

Resolving the Crisis of Governance in Caricom: A Contribution

Mervyn Claxton

A very lively, wide-ranging public debate took place in the thirteen states of the American Confederation, during the period immediately preceding the birth of federal government in the United States. It was conducted by means of published tracts, pamphlets, church sermons, town hall meetings, and newspaper articles. That public debate centered on the proposals contained in the document prepared by a Constitutional Convention, comprising fifty-five delegates selected by the thirteen Confederal states, whom Congress had appointed to revise the Articles of the Confederation. The defining idea of the constitutional draft was inspired by James Madison's concept of a republican democracy, which included separate authorities with separate responsibilities which allowed no one to control too much of the government; and a dominant national government that would curb the power of the states. The crucial role Madison played in that important public debate earned him the title, "Father of the Constitution".

In that public debate, which lasted between September, 1787 when the final draft of the Constitution was signed by the Convention delegates, and September 1788 when it was ratified, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay played an influential leadership role in informing and shaping American public opinion. They jointly wrote a series of short articles on the constitutional issues involved, which were published in newspapers in New York and widely reproduced for the American public. Those articles, all of which were signed "Publius", are considered to have made a crucial difference in obtaining the ratification of the proposals in the draft constitutional document, which eventually became the American Federal Constitution.

It was that crucially important public debate, which ensured that the American people would have a strong feeling of ownership of their constitution. The enormous reverence that the majority of Americans display towards their Constitution, and the great extent to which they are prepared to go to protect it from any legislative act or proposed constitutional change that, in their view, would go against the intentions of its framers, stems from that extensive, broad-based, consultative process.

In a book written at the turn of this century, Larry Siedentop, an Oxford political scientist, declared that there is a crisis in Europe - a crisis caused by two conflicting notions of the constitutional structure of the European Union, one favouring a *Europe des Nations* and the other in favour of a federal union or at least a more integrated one. Observing that questions about the dispersal of power, building human character, and the fostering of diversity were at the heart of the subtlest constitutional thought in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, Siedentop asked rhetorically: "*Why has Europe failed to generate a debate which approaches, in range and depth, the debate which developed around the drafting of a Federal Constitution for the United States? Where are our Madisons?*" (Democracy in Europe, 2000).

Few will dispute the proposition that there is a crisis of governance in Caricom. In my opinion, that crisis is even more important and needs to be addressed even more urgently than the European crisis identified by Siedentop. However, unlike Europe's crisis, which poses no real danger to European states, Caricom's crisis is arguably an existential one. One Caricom state was deemed to be in

danger of state capture by criminal gangs linked to the international drug trade. Another has long been "captured" by a predatory elite which has succeeded in effectively preventing, by violence or subversion, the emergence or survival of any government with a popular base; in another Caricom state, serious persistent ethnic tensions have resulted in periodic eruptions of racial violence since its independence. Widespread rioting and racial violence between the country's two major ethnic groups in 1962-64 caused the lives of more than 150 citizens. Communal violence in the same country, in the 1990s, cost the lives of hundreds of citizens, generating an ethnic-driven crime wave of such intensity, in the early years of this decade, that leading members of one of the country's two major ethnic groups called for a partition of the country along ethnic lines.

In its 2008 *Freedom in the World* report, Freedom House stated that violence against women is a "major problem" in another named Caricom country. A March 2007 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime stated that that same Caricom country has **the third highest rate of reported incidents of rape in the world**. That is the background against which the prime minister of the same country was publicly accused of raping a policewoman in February 2008. A public prosecutor later deemed the rape accusations groundless. That same year, the United States Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (2007) reported that the country's police force had investigated 47 cases of rape and 8 cases of attempted rape, but that only 18 of the cases were brought to trial. The alarming level of violence in the region, and the inability of Caricom governments to curb it, has led several of the latter to appoint police officers from Canada and the UK to head their national police forces. (Caribbean crime-fighting, Economist, 17 July, 2010).

http://www.economist.com/node/16595062?story_id=16595062) Caricom's resort to such "Great White Hopes", to employ Norman Girvan's colourful phrase, betrays the sense of dependence towards the North which still pervades Caricom society, and the continuing lack of confidence in our capacity to solve our own problems. It is a failure of governance.

The complete failure of checks and balances, and insufficient vigilance on the part of civil society groups, permitted the Prime Minister of another Caricom country to accumulate a considerable amount of power in his own hands, which he utilized in such an arbitrary manner that citizens' rights and liberties appeared to be threatened. That deplorable situation provoked a public denunciation by a prominent citizen, who declared in a public address last year that the quality of governance in the country was "tarnished". Astonishingly, the prime minister's wife, a government minister herself, put the blame for that situation on those rare voices in the society which had the courage to publicly protest and denounce the country's steady drift towards autocratic governance. She declared in an election campaign speech (12 April, 2010):

*“the PNM’s detractors were ruthlessly monopolizing the public information space to put us in this country on a journey of spite and hate.....no government can operate in an environment of anger, discomfort. Mistrust....all manifesting themselves in legal summons, in industrial disputes, in false accusations and in **blatant disrespect for office**. That is the climate that the detractors have created and they can be found everywhere – the many Opposition elements and they keep multiplying day by day, a few trade union leaders, some of the media and other coalitions and associations. **Are they leading the country down a path of civil unrest and war?**”*

If there had been any previous doubt about the government's real views on the legitimacy of civil dissent and political opposition, that campaign speech would have put paid to them.

In the light of the above, it appears quite evident that there is a much greater need, in Caricom than in Europe, for a wide-ranging, informed public debate on governance. Why has Caricom failed to

generate a debate that approaches, in range and depth, the debate which developed around the drafting of a Federal Constitution for the United States? **Where are our Madisons?** Acknowledging that the quality of the arguments put forward in the public debate that took place in America on the draft federal constitution varied considerably, Siedentop observed: *"But at its best, the debate [in America] involved contributions which rank, in subtlety and depth, with the most important works of European political thought."* I am convinced that we possess, within the region and among the Caribbean diaspora, the intellectual resources to generate contributions to a regional public debate on governance that would be of no lesser subtlety and depth than those which preceded the ratification of America's Federal Constitution.

Observing that *"part of the danger in Africa's present moment lies in the restrictions imposed on Africans in their efforts to formulate alternative futures"*, John Lonsdale emphasized that free political argument and open debate are essential to the formulation of such futures, without which there would be no sure means of mobilizing active consent to political authority. ("African Pasts in Africa's Future", in Bruce Berman & John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, 1992). Arguably, part of the danger in Caricom's present moment of crisis lies in the restrictions we impose on ourselves by our apparent reluctance, or inability, to formulate alternative futures. Free political argument and open, informed, public debate is just as essential for Caricom, as it is for Africa, if we are to formulate alternative futures for ourselves rather than passively accepting those that self-interested external forces are no doubt busy formulating for us.

The changes in modes of governance that may emerge as a result of current national initiatives which are underway in the region, or from those that might be undertaken in the future, would necessarily differ from country to country. Because of important differences in the composition and structure of their societies, the solutions which Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, for example, might decide to adopt would almost certainly differ in some aspects from those which Jamaica and Haiti might adopt. However, Caricom countries share a history of slavery, indentureship, colonial rule, acculturation and cultural alienation, economic exploitation, constitutional evolution, and post-independence regional collaboration. A marked similarity also exists in respect of economic circumstances and future prospects and, also, in the geopolitical challenges or problems that all Caricom countries face.

Those various elements, taken together, can and should be used to forge a persuasive overarching narrative which could give a uniquely Caribbean stamp to a regional governance paradigm that would be capable of accommodating our national differences; a historico-cultural narrative that would embody our hopes and aspirations, capture our collective imagination, and crystallize the essence of our historical experiences and our cultural specificities in a manner and a form that would establish a dynamic link between our different pasts, our shared present, and our common future; a narrative capable of stimulating our creative abilities and mobilizing our cultural energies in pursuance of a common endeavour; a narrative that would define, underpin, and cement our unique Caribbean identity; a narrative that would project, to the outside world, an image of ourselves, our culture, and our history of which we can be justifiably proud; a narrative that would give us the cultural confidence to forge our common future on our own terms, rather than on those determined by others; a narrative that would empower us to seek solutions for our problems, where necessary, outside of Northern paradigms.

Despite the marked differences in their national mix of constitutional measures, democratic practices, institutional structures, parliamentary conventions, and modes of governance, the West's governance paradigm has proven quite capable of accommodating all Western countries in its value system, without losing its distinctive "Western" stamp. That paradigm is supported by a powerful,

overarching Western historico-cultural narrative which has motivated, mobilized, and stimulated the cultural energies of North Atlantic peoples ever since the 16th century. Alas, like all other countries in the South, not only have Caricom societies been subjected to the culturally destructive effects of that Western historico-cultural narrative but we have also witnessed the mesmerizing influence it has had, and continues to have, on elites in Caricom and other regions of the South.

Within the broad framework of the Western narrative, each Western country created a powerful national narrative which was not only intended to underpin its particular mode of governance and mobilize its people's cultural energies in support of it but also, and perhaps more importantly, to forge a national identity around a selection of core cultural traditions and historical myths.

The great epics of the West - *El Cid*, the *Chanson de Roland*, Homer's *Odyssey*, King Arthur's Camelot - told, retold, and dramatized down the centuries, are an important part of Western cultural memory, and they have served to affirm and reaffirm Western cultural identity, without which no cultural confidence would have been possible. The myths propagated around the narrative of how the West was won have helped to fashion American identity and, via Hollywood, to fix forever in the minds of generations of young people throughout the world, a glamorous but largely fictitious image of the emblematic characters of that western epic. The credo of the westerner - that of the brave pioneer and man of honour, confronted by the savage Indian who was after both his scalp and his women, has endured, even in the face of documented historical evidence that the scalp-hunting, blood-thirsty Indian was a pure invention. That historical myth became the basis on which American notions of manhood were built. The principal character of the western, the cowboy, became an important iconographic symbol which was instantly recognized, everywhere in the world, as an emblem of American identity and masculinity. The image of the anonymous Marlboro cowboy is so evocative of manliness that some Marlboro advertisements did not even bother to show him smoking, the message being immediately understood in virtually every country and every culture.

Similarly, the myths underpinning the narrative of the American "melting pot" have survived the discovery by certain ethnic groups in America that they are considered "unmeltable". The myths surrounding the narrative of the American Dream, with its rags to riches refrain, have survived the reality that the U.S. is, by far, the world's most inegalitarian industrial society. On the Gini scale, it is more inegalitarian than Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, Iran, or Nicaragua. The top 1% of Americans own more than a third of the nation's net wealth (the top 5% own 60%). Their share of that wealth has now returned to the levels that existed before World War II. Furthermore, a report, published in June 2010 by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, highlighted findings from the Congressional Budget Office which showed that "*the gaps in after-tax income between the richest 1 percent of Americans and the middle and poorest fifths of the country more than tripled between 1979 and 2007.*" <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2789>

Other countries in the Western tradition have utilized similar historical myths to forge their national narratives and to fashion their national identity. Like America's narrative about the "Winning of the West", the emotive force, the mobilizing power, and the disbelief-suspending capacity of those Northern national narratives are so great that they have endured, despite unchallengeable historical evidence to the contrary. France's central national narrative, namely, that it is the country of Human Rights because it was the first to proclaim the Declaration of the Rights of Man, endures and continues to be re-affirmed *ad nauseam* despite the statement made in the French National Assembly, in July 1885, by Jules Ferry, a former Prime Minister, that the Declaration of the Rights of Man had not been written for the black peoples of Equatorial Africa. (René Dumont, *L'Afrique Noire est Mal Partie*, 1973). France's condemnation, in 1999, by the European Court of Human Rights, for the torture of a North African held in preventive detention for alleged drug dealing

(*Selmouni v. France*, App. No. 258003/94, 1999-V Eur. Ct. H.R. 155) has not dented national belief in the historical myth propagated by that national narrative.

Portugal went as far as inscribing in its constitution one of the core myths of its national narrative, the myth of its civilizing mission. Article 2 of Portugal's **Acto Colonial**, adopted in 1930 and subsequently incorporated in the country's 1933 Constitution as Article 133, stated: "*It was part of the organic essence of the Portugese Nation to perform the historical function of colonizing the overseas dominions and civilizing the indigenous populations*" (Joao Antonio J. da Costa, *A History of Goa*, 1982). The phrasing of the **Acto Colonial** ("It **was** part of the organic essence...the **historical** function") is evidence that Portugal had conceived its "civilizing" mission long before it was constitutionally adopted. The stark reality of Portugal's "civilizing" mission was unwittingly revealed, however, by the country's official statistics. They show that, in 1959, after several hundred years of presumably "civilizing the indigenous populations" of its African colonies, the **illiteracy** rates in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea, and Cape Verde were respectively, 97.8%, 96.74%, 98.85%, and 78.5%. (Barry Munslow, *Mozambique: The Revolution and its Origins*, 1983).

The national mix of each of the West's three major democracies - the United States, the United Kingdom, and France - is so very different, and so tailored to the socio-cultural values, traditions, and history of each country, that the governance system of none of the three countries would be considered acceptable by the people of the other two. French governance practices, for example, are so very different from those of America and Britain that Theodore Zeldin, the distinguished Oxford historian, and one of Britain's leading authorities on French history, felt it necessary to explain that it is impossible to understand French politics if the Anglo-Saxon model is used as a criterion, precisely because France has adapted its political institutions to its own, very different, political values and traditions. "*France has indeed borrowed ideas and labels from abroad but it has assimilated them very thoroughly into its own tradition, so that any resemblance to the original is largely nominal. Electoral practices and parliamentary usages in France have functions and a character which are substantially different from those in other countries.*" (*France 1848-1945*, Vol.1, 1973).

Caricom countries should follow France's example by assimilating, very thoroughly into their own traditions, the democratic ideas, labels (and practices) they have inherited from their respective European colonizers. That essential process should, however, be preceded by a wide-ranging, informed public debate, conducted in newspaper columns, television, radio, the internet, universities, sixth forms, and by trade unions, NGOs civil society groups, and other forums, which would facilitate the active participation of people in local communities, in the debate. Such a broad-based informed debate is needed to give the people (**all the people**) a sense of ownership of the governance changes which each Caricom country might eventually adopt. It would also be an initial, very important step in promoting greater public participation in decision-making and a more inclusive form of governance - objectives that form an important part of the agenda of the 14-member coalition of civil society groups which was recently formed in Jamaica, in the wake of that country's crisis of governance caused by the "Dudus" Coke drama. The coalition affirmed its "*commitment to a governance process that broadens and increases public participation in, and oversight of the national decision-making process.*" <http://www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/joint-statement-from-civil-society-groups-june-4-2010-12.pdf>

One of the most intractable problems which hinder the creation of a genuinely participatory democracy - one that eschews a top-down-model of governance in favour of a bottom-up model, whose legitimacy depends largely on the extent to which it involves the grassroots and responds to their expectations - is the great difficulty in persuading people at the lower echelons of the society

to participate actively, and vocally, in the political process. There are a number of reasons which might deter the less-advantaged sections of the society from actively participating in the political process via the activities of civil society groups who attempt to influence it. One reason might be the perception that those who tend to dominate such groups - academics, university graduates, members of the different professions, members of the business community etc. - would pay little heed to the opinion of "ordinary" citizens. The majority of the civic groups in the 14-member coalition draw their membership from those social categories.

Another possible deterrent might be the type of venue such groups tend to choose for their meetings. Another civil society grouping, Take Back Jamaica, which was recently created in Jamaica as a response by concerned citizens to the country's crisis of governance, *"had its first major meeting in the format of a forum on Sunday on the campus of the University of Technology."* <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100608/news/news1.html>. *"The group - drew on a large cross-section of individuals from the society, inclusive of academics, entertainers, businessmen and students."*

We need to create a different kind of format and choose different types of venues for wide-ranging public debates on issues, the importance of which requires the broadest possible citizen participation. We could consider "reinventing" our own version of the American townhall meeting. It is a type of format/venue which might encourage people at all levels of Caricom society to participate actively in the public debate. The townhall meeting is an invention of the Cherokee people in North America. Everyone in the local Cherokee community, **including women** (this was the 17th/18th century) would debate for days in the village town house on issues of public concern until a consensus was reached. *" 'Civilized' white America later borrowed, for their own political system, the townhouse meeting of the 'uncivilized' Cherokee, renaming it a 'townhall' meeting".* (Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents: The Indian Story, 1992).

We have already demonstrated our capacity for invention in the above respect. Eric Williams, Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, invented the **University of Woodford Square**, a format/venue which he utilized with immense success during the period immediately preceding Britain's granting of "responsible government" to the country. Williams motivated and mobilized citizens of all walks of life who thronged his nocturnal meetings in Woodford Square to hear him talk on issues of public importance. The format did not facilitate exchanges between the speaker and his public but the talks animated very lively debates in the press and among citizens at all levels of society. Moreover, ordinary citizens felt perfectly at ease with the venue - a "peoples" square in the city center.

The active participation of Caricom intellectuals, academics (especially political scientists), and the educated elite, in a wide-ranging public debate on governance in the region, is absolutely essential if such a debate is to be an **informed** one, which would not only permit a lucid analysis of the failings and inadequacies of our current governance systems but also present and explain, to less informed participants, viable, appropriate, alternative forms and modes of governance. Both the analysis and the selection of appropriate alternative forms of governance would necessarily take into account the experience of other countries in the South (their failures as well as their successes), which have attempted to adapt inherited forms of governance to their socio-cultural realities and historical experiences. Such information or knowledge would provide the basis for fruitful discussions, from which a consensus could emerge on both a Caricom governance paradigm and national, differentiated modes of governance that could fit within that regional paradigm. That was the crucially important role which James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay played in informing and shaping American public opinion during the public debate on America's draft

Constitution.

