

HISTORY, CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT:

WHAT MAKES US ANGUILLIANS?

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WHAT MAKES US ANGUILLIANS?

When I saw that this exercise has been billed as “Conversations on a Blueprint for Tomorrow,” my mind instinctively flashed to the campaigning mode of Senator Hillary Clinton, who embarked upon a “conversation” with the people of New York in her bid for their senate seat, and this year she launched a national “conversation” with the people of the United States of America in her bid for the Presidency.

Well, I am no Hillary Clinton, and Anguilla’s elections are not constitutionally due until 2010. So I take it that this is indeed not an Electioneering Exercise wrapped in a conversational haze. It is instead a strengthening of a people when they come together to reflect upon who they are, seek to determine their identity, and to determine their future directions.

Just this last week-end, Ralph Nader was reviewing his most recent book, *Seventeen Traditions*, I think it was called. He pointed out that in every family, there are remarks and admonitions of parents and grand-parents, which serve as life-long sign-posts of guidance for following generations and determine who they are and what they will become. Collectively such traditions, remarks and admonitions fashion and shape a people. And I urge you to reflect and sensitize yourself about those sayings among your family and your people.

History is the story of people. Culture is the essence of a people’s way of life. Development is the growth of the individual, singularly, and in all the divers dimensions of human life. Development is also the growth of individuals in a collective setting called community. The individuals belong to, and make up, the State. The State serves the purposes and well-being of the individuals collectively

In that collective setting, it is the salient value of promoting the advancement of the individuals who belong to that homogenous community, which justifies the existence of the State. Plato said: ‘The State is the Individual writ large!’

The term “nation” is widely used to define a cultural or social community existing in, and identified with a well-defined territory. A state imports the attribute of sovereignty, the right to rule and govern one’s self, enjoyed by a national community. The sense of

nationhood is the prelude to the state of sovereignty. The human instinct to govern and rule one's own future has catapulted to the fore-front of international relations the essential question of who comprises a nation. We see it at work in places like South Africa, in Cyprus, between the Greeks and Turkish Cypriots, in Kosovo and the other Baltic States, and most recently in Iraq – The Kurds, the Sheahs and the Sunnis.

Here, in Anguilla, we share the same human instincts about the right to self-determination, the exercise of which should empower us to enjoy the right of self-rule. We have the same urges to have our sense of self and self-worth defined by a crystallization and awareness of who we are as a people.

As a colonial territory, we are not a State, as a colonial people, we are not a State, but as a group, we fit the bill for aspiration to an Anguillian nation. So we are ripe to join the debate on that essential question of defining a nation by asking ourselves, “What makes us Anguillians?”

In essence, it is a question about our *nationalism*.

So, how do we approach this essential question of, “What makes us Anguillians?”

It is the same process of defining a national identity.

It has been said that national identity refers both to the distinguishing features of the group, and to the individual's sense of belonging to it. It is to be discerned from the group's perception of itself, as well as from the perception of outsiders. The essential requirement is that there must be: shared characteristics common to the people, and identified exclusively with the people, and accepted and embraced by the people, as their distinguishing marks.

External Perceptions

In the Anguillian context, our sense of being has been defined by reference to our relationship with St. Kitts, and our sense of Anguillianism started to take shape in the 1950's.

Until post-1980, when Anguilla hesitantly launched itself as a key player in the playgrounds of the world's rich and famous, Anguilla was a sleepy place about which we were often ridiculed by St. Kitts as a community in which we were all related and called

“Bubber.” We had not seen electricity, and there were those who used to point to the street lamp post, and show us “Moonlight ‘pon stick.” Collectively, we were known as “Bubber Johnnies.” We were mocked and scorned like Jed Clampett of the Hillbillies, but without the reverent respect that money brings. I suppose today we can follow in the footsteps of Jed Clampett.

