

# Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)  
is the institutional research repository for  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

## Citation

Zacharias, Thomas and Mullings-Lawrence, Sireita. 2020. Legacies of indenture: identity and belonging in post-colonial Jamaica. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, pp. 1-18. ISSN 0141-9870 [Article]

## Persistent URL

<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/28137/>

## Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk).

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk)

# **Legacies of Indenture: whiteness, identity and belonging in post-colonial Jamaica**

## **Abstract**

This article examines narratives of identity and belonging among descendants of white German indentured labourers in Jamaica and the local community in which they live. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews the research shows the ways in which members of the community in the village of Seaford Town make sense of and articulate elements of their German cultural heritage. This paper argues that while ideas about whiteness suffuse many of the identity-narratives, whiteness can variously be muted or amplified as a marker of identity. Similarly, notions of German-ness are not consistently articulated as embodied cultural forms. Here, culture is not conceptualized as static or embodied, but can be claimed and shared. In sum, the paper speaks to the ways in which whiteness read through a historical lens becomes remade in a contemporary context.

**Keywords:** whiteness, diaspora, identity, Caribbean, Germany, race

## **Introduction**

The Caribbean has been shaped – and continues to be shaped – by the problematic history of its colonial past (Higman 2011). It has constituted a focal point for more than 400 years of cultural exchange and mixture, and the interplay of power between Africa, Europe and the Americas (Hall 1990). The cultural and political histories forged by centuries of forced displacement, imperialism and, ultimately, post-colonial independence are unique to this part of the world and manifest in a variety of cultural practices and entanglements. This project investigates a specific and under researched element of the formation of culture and the conceptualization of race, power and identity in the Caribbean, with a particular focus on the German diaspora in Seaford Town, Westmoreland.

Travelling twenty-five miles south across potholed dirt roads from Montego Bay towards the south-eastern reaches of the parish of Westmoreland deep into the Jamaican countryside, one may come across, as we did, a young man riding past on a moped with sun-tanned white skin and blond hair waving at us as we pass the sign indicating that we are now entering the village of Seaford Town. A boundary stone welcomes the visitor to 'The German Township' – the village is also popularly referred to as 'Germantown'. On the surface, some of these community members resemble poor southern whites in the US, village farmers in Bavaria, or left-behind European tourists from a bygone age. Driving into the village it is noticeable that a proportion of its inhabitants are indeed of white complexion, and many of the children and young adults are what in England might be called 'mixed heritage', readily identified by various shades of skin tones and with blond or golden brown hair varying in texture from frizzy to straight and with green, hazel or blue eyes.

For us as sociologists who are rooted in the literature that critiques the reification of 'race' and its production through racist discourses (Goldberg 1990, 1993; Bulmer and Solomos 2004) the notion of people's physiognomy is, of course, tangential. The vignette about the inhabitants of Seaford Town serves here simply as an entry point to a story which in fact aims to disrupt and question narratives which assume any correlation between bodies, identities, locations or cultural practices. It instead emphasizes displacement, rupture and the syncretic and new forms of cultural identities and (be) longings that emerged from it.

The background to this research is the arrival - in 1834 - of approximately 260 German indentured labourers from Bremen in the small village of Seaford<sup>1</sup> Town. The focus of this project is the cultural history – and present – of this community. It explores narratives of identity and belonging among descendants of these nineteenth century German immigrants. In doing so, it contributes to a specific aspect of the politics of diaspora and cultural intermixture in the wider theoretical context of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). The importance of this project lies in its focus on a minority group which has not received much academic attention in the literature that is concerned with cultural identity and diaspora in the Caribbean (Goulbourne and Solomos 2004).

The material which addresses the history and culture of Jamaica makes very little mention of German immigration to the island, or of its cultural ramifications. Campbell (2002), for example, has pointed out that there has been a pronounced absence of a theorisation of immigration in the form of indentured labour during Jamaica's apprenticeship period<sup>ii</sup>. This project aims to contribute to the investigation of a gap in the wider story of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993), namely the ways in which identity is conceptualized or narrated by the fourth or fifth generation Jamaicans of German descent, and how notions of German identity are articulated, claimed and re-claimed by them, but also by the communities that have come into being through the early German settlers.

This article stems from a wider research project that involves multiple sites across Jamaica and which investigates how a German cultural heritage is understood and narrated amongst the descendants of German indentured labourers and the communities in which they live. This particular paper is interested in the specific ways in which members of the Seaford Town community make sense of their German-ness today, and how they maintain, re-invent or claim it.

### **Colonialism and creolization**

The literature which centrally frames this research addresses the history of colonialism and slavery and the concomitant issues around 'race', power and identity in the Black Atlantic (Brathwaite 1974; Holt 1992; Shepherd and Beckles 2000). These accounts help to contextualize the ways in which these themes still reverberate in complex ways in the contemporary cultural, social and political landscape of the Caribbean region and specifically in the narratives of the inhabitants of Seaford Town today.

