kempadoo and others, *Sun, Sex and Gold: tourism and sex work in the Caribbean*. Sexual services are not a marginal part of the tourist industry in the Caribbean but a constitutive element of it. This particular form of sexual desire is premised, in part, upon a ‘desire for an extraordinarily high degree of control over the management of self and others as sexual, racialised and engendered beings’. It is impossible to imagine Caribbean tourism without the sex industry, as can be seen in the nativist and colonial tropes used in its advertising campaigns. As Julia O’Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez-Taylor put it, ‘that sex industries today depend upon the eroticization of the ethnic and cultural Other suggests we are witnessing a contemporary form of exoticism which sustains post-colonial and post-cold war relations of power and dominance’.

It should, thus, not come as a surprise that World Bank economists can express the project of recolonisation in the naked terms cited above. It is also highly ironic that, as Jacqui Alexander has noted, Caribbean state managers can pass legislation ‘against certain sexualities while relying upon women’s sexualized bodies and a political economy of desire in private capital accumulation’. The bodies and dignity of Caribbean people are offered up again for the ‘good’ of the nation and the enjoyment of citizens from metropolitan locations.

**Gender, sexuality and the state**

What kinds of patriarchies do different modernities require? Gender and sexuality are crucial factors in any critique of the coloniality of citizenship. It is here that one finds some of the most pervasive and crude denials of citizenship in the Caribbean postcolony and apprehending the rationales for these denials moves us closer to explaining the crises of citizenship within the contemporary Caribbean state. The complexities involved in analysing the gendered nature of Caribbean citizenship are immense. Like women throughout the world, Caribbean women’s citizenship is constrained by gendered violence, poor access to reproductive health rights, lower wages for comparable work, higher rates of unemployment and the burden of a
disproportionate amount of caring work. The legacy of structural adjustment has been the destruction of the capacity of the state to provide social services and hence a corresponding increase in the burden of caring work performed by women and, simultaneously, a crisis of legitimacy in the ranks of state managers. Thus, tracing contemporary coloniality forces an interrogation of the masculinist dimensions of creole nationalism. It further suggests that we take seriously Kempadoo’s recent conclusion that the coloniality of sexuality in the Caribbean is productively seen not as merely a series a negative stereotypes foisted on to Caribbean bodies but also a constitutive part of the ways in which many Caribbean people formulate desire and experience their sexual lives.49

The critique of patriarchy and gender inequalities in the Caribbean is complicated not only by colonialism but also by the seemingly progressive actions of some Caribbean leaders in their mobilisation of women as part of the nationalist struggle.50 Despite the obvious political rationales for these stances – the need to mobilise women as an important constituency of voters for electoral victory – Natasha Barnes is correct when she states that ‘today none of us [Caribbean women] can say that we did not benefit materially and psychologically from the shifts of political allegiance that such nationalisms inaugurated’.51 It is hard, however, not to come to the conclusion that many of these leaders had a genuinely felt but, ultimately, paternalistic view of women’s rights. Thus, when women make new demands on the state in the post-independence era, this is deemed illegitimate due, in part, to the erroneous perception that women’s movements did not exist before independence but, more centrally, because the problem of the coloniality of gender formations in the Caribbean was never adequately addressed at that time. The problem becomes the hostility of the Caribbean state to further demands placed on it by women’s groups. Previous progressive affiliations are forgotten and their mobilisation is seen as a recent development ‘contaminated’ by contact with western feminisms. Women’s issues are, in short, expected to take a ‘back seat’ to more important issues of the state. In a situation in which a popular discourse of ‘male marginalisation’ has been advanced to explain male under-achievement in the educational system, any advance made by women is seen to be at the expense of men. Men are the paradigmatic citizens and women do not deserve any achievements they may wrest from societies in which men are, today, still overwhelmingly represented in parliaments, business and the courts.