The Effect of “Bubber Johnnieism”

At the time we resented it, but upon reflection it was an apt description of the totally homogenous society in which we lived. It connoted the fact that we were all related, each to the other by very strong blood ties, which we were unwilling to relinquish, despite the canonical admonitions of in-breeding. In our homogenous whole, we did not observe them. You can trace strong families from West End to their roots in East End; from the Valley to West End; from North Side to Sandy Hill; from the Farington to Long Ground and Statia Valley; Rey Hill to Island Harbour and North Side and South Valley; Shoal Bay and Little Dix represent a good medley with Stony Ground and its environs. When an Anguillian married “an *off-the-country* person,” there was ever such a quivering lifting of the brow and tones of reservation.

Strength in Community

This facet of community life meant that we lived together with comfortable intimacy, enjoying what we had, living with mutual respect, blissfully unaware of the fortunes of the world around us. The conjoint effect of poverty and administrative social neglect honed, in our closed society, a spirit of caring and sharing so necessary for the development of skills of survival.

Faalty to Country

“*Bubber Johnnieism*” bread solidarity and homogeneity both at home and abroad. It accounted for the cohesiveness of the Anguillian communities in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, or Harlem, New York, in St. Kitts or Antigua, Curaçao or Aruba, in Slough in England, or in St. Thomas and St. Croix.

For example, at the time of Anguilla’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence from St. Kitts, there were teachers abroad on career advancement courses who, in the ordinary run of things ought to have reported back to St. Kitts en route to their posts at home, because that was the federal capital. Some of those teachers opted to risk their years of

pensionable service by boycotting their return route through St. Kitts and finding other means and routes from England to St. Martin, to make it back home to secure the continued and uninterrupted education of the Anguillian youths in the course of turmoil, thereby declaring on which side they stood.

In face of such sudden withdrawal of a traditional treasury for the payment of civil servants, the limbing off of the traditional trade with St. Kitts, the cutting-off of medical supplies from a community not always staffed by a medical doctor, that *Bubber Johnieism* became most relevant and significant.

That *Bubber Johnieism* inspired Anguilla's then lone doctor who was in Jamaica teaching at the University to persuade Prime Minister Hugh Shearer in Jamaica that it was inhumane for medical supplies to be cut off, thereby causing Jamaica to step into the breach and come to Anguilla's assistance with medical supplies. There is so much about our history that is not written, and is not known. There was nobody in the Caribbean who was uttering a voice in support of Anguilla. Hugh Shearer was a smart politician; he wanted to do something, but it had political implications. He went to William Alexander Bustamante, leader of the opposition, who said, "But Hugh, if the people want to run their own business, do you see anything *wrong* with that?"

It opened the gateways for the Anguillian delegation of Wallace Rey and Jeremiah Gumbs to lay their cause before the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Bustamante, and by that very circumstance spawned the compassion in Jamaica through which the torch was light for Jamaica's recognition of Anguilla's *right to self-determination*.

We can recall the flamboyant Dudley Thompson and his inimitable aide and assistance to the fledgling Anguilla Councils in face of the fact-finding missions of Lord Caradon, himself a former distinguished and revered Governor of Jamaica. Jamaica had become Anguilla's fore-most ally in its struggle, and at the Student's Union on the Mona Campus of the University College of The West Indies (as it then was), students formulated and crystallized the debate on Anguilla's Right to Self-Determination. In 1967, it was the first time to clearly focus on the issue of self-determination for Anguilla.

The Internal Recognition of the Sense of Anguillianism: Shared Characteristics and Common Descent

Almost all movements of national identity make some claim to shared origins and descent. That is the first thing you look for. The fact that the ancestry is shared among

the members of the nation unites them, and it sets them apart from other nations, which do not share that ancestry.

What is our ancestry as Anguillians?

I recall that some time ago at a Bar Association meeting here in Anguilla, I had the temerity to advance my view as an Anguillian on what should be happening in the best interest of all Anguillians. I was roundly castigated by another lawyer from another jurisdiction, who rejected my right to speak as an Anguillian for present-day Anguillians, because he contended that “Anguilla belongs to the Arawaks.”

It is true that none of us can trace our origins to the Arawaks or Caribs, but it is fair to say that we peg our roots to the time of settlement in 1650 and tie it into the transportation of slaves in Anguilla.