As a result of the sugar revolution that was driven by a systematic regime of chattel slavery by British colonialists from the late seventeenth century until 1838, the descendants of enslaved Africans constitute Jamaica's demographic centre (Shepherd 2009). However, Jamaica's mixed population that was shaped by centuries of Spanish and British colonial occupation, also initially included multi-racial pirate settlers and later witnessed the influx of imported convicts or indentured labourers from Ireland, Scotland, China and India, together with French Huguenots and European Jews (Higman 2011). Writing about these migratory

flows, the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute the Caribbean's uniqueness, Stuart Hall reminds us that the region's history, and the experiences of slavery, colonialism, indenture and imperial power, is "...symbolically inscribed into the faces of the peoples" (1992:227). Ostensibly, the history of Seaford Town and its inhabitants constitutes precisely a part of this uniqueness and is reflected symbolically, but also literally in the faces of this community.

The story that led to the unusual presence of these white Jamaicans deep in the rural Hinterland is one aspect of the unique migratory shifts – forced and voluntary - which characterize the Caribbean. It began during a moment of crisis in the British Empire during the early nineteenth century (Holt 1992). Faced with the impending abolition of transatlantic slavery<sup>iii</sup>, Britain had to re-evaluate - and restructure – a hitherto immensely profitable economic system that had relied on a sheer endless supply of forced and free labour. The Jamaica Legislature initiated a transition period of four years (1834-1838) before full emancipation. This coincided with a period of economic and social instability in central Europe. The aftermath of the French Revolutionary War and subsequent Napoleonic Wars provided the pull-factors for many Germans to emigrate to America but also, in lesser numbers, to the Caribbean. Bade and Oltmer (2007) have characterised early nineteenth century emigration from Germany as relatively small in comparison to a much larger wave during the 1840s. The main causal factors for German overseas migration were the social and economic pressures associated with the transition from agrarian to industrial society: under- and unemployment in a social structure where the fledgling factory-structure could not yet accommodate large amounts of workers and a concomitant shrinking of the agricultural sector (Fies 2010).

From the moment of their arrival the German immigrants' own culture inevitably became creolised (Hall 2010). The process by which the cultural elements that the settlers brought with them fused with the cultures that existed around them is central. Therefore the material that addresses the racialized, classed and gendered identities that the systems of enslavement and colonialism produced (Mc Clintock 1995, Young 1995, Shepherd 2009) is necessary to unpack these complexities. The work of Hall (1990, 2010) and Clifford (1988)

helps to articulate culture as a *process* instead of a static and fixed state that can be readily mapped onto supposedly homogeneous groups.

Creolization offers a useful framework to help to understand what Braithwaite (1978) initially termed mutual indigenisation: the process and the dynamics of the coming together of different cultures that were forced into cohabitation in the colonial context (Glissant 1989). Creole culture as *relation* - the cultural and linguistic mixing that arises from the entanglement of different cultures in the same indigenous location - indicates that none of the cultures transplanted in the context of slavery and plantation society retain their original or pure state (Glissant 1997). Hall (2010) reminds us that the process of creolization always entails inequality, hierarchization, domination and subalternity. Arguably, the historically shifting articulations of 'race' and class and the intricacies around social power and status that accompany perceived difference in the context of Jamaica can be understood as a ramification of this process.

The complex interrelationship of race, colour and class in Jamaica, and the way this manifests itself in the coded processes of hierarchy and social power is rooted in the social norms generated by the plantation system (Mintz 2010). This system had secured hierarchical colour classifications as a readable code for racial difference and class relations (Austin-Broos 2002). In the postcolonial period, biological ideas about 'race' with the polarities 'black and 'white' which constituted the discourse of the plantocracy became replaced by historical explanations for difference in status, thus leaving intact the ambivalence that while racially ascribed characteristics persist, personal achievement can be affirmed and valued (Carnegie 1996). Austin-Broos (1994) has pointed out the centrality of *colour* as pertinent to the experience, but also the contestation of hierarchy. She argues that while racism has been attenuated in Jamaica, colour categories as an idiom of difference have endured, indicating that "...racialised notions of ethnicity as rendered in the colour categories become the central content of Jamaican culture" (1994:215), and as such continue to constitute a Jamaican sense of hierarchy. This highlights the intractable analytical problem of difference being situational and changeable in principle, for example through educational achievements, residential location or other claims to respectability, while at the same time remaining tied to the enduring pattern of colour categories. In Jamaica, terms such as high brown, brown skin, red,

near white or browning are part of a colloquial system of classification of skin-complexion determining the degrees of mixture between white and black (Mohammed 2000).

Jamaica's racial identity has been rendered variously in the public discourse on nationhood from emancipation through to independence and beyond. An early decidedly 'black identity' that had gathered momentum with the publication of the *Black Jubilee* in 1888 became muted with the sector of the professional middle-classes gaining state power at independence in 1962, espousing a non-racial 'creole nationalism' embodied by the national motto 'Out Of Many One People' (Tate 2013, Thomas 2002). However, a largely class-based but initially marginalized version of black nationalism lived on in the contemporaneous emergence of Rastafarianism underpinned by Garveyism and Ethiopianism (Hall 1977). Under the leadership of P.J. Patterson (PNP) a modified version of black nationalism reemerged in the mid 1990s. Critical of 'creole nationalism', Patterson was "...more open to implicit invocations of racialized frameworks for belonging and ownership" (Thomas 2002:39). This has led to a contemporary cultural outlook which re-centres black identity as a central attribute of Jamaican nationality (Carnegie 1996; Cooper 2004).