These issues are perhaps seen most starkly in the relationship of women to the law. Up to the end of the 1990s, sexual harassment legislation had been passed in only two Caribbean countries, Belize and the Bahamas, and one legal scholar has opined that the latter’s legislation is manifestly inadequate.52 Legislation such as the Sexual
Offenses Act (1986) of Trinidad re-inscribes the idea that men have ‘proprietary rights in women’s bodies’ as, under this law, marital rape can only occur when some form of legally recognised separation has taken place. Reflecting on the status of women in Commonwealth Caribbean jurisprudence, Tracy Robinson states the following:

In the early stages of the creation of independent Caribbean nation states, there were manifestly classes of citizenship rights for men and women. Women were cast as the dependants of men – put in constitutional language, they obtained rights to participate in civil society through men. That has changed and, in all but a few Caribbean countries, ‘equal treatment regardless of sex’ and gender-neutral language have become the mode of constitutional discourse. Even so, men continue to be the paradigm of a citizen . . . second-class citizenship describes not only the hierarchy between men and women but also the hierarchy of roles for women: in one case, women are second to men as citizens, and in the other, citizenship is perceived as secondary for women.53

The Caribbean state repeatedly re-inscribes the patriarchal understanding of the public/private domain, which has been tirelessly critiqued by generations of feminists, and, as a result of women’s second-class status, can claim that the fundamental rights and freedoms provided by Caribbean constitutions do not protect against gender discrimination; nor should they do so as, according to the Jamaican attorney general, this is not a matter of the ‘utmost importance’.54 One should not be surprised, then, that in the Jamaican parliament in 2003, one legislator could suggest that schoolgirls under sixteen undergo virginity testing, while another opined that women with more than two children outside marriage should be sterilised.55 This is nothing more than the spectre of colonialism’s abduction of Caribbean women’s bodies that just will not lie down and be still.

One of the most compelling discussions of denials of citizenship in the Caribbean postcolony has come from Jacqui Alexander, whose central concern is with the revision of citizenship to exclude those who practise a sexuality that differs from the heteronormative impulses of the state.56 The new, post-independence legislation that explicitly criminalises homosexual sex in many Caribbean jurisdictions not only makes the ‘psyche of homosexuality . . . the psyche of criminality’ but confirms that citizenship ‘continues to be premised within heterosexuality and principally within heteromasculinity’.57 In a devastating critique of black masculinity and its claims to legitimation in the post-colony, Alexander writes the following:

Black nationalist masculinity needed to demonstrate that it was now capable of ruling, which is to say, it needed to demonstrate moral
rectitude, particularly on questions of paternity . . . It . . . required distancing itself from, while simultaneously attempting to control, Black working-class femininity that ostensibly harboured a profli-gate sexuality: the ‘Jezebel’ and the whore who was not completely socialized into housewifery, but whose labour would be mobilized to help consolidate popular nationalism. Of significance is the fact that Black nationalist masculinity could aspire toward imperial masculinity and, if loyal enough, complicitous enough, could be knighted although it could never be enthroned. It could never become king.\textsuperscript{58}

It is through such ‘ruses’ that heteronormativity was inscribed and continues to be inscribed in the Caribbean postcolony. Caribbean patriarchy needs homosexuality. If it did not exist (which Caribbean state managers sometimes claim) then it would have to be invented.\textsuperscript{59} The few moves by Caribbean political elites towards decriminalising homosexuality are noteworthy more for their intellectual bankruptcy than anything else. A case in point here is Barbados, in which it was announced in February 2001 that homosexuality might have to be decriminalised to allow the distribution of condoms to male prisoners in the island’s jail.\textsuperscript{60} No discussion by elite authority was forthcoming about the intrinsic rights of consenting adults to make their own sexual choices, the colonial bases of the laws on sexuality or the absurdity of state attempts to legislate on desire. Nor could elite opinion countenance using the occasion to open a public debate about how the painful experiences of slavery and colonialism have historically and contemporaneously colonised desire and demanded a fashioning of the self that polices any sexual desire marked as illegitimate, vulgar and barbarous. Indeed, in response to opposition by religious leaders, the prime minister stated that ‘the church is in the business of saving souls . . . but we have to get down to the business of saving lives’.\textsuperscript{61} Here, again, we see the technocratic Caribbean state in full flower, managing gender, sexuality and disease with apparent adroit ease, without the slightest trace of knowledge about the colonial prove-nances of its understanding of those concerns.