"Democratic legitimacy in Europe is at risk. In many respects European integration is an accomplished fact.....But what remains uncertain is the political form the European union will take. That is why a great constitutional debate has become indispensable. Such a debate is needed to establish the goals of European political integration, the limits which such integration ought to respect and the means by which new powers and institutions can be made accountable to the peoples of Europe. Only by means of such a debate can the peoples of Europe once again become involved in their own fate." (Siedentop, 2000).

Like Siedentop's Europe, democratic legitimacy in Caricom is at risk.....that is why a great constitutional debate has become indispensable. John Lonsdale has remarked upon the incoherence of the language of modern politics in African countries, which finds little resonance within African civil society because it has no historical links with the core values of African peoples. (Lonsdale, 1992). A wide-ranging public debate is also needed in Caricom to enable us to arrive at a region-wide consensus on the core values of Caribbean society; to distinguish between the potentially divisive individualistic values we inherited from our colonial past and the community values of togetherness, solidarity, and brotherhood we inherited from our ancestral cultures; and to identify those among the latter which could help reinforce intercommunal relations and promote solidarity (at the national and the regional level) between different cultural groups, different social classes, and other categories of citizens who, for one reason or other, might feel alienated within the present set-up.

Moreover, if a region-wide consensus on our core values does emerge from such a debate, it might fundamentally change our conception of Caribbean identity as well as current attitudes, policies, and approaches to Caricom integration. If, for example, those ancestral values of togetherness and solidarity were applied to the "problem" of intra-regional migration, a subject that has provoked much heated discussion in recent times, we might identify feasible solutions that would be capable of satisfying all parties, without betraying our core values.

In his ground-breaking public address on the Trinidad and Tobago Government's derailment of democracy, -The Tarnished Quality of Governance in Trinidad and Tobago (<http://www.normangirvan.info/dumastarnished-governance-in-tt/>), Reggie Dumas made the following important suggestion, in respect of that country: *"What we have not done, and what I want to suggest this evening we do, is carry out a searching and detailed analysis of the structure of the society as a whole so that we may be better able to understand its elements and properties and thus be better able to deal with ourselves and one another, and with the fundamental issues facing us."*

Such an in-depth analysis is not only desirable but also essential, for it would provide both a better understanding of our society and a factual basis for an informed public debate; it would enable Caricom peoples to make an informed selection of the modes of governance which are best suited to national and regional social realities; and it would reveal the influence that our different historical experiences have had in moulding our character and personality (individual, community group, and national) and shaping our attitudes both to other groups in the society and to the outside world, especially the North.

Every society needs to believe in a past from which it can draw strength, inspiration, and confidence. Geoffrey Hartman, the American cultural theorist, has observed that knowledge by a

society of its past can retrieve lines of evolution that have been cut off - a recovery of history as a more complete form of memory: *"Only when that phase has been honoured can there be a moral culture politics, one in which we can choose our relation to the past and a retrieved, particular history becomes a motive for action."* (The Fateful Question of Culture, 1997). A society's knowledge of its past and, eventually, its coming to terms with that past is often an essential step in the construction of a democratic future. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was a recognition that a society, which is based on democracy and respect for human rights, could not be constructed on top of a heritage of oppression, violent conflict, and deep social divisions without that society first coming to terms with its past:

"In South Africa, different groups have different memories of the past. They have different conceptions of the past. They have different conceptions of what happened, why it happened, how it happened and who was responsible for which events. We simply cannot erase those memories in the hope of overcoming divisions. By ignoring these memories we will simply ensure that they survive separately in the stories that particular groups pass on to the next generation. These will be stories of hatred and mistrust that will simply form the basis of new conflicts to emerge in the future." (Hugo van der Merwe, **Demos Africa**, No.1, June 1999),

Much like South Africa, different social and ethnic groups in Caricom have different memories of the past. We have different conceptions of the past. We have different conceptions of what happened, why it happened, how it happened and who was responsible for which events. Like South Africans also, we simply cannot erase those memories in the hope of overcoming divisions in our societies. By ignoring these memories we will simply ensure that they survive separately in the stories that particular groups pass on to the next generation. These will be stories of hatred and mistrust which will simply form the basis of new conflicts to emerge in the future.

"[A people's] provision for the future.....is implicit in the way they reproduce the present out of the past....." (Lonsdale, 1992). Certain attitudes, actions, and patterns of behaviour in Caricom, on the part of politicians, ethnic groups, social classes, and other categories of citizens, are clearly reproduced out of the past and from our different conceptions and memories of that past. Such attitudes and patterns of behaviour are by no means inherent attributes or characteristics of our multicultural, multiethnic Caricom society or of its constituent groups. They are social constructs that were deliberately engineered and created by various actors and forces in our society, for that very purpose.

Octavio Paz observed that history helps us to understand certain traits, but it is we who must confront them ourselves, *"we are the only ones who can answer the questions asked us by reality and our own being."* (The Labryrith of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico, 1967). If we wish to establish a "moral culture politics" in Caricom, if we want to "retrieve lines of evolution that have been cut off" which might help us build viable alternative futures, we must first of all recover accurate knowledge of our past - knowledge of what actually happened, why it happened, how it happened, and who was responsible for what happened. We must stop relying on stories of hatred and mistrust that have been passed on from generation to generation, stories that will simply form the basis of new conflicts to emerge in the future. Instead of relying on handed-down stories, which were fabricated by others in order to divide us, we should examine the reality of our history, ourselves. Only when we have done so would we be able to answer the questions asked us by that reality.

The following attitudes and patterns of behaviour in Trinidad and Tobago, which Reggie Dumas

singled out and deplored in his public address, are clearly reproduced out of the past:

"politicians use another method to achieve the objective of power: they divide by race and religion"; "But that isn't all that is done to keep us separated; code words and phrases and actions are also ingeniously employed;" "We live side by side without knowing a great deal about one another. How many of us, for instance, have two genuine friends of a race different from ours?"; "every race and ethnic group in this place considers itself second-class and in some way disadvantaged."

Our past also appears to throw some light on current male-female relationships in Caricom, on the persistence of discrimination towards women, on the strong resentment (or ambiguous attitudes) of a large section of the male population towards granting women genuine equality, and on the intolerable level of gender violence in Caricom society. Basil Davidson argued that any consideration of the possible contribution of tradition to modern democratic governance in Africa would need to include an assessment of the lessons of the past, *"not as a futile attempt to renew the past but to consider what it can say about valid and enduring forms of government."* (The Search for Africa: A History in the Making, 1994). Basil Davidson's argument, in respect of Africa, applies perfectly to Caricom. We need to assess the lessons of Caricom's past, not as a futile attempt to renew it but rather to consider what it can say about valid, enduring, and culturally-compatible forms of democratic governance for Caricom.

Our Post-Emancipation Past

The British Parliamentary Act which abolished slavery in the British Empire, in 1833, created an Apprenticeship system, the stated objective of which was to prepare the slaves for freedom. However, the real reason for establishing the apprenticeship system was to prevent the newly freed slaves from abandoning the plantations in droves, which would overnight have deprived the plantation owners of much needed labour. All "freed" slaves above the age of six became "apprenticed" labourers who were legally obliged to work for their former masters for up to forty-five hours a week, without compensation. The period of continued compulsory labour depended on their respective status; former field slaves were to be apprenticed for six years while skilled apprentices and house slaves would be entitled to their full freedom after four years. In return, plantation owners were obligated to feed, clothe and lodge their former slaves. In lieu of providing food, some planters allotted plots of land ("provision grounds") to their apprentices, to grow their own food.

Many white plantation owners violated both the spirit and the letter of the law regulating the apprenticeship system. They charged their apprentices for food or rent, in the form of extra labour and inflicted brutal punishments on those who were considered recalcitrant. Such punishments included being put on the "threadmill" (a particularly diabolical form of punishment), floggings, being placed in chains, or forced to wear spiked iron collars. Harsh vagrancy laws were passed to deter the freed slaves from leaving the plantations, even during the short period of time that was granted each day, under the apprenticeship rules, to the former slaves to pursue their own activities. Eric Williams declared that *"Negro slavery was perperated in a modified form"* by the apprenticeship system. (Capitalism and Slavery, 1994 edition).

Almost everywhere in the Caribbean, slaves vigorously resisted apprenticeship. Even before the system was actually established, the slaves in St. Kitts demanded their full freedom on Emancipation Day (1st August, 1834), warning the Island's Lieutenant-Governor that they would go on strike on that day. There was also strong opposition to apprenticeship in British Guiana. In Essequibo, apprentices occupied a church and a church yard for three days and encouraged other

apprentices in the area to go on strike, which they did, vowing not to work except for wages. In Jamaica, apprentices in St. Ann's parish declared that they were prepared to be shot or to have their heads cut off rather than accept apprenticeship. In Trinidad, on Emancipation Day, a group of slaves who were gathered at Government house to be informed about the new apprenticeship laws by the Governor, began chanting: "*Pas de six ans. Point de six ans*" ("Not six years. No six years") when the Governor began speaking, drowning out the latter's words.

All the freed slaves suffered terribly under the apprenticeship system. As apprentices, they were often treated more harshly by the plantation owners than as slaves. But it was the women who suffered most. Visits between spouses who lived on different plantations were deliberately prevented, which facilitated the continued sexual aggression of female apprentices by their former owners, to the great frustration of male apprentices who found themselves still unable to protect their own women. Pregnant women were not spared such floggings, which often caused them to miscarry, to the great indifference of the plantation owners who would have paid more attention to their pregnant condition before Abolition when the children, to whom slave women gave birth, automatically became the property of their owners. That privileged situation had changed with Abolition. Plantation owners suffered no loss if their female apprentices miscarried

Female apprentices were the privileged target of the plantation owners, who aimed to make the women's lives so miserable that they would have no alternative to handing over their children to the planter as apprentices and to agreeing to work more hours in the fields. Planters were worried that, when the apprenticeship system finally came to an end, the female apprentices would refuse to continue working on the plantations and become homemakers - a life role that missionaries and abolitionists were actively promoting as being both Christian and "civilized".

The missionaries must have been very disappointed when, after the apprenticeship system ended, they discovered that the former female apprentices did not share their Christian vision of the "good life": "*Most black women declined to reinvent themselves in the feminine domestic image abolitionists had confidently ascribed to them. They showed little enthusiasm for the pure domesticity that white women were already fighting to escape or for exchanging dependence on white men for dependence on black.*" (Elizabeth Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, 2009).

A natural corollary of the black female "homemaker" was the black male "home provider", a vision of the black man and his life role which missionaries also actively promoted with the former apprentices. To enable former male slaves to provide a home for their wives so that the latter could exercise their duties as homemakers, William Knibb, the English Baptist missionary, helped to raise sufficient funds for the purchase of thousands of acres of land in Jamaica, so that 19,000 former slaves could own their own homes and a plot of land on which they could eke out a living. Missionaries believed that providing former male slaves with a home, and the means to support a household, would help restore to the latter their dignity, their manhood, and a sense of responsibility towards their women, of which they had been robbed under slavery. "*The idea was that male villagers would work on the plantations, then return at night to their Christian homes, **dependent** wives, and obedient children.*" (Abbott, 2009).

The homes of black freedmen were situated in free "Negro villages" which missionaries in Jamaica had established for that very purpose. Expounding his idea of freedom for the former slaves, Knibb declared that it should be measured "*by the cottager's comfortable home, by the wife's proper release from toil, by the instructed child, and by all that joy and peace which now gladdens the hearts of the beloved people of my choice.*" (Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*, 2002). In view of the determined rearguard

opposition, on the part of men in all societies and in every culture, to their women emancipating themselves from their authority, obtaining control over their own sexuality, escaping being imprisoned in the role of the dependent, obedient wife, and gaining their economic independence, it is virtually certain that, unlike their women, black freedmen in the Caribbean wholeheartedly embraced the missionaries' vision of their role as paterfamilias.

The refusal of black Caribbean women, after having won their freedom from their white male masters, to accept their missionary-allotted role as obedient, dependent wives must have been galling for their men and, also, a source of deep bitterness and resentment on their part. Apart, perhaps, from other black diasporas issued from slavery, black Caribbean men are, arguably, the only men in the world who have never been able to exercise uncontested authority over their women. Slavery deprived them of such authority and their women stubbornly contested it after emancipation. From Biblical times, until the mid-18th century when women in Europe and North America began, very tentatively, to contest it, men in all societies exercised virtually uncontested authority over their wives, an authority that was rigorously upheld by the law of the land.

In France, for example, it was not until 1964 that women won the legal right to open a bank account, to obtain a passport, or to travel out of the country with their children without their husband's written permission. The absurd extent to which women in reputedly "enlightened" countries of the West were subject to their husbands' absolute authority is revealed in relics of past laws, long forgotten on the statute books. Two such relics (if the info on the following weblink is accurate) are a still extant law of the American State of Vermont, which renders it illegal for women to wear false teeth without the written permission of their husbands (No.77), and a Michigan law which gives a man legal ownership of his wife's hair (27). <http://www.skrause.org/humor/stupidlaws.shtml>

Black Caribbean men have never enjoyed uncontested authority or legally-upheld rights over their women. They have no ancestral memories of uncontested patriarchal authority to assuage their feelings of wounded male pride, nor can they entertain the illusion that the advancement black Caribbean women have obtained in recent times is due to their own or their forefathers' magnanimity in gradually ceding their patriarchal authority. The memories of black Caribbean men are those of frustration, helplessness, and resentment at having to silently acquiesce in their women submitting, willingly or unwillingly, to the sexual demands of their white masters. No doubt, female slaves would have used such privileged "access" to their white masters as a bargaining chip, or even a Damocles' sword, to hold their men in check and to protect themselves from possible marital ill-treatment.

That humiliating situation would have further increased the feelings of frustration, on the part of male slaves, and stoked the fires of male resentment, hostility, and hatred. Such pent up feelings always seek an outlet. In the experience of clinical psychologists, it is the concerned individual's immediate entourage which usually suffers the brunt of such pent-up feelings when the floodgates finally burst. Because they were unable to vent their hate on their white masters, male slaves would naturally have directed it towards their own women. The very high incidence of gender based violence in the region is so alarming that Caricom has felt it necessary to appoint an Advocate for Gender Justice, among whose terms of reference is to coordinate the research on Gender Based Violence within the region. Perhaps research on the roots of such baffling gender-based violence should begin with an examination of black male-female relationships in the periods immediately preceding and following Emancipation. It is quite possible that the deep unhealed wounds of those two periods continue to fester in the ancestral memories of many black Caribbean men.

Indentureship

The horrors of slavery and apprenticeship were a powerful disincentive, for the freed slaves, to remain on the plantations as paid workers after they had recovered their freedom of movement. Rejecting the blandishing offers of plantation owners who were desperate for their labour, up to two-thirds of freed blacks in the West Indies fled the plantations to earn their living as small farmers, shop keepers, and petty traders. A system of indentureship was established by the British Government to provide plantation owners with the labour they needed. Indentured workers from India and, to a lesser extent, from China were recruited, initially on five-year contracts, with the opportunity to renew the contract when it expired, or the right to a passage back home. Beginning in 1838, varying numbers of Indian indentured workers were transported to Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana, Grenada, St. Lucia, St Kitts, and St Vincent. Chinese workers, who first came to the West Indies as indentured labour and, subsequently, as free voluntary migrants from the 1850s onwards, settled in Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guiana, and Suriname

Under the indentureship agreement, workers were to be paid at specified wage rates, work for a specified number of hours, and provided with medical care, "suitable dwellings", and food rations. Much like the apprenticeship system, plantation managers failed to fulfil their indentureship obligations while enforcing, with the utmost rigour, the disciplinary measures allowed them if workers failed to fulfil their part of the contract. When indentured workers protested against the violations of their contract terms by taking "industrial" action, the plantation managers imposed extremely harsh disciplinary measures. Unsurprisingly, the colonial judicial system supported the planters. Labour "offences" were criminalized. Criminal penalties, including imprisonment, were routinely imposed on indentured workers for a range of labour offences, such as, refusal to work or to complete assigned tasks.

Every beneficiary provision in the indentureship contract, without exception, was violated by plantation managers. The "suitable dwellings" provided were ancient ramshackle, overcrowded quarters which were often unfit for human habitation. Medical care was provided in plantation hospitals, which were so unsanitary that they were described as "filthy holes" in the report of the Royal Commission appointed in 1870 by the Colonial Secretary to investigate conditions of work for indentured labourers in British Guiana. As in the case of their treatment of the black workers during the apprenticeship period, plantation managers did not respect the stipulated limits on working hours. Instead of the ten hours specified in the indentureship agreement, Indian (and Chinese) indentured workers were forced to work between 16 and 20 hours a day. During a visit to his plantation, Quintin Hogg, a British absentee owner, discovered to his horror that workers on his Guyanese plantation had to work up to 22 hours a day. (John Edward Jenkins, The Coolie: His Rights and Wrongs, 1871). Jenkin's book depicted the plight of Indian indentured workers in Guyana so accurately and evocatively that it is considered part of the country's literary heritage. It is one of eleven books (of a projected thirty-six titles), written by Guyanese authors or about Guyana that were republished in the first phase of The Guyana Classics Library, which the Government launched in February 2010. <http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2010/04/11/reprinting-rare-and-out-of-print-books/>

Likewise, the wages paid to Indian workers were well below those to which they were legally or contractually entitled, when they were paid at all. White plantation managers and overseers employed many stratagems to withhold, deduct, or delay the payment of, their workers' wages. Some planters paid their indentured labourers no wages for an entire year but charged them for the rations, nonetheless. In 1885, when the legal minimum wage for indentured workers was twenty-four cents a day, one estate in British Guiana paid their indentured workers four to eight cents. In Trinidad,

planters paid their workers an average of a little over eighteen cents per task, seven cents less than the legal minimum. Discussing the dire situation in which indentured workers found themselves, British political scientist, Hugh Tinker, observed that the difference between the wages they had been promised and the wages they actually received "*made all the difference between a decent life and a miserable existence.*" (A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1890, 1974).