By 1960, all of the population in Anguilla were people of mixed blood, descendants of white settlers and African slaves. The last white person, Miss Howe, died in the 1950’s. Further, a glance at the population in 1960 would have shown that there were very few people in Anguilla, who had not been born in Anguilla, and fewer still, who did not claim Anguillian lineage through the four lines of their ancestry.

Pick up a telephone directory from the 1970’s, and you will see the genealogy of Anguillians portrayed there. The names are limited to: Adams, Brooks, Connor, Gumbs, Hodge, Carty, Lake, Richardson (pronounced *Rich’ison* not RichARDson), Webster, Harrigan, Hughes, Bryan, Fleming, Rogers, Romney, Ruan, Lloyd, Mussington, Proctors, Smiths, Vanterpool, Petty a few Lewis, a few Banks, Baird, *not virulent people*, Carter, Phillips, Paynes, a few Reys, also in the same class, Roberts, Sasso’s, Huntles, and a few Wallaces. There was *one* Anguillian family by the name of Fahie.

If you shared any of those names, you had probably been raised on *peas soup* with *corned pork* so thick with grains that the spoon stood up in it, or fed on rice and peas, guinea corn, cassava bread, *fish and fungi*, corn soup, stewed chicken or meat, *hushie dumplings*, *konkies* with a sliver of pork, sweet potato pudding and *soda cakes*.

It is the shared experience of birth in Anguilla, our shared experience of being descended from past inhabitants of Anguilla, our shared experiences of survival within the hardships of Anguilla’s social context, which form the foundation of our claim to Anguillianism.

Common Language

While we shared the English language with the rest of the Commonwealth as our means of communication, in accent and particular verbal skills, we made it uniquely ours. Other people marked us by our accents, and we identified ourselves by the accent. I have a clear recollection of the way the older girls at the St. Kitts Girls' High School used to tease me just to hear the *Bubber Johnie* speak.

I can recall the swift turn with nostalgia, as we walked along the Bay Road in Basseterre when we heard that Anguilla accent rolling out. And sure when we looked, there were some of the sailors from the *Betsy*, the *Linda*, the *Rose Millicent*, or the *May Lloyd*, which had just come into port. We heard that accent. It was exclusively ours, and we responded to it in a national sense.

Accents apart, there was exclusivity in our choice of words. I do not believe that there was another island in the Caribbean which spoke about "Frothing Fools." I have searched the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, and I cannot find it. While the word "bittle" for us is used in connection with physical beatings or abuse, in Jamaica, Guyana, and Barbados, it is the synonym of "bickle" used in connection with food. Their "bickle" is our "wittal" which we could "sluck off." When we gave a story just as we received it, we delivered it "Batem for batem," it was the corrupted Latin word *verbatim*. I hear nowadays as kids born, instead, the sheep "yeaned."

In our relatively cloistered community of the 1950's, we still had words like "Couden." When last did anybody *fo*t you a lick, and a *couden lick* at that? *I fo*t him a lick; *I lita kill him!* Check it. And all those greedy people who like to eat so much, the "Struckers." Along with, struck, *strucker* and *stricken*. "Struck" is shown in the *Dictionary of Caribbean Usage* as being *uniquely* Anguillian. So then, we had our language that united us.

Common Culture – Traditions

Ours was a way of life which was marked by compassion, love and caring for one another, respect for our elders, and the nurturing of the bonds of family ties. There was no East and West, North and South, in that matrix of human compassion. Marriages and families knew no territorial boundaries. Today, we are hearing about how the East cannot go to the West, and the Valley cannot go to Blowing Point. Marriages and families knew no territorial boundaries. In those days, there were no telephones, no radio

communications; so if there were a death in the West End, you would send out a rider on a horse with a bidding note. Children had their ordered place in society, and strong moral codes were indoctrinated in schools by way of moral instruction, even though there were breaches of those codes in the wider society. But we had the codes existed just the same and were *known*.

The men went away to work, and the women kept the home fires burning. It spoke to the virtue of some families. There were families with a gap of 3 or 4 years between the children, because the father had gone away. We knew about the responsibilities of the “Extended Family” long before the term was invented in social studies.

Acceptable social behaviour was under-pinned by the readiness of parents to receive complaints about their children; the readiness of parents to chastise the offending children; and the acceptance of the customary right of adults close to the children to admonish them in place of their parents when the parents were absent.