**Caribbean postcolonial citizenship?**

So many of the dilemmas that petit-bourgeois elite domination would cause in the postcolonial state were seen clearly by C. L. R. James at independence. In his essay ‘The West Indian middle classes’, James noted that this class ‘for centuries . . . [has] had it as an unshakeable principle that they are in status, education, morals, and manners separate and distinct from the masses of the people’.\textsuperscript{62} James’ lament about the role of this class as a facilitator of colonial governmentality, its
desire for little more than acceptance by the ruling elites and its intellectual bankruptcy is echoed by Percy Hintzen a generation later. In his commentary on ‘Structural adjustment and the new international middle class’, Hintzen observed that the interests of a ‘technocratic and managerial elite’ in underdeveloped societies are often similar to those of ‘international capitalist interests that define, dictate, and determine programmes and policies of structural adjustment and liberalization’.

The shift, then, is from a pre-independence middle class tied to the Colonial Office to a post-independence elite wedded to metropolitan capital and complicit with global neoliberalism and its agents, the IMF and the World Bank. Conspicuous consumption and the valorisation of tastes that inevitably derive from the metropolis are the only thing that can separate Caribbean elites from the masses and further legitimise their domination over them. James’ closing comments in ‘The West Indian middle classes’ – that ‘The ordinary people of the West Indies . . . do not want to substitute new masters for old. They want no masters at all . . . history will take its course, only too often a bloody one’ – is well seen in the spiralling levels of violence in many Caribbean countries.

In Jamaica, this rise in violent crime has led to analyses of the political moment as one of ‘hegemonic dissolution’ (Brian Meeks) in a situation of ‘predatory politics’ (Obika Gray). Meeks’ position is that, with the advent of structural adjustment and neoliberal globalisation, the Jamaican state’s ability to provide social services for the majority of the population has been considerably depleted. When this is allied to the fact that the middle classes (and, by extension, middle-class values) are seen as irredeemably corrupt, visionless and elitist, new sources of authority and empowerment are sought after by the poor and working classes. These may range from popular music to the trafficking of narcotics. All of this becomes a critical part of a complicated social environment, features of which include mounting crime rates, a sense of despair amongst a significant portion of the population and protests that quickly turn into ‘riots’. Nor is this situation specifically Jamaican, as the recent dramatic increases in crime rates (particularly murder and kidnapping) in Guyana and Trinidad have shown. What these depressing scenarios point to is the grim relationship between neoliberalism, narco-terrorism and middle-class domination under the guise of creole nationalism.

Obika Gray’s analysis of contemporary Jamaican politics suggests that it might be more fruitful to see state power there as a type of ‘predatory rule’, rather than the client-state relationship previously theorised by a number of Caribbean political scientists. Gray’s analysis consistently utilises the language of ‘citizenship’ and points to its denials through phrases like ‘effective democratic citizenship’ and ‘anxieties [over] moral citizenship’, though without clearly estab-
lishing his definition of citizenship and the extent to which the different social groups he assesses see it quite differently. He refers to the state’s ‘substantial curtailment of democratic citizenship’ and poses the question of ‘what consequences follow from permitting the Jamaican people culturally significant forms of social power yet denying them politically relevant forms of citizenship’.  