Expressing his opposition to the indentureship system, Lord John Russell, the British Colonial Secretary, declared in Parliament on 15 February 1840: "*I should be unwilling to adopt any measure to favour the transfer of labourers from British India to Guiana....I am not prepared to encounter the responsibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or, on the other hand, a new system of slavery.*" With the benefit of historical hindsight, Hugh Tinker, was able to confirm Lord Russell's dire presentiment about the likely nature of Indentureship. As Russell feared, it did lead to "a new system of slavery".

The experience of Indians in the Caribbean under Indentureship was astonishingly similar to that of Caribbean blacks under Apprenticeship. Eric Williams' description of the latter as "a modified form of slavery" echoes Russell's presentiment and Tinker's conclusion about Indentureship. Much as they had done with their black apprentices, plantation overseers coerced the wives of Indian workers into having sexual relations with them. Indian indentured males suffered the same humiliation as black apprentices did, in not being able to protect their women from sexual molestation by overseers. The 1870 Royal Commission of Inquiry reported it as being one of the special grievances of indentured Indians.

Like black workers under the apprenticeship system, Indian workers vigorously protested the harsh conditions of their indentureship; like the black apprentices also, many indentured Indian workers refused to continue working under the inhumane conditions on the plantation; like the black apprentices, many Indian workers rebelled by "downing tools" or attempting to flee the plantation. As in the case of black apprentices, such resistance was punished with the greatest severity by plantation managers and overseers which, in turn, provoked even more vehement reaction from Indian workers. It was the series of mass protests by Indian workers in British Guiana, culminating in the riots that rocked the country's sugar belt in 1869, which persuaded the Colonial Secretary to appoint the Royal Commission of Inquiry in March 1870.

The general lot of Indian indentured workers; the immense suffering they endured under inhumanly harsh work conditions; the systematic violation or non-respect of the provisions of the indentureship system; the arbitrary and severe punishment meted out to them by white plantation managers and overseers; the racial slurs and insults to which they were regularly subjected by the latter; the humiliation they suffered at having to helplessly witness the sexual violation of their women, were all so very similar to the experience of black apprentices that the two ethnic groups should have found common ground for building bonds of solidarity. Not only did that not happen but each of the two ethnic groups came to mistrust and despise the other, creating a situation which still impacts negatively on relations between the two groups. What went wrong?

From the very outset, white plantation managers and overseers adopted a policy of deliberately creating divisions and tensions between Indian indentured workers and black workers who had continued working on the plantations. Placing black and Indian workers in different work groups, as a first step in the implementation of that divide-and-rule policy, white managers and overseers openly made invidious comparisons which were calculated to create ill-feeling between the two groups. The white estate management put it about that black workers were stronger but more violent

and that Indian workers were weaker but more efficient. In its report, the ~~1970-1870~~ Royal Commission of Inquiry noted the social and political significance of the ethnic tensions created by the divisive actions of the white plantation management: *"The Indian despises the negro because he considers him.....not so highly civilized as himself, while the negro despises the Indian because he is so immensely inferior to himself in physical strength. There will never be much danger of seditious disturbances among the East Indian immigrants.....so, long as large numbers of negroes continue to be employed with them."* (Quoted in Alan Adamson, Sugar Without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904, 1972).

Unlike Indian workers, blacks who had decided to continue working on the plantations refused to enter into binding work contracts with the plantation management because they constantly sought better wages, which the planters systematically refused unless they were short of labour. The black workers' deep mistrust of the work contracts offered them by white plantation managers was later shown to be not all unfounded. Testifying in 1909 before a British Parliamentary Committee headed by Lord Sanderson (the Sanderson Committee), which had been appointed to investigate alleged mistreatment of Indian labourers in Trinidad, C. P. David, a member of the Trinidad Legislative Council and a determined opponent of indentured labour, declared:

"...the value, to the planter, of the Indian labour consists rather in the state of indenture than anything else. What he wants is an indentured labourer....somebody who is bound to to him for 5 years, and liable to be committed to prison for disobeying orders, and although the volume of free labour might increase, I expect that you would find that the demand for indentured labour would not diminish." (Kay Saunders, Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920, 1984).

The planters' deliberate policy of importing more indentured labour than the territory needed (which the Royal Commission noted in its report) not only ensured that there was seldom a shortage of available labour but also enabled them to keep wages very low. Moreover, Indians worked for less than blacks and were regarded by plantation managers as cheap and docile labour. Black workers suffered the consequences, causing them to resent Indian workers whom they considered the main obstacle to their obtaining better wages and improved working conditions. That black resentment, added to the mutual ethnic contempt that had been deliberately fostered by plantation managers and overseers, torpedoed any possibility of Indian and black plantation workers forming a united front against the planters. Adamson (1972) quotes a remark by the manager of a plantation owned by Henry Barkly, a British planter, that is quite revelatory of white fears and motives: *"I think the safety of the whites depends very much upon the want of union in the different races of labourers."*

In stark contrast to the deep mutual mistrust and the very tense relations which existed between Indian and black plantation workers, Chinese workers enjoyed cordial relations with their Indian counterparts. They even formed alliances with Indian estate workers when it was to their advantage to do so, in order to obtain higher wages and better working conditions. That never occurred between black and Indian workers despite the obvious advantages of such alliances for both ethnic groups. (Kumar Mahabir, Caribbean Chinese and Indians share common history). The white plantation managers saw no need to create divisions between Indians and Chinese. Because of the small number of Chinese workers, an alliance between the two groups would not have posed a serious threat to them.

<http://www.caribbeannetnews.com/cgi-script/csArticles/articles/000036/003637.htm>

There is no mystery whatsoever about the real origins of the ethnic tensions between Indians and blacks which still poison the political and social climate in certain Caricom countries. The negative

ethnic narratives and stereotypes, which are passed down from generation to generation so instinctively and naturally that we have almost come to consider them an inherent factor in Caricom society, are a deliberate social construct which dates from the period that immediately followed Emancipation. When, as Reggie Dumas observed in the address mentioned above, *"In a multiracial, multireligious, multicultural society such as ours, politicians use another method to achieve the objective of power: they divide by race and religion"*, they are merely imitating the methods that white plantation managers employed so successfully in the post-emancipation period. Referring to former colonial territories, including Caricom, Dumas declared: *"The centralist philosophy of the colonial whites was enthusiastically embraced by the non-whites who inherited the mantle..."*. Alas, that was not the only mantle we enthusiastically embraced in Caricom. However, I do not consider that, because we are a multiracial, multireligious, multicultural society, we are necessarily doomed to a politics of ethnic divisiveness. We can establish an alternative system of governance, one that is designed to make politicians who indulge in such divisive politics pay a very high political price for doing so.

But before we can construct a system of governance which would make ethnically-divisive politics impossible, we need to clear away the encumbering debris of the past. As Geoffrey Hartman perceptively observed, only then *"can there be a moral culture politics, one in which we can choose our relation to the past."* A wide-ranging, informed public debate would be very useful in that respect. It would provide, for example, the opportunity to inform the wider public of the root causes of the ethnic tensions that rack certain Caricom societies. People do not appreciate being the objects of cynical manipulation. The knowledge that the racial stereotypes and narratives which inform the attitudes and daily actions of, perhaps, the majority of Caricom citizens were deliberately generated by our white colonial masters, precisely in order to keep us divided, would not suddenly erase the deep feelings of mistrust that have accumulated over several generations.

However, an informed understanding of the defining events of our past should help us understand, and come to terms with, it. With such understanding, we might be persuaded not to continue being unwitting puppets pulled by the strings of long-dead white puppet masters, in a diabolical Punch and Judy scenario which was written for us more than a century and a half ago by people who definitely did not have our best interests in mind. Once that admittedly redoubtable hurdle is surmounted, we should be able to put the past behind us and work together to build a viable common future for Caricom.

Our character- and identity-forming historical experiences do not begin with the Middle Passage or with the arrival of the other diasporas in the Caribbean. John Thornton pointed out that African slaves in the Caribbean reproduced the social structures they had left behind. (*Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 1998). Elizabeth Abbott observed that when the Apprenticeship system was finally brought to an end in the Caribbean, the former slaves drew on their African traditions in building new communities for themselves (Abbott, 2009). The social structures they developed in the Caribbean, as slaves or as freedmen, would necessarily have differed in ways which reflected the world view and the socio-cultural values of each African cultural-linguistic group. It is a people's worldview that fashions their notion of the kind of society they would like to construct for themselves which, in turn, has a determining influence on the type of institutions and structures they actually establish to sustain that society.

"Africa's alternative histories are full of relevance to Africa's future. If only they are rediscovered." (Lonsdale, 1992). Africa's alternative histories (that is to say, those that have been denied or deliberately ignored by the continent's European colonizers) are also full of relevance to Caricom's future. We shall "rediscover" those "alternative histories", together, in the next section.

Our African Past: Its relevance to our present, and what it can teach us about inventing alternative futures for Caricom

The socio-cultural values and worldview of our respective African ancestral groups have influenced individual Caricom peoples and societies in ways which are still very perceptible. Having had the opportunity to live in Jamaica, Ghana, and Nigeria, apart from my own country (Trinidad and Tobago), I was able to see the influence of Akan culture (Ghana) on the attitudes, behaviour patterns, and character traits of Jamaicans and, also, the similar influence of Yoruba culture (Nigeria) in Trinidad and Tobago. I have seen, not only how the differences between Yoruba and Akan culture are reflected in the different attitudes, behaviour patterns, and character traits of Nigerians of Yoruba culture and Ghanaians of Akan culture but also, very importantly, how those same differences are reflected in the attitudes, behaviour patterns etc. of Jamaicans and Trinitobagonians.

Those respective values and differences have survived thousands of miles of distance, hundreds of years of time, and our acculturation to Western values. They will almost certainly continue to exercise an appreciable influence on us for a very long time. That is one of the reasons why it is so very important to go beyond the Middle Passage to learn about the African influences that have shaped Caricom societies. Such knowledge should provide us with valuable insights into our own societies, which would be very useful in forging viable alternative futures for Caricom. Discussing how the past continues to influence politics in Nigeria, J. D. Y. Peel, the British social anthropologist, observed: *"What is so striking is that, while the material ends of politics are so contemporary, the framework of action within which they are sought should show such continuity with the past."* (Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom 1890s-1970s, 1983). It is not at all unlikely that our African past has a determining influence on the framework of action within which we pursue our political goals, in which case, that past would doubtlessly provide Caricom peoples with valuable insights into alternative futures.

In the context of assimilating *"borrowed [or inherited] ideas and labels from abroad.....very thoroughly into [our] own tradition"*, to quote Theodore Zeldin's explanation of why France's successful democracy is so different from that of Britain and the U.S., our ancestral African and pre-partition Indian traditions have much to teach us. Although the 1970s saw a radical change in the way Afro-Caribbeans have traditionally viewed their ancestral African culture, to the best of my knowledge, that changed view does not extend to regarding our ancestral African culture as having any lessons for us in Caricom and, most certainly, not as a possible source of, or inspiration for, potential solutions for our problems of governance. Unrelenting European narratives of cultural superiority and inferiority have had a determining influence in forging our image of Africa. Such culturally demeaning narratives have apparently persuaded many, if not most, Afro-Caribbeans that they possess no valid political models, in their own history or their ancestral past, from which they can draw lessons or inspiration. The situation is, admittedly, slightly different in respect of India and our ancestral Indian culture but, as I shall show in the next section, that difference is one of degree rather than substance.

Discussing the relevance of Africa's past to Africa's present problems, A. E. Afigbo, the Nigerian historian, argues that the relevance of that past can be assured only when historians succeed in reconstructing a *usable* and *problem-oriented* past rather than being merely content with ferreting out more facts that attest to a glorious African past. (The Making of Modern Africa, 1986). It is precisely a usable and problem-oriented past, one from which Caricom could possibly profit, which I shall attempt to reconstruct in the following pages, rather than ferreting out more facts that attest

to a glorious African past.

Governance

The Federal Ashanti state (Ghana), which was established in 1702, was headed by a King who presided over the Federal Council on which the Chiefs of all the territorial Divisions (equivalent to provinces) of the Federation were represented. Chiefship among the Ashanti was based on the lineage system, with each lineage constituting a political unit that was represented on the Divisional Council. The power of the Chief of each Division, who was elected from among the members of the Divisional Council, was not unfettered. It was subject to control, for he was bound by custom to act only with the consent, and on the advice, of the members of his council. *"Whatever the extent of a chief's power, chiefship [in Africa] is inevitably associated with a collection of people who surround the chief at least as much to control him as to assist him."* (Wayne MacGaffrey, Custom and Government in the Lower Congo, 1970).

The members of each Divisional Council were expected to consult the groups they respectively represented and to give effect to their wishes. If the lineage, village, or subdivision was not consulted or properly served, the group concerned could change its representative, a right that effectively subjected the latter to popular control. *"The efficiency of the system depended on the chief acting with the concurrence of his elders, on an effective popular control of both the chief and his elders, so that they discovered and realized the will of the people in their legislative and executive functions, and finally on the adequacy of the lineage system to give representation to all members of a tribe or residents of a territorial Division. To a large extent these conditions were satisfied in Ashanti until after 1896."* (K. A. Busia, The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti, 1951).

A British observer, who visited the Ashanti Federation in the 1880s, described the Ashanti Federal Council, as *"a kind of parliament [at which] all matters of political and judicial administration are discussed by the King and Chiefs in Council, and where the latter answer all questions relating to their respective provinces, and are subject to the consequences of appeals, from their local Judicial Courts to the Supreme Court of the King in Council."* (T. B. Freeman, in **The Western Echo**, No.1, March 1886, quoted in Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State, 1992).

R. S Rattray, an English anthropologist and Ashanti specialist who spent several years in the Gold Coast, found *"a really remarkable likeness between the constitution of ancient Greece and that of the Ashanti."* (Ashanti Law and Constitution, 1929). The Ashanti are the largest sub-group of the Akan, the dominant ethnic group in Ghana. The authority of an Akan chief was constrained by a whole series of injunctions which were publicly recited before him on the occasion of his enstoolment (enthronement), the most important of which was that he should never act without the advice and full consent of his councillors who were subject, in turn, to similar restraints: *"Failure to accept such guidance or advice, or the least attempt to act upon his own initiative, was always a legitimate cause for destoolment."* (Rattray, 1929). If that particular quality of Ashanti democratic governance had survived the Middle Passage, or if it had been subsequently resuscitated after Independence, Trinidad and Tobago would certainly have been spared the serious crisis of governance that afflicted the country over the past few years.

To the outside observer, the fiction was often encouraged that an Akan chief was a despot and an autocrat. *"In reality, every move, every command which appeared to emanate from his mouth, had been discussed and agreed upon in private by every councillor who had a say in the offices of the*

state. These councillors, in turn, would also have taken care to sound their subjects right down to the least important. **Nominally autocratic, the akan constitution was in practice democratic to a degree of which even now not many have any correct conception.**" (Rattray, 1929). The recent crisis of governance in Jamaica, which revealed *inter alia* that personalities at the highest levels of government had committed unconstitutional, unethical, or even illegal acts, illustrate how far superior in effectiveness were Ashanti democratic checks and balances in preventing such unconstitutional acts and the arbitrary exercise of power.

Rattray considered that the Ashanti Constitution and constitutional practices were more advanced, in some respects, than even that of Britain. He also considered the Ashanti mode and practice of democracy to be closer to the Democratic ideal than is Britain's democracy: "*Here then we have a far more real equality than any which our [English] laws confer on us.*" (Rattray, 1929). Where Ashanti law and constitutional practice did not surpass that of Britain in excellence, they were at least similar or equal in quality: "*Ashanti customary law engendered rules of behaviour and of conduct which were not dissimilar from 'our' [English] ethical and moral code*" (Rattray, 1929). In the light of the questionable conduct of a number of political office-holders in several Caricom countries, over the past few years, it is quite evident that Caricom systems of law and justice do not engender an equivalent standard of behaviour and conduct.

Traditional Akan democratic governance and practice could provide valuable lessons and/or inspiration in identifying solutions for other serious problems that we face in Caricom. The Akan had remarkable success in welding together different ethnic groups into a peaceful, multicultural society, within which each ethnic group had an equal place and no individual felt disadvantaged or discriminated against because of his ethnic origin. The Akan consolidated the unity of the different ethnic groups over whom they ruled, not by forcefully integrating minority groups or expelling them but by proclaiming and applying a doctrine of equality between all cultural groups, accompanied by the formal prohibition of any discriminatory reference to anyone's ethnic origins. (George Hagan, *L’Affirmation de l’Identité Culturelle et la Formation de la Conscience Nationale dans L’Afrique Contemporaine*, 1981).

Decrees issued on national integration by Sebetwane, King of the Kololo, people of Central Africa, bear an uncanny resemblance to the pillar inscriptions of the India's Emperor Ashoka, in the 4th-century B.C. (discussed below). The Kololo, migrating from south of the Limpopo, had moved into the territory of the Lozi (in present day Zambia) on whom they imposed their rule. Despite the violence of the initial conflict between the Kololo and the Lozi, immediately after his victory, Sebetwane worked to establish a consensus between the two peoples. He "*discouraged the Kololo from adopting the attitudes of a dominant aristocracy, and consciously strove to fuse the two groups into a single people.....His policy of fusion was embodied in the decree that 'all are children of the chief'*" (John D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath*, 1966. That policy was so successful during Sebetwane's life time that the Lozi adopted the name Kololo. What a striking contrast between the widespread practice of political authorities, in pre-colonial Africa, of promoting ethnic harmony and integration, as exemplified by the Ashanti and the Kololo, and that of political authorities in Trinidad and Tobago, which Reggie Dumas justifiably denounced in his public address: "*every race and ethnic group in this place considers itself second-class and in some way disadvantaged.*"

Revealing the ethnic or social origins of an Ashanti subject was regarded as a grave offense **for which even a chief or a king could be deposed.** (George B. N. Ayittey, *Indigenous African Institutions*, 1991). It is recorded that an Ashanti Chief, Osei Yaw of the district of Kokofu, was actually deposed for his habit of disclosing the ethnic origins of his subjects. (Busia, 1951). Reggie

Dumas made the following pertinent observation in his public address: "*In a multiracial, multireligious, multicultural society such as ours, politicians use another method to achieve the objective of power: they divide by race and religion, while swearing blind that they are doing everything they can to bring about unity.*" In the Ashanti state, politicians who dared to act in such a manner would have been immediately removed from office, no matter how important a position they held, or they would have been punished in other ways if they held no office. Ashanti democratic governance could most certainly teach us, here in Caricom, many valuable lessons on how a multiethnic country should be governed.