The literature on cultural intermixture, resistance and creativity emerging from transatlantic slavery and its aftermath foregrounds the African diaspora. In this context, the terror, dislocation and trauma of enslaved peoples from Africa rightfully constitute the central vector of the social history of the Caribbean region. Consequently, research which focuses on the cultural ramifications of *white* indenture needs to strike a delicate balance; in discussing the cultural history and everyday life of the Seaford Town community the intention is not to re-centre whiteness or detract from the racist history that led to this settlement. In 1838 in Jamaica only a small fraction of the population was white but "...in the subsequent 124 years before Independence, Jamaica evolved social forms that allowed tiny white and 'coloured' minorities to maintain their dominance [...]" (Mintz 1989:35). It is clear that even despite their relatively low class-positioning<sup>iv</sup> the settlers and their descendants would have benefitted from their whiteness. However, as will be shown, tracing the cultural routes of white indenture might instead bring into focus the inability to "regroup in new settings" (Mintz 1989:12), the need to adapt new cultural forms, to borrow from those who were not white and, centrally, the loss or steady erosion of whiteness.

## **The currency of whiteness**

The normative power and the operational mechanisms of whiteness are a central theoretical element of this research. The focus of this paper is what can be described as the currency of whiteness: it investigates the ways in which whiteness features in the narratives of our respondents. This notion borrows<sup>v</sup> from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of the *embodied* state of cultural capital insofar as it relates to the historical distribution of social power along racial lines in the colonial, but also the post-colonial context.

With a central theoretical push to re-inscribe and make visible the racial-ness of white experience (Dyer 1997, 2000) and an analytic focus on Europe and North America, the literature on whiteness provides a critical intervention in the analysis of processes of racism, the reproduction of structural inequality and the mechanisms of exclusion. Whiteness, in this context, has been described variously as a set of unmarked and un-named cultural practices – a position of structural advantage - where whiteness constitutes the dominant normalised location (Frankenberg 1993) from which other ethnicities are seen and determined. Whiteness positions white people as race-less universals whose privilege-holding invisible identities enables the continuation of structural racism (Clarke and Garner 2010). Lipsitz (1998) has described whiteness as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed and which does not need to acknowledge its role as an organising principle in social and cultural relations.

In the predominantly African-descent and creolized population of Jamaica, this poses the question of whether the immediate social power of whiteness operates in the same way as it does in Europe or North America. How relevant is the way in which whiteness intersects with class or the division between rural and urban contexts? It is important to consider the centrality of whiteness in the forging and reproduction of cultural and social power in the colonial and post-colonial context, its embeddedness in the system of colonial domination and racial slavery and its shifting status in Jamaican social memory. Formations of whiteness in their intersection with class still permeate the social landscape today (Kelly and Bailey 2018) - white Jamaicans are generally understood to be descendants of the former colonialists (Robinson-Walcott 2003). Our own definition of Jamaican whiteness corresponds with Robinson-Walcott's more open characterization as an *elastic* or fluid signifier that may



intersect with class, is tied to phenotypical appearance but not to the presumption of genetic or biological purity. In this sense, white in Jamaica can mean “white, light or light brown” (Robinson-Walcott 2009:110).

Drawing on the work of Fanon (2017), scholars such as Mohammed (2000) and Tate (2013) have shown how whiteness as the internalisation of the colonial relationship is reproduced in contemporary settings through colour classifications and categorisations of skin-shade or -tone<sup>vi</sup>. However, if we augment these theories of whiteness with the specific theoretical rationale that focuses on the notion of creolization in the Caribbean context (Palmié 2008, Hall 2010), it is possible to detect moments where whiteness may be seen to be losing some of its traction as a modality of power or prestige. This paper argues that in the culturally specific microcosm of contemporary *rural* Jamaica, for example, narratives of whiteness can also become dis-located and replaced by demotic articulations of cultural mixture, in which the cultural salience of whiteness can be seen to be eroded and where its normative power dissolves or at least takes on a different meaning.

### **Methodology and Methods**

The research for this specific paper was conducted mainly in the rural community of Seaford Town and the surrounding areas of Gringer Hill and Lamb’s River. Our primary research methods consisted of ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured qualitative interviewing. Concerned with the interpretation of cultures (Geertz 1973), our ethnographic approach echoes Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1992) position that the social world cannot be understood in terms of causal relationships or by the assumption of universal laws governing social action. Instead, we see human actions as “...based upon, or infused by, social meanings: intentions, motives, attitudes, and beliefs” (1992:7). In this context, it is important to be reflexively aware of our own writing *of* a story, and the way in which we, as authors are “situated between powerful systems of meaning” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:2). Cultures and our writing of them are produced historically and are actively contested. In this sense it is important to recognise that the “...constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts” that we establish and *produce* in fieldwork settings can at best be ‘partial’, but never objective or even scientific ‘truths’ (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:2).

Glissant's criticism of ethnography constitutes a guiding principle for our research. His account of the malleability and fluidity of culture is closely linked to an inherent critique of Anthropology's ethnographic approach, which insists on "...fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival" (1989:14). This research constitutes an interpretative ethnography where individual narratives matter and culture cannot be read as immutable or static (Bhabha 1993). In this spirit, we found that speaking to people more informally was a much better way to engage with them. This kind of 'ethnographic interviewing' is a social interaction structured by both researcher and informant (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992). We chose to conduct reflexive interviews which were open ended and semi-structured (Silverman 1993).