But if this is applicable to Jamaica, what of the region as a whole? A wider critique is needed to help us understand the ruses – such as patriarchy, heteronormativity or anti-black racism – that are typical of the postcolonial state in the Anglophone Caribbean. Indeed, the concept of postcolonial citizenship allows us to better centre gender and sexuality in any theorising of the limitations of the Caribbean state. As a concept, it makes it clear that the future of radical activism within the region will be dependent not only on developing new theories of the state but on an assembling of a number of these themes into a more explicitly and coherently articulated sense of what postcolonial citizenship entails. Radicalism here signifies an inalienable commitment to justice for colonised people, a dedication to Third World liberation and a ready acknowledgement that resistance to the coloniality of power is the only way towards a human existence in this modern colonial world – themes always part of Caribbean radicalism but strangely attenuated today.

In brief, it is the appeal of a bourgeois western citizenship that has animated the desires of the elites in the Caribbean postcolony and which explains their repudiation of any type of citizenship that does not meet this criterion. Citizenship has been constructed not merely on the denial of the experiences of the black and Indian masses but also on the denial of the experiences of women and homosexuals – in short, everyone who did not fit the template of ‘white bourgeois heterosexual man’ in its now brown/black male Caribbean configuration. The ‘ossification of freedom’ in the Caribbean is linked to desires for ‘respectability’ and ‘decency’ that are completely based on a western epistemological frame of reference – and, more specifically, on a colonial, pseudo-Victorian mutation of this order. The fact that governments throughout the region did not use independence as a time to usher in new perspectives on rights and freedoms, but have instituted legislation designed to stifle protest, points not just to the desire for ‘regime survival’ but also to the seductions of reproducing the relationship between government and governed instituted by colonialism. The Caribbean postcolonial state is a failure, not merely because of its inability to protect its citizens from the depredations of global capitalism, but because it has been unwilling to continue the process of dismantling the structures of power and discourses of otherness instituted by the colonial state. That this situation is untenable and results in what Frederic Jameson has called ‘grisly and ironic reversals’ of the
possibilities of true human liberation spoken of so haltingly at independence is, by now, clear.

The salient questions have been posed by Earl Lovelace in his 1996 novel, *Salt*:

> How can you free people? ... When every move you make is to get them to accept conditions of unfreedom, when you use power to twist and corrupt what it is to be human, when you ask people to accept shame as triumph and indignity as progress? What is power if power is too weak to take responsibility to uphold what it is to be human?72

They remain to be answered. There is an absurdity in the Caribbean postcolony, in the way it reinscribes the tropes of coloniality that have for so long presented the Caribbean people as deficient, backward and incapable of the considered reflection that could lead to genuine transformations of their societies. Absurdity is a tough word to use to describe the paradoxes of citizenship in the contemporary Caribbean, as it immediately brings to mind V. S. Naipaul’s dehumanising contempt of a generation ago. But what if absurdity was instead a reflective position, a momentary sigh, before a cry of ethical revolt against the present?73 Here, instead of Frederic Jameson’s claim that it is history that hurts, that ‘refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis’,74 in today’s Caribbean we may claim the following: it is not history that is absurd, it is the contemporary that is absurd. History may haunt, but the contemporary is what hurts.

**References**

2. C. L. R. James, ‘The making of the Caribbean peoples’, lecture delivered at the Second Conference on West Indian Affairs held in Montreal, Canada, 1966.
6 I would like to thank Chris Searle, himself one of the foremost British radicals who worked for the revolutionary government, for this insight. For Searle’s work on Grenada, see Chris Searle, Words Unchained: language and revolution in Grenada (London, Zed Press, 1984).


8 On the simplest level, this transition resulted in Caribbean people becoming citizens of a nation state rather than subjects of an empire.


13 Hintzen, ‘Rethinking democracy in the postnationalist state’, op. cit., pp. 105, 121.


15 Percy Hintzen, ‘Democracy and middle-class domination in the Anglophone Caribbean’, in Carlene J. Edie, ed., Democracy in the Caribbean: myths and realities (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger, 1994), p. 13. Hintzen cites Max Weber’s observation that ‘once it is established, bureaucracy is among the social structures which are the hardest to destroy’, with clear resonances for the contemporary predicament.