As late as 1963, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, confidently made the following astonishing assertion in a public lecture he gave on BBC radio: "*Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at the present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, and darkness is not a subject for history.*" (The Rise of Christian Europe, The Listener, 28 November 1963). Trevor-Roper's dismissive remark about Africa was made a little over three decades after the publication of Rattray's detailed, scholarly work on the political and legal systems of the Ashanti people that covered the area of the colonial Gold Coast (modern Ghana) and whose effective system of democratic governance had survived intact for two centuries, from the founding of the Federation in 1702 to its conquest by Britain in 1902.

Those outstanding achievements of an African state, the quality of whose democracy and legal system a distinguished English anthropologist considered superior, in several respects, to those of Britain itself, were apparently ignored by, or unknown to, Trevor-Roper. Trevor-Roper became a student at Oxford in 1931, where he studied Classics and Modern History. He obtained a first degree in each subject in 1934 and 1936, respectively, before becoming a fellow at Merton College in 1937. Rattray's book, Ashanti Law and Constitution, was published by Oxford University Press **only two years** before Trevor-Roper became a student at Oxford, where he spent his entire academic career. If the Regius Professor were unaware of the existence of Rattray's book, with its stunning research findings that must have caused a great stir in academic circles because it seriously undermined the validity of much prior research and writing on Africa, he must be considered guilty of culpable ignorance to an extraordinary degree. If Trevor-Roper did, indeed, know about Rattray's book but chose not to acknowledge or make any reference at all to it, even to challenge its findings, he must be considered guilty of gross intellectual dishonesty.

Rattray, who was both a lawyer and an anthropologist, wrote several books on the Ashanti (all published by Oxford University Press), apart from Ashanti Law and Constitution. The quality of Rattray's work is not in question. Subsequent writers on the Ashanti, who were best qualified to judge Rattray's work, all acknowledge his achievement. T. O. Elias, Nigeria's most distinguished academic jurist, generally relied on Rattray's book for the relevant sections of his landmark work, The Nature of African Customary Law (1956). K. A. Busia (an Ashanti), Ghana's most distinguished anthropologist and one of Africa's foremost scholars, found Rattray's book "*generally correct and accurate*" (Busia, 1951). Meyer Fortes, a distinguished British social anthropologist who has written widely and authoritatively on Africa, wrote of "*Rattray's splendid corpus of ethnographical and historical researches*" (Kinship and the Social Order, 1969).

The Ashanti Federation, with its well-established system of democratic governance, was by no means an African exception. Several other traditional African polities had also successfully established democratic systems of governance. Writing about West African states between the 13th and 17th centuries, Basil Davidson observed that they remained much more broadly democratic, in the representative and consultative sense of the word, than contemporary states in Europe. Although

they produced no *parliamentary* forms of governance which resembled those of Western Europe, the question of political representation was always present in the political life of those states, and that particular issue presented one of the thorniest problems that rulers of states such as Mali and Songhay had to face. (Basil Davidson, Africa: History of a Continent, 1972.) *“Even in the most powerful of Africa’s old kingdoms people argued passionately about the sources of power. Subjects espoused different theories of government.”* (John Lonsdale, "African Pasts in Africa’s Future", in Bruce Berman & John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, 1992).

At the beginning of the 16th century, Fuuta Jaloo, a West African state, established political institutions under a monarchical form of government, which survived in that same form until the second half of the 19th century - a period of almost four centuries. By the 17th-century, Fuuta Jaloo, was already endowed with many of the attributes of a modern democracy. *“These include decentralization of politics and administration, economic and fiscal autonomy of regional authorities, participation, representation through elections, transparency, and accountability.....”* (Tirmiziou Diallo, *“FUUTA JALOO: The Structure of an African State”*, in Donald Rothchild (ed), Strengthening African Local Initiative: Local Self-Governance, Decentralization and Accountability, 1994).

Basil Davidson contends that pre-colonial African political structures endured because they were accepted. *“They were accepted because their rules of operation were found to be sufficiently reasonable in providing explanation, and sufficiently persuasive in extracting obedience.”* (Davidson, 1992). That appears to be the reason why the Ashanti Federation and Fuuta Jaloo, as well as their respective systems of governance, "endured" for such extraordinary long periods of time. It also explains why the systems of governance that African countries inherited, at independence, from their European colonizers and those with which post-colonial African leaders replaced them, have all had very short lives.

As in the case of the Ashanti Federation, certain traditional African polities were considered, by Europeans who became acquainted with them, to be even more democratic than Europe democracies. The Gada system of democracy of the Oromo people (North-East Africa), which first came to the notice of the West in the 16th century, was considered uniquely democratic by many Western travellers, diplomats, and social scientists who were able to study the system at first hand in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Hamdesa Tuso, “Indigenous Processes of Conflict Resolution in Oromo Society”, in I. William Zartman (ed), Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict “Medicine”, 2000.) An English traveller who visited Abyssinia in the 19th century considered the Gada system of democratic rule to be **superior to all existing republican systems of government in the world**. (W. Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia, 1868).

With very few exceptions, the power of traditional African Kings and Chiefs was so closely regulated by tradition that it could not be exercised in an absolute or arbitrary manner. Moreover, with very few exceptions, the principle of absolute rule was **not** accepted in pre-colonial Africa as it generally was in Europe until the 17th century. The founding traditions of the Barotse people (Zambia), for example, *“emphasize that the king was bound by the law, and if a king ruled cruelly his council and the people were entitled to rebel against him and to try to dispose of him.”* (M. Gluckman, The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence, 1965). The Mossi monarchy (Burkina Faso) was a constitutional one in which imperial office belonged, hereditarily, to the same family. However, imperial succession was not automatic, as it was and still is in hereditary European monarchies. The Barotse Emperor was chosen by an “electoral college” of four dignitaries, presided over by the "Prime Minister". (Cheik Anta Diop, L’Afrique Noire Pré-Coloniale, 1987).

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard have described the constraints that were generally placed on traditional African rulers, in their exercise of power, which compelled them to rule in a consensual manner:

“The king’s power and authority are composite. Their various components are lodged in different offices. Without the cooperation of those who hold these offices, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the king to obtain his revenue, assert his judicial and legislative supremacy, or retain his secular and ritual prestige. Functionaries vested with subsidiary powers and privileges can often sabotage a ruler’s acts if they disapprove them.” (M. Fortes & E. E. Evans-Pritchard, African Political Systems, 1940).

Thus, the relationship which exists between parliament, the civil service, and the elected Government in a modern Western democracy is essentially no different from the relationship that existed between comparable institutions in traditional African governance, and in pre-colonial African states.

Certain states in pre-colonial Africa had established consensual political systems which required that major decisions be made only after widespread consultations had been undertaken among the population (John Mw Makumbe, Is There a Civil Society in Africa?, **International Affairs**, Vol.74, No.2, April 1998). Underlying indigenous provisions for participation and representation, were notions of consensus, decisions made on the basis of compromise, and an emphasis placed on discussion and the public airing of different views *“Inherent in these practices was an effort to balance multiple processes for popular autonomy with rulers’ demands for control. Decentralization, financial independence and/or large measures of local self-government were integral features of even the most hierarchical polities in the pre-colonial period.”* (Naomi Chazan, “Democratic Fragments: Africa’s Quest for Democracy”, in S. N. Eisenstadt (ed), Democracy and Modernity, 1992).

Although there were a very few African states in which no institutional checks on their rulers existed, or where existing checks were so ineffective that they rendered the system autocratic in effect, that does not appear to be a general feature of traditional African political systems. Hence, as Busia asserts, little or no justification can be found for authoritarian régimes or the one-party state in African political traditions. (K. A., Africa in Search of Democracy, 1967). Amhara society, the dominant cultural group in Ethiopia, stands as an exception to African democratic traditions, for the accountability of the ruler to the people he ruled was not a traditional feature of Ethiopian political culture, as it was for virtually all other traditional African states. Every aspect of Amhara society, it has been observed, is founded in authority relations, (Christopher Clapham, “Ethiopia and Eritrea”, in John A. Wiseman (ed), Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1995).

Checks and balances

The successful maintenance of democratic rule requires that there be an effective system of checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power. The removal of constitutional limits to presidential mandates, the arbitrary treatment of political opponents, the systematic removal of institutional checks and balances, and the concentration of state power in the presidential office, are all characteristics of governance in post-colonial Africa. Yet, the majority of African pre-colonial societies were so concerned by the potential abuse of power that they developed complex systems of checks and balances to control its use and possible abuse. *“There existed a rich body of constitutional practices in pre-colonial Africa, defined by reciprocity, accountability and a form of political legitimacy by which rulers could be challenged if they transcended established cultural*

and political norms." (John Healey & Mark Robinson, Democracy, Governance and Economic Policy: Sub-Saharan Africa in Comparative Perspective, 1992).

The central feature of the political system of the Tallensi (northern Ghana), for example, was a subtle conjunction of checks and balances. Greatly concerned with the uses and abuses of power "*they have carefully allowed for the exercise of the first and the discouragement of the second.*" (Basil Davidson, The Africans: An Entry to Cultural History 1969). Yoruba (Nigeria) and Fanti (Ghana) chiefs were normally subject to democratic checks and balances, including the possibility of being deposed which, apparently, occurred quite often. Indeed, it was the complaint of British colonial governors that Ghanaians, especially, were too fond of deposing their chiefs. (W. Arthur Lewis, Politics in West Africa, 1965).

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard emphasized that such checks and balances were integral to the functioning of traditional African political systems. They were more than mere administrative devices for they were based on fundamental principles that governed the exercise of power and authority in those systems:

"It would be a mistake to regard the scheme of constitutional checks and balances and the delegation of power and authority to regional chiefs as nothing more than an administrative device. A general principle of great importance is contained in these arrangements, which has the effect of giving every section and every major interest of the society direct or indirect representation in the central government. Local chiefs represent the central authority in relation to their districts, but they also represent the people under them in relation to the central authority. Councillors and ritual functionaries represent the community's interest in the preservation of law and customs, and in the observance of the ritual measures deemed necessary for its well-being. The voice of such functionaries and delegates is effective in the conduct of government on account of the general principle that power and authority are distributed." (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard (1940).

In view of the very high levels of violence in Caricom, the "tarnished" quality of our democracy, and the recent revelations of government leaders, in two Caricom countries, exceeding their political or legal authority, our ancestral African cultural heritage has important lessons for Caricom countries. The advanced, highly sophisticated democracy of the Akan peoples, for example, the effective checks and balances in their political system, their constitutional and extra-constitutional restraints on the exercise of power, and the effectiveness of their legal system in ensuring lawful behaviour, are fertile sources of political knowledge and inspiration for Caricom countries, in their search for alternative modes of governance that would be more in keeping with their values, their historical experiences, and their socio-cultural realities.

Conflict Resolution and The African Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is widely regarded as an indispensable institution for protecting the democratic liberties and civil rights of citizens. Consequently, virtually every country in the South, including Caricom countries, has appointed an Ombudsman. Regrettably, what they have all created is a carbon copy of the Swedish-originated Western institution which, quite naturally, given the very narrow Western conception of democracy, has been designed to emphasize the protection of civic and political rights only. Such an institution is of dubious effectiveness in the largely multicultural societies of the South where severe socio-economic inequalities generate high levels of violence, and whose peoples naturally place just as much importance on protecting economic, social, and

cultural group rights. Barbara von Tigerstrom, a Canadian law professor, noted that, in his 1996 Annual Report, Namibia's Ombudsman recorded a substantially greater number of citizen complaints concerning the violation of economic, social, and cultural rights than he did for political and civic rights. (The Role of the Ombudsman in Protecting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Ombudsman Yearbook, Vol.2, 1998).

Calling into question the effectiveness of lifting an institution, lock, stock, and barrel from its Western context - together with its Western structure, Western objectives, and Western procedures - and transferring it to a post-colonial social context, J. F Mbwiliza made the following pertinent observation: "*What needs to be understood is that, although the 'ombudsman' as an institution has acquired global dimension, it eventually has to be culturally specific in its structure and content.*" (The Permanent Commission of Enquiry: The Context and the Law, International Ombudsman Yearbook, Vol.3, 1999). The very high incidence of ethnic conflict and civil war in Africa is eloquent testimony of the total ineffectiveness of the Western Ombudsman institution in protecting the rights of minority groups in multicultural societies.

Like the excellent Ashanti institutional model of democracy, which was completely ignored when Western systems of governance were conferred on African countries at independence, an effective, indigenous African "Ombudsman" institution existed in many African countries. Known by various names in different countries, and bearing a remarkable resemblance to the Swedish Ombudsman, it appears to have been a standard feature of pre-colonial African societies. Institutions performing a function similar to that of the Swedish Ombudsman were so ubiquitous in pre-colonial Africa that an American Emeritus professor at Johns Hopkins, who holds the Chair in Conflict Resolution, was moved to remark: "*The Ombudsman seems to be an African invention, even if better known in the West by a Scandinavian name.*" (William I. Zartman, "Changes in the New Order and the Place for the Old", in Zartman (ed), Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict "Medicine", 2000).

The *Ngambela*, an indigenous institution of the Barotse people (Zambia) should be a perfect candidate for the role of a modern Zambian Ombudsman. It is deeply rooted in local tradition and thus possesses the necessary political and cultural legitimacy. Not only is the official role of the *Ngambela* to protect the people from abuse of power by the traditional state but, once appointed by the king, the *Ngambela* becomes independent of the former's power and can even oppose the king himself, in his official role as protector of the people's interests (Max Gluckman, The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence, 1965). Although the Barotse king could obtain the removal of a particular *Ngambela*, he did not have the power to abolish the post itself (Gluckman, 1965). That traditional institution's "statutory" independence and its incumbent's total freedom from any royal (government) control invite favourable comparison with the Independent Authority of a modern Western democracy.

Indeed, the Barotse "Ombudsman" is a more sophisticated institution for protecting the interests of the citizen than its renowned Swedish counterpart which, regrettably, served as the template for Zambia's Ombudsman. Always concerned by the possible abuse of power, the Barotse surrounded the *Ngambela* with the additional safeguard of another office - that of the *Imandi* - who is specially charged with restraining the *Ngambela* should the latter abuse his power over the people instead of protecting their interests. (James S. Wunsch, Refounding the African State and Local Self-Governance: The Neglected Foundation, Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.38, No.3, 2000).

In creating an Ombudsman-type institution and making it an integral part of their systems of

governance, pre-colonial African societies were well in advance of all Western democracies, perhaps by as much as several centuries. Sweden was the first Western democracy to have done so - in 1819 but, apart from Finland, which created an Ombudsman modelled on Sweden's in 1919, no other Western democracy deemed it necessary to establish a similar institution, before the 1960s. Britain established its Ombudsman institution (the Parliamentary Commissioner) in 1967; France established its own (the Mediator) in 1973, and Canadian provinces began establishing theirs in the 1960s.

A number of African countries had developed very effective conflict resolution systems, which were designed specifically to prevent or resolve the type of social conflict which occurs in multicultural societies, like ours in Caricom. The conflict management system of the Arusha, an East African people, has attracted high praise from a number of Western writers. Kenneth S Carlston, an American law professor and international expert on conflict resolution, described the Arusha conflict resolution process as an "ingenious", "innovative", "sophisticated" one, which could serve as a model for dealing with national and international conflicts: *"With only the most rudimentary perception of the law, in the sense of legal norms supported by a sanctioning process, the Arusha were unable to develop the concept of an authoritative, third-party decision-making body. They instead developed the mediation process to a degree that capital and labor groups in national societies and states in international society might well envy and emulate today.....The experience of the Arusha points to a possible new model of an international society of peace."* (Social Theory and African Tribal Organization: The Development of Socio-Legal Theory, 1968).

In addressing their problems of governance, Caricom countries should find valuable ideas and inspiration from both the traditional African "Ombudsman" and traditional African conflict resolution methods, such as those of the Arusha. As multicultural societies having to deal with problems which are peculiar to such societies, Caricom countries might well find the traditional African Ombudsman of greater relevance to their own needs than the Swedish Ombudsman.

Public Administration

An honest, efficient public service is an absolutely indispensable requirement for democratic governance. Karl Polanyi, a distinguished academic of Hungarian origin, posited the theory that a country's livelihood strategy - its political economy - is an adaptation to its environment and material conditions, a strategy that is embedded in, and largely informed by, the country's society and culture. Eighteenth-century Dahomey was one of several pre-modern examples which Polanyi used to validate his theory, by demonstrating how centrally-important Dahomey's culture and traditions were in the design of its unique system of political management and public administration, and in the high level of excellence they achieved.

"The study of eighteenth-century Dahomey reveals that the gift of statesmanship is not a European privilege. There was a high level of statecraft in the early state. The social structure of the early state abounds in institutional devices that act as safeguards both to freedom and efficiency.....Arbitrary rule was barred through the formal separation of the central administration from activities originating in familial and local life, those cradles of tradition and freedom. Such jurisdictional limitations were reinforced by the administrative division of defense, trade, taxation, and currency domiciled in the palace, while local autonomy was rooted in primordial custom which the King himself did not dare to offend." (Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An Analysis of an Archaic Economy, 1965).