Ours was a way of life fashioned out of the need for survival. With little resources and no established pay-day, we survived as a sea-faring people, living off the land in a peasant economy in which all income-related activities were family, and community, based. The children were the first corps of the labour force. If you had 8 or 10 children, you had a good labour force. You wouldn’t think of keeping it to 2. *Jollifications* were the means of marshalling a labour force to accomplish the work which had to be done, whether it was ploughing the land and planting the crops, or pouring the roof of a house under construction.

At Christmas and Emancipation times, we entertained ourselves as a community – the serenaders going from house to house, village to village, bringing good cheer with Christmas carols, even if they stole the just-butchered meat hanging in the tree or the cakes and puddings out of the brick ovens, when those in the house did not respond in the appropriate and customary manner. Jimmy Carty and his brother Nathan were national icons as *mocker-jumbies* dancing their way on tall sticks from North Side to West End, Sandy Ground to Island Harbour, bedecked in their most elaborate skirts and slips with deep torsion lace and their head ties. The bazaar and the races in The Wire on August Monday were a veritable re-enactment of the Village green in Goldsmith’s Deserted Village.

And our weddings... weddings... no cars, no means of transportation. The bride and groom walked to the church, and to the reception with the cake bearer going before them. I can still see it, and this is the context in which we are fashioned.

Our sense of survival. We began to define ourselves in the 1950's. With the coming of the hurricanes, that first one in 1950. Donna was in 1960. And in our coming together and our sense of survival, we fashioned an architecture that was uniquely ours ... in concrete, with flat roofs, we studied about roofs with parapets. I can recollect that there were two houses built about the same time, a house in which the Honourable Minister of Finance grew up, and my parents' house, and the architecture were identical. Unfortunately we lost our roof. It was devised for us to resist hurricanes... A man by the name of Best came up with a design for that house – a flat roof with a parapet from the West around it, so the Eastern portion of the roof would allow the water ordinarily to run off, but since the deadliest winds of the hurricane came from the West, the house was parapetted on the North, West and South to protect the flat roof from the impact of those winds. And that flat roof gradually spread itself right across Anguilla. It went from galvanized, but that would leak – so they went from galvanized to concrete, but now the concrete breaks up, so they need to find a solution for that.

Anguillianism and the Diaspora

Immigration is an agent of national fermentation.

Anguillians have a long tradition of migration to find work for personal advancement and the support of those at home by remittances. There is hardly an Anguillian who has left these shores without the intention to return. That homing instinct and the need for security in a foreign land drove them to create their own enclaves. And so, as I said before, we had Perth Amboy in New Jersey, Curaçao and Aruba, St. Thomas and the USVI, Slough in England, to name a few.

Their sense of togetherness was reflected in the societies of support which they created – The Anguilla Benevolent Society of New York, and a very strong one in St. Thomas as well.. These were bridges between the settlers in the new enclaves, and their re-absorption as returnees when they came back home.

We have always been a people who used to embrace our own. You only had to be able to answer this simple question, “*Who you for?*” to be wrapped in a blanket of acceptance. We did not leave our blood-lines outside in the cold.

Constitutional Recognition

It was that evolution of the identification of who we were that led to the constitutional prescription of who was a *Belonger* in the Constitution of 1976. Recognition was given to the right of abode, the need to migrate and the right of return; and that recognition spiraled down to the third and fourth generation. Those rights were rooted in two delimiting factors: a) birth in the island, and b) descent from past inhabitants of Anguilla.

A look at those provisions is instructive. Belongership was defined primarily by reference to birth and lineal descent embracing those in a diaspora. Significantly, it gave recognition to the precept that “*Maternity is a fact but Paternity is an assumption.*” And so for the purposes of the fundamental rights and freedoms, the Constitution recognized those born in Anguilla, those born outside of Anguilla whose father or mother – and Anguilla was the first territory in the region who gave women that right – was born in Anguilla, and their spouses or persons under 18 years of age who are the children of persons born in the diaspora. It also embraced persons naturalized or registered in Anguilla, commonwealth citizens domiciled in Anguilla and who were ordinarily resident for a period of 7 years – *The Jacob and Rachael* qualification: Their spouses and their children under 18 years. These were all included.