16 Ibid., p. 14.

17 Ibid., p. 17.


20 Ibid., p. 106.


22 Ibid., p. 70.

23 Ibid., p. 70. My italics.


25 On the racial state, see David Theo Goldberg, ‘Racial states’ in Goldberg and Solomos, op. cit., and his The Racial State (Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2002). This global elite is hegemonically white but far from solely so, as it is perfectly willing to admit members who possess European cultural capital and a neoliberal capitalist ethos or what Walter Rodney, among others, once called the comprador elite of the Third World.

26 By other regimes in the West, I refer here to the United States and the debacle of the 2000 election, particularly the result in the state of Florida where there is little doubt now that systematic discrimination and disenfranchisement took place

27 The title of a 1998 Chris Cozier exhibition. The ‘medal’ refers to the acknowledgement given routinely to citizens deemed to have given good service to the nation and routinely comes in the form of knighthoods, ‘crowns of merit’ and other such colonial titles.


30 Ibid., p. 478.


35 The rise of tourism is linked to the fact that Caribbean countries, beset by a legacy of underdevelopment that necessitates the importation of a large amount of food and manufactured goods, have consistently needed large flows of foreign exchange to stabilise their economies. As Polly Patullo points out, ‘for two decades tourism has distinguished itself as the only steady growth sector for the region’. Polly Patullo, *Last Resorts: the cost of tourism in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica, Ian Randle Press, 1996), p. 12.

36 The purest versions of the tourism economy in the Caribbean can be found in Antigua, the Bahamas, Barbados and St Kitts. St Lucia, Grenada and most other Anglophone Caribbean islands are trying desperately to emulate the patterns these islands have established. Tourism in Jamaica is more specific to particular locations within the island. Trinidadian tourism is mainly linked to carnival, resulting in a somewhat different set of circumstances to what I discuss above. In 2000, the numbers of long-stay tourists (one night or more) and the populations of the respective islands were: Antigua (206,871 tourists; 71,800 population); Barbados (544,696; 267,500); St Kitts and Nevis (73,149; 40,400); St Lucia (269,850, 156,000). ‘Country Visitor Analysis’ (Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2000).

37 In Barbados in the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, heated debate revolved around the government’s decision to remove a statue of Horatio Nelson from the central square in the capital. While much of the debate was between the white elite and conservative blacks versus local pan-Africanists, one of the arguments that gathered most force and was frequently repeated in the newspapers was that British tourists (the major market) liked the statue, which should be reason enough to retain it. Indeed, there were reports in British newspapers (notably, the *Guardian*) about the controversy and travel agents reported that British tourists had asked if they were not welcome in Barbados any more. As of April 2007, the statue remained in place. Similarly, in Barbados in 2003, comments were made in the press that the proposed introduction of breathalyser tests might harm the tourism industry.


42 Ibid., p. 62.

43 Ibid., p. 89.


46 Ibid., p. 37. A discussion of sex work in the Caribbean raises the far more intricate question of the extent of agency that sex workers have in their work and lives and I would certainly disavow any analysis that sees them merely as helpless victims of western imperialism. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the fundamental coloniality of the desires that create a market for their services in the tourism industry.

47 Alexander, ‘Not just (any)body can be a citizen’, op. cit., p. 19.


53 Ibid., p. 25. Emphasis in original.


56 Alexander, ‘Not just (any)body can be a citizen’, op. cit., p. 6.

57 Ibid., pp. 7, 10.

58 Ibid., p. 13.


61 Ibid.


63 Hintzen, ‘Structural adjustment and the new international middle class’, op. cit., p. 52.


67 Ibid., p. 74.
70 I should make it clear here that I do not refer to a ‘failure’ in the same sense of the contemporary neoliberal discourse on ‘failed states’.
74 Quoted in Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, op. cit., p. 49.