### **The history of Seaford Town**

Seaford Town, located in the north-eastern tip of Westmoreland Parish, is a result of the shifting geo-political power relations and economic and cultural transformations in the eighteenth century Atlantic world (Chaplin 2011, Rediker 1987). It is linked in complex ways to Africa and Europe and is a manifestation of the interchange between Jamaica, Britain and Germany: during the transition years of 1834 to 1838, the Jamaican planter class were faced with enormous financial losses and the prospect of labour shortages. Estate-owners were concerned that after manumission the freed slaves would abandon the sugar plantations in the low-lying coastal plains, desert into the mountainous central regions of Jamaica and occupy Crown land. Given the recent 'Christmas Rebellion' of 1831, another concern was the risk of uprisings (Shepherd 2009). White planters feared that bands of former slaves would organise insurrections from hideouts in the mountains (Senior 1978: 27). As a countermeasure, the Jamaica Legislature directed to "...import immigrants to occupy the interior hills and so deny the ex-slaves opportunity to acquire land [or] labour beyond the sugar estates" (Hall, 1972:49). The initiative specifically targeted white immigration from Germany.

Echoing ideas associated with the Hegelian notion of a *Volksgeist*, members of the Jamaica Legislature were convinced that Germans with their "...sturdy character, law-abiding instincts, habits of industry, painstaking zeal, honesty and intelligence' would be very

serviceable workers and would be useful for setting the example to the Negro ex-slaves, held by the colonists to be congenially lazy, dishonest and undisciplined” (Senior 1978:28). Such views echoed popular ideas about ‘race’ and racial attributes promulgated by contemporary commentators such as Meiners or Linnaeus (Malik 1996, Anderson and Benbow 2009). Nineteenth century pseudo-scientific taxonomies of ‘race’ and hierarchy were instrumental in reproducing the ideology of supremacy of white Europeans both in terms of character and economic disposition. The supposed merits of particular ‘racial’ groups were seen as significant alongside the economic imperative foregrounded by the colonists: there was a “...charm in European birth and white complexion” (Senior 1978:53). The accounts of Hall (1972) and Senior (1978) are critical in thinking through how capitalism, colonial power, ‘race’ and class intersect at a particular moment and in a particular location (Monteith and Richards 2002; Shepherd 2009).

As a result of the initiative by the Jamaica Legislature, Seaford Town was established in 1834 as a settlement<sup>vii</sup> of German indentured labourers, recruited by Solomon Myers, the German-Jewish owner of a coffee-estate in St George’s and his collaborator, the itinerant William Lemonius, a Prussian who had served in the British Army and Jamaican Constabulary. Lemonius initially recruited around 260 German labourers and their families from Bremen and Hanover who boarded the ship *Albers* bound for Montego Bay. However, the settlers soon found that the reality in Jamaica was a far cry from the prosperity assured by the colonial agents. They discovered that none of the promised lodgings had been constructed, and that basic provisions and tools had not been supplied. Their arrival was based on a betrayal, with Myers and Lemonius the chief benefactors (Senior 1978). After outlining the theoretical, methodological and historical context of this research, the following sections will discuss some of its findings. The first part will address what we considered identity-narratives of loss and transformation. The second section which focuses on a local football match considers the transformative and fluid dimensions of cultural identity.

### **Narratives of Loss and Transformation**

Seaford Town is nestled between two hillsides connected by a winding main road. One end of the town has a small main square, a supermarket, a cook-shop and several kiosks and rum-bars. The other end contains the church and cemetery, the primary and technical schools and

Hylton's shop. Opposite is the local museum – a room in a disused primary school, where local resident Mr Hacker would share the community's history with tourists, who occasionally make the journey from the larger towns Montego Bay in the north, or Black River in the south.

Mr Hacker regards himself as the tour guide and custodian of the history of the German settlers. He can trace his family lineage back to the original arrivals on the *Albers*. Now in his seventies and not in good health, he talks in disillusionment about what he considers the impending decline of German culture in Seaford Town. His opening comments<sup>viii</sup> sound like a contemporary response to Lemonius's broken promise; *"The place is so... down. There's no factories here... it's a country area, it's always like this."* When we ask him how people generate an income, he responds 'by farming', and tells us that he used to work as a millwright at the Jamaica Bauxite company. He regretfully describes the seemingly inevitable disappearance of the white population of Seaford Town: *"In a few years time you come 'ere and won't find much fairskin cos the older ones they're dying out and, see they're mixed now - chocolate coloured, you won't find any fairskin again..."*

In his account skin-colour features as a key signifier of German-ness - a theme that he returns to throughout our conversation. His understanding of skin-colour as being *passed on* echoes early twentieth century ideas about the biological reproduction of the nation (Linke 1999). We ask him what he perceives as the legacy of the early Germans, and if he thought that anything could be passed on. His response sounds resigned: *"Who you going to pass dat on, most ah dem gone..!"* and continues *"... you find that coloureds now have the same name like German names, but they're mixed. You have fairskin' girls in here you know, and they don't want their own colour"*.

Mr Hacker bemoans the disappearance of 'fairskin' - lighter or white skin tones - which he believes will ultimately fade into what he calls 'chocolate coloured'. He claims that in the past relationships of white girls with black men would have been frowned upon, but that this was now different - they now 'don't want their own colour'. For him the rejection of fair skin – whiteness or aspects of whiteness – means rejecting the status that he thinks comes with this skin-tone, or what it might have meant in the past. But this observation also shows that in

this community, at the level of interpersonal relationships, traditional colour boundaries are being transcended and remade.