On the question of who was qualified to vote, the Constitution made provision for others besides those who can claim ties by descent.

But the acid test of Anguillianism was contained in the qualifying provision detailing who was entitled to stand for elections to the Legislative Assembly. By Section 35 of the Constitution, a person was qualified to be a candidate if he or she is a British Subject of 21 years or upwards and if and only if:

- a) was born in Anguilla and is domiciled there at the date of his (or her) nomination for election; or
- b) has resided in Anguilla for a period of not less than three years immediately before the date of his (or her) nomination for election, and is domiciled there at that date, and is the son or daughter of parents, at least one of whom was born in Anguilla.

So birth and lineal descent from past inhabitants were critical factors in defining who was an Anguillian in order to ascend to the highest office in the land. You had to have the *blood*.

Socio-economic Development and the Changing Dynamic of Anguillianism

I come now to consider the socio-economic development and the changing dynamic of Anguillianism. Anguilla has moved away from that social environment of migration for economic advancement and the culture of jollifications. It has become a more vibrant market place with economic tentacles of international proportions. We have reversed the trend of exporting labour to importing labour. Where we used to be guests in another man's country, we are now hosts in our own.

In 1967, Anguillians sang the song, "We are out to build a new Anguilla." The new Anguilla is *here*, and it has serious implications for those who would claim to be Anguillian.

In this new dynamic of social change, the names of people living in Anguilla are no longer restricted to that register of names to which I have referred. People living in Anguilla know little about the ways and means which we had honed for survival, the kind of food which gave us sustenance. There are those born in Anguilla, who do not share the blood, who know nothing about our past inhabitants and claim no connections with them. The bonding glue of communal inter-dependence has *thinned*.

Our cultural definition has become frayed at the margins. The impact of television and the new technological means of communication, the influx of investment, our new climate of fine dining and the new wave of population immigration have created a culture in transition.

We are in an era of Constitutional reform. The critical question is going to be, "Who is an Anguillian?"

How we answer that critical question will depend upon our feeling of exposure, or our sense that, as an evolving community, we ought to embrace the expansions of our population and confer upon them security of abode and full participation in the democratic process. Or, do we see a real need to protect those who, despite the naysayers, are now regarded as the indigenous peoples of Anguilla, and not necessarily, the Arawaks?

There is the philosophy of thought that protection of indigenous peoples is essential to avoid the convulsions in social stability, which the unfettered surrender to an influx of migrants could bring about.

Will we do like Margaret Thatcher, and say you belong to where your parents and grandparents came from, that lineal connection to the homeland is essential? Or, will we go the route of Ernest Renan, the 19th century philosopher from Brittany, and say that the right to be called Anguillian is based upon “the daily plebiscite” whereby people who *live daily* in the community, and so re-affirm their desire to be part of the community, are entitled to stake their claim to be included as rightfully belonging to the group?

These are two diametrically opposed approaches to the concept of nationality, as well as to the concept of “What makes us Anguillian?”

Thatcher’s philosophy, expressed in her Nationality Act 1981, is very much in the tradition of the French and the Japanese, who do not admit the inclusion of strangers into their national mix. The USA, an ever-evolving nation comprised of immigrants from the four corners of the world, is very much in the spirit of Ernest Renan – “*Avoir faire des grandes chose ensemble, vouloir en faire encore*” Or, *Having done great things together and willing to do more*; we move on to nationality and citizenship together.

Anguillia will need to formulate a premise for our Anguillianism based on our own peculiar circumstance. We are a small island with limited resources, the most valuable of which is our tie to the land; but we have been a traveling people, who in so many ways have made the world our oyster.

Will we seek to protect our blood-lines as an endangered species, or will we give way to the changing dynamic of changing cultures in our midst brought by the new movements of our times? How much credit we will give to those who adopt our land and choose to throw in their lot with us? Or is there a need to protect our way of life and ourselves from being over-whelmed and over-come by the new migrant force?

Ours is the responsibility to decide. And there is a lot between the mortar and the pestle.

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