18th-century Dahomey drew upon its traditional culture in its choice of a dual structure of state administration and, also, in the manner in which checks and controls on administrative power were institutionalized. The notion of duality was a central concept of Dahomey's culture that pervaded the entire society, and an obsession with its perceived perfection, dating back to mythological times, led Dahomey to organize its entire society on the duality principle. The ideal structure of every group in the divine world of the people of Dahomey was a set of twins of mixed sex, which provided the inspiration for its original system of public administration. Every male official in the kingdom had a female counterpart whose duty was to familiarize herself with the work of her male counterpart and to keep a close check on his administrative actions. (Paul Mercier, "The Fon of Dahomey", in D. Forde (ed), African Worlds, 1954). Thus, Dahomey's public administration system was designed in a way that ensured both genuine gender equality and "*institutional checks of a rare effectiveness.*" (Polyani, 1965).

The dual organizing principle was also applied to the army. Every soldier, from the highest ranking officer to the lowest rank, had a female counterpart based in the palace who performed a similar function. Despite the cumbersome bureaucratic structure which such a system implied, contemporary foreign observers all acknowledged Dahomey's outstanding efficiency in both civil and military affairs. Melville Herskovits, the American anthropologist, estimated that Dahomey's standing army also included female soldiers whose number varied between 5,000 and 10,000. (Dahomey, an Ancient West African Kingdom, 1938).

Putting the sexes on an equal footing was not only far in advance of prevailing practice in Western countries at that period, but it also places 18th-century Dahomey well in advance of **all** countries in the 21st century, none of which has yet succeeded in ensuring genuine gender equality in the work place. It is most interesting to note that it was the female who occupied the position of "controller" vis-à-vis the male in the country's public administrative system. The remarkable success of Dahomey's innovative and precociously advanced administrative system of gender pairing, and of placing the female in the position of "controller", are reflected in Polanyi's comment: "*The administration of Dahomey attained excellence in the way of honesty, precision, and reliability.*" Governance in 21st-century Caricom could well do with such qualities.

Dahomey's unique system of public administration survived right up to the beginning of the colonial period. Richard Burton, the 19th-century English explorer who visited Dahomey, bore witness to it: "*Dahomean officials, male and female, high and low, are always in pairs.*" (A Mission to Glele, King of Dahome, Vol.1, 1893). The country's European colonizers doubtlessly viewed Dahomey's traditional system of public administration, with its accent on gender equality, as being contrary to nature. Consequently, they decided that it must be abolished so that the natural order of things could be restored. Dahomey was one of the major sources of slave labour for the Caribbean. Caricom countries, which still experience immense difficulty in achieving gender equality in the work place, ought to regard 18th-century Dahomey's stunning success in that respect, as a source of inspiration for their own efforts in that direction. Moreover, Dahomey's experience demonstrates convincingly that gender equality in the work place can bring not only greater efficiency but also "*excellence in the way of honesty, precision, and reliability,*" qualities that are arguably more associated with female management than with male.

The Rule of Law

Contrary to widely-held perceptions, pre-colonial African societies were generally both lawful and law-abiding. They all possessed more or less well-developed systems of law and justice which ensured that they remained so. Discussing the state of law and justice in 18th century Dahomey,

Polanyi observed: *"This archaic society possessed a solid structure built upon the rule of law."* (Polanyi, 1965) James H. Vaughan arrived at the very same conclusion: *"Virtually all of these [African] diverse political organizations are based upon the validity of public means of resolving disputes and conflicts, that is upon the rule of law."* ("Population and Social Organization", in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara (eds), Africa, 1986).

N. J. J. Olivier's conclusion is no different: *"All these Bantu societies therefore seem to have a well-developed system of law and a system of courts which have judicial authority to pronounce in legal matters and to enforce their judgements; provision is made for appeals to higher courts, the highest being the court of the chief (or tribal court), which is often the court of instance in serious criminal matters."* ("The Governmental Institutions of the Bantu Peoples of Southern Africa", in Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin, 1969).

As Claude Ake observed, in respect of pre-colonial African societies, *"The moral and spiritual significance of abiding by the rules for the entire society induces everyone to respect the [traditional] law and to resist its corrupt exploitation for private benefits. These circumstances operationalize the rule of law in a manner that is at once more rigorous and more concrete."* (Ake, 2000). That traditional "rule of law", which proved quite effective in pre-colonial Africa, is striking by its general absence from many contemporary African societies, where it is either non-existent or not at all effective. Ake attributes that situation to the alien nature of Africa's modern legal systems, which are not at all relevant to the values and social experience of African peoples.

Corruption

One of the major obstacles to healthy democratic development in modern Africa is the widespread prevalence of public corruption in general, and the corruption of political leaders in particular. Contrary to widely-held perceptions, public corruption was not a characteristic feature of pre-colonial African societies. *"It is important to stress, for the benefit of modern African elites, that political power or office in traditional Africa was not used as a basis to accumulate wealth.....the African chief was forbidden to accumulate personal wealth."* (Ayittey, 1991).

The marked change in traditional African standards of public probity occurred **only after the advent of colonial rule**. That is clearly illustrated by the observation of the distinguished German historian, Ludwig Bauer, in his remarkable biography of King Leopold: *"Despotism and kleptocracy do not inhere in the nature of African cultures or in the African character; but they are now rife in what was once called British colonial Africa, notably West Africa."* (Ludwig Bauer, Leopold the Unloved 1934).

Busia (1951) has explained how British colonial rule was responsible for the radical change in African mores that Bauer noted. The traditional rules that were established to prevent Ashanti chiefs from illicit enrichment in the pre-colonial era were much more rigorous than those of any advanced democracy in the 21st century. Traditionally, the Ashanti chief could not possess private property; everything he owned before his investiture as chief had to be handed over to the stool (state). He was entitled to the use of state property, but any interest or profit derived from such use reverted to the state, not to the personal estate of the Chief. As Meyer Fortes informs us, *"The office is deemed to absorb the whole person during his tenure of it. Thus any treasure a chief takes with him when he is installed becomes part of the stool property, and any territory, persons or valuables he is instrumental in winning during his tenure of the stool accrue to the office."* ("Ritual and Office in Tribal Society", in M. Gluckman (ed), Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations, 1962).

The constitutional safeguards against personal enrichment by Ashanti chiefs, as determined by tradition, were thus even more rigorous than those currently imposed on politicians holding office in the most advanced Western democracies, who can put their personal fortunes into a blind trust for the period they remain in office. Moreover, unlike Ashanti chiefs, individuals who accede to political office in Western democracies do not have their private wealth or their personal possessions confiscated by the state, **personal wealth that Ashanti chiefs cannot recover when they leave office.**

An Ashanti Chief could not engage in trade to enrich himself, although his subjects were allowed to trade on his behalf. He received tribute from his subjects in the form of goods and services and, when necessary, special levies were raised for specific purposes. The chief himself was not allowed to handle state funds, which were under the strict control of the state treasurer who was the only official entitled to receive and disburse such funds. (Busia, 1951). From the special levies and the goods and services provided him, the chief was able to meet his personal needs, provide hospitality to visitors, reward certain of his subjects, and distribute presents at religious festivals. The latter "services" were among the obligatory "duties" of an Ashanti Chief towards his people. They were a sanction of his authority and also served to bind his subjects to him.

The colonial regime placed restrictions on the imposition of levies by the chief, for which the prior approval of the colonial governor was needed. Although other sources of the chief's wealth, such as tributes in kind had dried up, chiefs felt an obligation to continue dispensing hospitality, gifts, and rewards, as before since they were closely associated with his chiefly authority. In order to continue to meet such obligations, many chiefs engaged in business activities, which made them economically vulnerable and liable to incur debts. Some resorted to borrowing money to meet the expenses that went with their position and status; others made illicit use of state funds, as a last resort. (Busia, 1951).

The checks and controls on the management of Ashanti state funds, which existed in the pre-colonial era, had worked so well that the removal of chiefs for the misappropriation of state funds was a very rare occurrence. In that early period, the principal reasons for the removal of Ashanti chiefs were failure to consult the elders or a violation of custom. By the 1920s, however, the most common cause of deposition from office had become the "*misappropriation of stool funds*", a situation that persisted into the post-colonial period. (Busia, 1951).

On the other side of the continent, Helge Kjekshus demonstrated how the British colonial administration in Tanganyika undermined traditional African moral and ethical rules which prevented corrupt practices in the marketplace. Those rules were directed particularly against cheating on the quality and volume of the produce sold, and also against attempts to unilaterally inflate the exchange prices. That very effective traditional control system broke down in the colonial period as a result of the colonial authorities deliberate undermining of the authority and the position of the Chief, who had been the final market authority. (Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika 1850-1960, 1996).

The result was that "*cheating and falsification of goods spread unhindered in the local markets. Since there is nothing to fear such practices have taken over the entire market.....Undiluted milk can simply not be bought any more.*" (B. Gutmann, *Das Recht der Dschagga*, 1926, quoted in Kjekshus, 1996). The deleterious effect of that pernicious colonial policy, which was calculated to neutralize the power of the local chiefs, was not limited to the market place. It also undermined the moral authority and the moral sanctions that underpinned law-abiding behaviour in village communities, thereby encouraging the perpetration of illegal and corrupt acts which had country-

wide repercussions.

The "moral ethnicity" which prevailed everywhere in pre-colonial Africa, and which ensured both a high level of public morality and an almost total absence of corruption, was not completely destroyed by colonial rule. It still exists, but it is limited to traditional spheres. Two English writers, who resided in Nigeria during the early years of the country's independence, were struck by the contrast between the corruption of local government authorities and the integrity of local ethnic unions:

*"It is apparent from what they do that the [tribal] unions are handling sums of money comparable to those of many local authorities, **that they are spending it constructively, and that they are handling it honestly**.....whereas councillors bribe and council treasurers abscond without shocking public opinion, the treasurers and committee members of the unions do not do so.....This is a point of crucial importance. To put your finger in the till of the local authority will not unduly burden your conscience, and people may well think you a smart fellow and envy you your opportunities. To steal the funds of the union would offend the public conscience and ostracize you from society. The ethic is there, but it has not yet been transferred from the seat of natural loyalty, which is the clan or the tribe, to the new seat of loyalty which is the state." (Ronald Wraith & Edgar Simpkins, Corruption in Developing Countries, 1963).*

In their book, Wraith and Simpkins drew attention to a study, which they had undertaken on public corruption in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their findings revealed striking similarities between corruption in British public life during that period and corruption in post-colonial African and Asian countries, with Britain taking the prize for corrupt practices. The authors mentioned, in particular, the blatant bribery in 19th-century British elections, biased government policies that openly favoured the party in power, the violence and thuggery that marred English elections, and the incompetence and corruption of county judges. The widespread corruption in British public life was detailed in the report of the 1833 Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations. In the course of the 19th century, British public corruption was addressed in stages, through a number of legislative measures. Major British anti-corruption measures in the 19th century included the Municipal Corporation Act (1835), the Secret Ballot Act (1872), the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act (1889) and the subsequent establishment of an impartial Civil Service Commission. In striking contrast, public corruption in contemporary Africa was a rare phenomenon.

Violence and Aggression

In a report on East Africa written at the turn of the 20th century, a British Commissioner did not hesitate to make the following blatantly false assertion:

"Modern East Africa is the greatest philanthropic achievement of the later nineteenth century.....Perhaps political philanthropy is never quite disinterested; but when a Government can point to the triumphant accomplishment of the great work of humanity there is no reason why it should not receive due recognition.....It is only a few years ago since East Africa was nothing but a human hunting-ground.....The native tribes warred with one another in order to get slaves to sell to the Arabs, and this picture of slavery and bloodshed was chiefly diversified by interludes of terrible famine.....How great is the difference now! There can be no doubt of the immense progress made in rendering the civilisation of the African at least possible, and it is a progress which need occasion no regrets, for we are not destroying any old or interesting system, but simply introducing order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism". (Sir Charles

Eliot, Report by His Majesty's Commissioner on the East Africa Protectorate, 18th April 1903, Africa No.6, Cd.1626.

That narrative of pre-colonial African tribes warring with one another in East Africa, which was fabricated by the British Commissioner, did not apply to West Africa, either. John Barbot, a 17th century slave-trader on the Atlantic coast of Africa, recorded that: *".....in 1682 I could get but eight [slaves] from one end of the coast to the other; not only because we were a great number of trading ships on the coast but by reason the natives were everywhere at peace."* (Quoted in Basil Davidson, The African Past, 1966).

Richard Waswo, a professor of English at Geneva University, has brilliantly deconstructed, in a landmark work, the story of Western Civilization - a story largely based on fiction and fabricated "facts". In the preface to his book, from which I quote below, he likens that fabricated Western story to a plot: *"It is the history of a plot that is continually enacted both in language and in the world. The story that contains the plot together with later versions of the plot in ostensibly nonfictional discourses constitute one of the 'grand narratives' that Jean-François Lyotard has assured us are dead in this postmodern world."* Waswo then informs us that such "grand narratives" are by no means dead, adding that *"we (members of occidental culture) have internalized it...."* Waswo debunked one of the *"ostensibly nonfictional discourses"* on Africa, which masquerades as fact:

The most striking feature of the British image of Africans is its variance from the African reality. It is impervious to ever-increasing data and is created by Europeans for European needs. It is thus impervious because it never came from 'data'; it comes from a story that has been told so often, enacted so widely, diffused into discourses of such greater scientific credibility than fiction, that it's untouchable. It's also generally European, not merely British." (Richard Waswo, The Founding Legend of Western Civilisation: From Virgil to Vietnam, 1997).

The successful establishment of collective security and a peaceful society was one of the great achievements of the medieval West African state: *"In spite of the frequent power struggles the [West African] state showed a remarkable capacity to provide protection to the people."* (Abdoulaye Bathily, "The West African State in Historical Perspective" in Eghosa Osaghe (ed), Between State and Civil Society in Africa, 1994. Ibn Battuta, the famous 14th-century Moroccan traveller and chronicler, who visited Mali in the course of his travels, was greatly impressed by Mali's achievements in respect of law, order, and security. Battuta noted in his chronicle: *"The Sultan does not tolerate the slightest breach of justice; - complete security in their country - neither the passing traveller nor anybody living there has to fear from robbers or aggressors."* (Bathily, 1994). Dutch travellers to the city of Benin (Nigeria) at the very beginning of the 17th century were also impressed by the city's civic stability and peace. (Davidson, 1994).

The late Leonard Thompson, who was Emeritus Professor of History at Yale and Director of the Yale Southern African Research Program, asserted that there were no traditions of devastating warfare among the peoples of Southern Africa before the 19th century (that is to say, before the advent of colonial rule). (A History of South Africa 1990). The deadly rivalry that developed between Xhosa and the Zulu peoples was deliberately fomented, fanned, and supported, firstly by the colonial administration and, subsequently, by Afrikaner governments. Both ethnic groups have more in common than what separates them. Seventy per cent of the Xhosa and Zulu languages is shared. The belief systems of both ethnic groups, as well as the norms and values that govern social interaction, marriage, and family, in both groups, are essentially the same. (Mary de Haas,

Natal/KwaZulu: Present Realities, Future Hopes, 1987). Indeed, the concept of the Zulu as a discrete ethnic group did not emerge until the 1870s, presumably as a result of colonial policies of divide-and-rule. (John Reader, Africa: A Biography of the Continent, 1997).

In Kenya, the "grand narrative" that the Kikuyu and Masai peoples were sworn enemies was a fabrication of the colonial administration, designed to serve its own interests. It has no basis whatsoever in historical fact. Although some fighting did take place between the two groups, there was also a considerable amount of peaceful interaction. Both ethnic groups traded with each other, intermarried, and shared important social and ritual practices. (Godfrey Muriuki, A History of the Kikuyu, 1975). Frederick Lugard (later Lord Lugard) was a senior British army officer who served in various military capacities in Eastern Africa during the 1890s, including the post of Military Administrator of Uganda (1890-1892). In an entry in his diary, **Lugard compared the relatively peaceful nature of the Kikuyu with the violent nature of the British:** "*When Wakikuyu fight, a man gets his skull cracked perhaps at most. If the British fight, and bring guns many men die.*" (Margaret Perham, Lugard. Volume 1: The Years of Adventure 1858-1898, 1960).

Lugard's comparison was very apposite. The picture of violent and constantly warring African tribes which was a defining feature of British and European colonial narratives, is actually a mirror image of British and European societies between the 15th and 20th centuries. For most of that period, Europeans were constantly at war with one another or engaged in wars of conquest throughout the world. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which engulfed the whole of Europe, was exceeded in geographical scope, number of casualties, and degree of destructiveness only by the First and Second World Wars.

Moreover, unlike Africa before the 19th century when European colonial wars and colonial rule destroyed the peace and stability which previously existed throughout the continent, British society, in particular, was a very violent one. The word "mob" (derived from the Latin *mobile vulgus*) was coined in the 1680s to describe the social chaos caused by the public violence that engulfed Georgian England. Prevailing social conditions brought the term into general use in the early 18th century year. The early 1700s were described as the most riotous in English history. London was racked by regular outbreaks of riots by mobs provoked by economic grievances, politics, or religion. (Robert Shoemaker, The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England, 2004). One contemporary observer complained that Britain had witnessed more mob violence and insurrections in the single year, 1715, than had occurred in the kingdom since the Norman Conquest. Ian Gilmour described the great rebellions of Scotland in 1715 and 1745, of Ireland in 1798, and the violent Gordon riots of 1780, in a book whose title is most revealing. (Riot, Rising and Revolution: Governance and Violence in Eighteenth-century England, 1993).