Mr Hacker's comments evoke Jamaica's system of 'colour coding' (Austin-Broos 2018: Kelly and Bailey 2018). These institutionalised taxonomies are reproduced in part as the internalisation of the colonial relationship (Fanon 2017), or, as Gilroy has rephrased it in the introduction to the recent reissue of Fanon's important text, "an artefact to the subordination of whiteness" (Fanon 2017: viii). The way in which issues around complexion are articulated poses important questions about both the construction and negotiation of gender identities as well as "...the intra and inter-group negotiations which take place in the political and social struggle of identity formation" (Mohammed, 2000:27). For Mr Hacker the *fairskin* girls are significant carriers of the German identity. In fact, many of the community members informed us that over several generations the white settlers in Seaford Town attempted to maintain their white identity by intermarriage with other whites. When we ask Mr Hacker whether he thought that his German heritage has assisted him in life in any way, he responds:

*"I don't see it because when I was young I went and joined the Jamaican Defence Force and there's not much fair skin people there, mostly coloured. I learned to live with coloured people ... even more than white people... their lifestyle are different. Most white people has a different way of approaching life, and the average coloured person has a different way of approaching life."*

Here, the notion of German heritage is expressed in a terminology of colour, but Mr Hacker now also includes what he considers a significant *cultural* difference linked to the difference in skin-colour. For him the aspect of 'fair skin' is the key determinant of identity. His proposition of a fundamental difference between black and white is conspicuous, as is his deploying of the term *coloured*, an anachronistic term in today's Caribbean (Mohammed 2000). When probed about what constituted this particular difference he responds with criticism of the way in which young black Jamaicans are entrapped by a get-rich-quick-culture and argues that they are no longer interested in hard work or education. While his nostalgia and vocabulary reflects a sense of generational identities and changing labour markets it also

echoes his subjective experience of a changing political system which places blackness more centrally in the national ideology and marginalizes whiteness (Carnegie 1996)

While Mr Hacker is proud of curating the museum, he's also dismayed that the number of people visiting has dwindled – *"nobody come down anymore"* he says. There is a sense of loss in his narrative and it is evident that, for him, the only palpable legacy of German-ness lies in the descendants' white skin. He emphasises this by claiming that black people are not interested in the history of the Germans in Seaford Town:

*"...most of them don't know the history cos one don't tell the other. And the museum is there but most of them not interested.. A black man don't interested in white man history."*

Probing why he thought that was the case unearthed a moment where Mr Hacker voiced his frustration with what he considered simplified representations of the role of whites in early nineteenth century Jamaica, while simultaneously emphasising the similar social positioning of white settlers and freed slaves. He argued that black Jamaicans were only interested in telling what he thought was 'their' part of the history:

*"...the coloured people want to tell you about their history, the slave part of the history...although my ancestors never had anything to do with slavery because they came here just after emancipation. They were in the same position as the slaves – even poorer because the slaves they knew their way around, we wouldn't know which crops to plant - they showed us..."*

His previous account of evaluative difference is moderated if not inverted by recounting the story of his ancestors. Mr Hacker's narrative is analogous with our findings in the literature regarding the similitude in class positioning underlined by the bonded nature of labour to which the settlers were contracted. Addressing such moments of solidarity during the early nineteenth century, Green (2006) reminds us that while 'race' trumped class in the white creole imagination, one must consider the "...conviviality between free Blacks and Coloreds and lesser Whites" (2006:6). In this retelling of the freed slaves' solidarity and help, the

emphasis on 'difference' is muted and disappears. Mr Hacker's account of the experience of his ancestors underlines Hall's (1990) insistence on the transformative and changing nature of cultural identity, particularly the notion that wider structural factors beyond their immediate control impacted on and shaped peoples' identities. Slotted in alongside the freed slave villages, the settlers became part of "the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery" (Hall 1990: 228). Stripped of the supposed superiority of their whiteness or European-ness bestowed on them by a racialized colonial order, their class positioning, their own indenture and the need to survive reconstituted – at least temporarily – these differences.

Mr Hacker claims ownership of the history of the white settlers - partially told here as the history of entanglement and cooperation, but also of their suffering. While acknowledging proximity in terms of the exposure to the power structures at the time and a similar class positioning, it nevertheless historically reproduces Seaford Town whites and blacks as essentially different. While the configurations of 'race', class and colour in Jamaica are in many ways very different to the taxonomies and representations of difference that operate in a western context (Hall 1977) or perhaps even "...unassimilable to other categories as they exist in the West" (Austin-Broos 1994:216), Mr Hacker's account reproduces ideas about the status of whiteness that characterize the US or European context. His concern with hierarchy is revealed in his "connection of behaviour with color and with the manner in which a 'black' behaviour is reproduced across generation" (Austin-Broos 1994:224). Conversely, Mr Hacker has lived his entire life embedded in a profoundly syncretic community. He has what he termed 'chocolate coloured' grandchildren and enjoys a close friendship with nineteen-year-old Alton, a Maroon descendant who visits him daily and has a keen interest in learning about the history of his old friend's ancestors.

Here it is worth considering Back's (2002) insightful comments on the false comforts achieved in thinking in terms of absolute moral categories. Mr Hacker's narrative is complex, and at times contradictory and ambiguous. His identity shifts between a lived vernacular creolized identity and one that re-centres whiteness – it contains a sense of his own un-belonging and of the decay of his own group (Robinson-Walcott 2003). He draws as much from the knowledge about the suffering of his ancestors as he does from his own experience and disappointment, oscillating between the past and the present where elements of the past

inform his interpretation of the present. His lament for the perceived loss of German culture and language is invariably tied to his own identity – an identity that lives through his whiteness.

We spend the next morning with Kim, a woman in her mid-twenties who runs Hylton's shop which sells groceries and daily staples. She is a descendant of the original settlers and speaks with enthusiasm about her German heritage while explaining her family lineage and her 'mix'. Kim responds to questions about the status of 'fair skin' and her own social mobility in a humorous manner: "*Dem ting deh nuh work again...*". She explains that her light complexion and shoulder length straight hair might have been an asset to help get her somewhere in life once upon a time. However, she insists that she would never "use it as a tool" to manoeuvre across class and race boundaries in order to "get to places". Kim says it simply does not work today as people who are in higher positions have to work to get there "*... whether you brown or almost white...*".

She describes a moment where the currency of whiteness loses traction in the social: it provides little perceived exchange value (Bourdieu 1986). She challenges ideas about the ways in which social mobility might operate through whiteness. In contrast to Mr Hacker, the issue of 'fair skin' features much less prominently for her: skin-colour is peripheral and insubstantial even as she expresses pride in her German ancestry. This reflects the notion of heritable identity (Carnegie 1996), where previously static class or colour lines can be transcended and where difference becomes changeable in principle (Austin-Broos 1994).

At this point three young men in their late teens or early twenties who had been sitting on the veranda of the shop join the conversation. They point to a cluster of houses on the side of the hill and tell us that they are owned by "*the German people*", referring to members of the community who are descendants of the early settlers but who have since moved away: "*...most of them migrate, but they still have property here*". When we ask them how familiar they are with the history of Seaford Town's early settlers they begin to recite the names of the families that came from Germany and tell us how interesting they find that history. This provides a sharp contrast to Mr Hacker's claim that black people were not interested in this<sup>ix</sup>. They claim local history as *their* history, arguing that it "*...is the history of everybody, and it's the history for everybody*". Asked about their own identity they respond that "*Every white*



*person now has a little bit of black in them. With their children and grandchildren, the races started to mix*'. In the narratives of Kim and the young men whiteness and skin-colour more generally loses much of its salience. It signifies that continual change and mixture is an ordinary part of life which they live as a profoundly mixed, a hybrid identity (Bhabha 1994) beyond the static polarities of black and white.

### **Sport, community and new identities.**

On a Sunday afternoon in late August, we visited a football match between Seaford Town FC and the neighbouring village. The patchy football pitch was enclosed by trees and bordered on two adjacent sides by a low bank interspersed with rocks and trees that served as a natural terrace. Around one hundred spectators of all ages milled around in an excited atmosphere, and a sound-system pumped out bass-heavy music from the corner of the field. On the pitch there was an atmosphere of excited competition. The two six-a-side teams displayed an attitude of combativeness and bravado cheered-on loudly by the spectators.

A remarkable aspect was that the entire team of Seaford Town was dressed in replica 'home' kits of the German national football team of 2014. With each player wearing the black, red and gold chevron horizontally across the chest - it was clear that, symbolically, *Germany* was playing. Interestingly, genealogy or phenotype played no role in this identification – a small number of the players descended from the early German immigrants but many did not. This adopted identity was recognised collectively amongst the Seaford Town players and fans. Talking to spectators we were told that Seaford Town FC was feared by rival teams because of their German 'heritage'. We learned that the players and indeed the whole of Seaford Town felt a deep sense of connection and identification with Germany as a whole, and German football in particular. We witnessed a form of cultural identification with Germany that was expressed as self-evident and ordinary, but this identity was not articulated through whiteness. Here, Identity was not fixed but fluid and context dependent.

The identification of the Seaford Town football team with Germany can be thought of as a salient example of what Stuart Hall (1990) describes as cultural identity in the *difference* mode. Hall contrasts this mode of identity with a more defensive and limiting mode of identity - the *sameness* mode - which relies on the notion of a recoverable collective 'true' and

authentic self, often with Africa at its centre. Hall makes allowances for such yearnings for an imaginary essential identity in the face of its loss when he explains that: “...such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diaspora” (1990:224). As resources and resistance, he contends, “Such texts restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past” (1990:225). In his criticism of such a perspective he proposes a model of cultural identity that refuses, and refutes, the notion of cultural essence. Emphasising identification rather than identity, he suggests that individuals position themselves around cultural representations. Such cultural *identification* is more intangible and discontinuous but allows for a more open, creative conception of cultural identity. This identity acknowledges the impossibility of return to *before* the colonial encounter, but examines and relates itself to the colonial experience, recognising the transformative impact it has on both coloniser and colonised. It is a creolised identity that rejects homogeneity and recognises the benefits of heterogeneity and diversity.