As demonstrated above, the quality of pre-colonial African systems of governance equalled or surpassed that of contemporary European countries in every single aspect of statecraft. Alas, despite the considerable documentary evidence that attests it, pre-colonial Africa's stunning governance achievements remain largely unknown, even among African diasporas. That is the result of the telling and retelling of fabricated colonial narratives which were designed to convince colonized peoples of their inherent inferiority, their immaturity, their utter incapacity to govern themselves, and of the total absence of any worthwhile achievements in their past. In one of his poems, Kipling described colonized peoples as "sullen peoples, half-devil and half child". (The White Man's Burden, 1889). In the words of Richard Waswo, it is "*a story that has been told so often, enacted so widely, diffused into discourses of such greater scientific credibility than fiction, that it's untouchable.*" The story of black Africa's incapacity to govern itself, its savagery, the inherently violent and corrupt nature of Africans etc. was told and retold in school books, official literature,

articles in the Metropolitan press, novels, adventure stories, and films - so much so that African diasporas, in Caricom and elsewhere, came to believe it.

Describing the destructive effects of colonial education and the colonial experience on the image African have of themselves, their culture, and their history, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan novelist, academic, and theorist of post-colonial literature, asserted that the process "...annihilates a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves". (Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, 1986). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has eloquently described the major obstacle that many, if not most, Afro-Caribbeans would have to overcome, not only in developing a healthy relationship with their historical past and ancestral culture but also, even more importantly, in recognizing that they may both have valuable lessons for Caricom.

Waswo concluded that such demeaning narratives ("grand narratives") continue to exercise their baneful influence because "*we (members of occidental culture) have internalized it.....*". Unfortunately, members of Caricom culture appear to have also internalized it. Although we may not want to admit it, our internalization of such "grand narratives", particularly concerning Africa, is so deeply rooted in our collective subconscious that they probably continue to influence our attitudes and actions in many areas of life. They need to be completely uprooted before we could be genuinely persuaded that our African past has valuable lessons for us. That is why I have gone into so much detail in recounting the stunning achievements of that past, in the area of governance. In the next section, I discuss our Indian past, which was also the subject of demeaning colonial narratives, and the valuable lessons it holds for Caricom.

Ali Mazrui, the distinguished African political scientist and former Reith Lecturer, suggested that "*Africa's traditional patterns might well constitute a pertinent road-sign for the travellers in search of new social bearings*". ("Africa's Relevance to Modern Civilization: Past Influences and Future Trends", in Joseph S. Roucek & Thomas Kiernan (eds), The Negro Impact on Western Civilization, 1970). Similarly, I suggest that Africa's traditional patterns might well constitute a pertinent road-sign for Caricom countries in search of new political bearings and alternative modes of democratic governance.

Our Indian Past: Its relevance to our present and what it can teach us about inventing alternative futures for Caricom

Alas, but unsurprisingly, India also had its own Trevor-Ropers. Lord Thomas Macaulay, the 19th-century British statesman, served between 1834 and 1838 on the British Supreme Council for India, which was based in Calcutta. In a minute he wrote on Indian education, in 1835, Macaulay declared:

*"I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists [Europeans versed in the knowlede of the Orient] themselves. **I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.** The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education. -"*

*"It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, **that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England.** In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same."* (Thomas Babington Macaulay, Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education).

Macaulay's minute is a splendid example of the "grand narratives", to use the euphemism Richard Waswo employed to describe the totally fabricated accounts of non-Western peoples and cultures which supposedly "reputable", but intellectually dishonest Western individuals of prominence have propagated since the 16th century, under the guise of "*ostensibly nonfictional discourses*". Let's make a factually accurate comparison of the respective historical achievements of Britain and India, one that would really reveal "*the relative position of the two nations*". **The results of that comparison will clearly show that the relative position of the two nations is exactly the reverse of what Macaulay concluded in his fictional narrative.** To paraphrase Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Britain has no history before the arrival of the Romans in 43 B.C. There is only the history of Romans in Britain. The rest is largely darkness, and darkness is not a subject for history." The Romans, whose colonization of Britain lasted until 410 A.D., introduced that country to civilization, in the form of agriculture, industry, urbanization, and architecture, leaving behind them a legacy of roads, villas, and steam baths, the ruins of some of which are still visible and visitable.

Francis Pryor is a leading British archaeologist, author of several books, including Britain BC: life in Britain and Ireland before the Romans, 2004, which is perhaps his most important work. The principal theme in his fairly considerable body of work is that British civilization did not begin with the Romans, whose arrival he claims to have been only one stage in the history of British civilization. Nonetheless, in a recent interview, Pryor readily acknowledged that many of Britain's megalithic and prehistoric sites do not yield their secrets easily. They are difficult to understand. "*They are just piles of soil, they are barrows, you've seen one you've seen them all*". Although there is fragmentary evidence that Britons had lived for hundreds of years on the banks of the Thames where London now is, they never developed an urban centre there. London (*Londinium*) was founded in 47 A.D. by the Romans.

A comparison of Britain's blank record in the area of urban civilization, in the pre-Christian era, with that of India is most illuminating. The city state of Mohenjo-daro, built around 2,600 B.C., was one of the largest urban settlements of the Indus valley civilization (3,300-1,700 B.C.). It extended over much of Northern India and modern Pakistan. Over a thousand cities and settlements belonging to that civilization have been discovered. Mohenjo-daro was rediscovered in 1922, and excavations over the following decades have revealed it to be remarkably advanced, in terms of urban planning and building construction. It had wide city streets, which were all laid out on a grid system in a perfect pattern. Its buildings, some of which were two storeys high, were constructed with bricks of uniform size. Individual homes had internal air-circulation systems and opened only to inner courtyards and small inner lanes. Individual buildings and homes, which satisfied their water needs from wells, were connected to a drainage system that conducted waste water to covered drains lining the major streets.

Mohenjo-daro possessed a large, elaborately-built public bath with a pool in its centre which was 39 feet long, 23 feet wide, and 8 feet deep. The public bath was equipped with its own well and drainage system. One of the city state's public buildings was equipped with an underground furnace (hypocaust) that might have provided heated bathing. **Mohenjodaro's public sanitation system was not equalled by London until the 19th century, 4,500 years later.** The following YouTube gives an artist's impression of what Mohenjo-daro must have looked like, based on the evidence provided by excavations: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdGbamPgf8o>. The following link takes the viewer to a photo gallery of Mohenjo-daro's excavated ruins: [A Walk Through Mohenjo-daro.](http://www.harappa.com/har/moen0.html) <http://www.harappa.com/har/moen0.html>

The Maurya Empire (321-185 BC) was the largest and most powerful of Ancient India. It was founded by Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, the first head of the Mauryan dynasty, who created an administrative system whose efficiency was not surpassed until the advent of British rule in the nineteenth century. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to Chandragupta's court wrote a detailed account of life in the Maurya Empire, fragments of which are still extant. Chandragupta's capital Pataliputra, known today as Patna, covered eighteen square miles and was probably the largest city in the world. <http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Places/Place/419417> It would be most ungenerous to compare India's Patna with contemporary urban structures in pre-Roman Britain - "*piles of soil.... barrows, you've seen one you've seen them all.*"

Macaulay asserted that "*when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable.*" The Maurya Empire was a great center of trade, commerce, and **learning, in which Emperor Chandragupta established several universities** and Buddhist monasteries. Patna attracted merchants and **intellectuals** from all over India. It is unclear when the first Britons learned to read and write, but literacy was probably introduced to Britain by Roman monks, in the early centuries of the Christian era, that is to say, several centuries after Patna had become a centre of learning, where several universities existed. Moreover, Roman monks must have had a very difficult time teaching Britons, because of their alleged stupidity and low capacity for learning. In a letter he wrote to his friend Atticus in Athens, in 77 BC, the Roman essayist Marcus Cicero of Arpinium, advised him: "*Do not obtain your slaves from Britain because they are so stupid and utterly incapable of being taught that they are not fit to form part of the household of Athens.*" (Jonathan Kingdon, *Self-Made Man and his Undoing*, 1993).

The Arthashastra, which is perhaps India's greatest treatise on public affairs, was written by Chandragupta's chief minister, Kautilya, as a guide for the Emperor and his ministers. It covered the areas of economic policy, politics, foreign affairs, administration, military strategy, and statecraft. Chanakya used the *nom de plume*, Kautilya, for his treatise, which experts on the period consider to have largely reflected actual practice in the Mauryan Empire. In the Arthashastra, the ruler is advised to "*facilitate mining operations,*" "*encourage manufacturers,*" "*exploit forest wealth,*" "*provide amenities*" for cattle breeding and commerce, and to "*construct highways both on land and on water.*" Price controls were advocated because "*all goods should be sold to the people at favorable prices,*" and foreign trade should be subsidized: "*Shippers and traders dealing in foreign goods should be given tax exemptions to aid them in making profits.*"

Official corruption and how to prevent it was a great concern of Ashoka's governance. Kautilya, carefully distinguished between forty different ways in which a public servant could be tempted to be financially corrupt, and he described how a system of spot checks, associated with penalties and rewards, could prevent such activities. (R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra, Part 2*, 1972).

Kautilya was the world's first great political realist. Because of its stark political pragmatism, the Arthashastra has often been compared to Machiavelli's The Prince. But no less a person than Max Weber considered the Arthashastra far superior to Machiavelli's masterpiece, which was written 1,200 years later: "*Truly radical 'Machiavellianism', in the popular sense of that word, is classically expressed in Indian literature in the Arthashastra of Kautilya (written long before the birth of Christ, ostensibly in the time of Chandragupta): compared to it, Machiavelli's The Prince is harmless.*" (Politics as a Vocation, 1919).

Chandragupta's grandson, Ashoka, who became the third ruler of the Mauryan Empire in 274 B.C., compiled a number of edicts which he had carved on rocks and stone pillars throughout his Empire. Several of the pillars he constructed are still standing. From his edicts, we get a glimpse of Ashoka's humanistic conception of governance, a humanism that antedated European humanism by more than a millennium. The Edicts reveal the true spirit and purpose of Ashoka's rule and his conception of the duty of a ruler: "*He shall.....personally attend the business....of earth, of sacred places, of minors, the aged, the afflicted, and the helpless, and of women.....In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness.*" (Vincent Smith, The Oxford History of India, 1958).

In an extraordinary tribute to Ashoka's greatness and his outstanding legacy to the world, H. G. Wells declared, "*In the history of the world there have been thousands of kings and emperors who called themselves 'their highnesses,' 'their majesties,' and 'their exalted majesties' and so on. They shone for a brief moment, and as quickly disappeared. But Ashoka shines and shines brightly like a bright star, even unto this day.*" (The Outline of History, 1920).

Religious tolerance was a fundamental principle of Ashoka's governance. Although he was a devout Buddhist, Ashoka did not persecute the Brahmins and Hindus but, instead, proclaimed religious toleration as an official policy. In the Arthashastra, Kautilya states: "*The king....honors every form of religious faith...*", In that respect, as in so many others, India was light years ahead of Europe. Religious tolerance and the concern of Indian rulers for the quality of their governance was by no means restricted to Ashoka's reign. They appear to have been inherent features of pre-colonial Indian governance. One of the first books in the Persian language to be translated into English was Ain-i-Akbari, the third volume of The Akbarnama, a three-volume work written by Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak, the Grand Vizier of Akbar the Great (1542-1605), the third Mughal Emperor of India. Bernard Cohn, the American historian and anthropologist, a specialist in British colonial history, describes Ain-i-Akbari as an "*account of the mode of governing*" under Emperor Akbar, "*in which is to be found the rules and regulations by which the Moghul court governed as well as detailed discussions of the qualities of a good ruler*". (Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India, 1996).

Akbar implemented a deliberate policy of reconciling his Hindu subjects. Though a Muslim, he appointed Hindu ministers of government and he himself married several Hindu Rajput princesses. At a time when European Christians were tyrannizing each other, persecuting Jews with the Inquisition, and burning heretics at the stake, Akbar was proclaiming in Delhi that "*no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him.*" During Emperor Akbar's lifetime, religious tolerance made a tiny advance in Europe with the ending of the French Wars of Religion (1562–98), although the Thirty Years War which engulfed the whole of Europe in the following century could be considered a prolongation of those wars of religion, on a continental scale. Europe made a slow start on the road to religious tolerance when the Catholic Church was forced to tolerate what it could not prevent. But the very little progress that Europe achieved in the area of religious tolerance is well illustrated by the definition of "tolerance" in the first edition of the dictionary of the Académie Française (1694): "*complicité*

avec du mal" (complicity with evil).

British colonial rule was to reverse more than two millennia of religious tolerance in India. Like Africa, when the British set tribal group against tribal group (where inter-tribal cooperation and amical relations had previously existed); like the West Indies when the British set freed blacks against indentured Indians (where the similarity of their suffering and their harsh treatment by British planters and plantation managers provided grounds for cooperation between the two ethnic groups); the British set Muslim against Hindu in colonial India (where mutual tolerance and cooperation had previously existed). The British colonial administration in India is indirectly responsible for the acute Hindu-Muslim animosity which now poses such a serious threat to peace in the sub-continent and, also in the world, if one of the two countries involved were to decide to launch a nuclear first strike.

Boasting of the great superiority of English civilization over Indian civilization, Macaulay declared in his minute: "***In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same***". As we have seen above, that "Grand Narrative" is actually a reverse image of the relative position of the two nations. Once asked by a British reporter what he thought of Western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi replied: "*It would be a good idea.*" One of the most important civilized values is good manners. "*Manners maketh man*" is one of the adages that was incessantly drummed into young heads in England, as it was in the colonies. In the first volume of his memoirs, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. recounts an experience of his mother in India, in the early 1930s. Having been befriended by an Indian and wishing to express her gratitude, she asked a British official how to say "thank you" in Hindustani. The latter declined her request, with the comment: "*No white person ever thanks an Indian for anything.*" (*A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings 1917-50*, 2000).

There are many other revealing examples of similar "civilized" behaviour on the part of the British in India. At the beginning of the 19th century, India was one of the world's two leading manufacturers and exporters of textiles, which made it one of the world's wealthiest trading nations. The other was China. India became a British colony *de facto*, in 1757, under the rule of the East India Company. It became a Crown Colony in 1858. After two centuries of British rule, India was transformed from one of the world's wealthiest and most advanced countries to one of the world's poorest, as Britain's leading economic journal admitted: "*When the British left India in 1947, the country was relatively poor and backward.*" (***Economist***, 16 August 1997). Since the 17th century, textiles had accounted for more than 50% of non-agricultural economic activity in India whose tissues, the high quality of which was very much appreciated in Europe, represented almost two-thirds of India's exports. Because of their poorer quality and higher cost, English textiles could not compete with India's superior textile products. Consequently, England decided to destroy India's textile industry and with it, India's economy.

In his seven-volume History of India, John Stuart Mill's account of how Britain's deliberately destroyed India's thriving textile industry is absolutely devastating:

"It is also a melancholy instance of the wrong done to India by the country on which she had become dependent. It was stated in evidence [to A Select Committee of the House of Commons] that the cotton and silk goods of India up to this period could be sold for a profit in the British market at a price from 50% to 60% lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70%-80%, on their value, or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and of Manchester would

*have been stopped in (sic) their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the powers of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacture. Had India been independent, she would have retaliated; would have imposed preventive duties upon British goods, and would thus have preserved her own productive industry from annihilation. This act of self-defense was not permitted her; she was at the mercy of the stronger. British goods were forced upon her without paying duty; and **the foreign manufacturer employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competition with whom he could not have contended on equal terms.**" (J. S. Mill, History of British India, Continuation and Notes by Wilson, Vol.1, Chapter 8, 1845).*

Indian weavers of fine cottons and silks were compelled to sell their cloth only to British traders, at prices decided by the latter. Any Indian found selling his cloth to traders other than British was severely punished. Also, no duty was charged on British goods entering India. In contrast, Indian exports to Britain were subjected to high imported duties. The destruction of India's textile industry required that India's weavers be prevented at all costs from utilizing of their redoubtable skills. That was often done with great violence and brutality. When Indian hand woven textiles continued to sell better than the products of British mills, **the thumbs of the best Bengal weavers were cut off** in order to neutralise the great advantage of superior Indian skills. (Vandana Shiva & J. Bandyopadhyay, Political Economy of Technological Polarisations, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.xvii, No.45, 1982). That was one of the many dubious ways in which the British demonstrated the superiority of their civilization over that of India.

Architecture was one of several aspects of civilization which Ancient India could have taught contemporary Britain. At around the same time (first century A.D) the Romans introduced architecture to Britain, Fa-Hien, a Chinese Buddhist monk, visited Pataliputra several times. In his written account of his journeys. Fa-Hien expressed admiration for the "*elegant carving and inlaid sculpture-work*" of Ashoka's palace, which the monk thought had to have been built by spirits, so beautiful it was. India maintained its great architectural tradition down through the centuries. The Taj Mahal, which was built by the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, in the 17th century, is considered one of the eight wonders of the world. In the opinion of a number of Western historians, the Taj Mahal's architectural beauty has never been surpassed. It has certainly not been equalled by any British building. Built entirely of white marble, it has been called an "*elegy in marble.*" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBgjn9a4Ybo&feature=related>

Governance

Western countries held celebrations, in 1993, to mark 2,500 years of democracy, having sited its founding moment in the reforms which the Athenian nobleman, Cleisthenes, introduced into the Constitution of Athens in 508 B.C. Notwithstanding that confident Western assertion, there is documentary evidence **that earlier in the sixth century, B.C. Ancient India independently invented democracy.** In his account of India, written more than three centuries later, Megasthenes mentioned the existence of Indian city-state republics, calling several by name, "democratic".