The players personify cultural identity as a matter of becoming as well as of being. Identities are reconfigured through a number of different local and global, historical and present identities. They draw on ephemeral versions of ‘heritage’ and history, while seeking to deploy – via proxy – the more recent sporting prowess of the Germany national team which is acquired by association and worn symbolically as the German jersey. It is a reconstitution without recourse to roots or linear models of identity: a hybrid identity removed from notions of whiteness. ‘Heritage’ is claimed without resorting to the conceptions of whiteness that pervaded Mr Hacker’s account. These new identities belong to the future perhaps more than to the past. We might think of this as the apogee of the ‘tropicalisation’ of the German settlers’ experience (Hall 2010). The spurious power once bestowed by whiteness, increasingly became eroded and indigenized within Caribbean society as, over generations, they had to “... exist alongside a set of very different cultural impulses in the intimacy of a very different, ‘undomesticated’ native space” (2010: 30). This identity has been a product of the historical ruptures and discontinuities that impacted on both the slave societies, but perhaps in a similar way on the transplanted Germans that arrived there later. All of these elements were recombined creatively by the actors in a moment of convivial popular practice: the Sunday afternoon drama of a football match.

## Conclusion

The German settlers and their descendants became *Caribbean* people who carried elements of a given culture, but who had to accommodate to and incorporate other cultural elements – often in order to survive. It illustrates a ‘Caribbean demotics’ as a matter of pragmatism (Lehmann 1998: xxv), echoing Hall’s (1990) argument that we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side: the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute the Caribbean’s uniqueness.

The stories of Mr Hacker, Kim or the football team are just a glimpse of the ways in which a German identity permeates life in Seaford Town. The German diaspora in Seaford Town had to discover new ways of imagining their relations to the multiple temporalities of objects, people and events, and of the worlds that they inhabit. Loss is lived alongside attempts to establish an imaginary fullness. The normative power of whiteness might be mourned in some quarters, but it has become subject to the logic of cultural translation where the original is impossible to restore. Cultural identity in Seaford Town constitutes a diasporic and hybrid Third Space “...from which colonialism's failed project of promoting purity and polarity may be properly seen, criticized, and rejected” (Bhabha 1994:37).

The descendants of the German immigrants articulate an identity which simultaneously draws on the past and the present while also responding to changing national ideologies. An ‘original’ identity that is largely lost and only lives on in material forms in the few exhibits in Seaford Town’s museum or the assumed currency of whiteness of skin, has been replaced by more imaginary and imaginative ways of identify-*ing*. It has become, or is becoming an identity that can be claimed and appreciated by wider sections of the community, not just those that are the direct descendants of the early Germans that first arrived here. It is a *new* culture that is firmly alive in the ‘difference’ mode.

---

<sup>i</sup> Seaford Town is recognised as a community founded by German immigrants. In agreement with our respondents their names were not anonymised.

<sup>ii</sup> Stuart Hall has emphasised the 'second slavery of indenture' (2010:30)

<sup>iii</sup> The slave trade was abolished in Britain in 1807. British slave-owners were required to ameliorate the living and working conditions of slaves in 1823; slavery as a legal institution was abolished in 1833 and complete emancipation proclaimed in 1838 (Holt 1992).

<sup>iv</sup> The settlers were not part of the planter class.. Bound by contract, they constituted unfree labour.

<sup>v</sup> However, whiteness as it is discussed here is irreconcilable with Bourdieu's insistence on acquisition. It is not, in this sense, accumulated labour.

<sup>vi</sup> See the current debate about skin-bleaching in Jamaica (see Brown-Glaude 2007 and Tafari-Ama 2016)

<sup>vii</sup> There is a difference between this setup and the self-established 'free villages'. These autonomously inaugurated villages in which ex-slaves were granted land-rights constituted an important source of community and identity. It was an important mode of resistance to the plantation regime (Besson 1984)

<sup>viii</sup> Patois phrasings have been left in the original.

<sup>ix</sup> One of the young men is of dark complexion, the other two are what is colloquially termed 'high brown' complexion.