The forms of "parliamentary" democracy which existed in several northern Indian republics between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C., detailed descriptions of which are recorded in extant ancient Buddhist texts, were more advanced than that practised by the contemporaneous Athenian democracy. What is even more striking is that parliamentary democracy in the West did not achieve the level of sophistication of Ancient Indian parliamentary democracy until more than two thousand years later. The constitutions of those ancient republics were rooted in Indian culture, in that they

were all modelled on the constitution of the *Samgha* (the Buddhist Order) whose body of rules emphasized, *inter alia*, the sovereignty of the Assembly of all members, the importance of the assembly meeting frequently, and rule by majority.

The political affairs of the Republic of the Sakayas of Kapilavatthu, situated on the border of Nepal and identified as present-day Tilaum-Kat, were conducted in assemblies that were open to all citizens, whatever their age or social status. Ramashankar Tripathi provides a detailed description of how its parliamentary assembly functioned, as recorded in contemporary Buddhist texts:

*"We learn that there were regular meetings with proper seating arrangements made by a special officer called **asanapannapaka** or **asanaprajnapaka**. Each meeting to be valid must have the requisite number of members present, but the chairman (**Vinayadhra**) was not counted for the purpose of the quorum. It was the duty of the whip (**Ganapuraka**) to complete the quorum by requisitioning the presence of members. The business began with the formal presentation (**sthanapanam**) of the motion (**natti or jnapti**), which was followed by a proclamation (**anussavanam**). Discussion related to the motion only, and all cantankerous or irrelevant talk was avoided and checked. A resolution (**pratijna**) received one reading (**jnapti-dvitiya-kamma**) and sometimes even three (**jnapti-catuttha-kamma**). Silence of the members on the resolution was regarded as assent, but in case of disagreement they had recourse to various devices, like referring the matter to a committee with a view to arriving at a unanimous decision. If no unanimity was possible, votes (**chanda**) were taken. Voting was by tickets (**salaka**), generally slips of wood, of various colours to indicate different views.....Voting was perfectly free and unfettered, and the majority view (**ye-bhuyya-sikam**) prevailed. A question once decided was not to be reopened.....The procedure was thus democratic, anticipating in many respects the working of popular assemblies. (History of Ancient India), 1942).*

In his book on India's ancient republics, J. S. Sharma confirmed the above account of Indian democracy, adding that the parliamentary assembly of the Licchavis also provided for absentee voting. (Republics in Ancient India c.1500 B.C.-500 B.C., 1968). The above-mentioned parliamentary measures did not become standard practice in Western parliamentary democracies until the 18th century, at the very earliest.

The Panchayat

India's ancient democratic values and its excellent democratic structures have survived, in one form or another, right down to the present time. The term *panchayat* (government by a body of competent men) came into general use in medieval times to designate the village executive. Village *panchayats* flourished up to the eighteenth century when they were divested of their powers by the British colonial administration, an action for which the colonial administration subsequently (Decentralization Report of 1909) provided the following justification: "*The re-establishment of village panchayats would serve as a vehicle for the emergence of an unorthodox system of village governments, not necessarily conducive to a wholesome growth of the British Empire.*" (Indira Rothermund, The Aundh Experiment, 1983). Until then, *panchayats* had possessed substantial administrative powers, India's central government having traditionally accorded them considerable scope for autonomous action.

Attempts undertaken in India, over the past century, to revitalize the village *panchayat* have become the basis of efforts to democratize Indian society, right down to the lowest levels. Thus, amendments to the Indian constitution in 1992 required states to hold *panchayat* elections but gave

them discretionary power over the degree of autonomy to be accorded to *panchayats*. *Panchayati raj* has accelerated the pace of social change in rural India and has promoted greater participation in political life at the village level since, under the Indian constitution, all elected bodies must reserve a third of their seats for women and, also, for a certain number for members of the scheduled castes.

The members of the *panchayat* of Veerampatinam, a village in Tamil Nadu, are elected for a year by the whole population, including all castes. No member is allowed two successive mandates, and everyone in the village has an opportunity to be a member of the *panchayat* at least once in his lifetime. *"This non-renewable mandate prevents the politicization of the village assembly and membership of it from being turned into a political career; this practice is reminiscent of Athenian democracy, and coincides with the proposals of contemporary political scientists concerned with the confiscation of power by political 'castes'."* (Guy Sorman, *Le Génie de L'Inde*, 2000).

India's "modernized" *panchayat* has attracted high praise from UNDP and Amartya Sen, among others, as an effective institutional method of promoting bottom-up, rather than top-down, democratic governance, as well as greater political participation at the grassroots level. Citizen groups in Jamaica recently demanded measures to promote a similar mode of governance. However, the greatest tribute ever paid to India's *panchayat* democracy is, incontestably, the one paid by Alexis de Tocqueville. **Tocqueville considered the *panchayat* an ideal democratic model** and planned to devote a comprehensive study to it, similar to his two-volume *Democracy in America*, but had to abandon the project because of ill health. (Guy Sorman, "La Nouvelle Richesse des Nations", 1987)

From the early 20th century right down to the 1960s, there was virtual unanimity among Western *cognoscenti* that, because of its traditional culture and social structure, it would be impossible to establish parliamentary democracy in India. In a letter dated 6 June 1906, John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, asserted: *"I do not think it desirable or possible, or even conceivable, to adapt English institutions to the nations who inhabit India."* (S. R. Mehrota, "The Politics Behind the Montagu Declaration of 1917" in C. H. Philips (ed), *Politics and Society in India*, 1963). Lord Kimberley, another Secretary of State for India, declared that the notion of parliamentary representation in India *"is one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men."* (Myron Weiner, *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics*, 1989).

Such assertions underline India's outstanding achievement in successfully establishing a parliamentary democracy despite the formidable odds it faced. That achievement demonstrated that India possessed the cultural resources, the creativity, and the confidence to invent a political model that was capable of surmounting such redoubtable obstacles. After fifty-five years of Indian democracy, no less an authority than Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen commented: *"India's democratic institutions have stood the test of time (on the whole) and popular support...[They] have proved quite robust (even surviving major challenges such as the imposition of 'emergency' in 1975 to 1977, which was reversed by a popular electoral vote), and they appear to enjoy wide legitimacy among most sections of the population."* (Jean Drèze & Amartya Sen, *Democratic Practice and Inequality in India*, **Journal of Asian and African Studies**, July 2002). Patrick Heller expressed the same opinion in almost identical terms: *"India's democratic institutions have withstood the test of time and the test of a fissiparous society."* (*Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons From India*, **World Politics**, Vol.52, No.4, July 2000).

How did India bring off that remarkable achievement? India's accomplishment can be attributed to its successful adaptation of the multi-party system to indigenous social structures and cultural traditions. Traditional Indian culture possessed a number of features which were favourable to the

modern democratic process. Among the features of Hinduism that made political pluralism acceptable are its decentralized authority structure and its doctrinal pluralism, which embraced the view that there are many different paths to salvation. The Hindu notion that religious and philosophical truths have both a theoretical and a practical level of validity ensured that there was no real conflict between modernizing beliefs in the reality and the desirability of progress, on the one hand, and such traditional doctrines as the unreality and the ephemeral nature of the world, on the other. (Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization 1972). Indian culture possessed a high cultural tolerance for dissent, and the Hindu tradition of making society subordinate to the demands of the secular power facilitated the acceptance of the modern political structures by large sections of the population.

India's modern political structures, its political strategies, and its political style have preserved those characteristic features of Indian tradition. India's modern political institutions and practices, and the changes brought about by political modernization, were thus able to acquire legitimacy within the parameters of Indian tradition. In that way, not only did the modern political institutions and practices that were introduced into India avoid being considered alien by the mass of the people, but that process actually facilitated the assimilation of the new political norms by the population. (Rajni Kothari, Politics and the People: In Search of Humane India, 1989).

Perhaps the most important political obstacle that India was able to overcome in its successful democratic transition, one that has bedevilled virtually all other post-colonial countries, was the introduction of a multi-party political system in a society that is characterized by deep social and cultural cleavages. In the absence of a national social consensus which would permit political appeals to be made to a national electorate, and political activities to be organized across social cleavages, a multi-party system tends, more often than not, to lead to political parties and political competition being aligned with the cleavages in the society.

India solved that problem through the "Congress system", the establishment of a multi-party system of political competition, but with an inclusive governing party - the Congress party - playing a dominant role. Consequently, a place was found in the Congress party for every social group - religious, linguistic, ethnic, and caste. (Richard Sisson & Ramashray Roy "The Congress Party and the Indian Party System" in Richard Sisson & Ramashray Roy (eds), Diversity and Dominance in Indian Politics: Changing Bases of Congress Support, Vol. 1, 1990. The Congress party thus became an "omnibus" political party in which all streams of ideological thought and all the important social and cultural interest-groups in the country were represented. It mobilized its political support from within traditional social groupings as well as from the new, emerging forces in the society. The important political competition took place *within* the Congress party, not between Congress and the minority parties in parliament as would have been the case if the multi-party system had functioned in the classic Western manner.

The Congress system incorporated India's historical experience, reflecting the traditional relationship between politics and society in India. It also proved to be an effective system for containing and resolving the type of conflicts which arise between social groups in a divided society. More importantly, perhaps, the Congress system was successful in engaging traditional groups in the society in the practice of democratic electoral politics "*Both the traditionally entrenched social groups and the new aspirants developed a stake in Congress, internalized the symbolism and procedures of the electoral and parliamentary systems, and got actively involved in the overall framework of authority and decision-making represented by the Congress.*" (Kothari, 1989). With respect to India's successful cultural appropriation of democracy, R. S. Khare observed that the country's most significant achievement is that India's intellectuals and elites, who

have continued to maintain their faith in democratic norms, had succeeded in justifying democracy to the masses **in terms of India's own traditional culture and social structure**. (Culture and Democracy: Anthropological Reflections on Modern India, 1985).

Post Scriptum

Nationality and Citizenship

Caricom is experiencing serious problems of integration, intra-regional trade, and intra-regional immigration, with many member countries privileging national interests at the expense of regional interests. In a recent article, Rickey Singh observed that: *"The failures are rooted in lack of collective political will to overcome parochialism and a narrow sense of nationalism in favour of a shared vision of "one people, one market, one Caribbean" — to which they all claim commitment ."* (Delaying inevitable in Caricom 14 July, 2010). Such narrow nationalism is a betrayal of our ancestral traditions, In addressing their problems of regional integration, Caricom countries would do well to draw upon their ancestral traditions of multi-nationality, which eschewed narrow nationalism.

Both India and African countries were/are essentially multinational states. The concept of the "nation" was a foreign one to Indian civilization, as it was to Africa. Rabindranath Tagore, India's first Nobel Laureate (1913), pointed out that no word existed for "nation" in any of India's languages, Indian culture had assimilated a number of immigrant peoples through the unique institution of caste, by which people were assigned to a particular status and which forbade intermingling. That social structure stood in the way of the development of Western-type nationalism in India. (Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism, 1976).

Moreover, the absence of natural boundaries and the presence of a common, homogeneous culture did not favour the development of intense feelings of patriotism, either at the local or the state level. But a certain form of patriotism did exist at the national level. Indians came forward to defend their country whenever its religion, its culture, or its independence were at stake, as was demonstrated by the determined opposition that Indians offered to Alexander the Great. (A. S. Altekar, State and Government in Ancient India, 1955). India is the most culturally heterogeneous nation-state in the world. Within its pre-Partition boundaries were to be found five major religions, fourteen to sixteen major languages, 179 minor ones, and 544 dialects. At another language level, the 1961 Indian census identified 1,652 mother-tongues. (J. Das Gupta, Language Conflict and National Development, 1970).

The concept of a narrow national identity also ran counter to African political traditions and to their notion of their own identity. In certain parts of Africa, the fluidity of the boundaries which demarcated the territory of each lineage helped to prevent the development of territorial political loyalties that could assume a "national" dimension. The lineages of the Tallensi of Northern Ghana, for example, overlapped one another to such an extent that it was impossible to state clearly where the lines of cleavage ran: *"These overlapping fields of political relations stretch almost indefinitely, so that there is a kind of interlocking of neighbouring peoples. While we can see that this people is distinct from that, it is not easy to say at what point culturally or politically, one is justified in regarding them as distinct units."* (Fortes & Pritchard, 1940).

The Akan peoples (Ghana) never conceived of an Akan nationality as such. The term *oman* which means "nation" in the Akan language has two senses. In its narrow sense, it designated the numerous politico-cultural groupings that inhabited the territory where Akan was the dominant culture. The Akan people never referred to themselves, as a people, by the term *Akanman* - the

Akan nation or Akan state. When they wished to evoke their common cultural identity they used the term *Akanfo* - the Akan peoples. (Hagan, 1981). Moreover, in its broader meaning, the only other use of the term *Akanfo* was in the sense of Akan consciousness of their identity as a black people. In attaching the word *oman* as a suffix to the term *ebili* or *bibir* (black), the Akan formed the concept of *ebidiman* or *ebidirman* which designated all men and women who identified themselves as *ebidifo* (black).

Such a concept, when translated into political terms, resulted in a nation with no external or closed frontiers, no internal political boundaries, **nor any feelings of “us” or “them” vis à vis other African peoples because all Africans were considered as belonging to a single black “nation”**. In the Akan conception, differences in culture could never be a cause of enmity between black peoples, and **since black identity was regarded as a source of enrichment, it was considered more important for state formation than *oman*, taken in its narrow sense of “nation”**. (Hagan, 1981). For the Akan people, therefore, a common black identity provided the same sense of collective identity that Islam provided for Muslims.

In the pre-colonial period, there were significant flows of people between African territories, the concept of citizenship being an extremely fluid and ill-defined one. The permanent designation of entire communities as “foreign” is a recent occurrence in Africa. It is a sharp departure from traditional African practice that had always favoured the eventual assimilation of communities of different cultural origins, which resulted in such differences being a much less divisive issue than it has become in post-colonial Africa. (Jeffrey Herbst, “The Role of Citizenship Laws in Multiethnic Societies: Evidence from Africa”, in Richard Joseph (ed), *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, 1999). Moreover, the traditional African recognition of a right of exile, and the abundance of available land, had combined to make migration the preferred form of political protest in pre-colonial Africa. (I. A. Akinjogbin, “*Le Concept de pouvoir dans L’Afrique traditionnelle: L’aire culturelle yoruba*”, in *Le Concept de Pouvoir en Afrique*, 1981).

Citizenship laws took on a particular importance after Independence when individual African countries began to determine who among their residents were “nationals” and who were not. This process of community definition and division not only effectively reduced the opportunities for migration **but also gave birth to the novel concept (for Africa) of the black “foreigner”**. The imminence of independence led to riots in several African countries, in the 1950s and the 1960s, as the “indigenous” inhabitants of those countries demanded that (more recent) migrants be expelled. (Simon Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change” in William R. Bascom & Melville J. Herskovits (eds), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, 1959). African countries with less restrictive nationality laws, such as Tanzania, tend to experience less political violence and they are also more successful in developing national unity. Moreover, as Herbst suggests, Tanzania’s relatively good ethnic relations are, at least in part, due to the country's fairly liberal nationality laws. (Herbst, 1999). Caricom should take note.

Caricom countries should draw inspiration from their Indian and African multi-national ancestral traditions to kickstart the stalled regional integration process. Like the Akan, we should banish any feelings of “us” or “them” vis-à-vis other Caricom citizens; all Caricom citizens should be considered to belong to a single Caricom “nation”. We should regard Caricom identity as a source of enrichment, one that is much more important for state formation than our individual feelings of nationalism. The recent practice of issuing national passports that identify the holders as members of Caricom by embossing the words “Caribbean Community” on the cover should be seen as sending a message of our common identity to our own citizens; and used as a powerful signal to the countries in the North that they must henceforth deal with us as one people, one Caricom "nation"

united to defend our interests as a region. As in Europe, this action does not necessarily imply complete freedom for Caricom citizens to migrate immediately to any other Caricom country, but that should be the eventual objective.

As demonstrated above, our African and Indian ancestral cultures developed original forms of democracy which, in every single aspect of governance, were superior or at least equal in quality and effectiveness to contemporary forms of democracy practised in the West. To paraphrase Zartman (re the Ombudsman), "democracy seems to be an Indian and, to some extent, an African invention, although it is widely known as Western democracy and is generally considered to be Western in origin." Post-Independence India stunned British critics who, believing the "Grand Narratives" they had long propagated about India, such as the notion of parliamentary representation in India being "*one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men*", by proving them totally wrong. Drawing upon its ancestral democratic traditions, India invented modes of parliamentary governance which successfully persuaded the country's multicultural, multiethnic population to put their faith in democracy, precisely because democracy was justified to the masses **in terms of their traditional culture and social structure, not in terms of Western democratic principles.**

Unfortunately, apart from Mauritius, Botswana and, to a certain extent, South Africa, post-colonial African countries did exactly the opposite, with predictable results. In developing alternative forms of democratic governance which would be better adapted to our socio-cultural realities and local conditions, Caricom should follow the example of modern India's rather than that of modern Africa, while drawing inspiration from the traditions of both and the post-Independence achievements of the former. Those latter achievements demonstrate a great capacity to innovate, adapt, invent, and re-invent. Africa's traditional culture has shown a similar capacity.

Jan Vansina has described the innovative and adaptive capacity of the ancestral tradition of Equatorial Africa, which had continued over the centuries to mould the various societies that evolved from it even when they assumed different structural forms. "*Every time an institutional structure was destroyed, the innovation to replace it was drawn from the wellsprings of the Equatorial tradition. When it had to cope with an externally induced crisis....the tradition was not defeated. It adapted. It invented new structures which fell outside of its own parameters.*" (Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa, 1990). The Equatorial tradition was destroyed within forty years of the Scramble for Africa, foreign domination having prevented it from inventing new structures to cope with the new challenges it had to face. The capacity to innovate, to adapt, and to invent appears to be an inherent feature of traditional African cultures, an attribute that is too intrinsic to African culture to have been irremediably destroyed by the colonial and post-colonial interregna. That inherent inventive capacity of our ancestral African culture can be drawn upon by Caricom countries to develop culturally- and socially-compatible alternative modes of democratic governance.