---

## References

- Anderson, L. and H.M Benbow. 2009. "Christoph Meiners' History of the Female Sex (1788–1800): The Orientalisation of Spain and German Nationalism." *History of European Ideas* 35 (5)
- Austin-Broos, D. 1994. "Race/Class: Jamaica's Discourse of Heritable Identity." *New West Indian Guide* 68 (3): 213-233.
- Austin-Broos, D. 2002. "Stuart Hall and Jamaica." *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 11 (3): 309-314
- Back, L. 2002. "Writing in and against time." In *Researching Race and Racism*, edited by M. Bulmer and J. Solomos, 203-213. London: Routledge
- Bade, K. J. And J. Oltmer. 2007. "Mitteleuropa/Deutschland" In *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa*. edited by C. Langenfeld, 141-170. Schöningh: München
- Besson, J. (1984) "Land Tenure in the Free Villages of Trelawney, Jamaica." *Slavery and Abolition* 5 (1): 3-23
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital.' In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson, 46-58. New York: Greenwood
- Bulmer, M. and J. Solomos, eds. 2004. *Researching Race and Racism*. London: Routledge
- Braithwaite, K. 1978. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Oxford: Clarendon
- Brown-Glaude, W. 2007. "The Fact of Blackness? The Bleached Body in Contemporary Jamaica." *Small Axe* 24: 34-51. doi:10.1353/smx.2007.0039
- Brathwaite, K. 1978. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- 
- Campbell, C. 2002. "Early Post-Emancipation Jamaica: The Historiography of Plantation Culture." In *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom*, edited by K. Monteith, 52-72. Kingston: University of West Indies Press
- Carnegie, C.V. 1996. "The Dundus and the Nation." *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (4)
- Chaplin, Joyce, E. (2011) "The British Atlantic." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World: 1450-1850*, edited by N. Canny and P. Morgan. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Clarke, S. and S. Garner, S. 2010. *White Identities – A Critical Sociological Approach*. London: Pluto Press
- Clifford, J. and G. Marcus. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: The University of California Press
- Clifford, J. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Cohen, R. and P. Toninato, eds. 2010. *The Creolization Reader*. London: Routledge
- Cooper, C. 2004. "Enslaved in Stereotype: Race and Representation in Post-Independence Jamaica." *Small Axe* 16: 154–169.
- Dyer, R. 1997. *White*. London: Routledge
- Fanon, F. 2017. *Black Skin White Masks*. London: Pluto Press
- Fies, A. 2010. "Die Deutsche Überseeische Massenauswanderung im 19. und Frühen 20. Jahrhundert." [German Overseas Mass-migration in the 19th and Early 20th Century] In *Die Badische Auswanderung im 19. Jahrhundert*. Karlsruhe: KIT Publishing
- Frankenberg, R. 1993. *White Women, Race Matters*. London: Routledge
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books
- Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic – Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso
- Glissant, E. 1989. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press
- Glissant, E. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

---

Goldberg, D.T. 1990 *Anatomy of Racism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Goldberg, D.T. 1993. *Racist Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell

Goulbourne, H. and J. Solomos. 2004. "The Caribbean Diaspora: Some introductory remarks." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27 (4): 533-543

Green, C.A. 2006. "Hierarchies of Whiteness in the Geographies of Empire." *New West Indian Guide* 80 (1): 5-43. [www.jstor.org/stable/41850423](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41850423)

Hall, D. 1972. *Bountied European immigration into Jamaica*. Kingston: University of West Indies Press

Hall, S. 1977. "Pluralism, Race and Class in Caribbean Society." *Race and Class in Post-colonial Society*. 150–182. Paris: UNESCO

Hall, D. 1953. "The Apprenticeship Period in Jamaica 1834-1838" *Caribbean Quarterly* 3 (3) doi:10.1080/00086495.1953.11829528

Hall, S. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford, 222-237. London: Lawrence and Wishart

Hall, S. 2010. "Creolité and the Process of Creolization." In *The Creolization Reader*, edited by P. Cohen and P. Toninato, 26-39. London: Routledge

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. 1992. *Ethnography*. London: Routledge

Higman, B.W. 2011. *A Concise History of the Caribbean*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Holt, T.C. 1992. *The Problem of Freedom – Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain 1832-1938*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

Kelly, M. and Bailey, S. 2018. "Racial Inequality and the Recognition of Racial Discrimination in Jamaica." *Social Identities* 26 (4): 688-706

Lehmann, S. (1998) 'In Search of a Mother Tongue' in *MELUS* 23 (4): 101-118 doi:10.2307/467830

- 
- Linke, U. 1999. *German Bodies*. London: Routledge
- Lipsitz, G. 1998. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Malik, K. 1996. *The Meaning of Race*. London: Macmillan
- Mc Clintock, A. 1995. *Imperial Leather*. London: Routledge
- Mintz, S. 1989. *Caribbean Transformations*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Mintz, S. 2010. *Three Ancient Colonies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Mohammed, P. (2000) "'But most of All Mi Love Me Browning': The Emergence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Jamaica of the Mulatto Woman as the Desired." *Feminist Review* 5: 22-48. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1395848>
- Monteith, K., and G. Richards, eds. 2002. *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Palmié, S. 2008. *Africas of the Americas: Beyond the Search for Origins in the Study of Afro-Atlantic Religions*. Leiden: Brill
- Rediker, M. 1987. *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Robinson-Walcott, K. 2003. "Claiming an Identity We Thought They Despised: Contemporary White West Indian Writers and Their Negotiation of Race" *Small Axe* 7 (2): 93-110. doi: 10.1215/-7-2-93
- Robinson-Walcott, K. 2009 "Deconstructing Jamaican Whiteness: A Diasporic Voice" *Small Axe* 13 (2): 107-117. doi: 10.1215/07990537-3697310
- Senior, C. 1978. "German Immigrants in Jamaica 1834-8" *Journal of Caribbean History* 10 (11): 25-53.
- Shepherd, V. 2009. *Livestock, Sugar and Slavery: Contested Terrain in Colonial Jamaica*. Kingston: Ian Randle



---

Shepherd V. and H. Beckles, eds. 2000. *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*. Kingston: Ian Randle

Tafari-Ama, Imani M. 2016. "Internalized Racism, Skin Bleaching and Hair Straightening." *IDEAZ* no.14: 1-19

Tate, S. 2013. "The Performativity of Black Beauty Shame in Jamaica and its Diaspora." *Feminist Theory* 14 (2): 219-235. doi: 10.1177/1464700113483250

Thomas, D. A. 2002. "Modern Blackness: 'What We Are and What We Hope to Be.'" *Small Axe* 12: 25–48.

Young, R. 1995 *Colonial Desire*. London: Routledge