Because of social and cultural differences, no single country can realistically serve as a template for others in search of compatible forms of democratic governance. But Mauritius, undoubtedly, comes closest to being such a template. Indeed, Mauritius has a more "Caribbean" profile, than any single Caricom country. Like Suriname, Mauritius was colonized by the Dutch; like Grenada, St Lucia, Dominica, and Haiti, it was colonized by the French; like the other countries in Caricom, it was colonized by the British. Like virtually all Caricom countries, the economy of colonial Mauritius was a sugar plantation economy, based on African slave labour; like Haiti, Dominica, and St Lucia, a form of French creole (kreol) is spoken or understood by a large section of the population.

As in the Caribbean, the Apprenticeship system was established in Mauritius at the very same time and for the very same reasons; like the West Indian colonies, Mauritian plantation owners abused the system atrociously and in exactly the same ways. "Recalcitrant" apprentices were subjected to heavy penalties which included extra hours of labour, whippings or jail terms, provoking the same resentment, resistance, and "rebellion" as occurred in the West Indies. Eric Williams described Apprenticeship in the West Indies as "a modified form of slavery". The manner in which the system functioned in Mauritius was judged in virtually identical terms: "*The apprenticeship system converted chattel slaves into serfs*". Moses Nwulia: The 'Apprenticeship' System in Mauritius: Its Character and Its Impact on Race Relations in the Immediate Post-Emancipation Period, 1839-1879, **African Studies Review**, Vol 21, No.1, April, 1978).

Like the West Indian colonies, most of the former slaves refused to continue working on the plantations when the apprenticeship period ended. Like the West Indies, indentured labour was imported from India and China. Moreover, the colonial government in Mauritius collaborated with the governments of Jamaica and Trinidad to avoid competition by establishing a joint recruitment agency in Calcutta (C JAYAWARDENA, Migration and Social Change: A Survey of Indian Communities Overseas, **Geographical Review**, Vol. 58, No. 3, July, 1968). As happened in the West Indies, plantation owners and managers abused the indentureship system, in exactly the same ways. Indentured Indians suffered terribly. Their wages were very poor, their food rations inadequate, malnutrition was rife, medical care and sanitation were lacking and labourers worked 10 hours a day seven days a week (A. SIMMONDS, Modern Mauritius: the politics of decolonization, 1982).

As in the West Indies, Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius found themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy (J. HOUBERT, Mauritius: Independence and Dependence, **Journal of Modern African Studies**, Vol. 19, No.1, 1981). Like the West Indies, cheap indentured labour placed the former slaves in a very disadvantageous situation, which created similar resentment on their part; as in the West Indies, plantation managers not only stoked that resentment but also fostered mutual ethnic distrust.

The structure of society that emerged in post-Emancipation Mauritius very closely resembled that in the post-Emancipation West Indies. It was hierarchically structured in a steep pyramid of power and wealth, at the top of which was a tiny White elite of French descent, comprised of landowners, merchants, officials and professionals (K. BALLHATCHET, The Structure of British Official Attitudes: Colonial Mauritius, 1883-1968, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, No.4, December, 1995). A very large number of (Afro-Creoles), the descendants of emancipated slaves, were "mired in extreme poverty". (R SANDBROOK, Origins of the Democratic Developmental State: Interrogating Mauritius, **Canadian Journal of African Studies**, Vol.39, No.3, 2005).

Like their counterparts in the West Indies, white Mauritius elites in the 19th century sought to consolidate their economic power and social position by acquiring "political" power. In the early 1880s, they launched a campaign for a greater say in the governance of the colony, culminating in a petition to the British Colonial Office in October 1882. Mauritius' Lieutenant Governor discerned the real objective of their demand, in the likely effect of such a development: "*It must shut out the Indian and the descendant of the old slave population, and so place the power in the hands of an oligarchy of the upper classes...*" (H. A. WILL, Problems of Constitutional Reform in Jamaica, Mauritius and Trinidad, 1880-1895. **English Historical Review**, Vol. 81, No.321, October, 1966).

Complementing the striking similarities in the history of Mauritius and that of Caricom countries, is the similarity in their respective societies and economies. The economy of Mauritius still has a large

plantation sugar component; like that of many Caricom countries, it is based on a mix of sugar, tourism, and textiles; it has to confront the same environmental and economic challenges as Caricom island states dependent on tourism. Like several Caricom countries confronting problems of globalization, Mauritius has attempted to diversify its plantation sugar and tourism-based economy, by establishing offshore banking and financial services. Like Barbados, Mauritius has also diversified into information and communication technology, and business process outsourcing.

Mauritius shares the same social problems of a society with a plantation economy heritage - *"The sugar plantocracy dominated by a tiny white minority"*, as Abbott so aptly describes it (2009). It has ethnic divides that are identical or similar to those of Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname; religious divides (Christian, Hindu, and Muslim, that are identical to those three countries; and problems of socio-economic class, similar to those of Jamaica and Haiti. Like all other countries in the South, during the 1990s and the early years of the present decade, its economy suffered from problems generated by globalization. Like most countries, those problems hit the lower socio-economic classes in Mauritius hardest, thus creating favourable conditions for the events described below.

In February, 1999, those underlying problems of socio-economic class found explosive expression in riots which shook the country to its foundations. Three police stations were ransacked, vehicles were burned, and public buildings set on fire during the three-day riot, which was sparked off by the death, in police custody, of a popular reggae singer (Kaya) who had been arrested for smoking marijuana at a rally, held to demand that the drug be decriminalised.

The similarity with Jamaica's problems of socio-economic class and, also, with the recent events in Tivoli Gardens is striking. The same cocktail of explosive elements characterized the situation in both countries. A BBC report on the riot in Mauritius, posted on its website reads like a script of the violence provoked by the Jamaican government's attempt to extradite "Dudus" Coke: [Four dead in Reggae riot](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/285797.stm) (24 February, 1999). (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/285797.stm>). Here is an excerpt:

*"The President of Mauritius has threatened to declare a state of emergency to curb ongoing violence which broke out after a popular reggae singer, known as Kaya, died in police custody. As rioting rampaged through the capital Port Louis for a third day, **President Cassam Uteem promised that there would be a judicial inquiry into the death of the singer.** At least four people have so far died in clashes with police, which have been described as **the worst the island has seen for 30 years.** Thirty police officers are reported to have been injured, as rioters hurled firebombs at police stations. Demonstrators have been blocking main roads and witnesses have described dozens of cars being burned. Shops, schools and businesses have remained closed in Port Louis, as large crowds attended Kaya's funeral. "*

*"President Uteem said the unrest could affect the island's international image. **"A few hundred people cannot hold a country hostage,"** he warned in a radio broadcast. The singer's supporters say his skull was fractured, and **have accused the police of brutality against the island's Creole community.** The police have denied this. Many of the protestors who went on the rampage are young Creoles - a community descended from African slaves that makes up about 30% of the population in Mauritius. **They often come from the poorer parts of the capital and other towns and are considered to be underprivileged.**"*

The great difference between Mauritius and Jamaica is that, unlike Mauritius, Jamaica's

"underclass" problem is remains stubbornly structural and successive Jamaican governments have made no serious efforts to tackle them. In contrast, Mauritius has made considerable progress in deliberately developing an inclusive, egalitarian society and an inclusive, consensual, compassionate system of governance that is designed to make every community and every individual feel an integral part of the society. Hence, its "underclass" problem can no longer be considered a structural one. The February 1999 riots revealed both the immensity of the problems Mauritius inherited at independence and the distance it still has to cover in order to achieve the goal set by Mauritius' governing class. But the following excerpt from the same BBC report demonstrates how much has been achieved so far. Moreover, unlike Jamaica, one can be sure that the government of Mauritius would have done a great deal of soul-searching concerning what went wrong and how to make it right.

"Mauritius has a reputation for political stability, and racial harmony among the mix of Asians, Europeans and Africans who make up its million-odd population. The former French colony is also relatively prosperous - its palm-fringed beaches have been a magnet for wealthy European holidaymakers. Whatever the truth of Kaya's death, the events of the past few days have shaken the island's peaceful image."

With exactly the same history of colonization, slavery, indentureship, colonial racial discrimination and disparagement; with the same plantation society, the same ethnic and religious divides, and a similarly pauperized economy, Mauritius transformed the impoverished country it was at independence into a relatively prosperous one. It transformed its divided society in which ethnic tensions had been fostered by colonial administrations into one where racial harmony reigned. As Elizabeth Abbott observed, *"by independence in 1968, the majority Indian population, the black Creole minority, and other minorities had forged a community of interests permitting them to work together for economic growth and other goals..."* (Abbott, 2009).

Mauritius also successfully replaced a potentially divisive system of parliamentary democracy, bestowed upon it by the departing colonial power, with an inclusive system of democratic governance. It did so without sacrificing the classic freedoms of Western liberal democracy, as its top rating in Freedom House 2010 democratic rankings clearly show. http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Tables_and_Graphs.pdf An even more astonishing achievement on the part of Mauritius is that it accomplished those major social, political, and economic transformations without generating the social violence that often accompanies rapid social and economic change. With a homicide rate of 15.1 per 100,000 population, Barbados is, by far, the least violent Caricom society. Mauritius' homicide rate (4) is almost one fourth that of Barbados. Mauritius should serve, not as a template, but as a model and an inspiration for Caricom countries, which absolutely need to adapt their systems of democratic governance to their socio-cultural realities.

Caribbean Identity and Cultural Self-Confidence

However persuasive a case could be made for Caricom countries to seek alternative modes of democratic governance, outside of existing paradigms, such an option necessarily requires a degree of cultural confidence which we still appear unable to muster. The observation Rex Nettleford made, in that respect, some thirty years ago is still, arguably, quite valid: *"The paradox of Caribbean life is the more things change the more they have remained the same. The vault-like ascent by the society from slavery into freedom and then from colonialism into constitutional independence is yet to be matched within the society by a corresponding progress from cultural*

inferiority of the vast majority to cultural self-confidence." (A Caribbean Cultural Identity - The Case of Jamaica, 1978).

We saw the unfortunate effect of that lack of cultural self-confidence, during CARIFORUM-EU EPA negotiations two years ago, in the failure of Caricom negotiators to consider options outside of existing paradigms, as Clive Thomas pointedly noted at the time. *"the scope of the consultations was pre-determined and effectively limited to one of two options for Caricom.....basically the methodology of CRNM's consultations was flawed by **its own deliberate avoidance of consideration of options other than the two on offer by the EU** [with the result that] the region, therefore, was largely **reactive** to EU positions."* (Guyana and the Wider World, Stabroek News, March 16, 2008).

Thomas correctly identified the reason for that fatal failure on the part of Caricom: *"The EPA was considerably aided by the successful implantation of the EU's world view of the region and its future among significant sections of the region's intellectual and ruling elites, including those holding influential positions in the negotiations."* (Guyana and the Wider World Suckered: The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as massive manipulation, Stabroek News, January 20, 2008).

Kafra Kambon, the Caribbean Black activist, percipiently described the scope of our dilemma and the crisis we face because of our assimilation of a eurocentric world view: *"If we examine the societies culturally, we find that despite the complex influences which have gone into shaping the Caribbean, the values and lifestyles are dominated by imitation of Europe. These realities are not just effects of cross cultural influences which are to be expected in the close international contacts of the modern world. Our cultural crisis goes much deeper. **The Caribbean has not been able to form an image of itself by which it can deal with the rest of the world.** The inner cultural consciousness is too underdeveloped for effective qualitative judgements to be made about what to accept and how or what to reject – too underdeveloped for authentic values to govern the way of life."* (reference source unknown).

The stunning achievements, in terms of democratic governance, of two of Caricom's ancestral cultures- India and Africa - which equalled or surpassed Britain and Europe in the quality and originality of all aspects of their democratic governance, should be the foundation on which we should reconstruct a cultural confidence that was so effectively destroyed by centuries of disparaging "Grand Narratives" propagated by European colonial powers. Those achievements should also give Caricom peoples the confidence and the inspiration to seek alternative modes of democratic governance, outside of Northern governance paradigms. However, since those ancestral achievements are so little known, having been overshadowed by the "Grand Narratives", an extensive, informed public debate is all the more important, for it is precisely through such a debate that the general public in Caricom would learn the truth of their ancestral history and be able to draw confidence from it.

But however necessary the spread of that knowledge may be, it would not suffice to fully restore the cultural confidence of Caricom peoples. In addition, they need to develop an overarching historico-cultural of the kind suggested earlier in this paper. It should be a narrative that would project an image of themselves, of which they can be justifiably proud; an image that would allow them to deal with the rest of the world on advantageous rather than disadvantageous terms; an image that reflects their ancestral identity rather than deny or reject it; an image that would constitute a cultural bulwark against the assimilation of values which dehumanize, diminish, or disparage them; an image that would be a cultural mirror which accurately reflects their real qualities (and defects) rather than those created in the lurid imaginations of foreigners. Finally, it should be an image that

would send a message to the rest of the world that the African and Asian Diasporas have not only survived the Middle Passage, indentureship, apprenticeship, and the various ordeals and humiliations to which they were subjected throughout the colonial and post-Emancipation eras but that they have emerged all the stronger for it, ready to assume their rightful place in the modern world, as a unified regional entity.

The idea of an American “melting-pot” originated with Michel-Guillaume de Crèvecoeur, a French aristocrat who emigrated to America in 1759. He declared that the American is “*neither an European nor the descendant of an European....Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.*” (Letters from an American Farmer, 1782). Similarly, Caribbeans are no longer Africans or descendants of a specific African culture-area; no longer Indians, Amerindians, Chinese, Syrians/Lebanese, Europeans, but a community of peoples from different horizons who “are melted into a new race of men”. Whether our “labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” is entirely up to us. It will depend on whether we possess, or can acquire, the confidence, the political will, the imagination, the ambition, the belief in a common destiny, and the drive to make that destiny come true.

In forging an overarching historico-cultural narrative, Caricom should take a look at the various attempts made by its Francophone neighbours, in that very respect, during the greater part of the 20th century. Confronted by disparaging French and European narratives of European cultural and racial superiority, and corresponding narratives of black inferiority, a group of black Francophone intellectuals and writers, including the S enegalese, L eopold Senghor, the Martinican, Aim e C esaire, and the Guyanese, L eon Damas, formulated the theory of *negritude* in the 1930s. Aim e C esaire pithily expressed the Francophone Caribbean's dilemma of identity in a famous pun: “*Je ne sais pas si nous sommes des Fran ais   part enti re, mais nous sommes enti rement   part.*” Like most puns, it cannot really be translated into another language, but I shall attempt to do so, nonetheless: “*I do not know if we [French Antilleans] are entirely a part of the French nation but we feel entirely apart from the French.*” Drawing on a shared African cultural heritage, *negritude* postulated a common black identity that would generate the solidarity which blacks needed to withstand and confront French racist assaults on their cultural identity and self-confidence.

In the early 1980s, Edouard Glissant who is perhaps Martinique's most gifted writer, formulated a new concept, *Antillanit * (“Caribbeaness”), which implicitly rejected the racial exclusiveness of *negritude*, whose basic thesis was that Caribbean identity could be defined solely in terms of black culture and African descent. *Antillanit * postulated that Caribbean identity came not only from the heritage of ex-slaves, but was equally influenced by Amerindians indigenous to the Caribbean, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans. Another concept, *Cr olit *, which followed closely on the heels of *Antillanit *, was jointly elaborated by three Martinican writers, Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernab , and Rapha l Confiant. Like *Antillanit *, *Cr olit * emphasized that Caribbean culture and identity are not limited to the survival of African cultural forms in the Caribbean, but that it is a composite creole culture which was created from a multiplicity of different cultural elements - African, Amerindian, Indian, Chinese, and European - a culture that is uniquely Caribbean.

The three Martinican writers described *Cr olit * as “*the interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history*” ( loge de la cr olit  (“In Praise of Creoleness”), 1989. Two years later, Chamoiseau and Confiant revisited the concept of *Cr olit * in their book, Lettres cr oles (1991).

A Jamaican academic, Beverley Ormerod, discussed the two principal Francophone theories of Caribbean identity and culture:

"Speaking from the viewpoint of a black West Indian, Césaire holds up African culture as the single great alternative to European culture, the sovereign remedy for the alienation provoked by European colonialism. The founders of Negritude make an unspoken assumption that the Caribbean non-white individual will opt to be assimilated into the African cultural sphere. While invoking the Hindu in Calcutta, for example, Césaire does not consider the different cultural position of the large number of West Indians descended from coulis or "East Indian" indented labourers, whose syncretic life-style may combine Eastern religious practices with West Indian social elements."

*"Chamoiseau and Confiant have revalorized racial diversity in French Caribbean literature in order to illustrate their conviction that modern "Creole society" cannot be encompassed by a simple black-white definition....The theory of Creoleness also concerns the content of literary works, maintaining that Creole fiction should express the true experience and the collective voice of the Martinican working class in all its diversity: multiracial and interracial..... (The Martinican Concept of "creoleness"; a multiracial redefinition of culture, **Mots Pluriels**, No. 7, 1998).*

Finally, and most importantly, **cultural confidence** should not be confused with **cultural pride**. The real test of a people's confidence in their culture is not whether they are proud of their society's cultural attributes, its cultural traditions, its cultural products, or its past cultural achievements, but whether **they have confidence in the capacity of their culture to provide solutions to the problems of governance, development, and others, which pose serious threats to their society**. In that respect, it should be pointed out that a country's culture (its cultural resources) comprise all the non-physical resources created, or possessed, by its people, that is to say, all sources of cultural creativity, the cultural heritage, knowledge, skills, traditions, techniques, customs, institutions, methods of social, political or economic organisation and management etc. - in short, everything that constitutes a people's cultural capital.

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