

Digital Humanities, Social Justice and the Pluricultural Realities of Dutch Caribbean Heritage Archives

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Heritage preservation in the Caribbean has over the years become an area marked by the pushes and pulls of international organisations, agreements, and treaties. In the postwar decades the international agenda for peace resulted in pushes for decoloniality, democracy, and solidarity, with strong forces fighting for social justice and civil rights. This was globally supported by transnational regulatory bodies such as the United Nations. An inherent element of the changing paradigms was a universal call for the democratisation of culture. This broad normative concept implied that policies and agreements relative to heritage were to support the universal causes of human rights and social justice by guaranteeing inclusiveness. In the 1970s and 1980s, organisations such as UNESCO became increasingly concerned with these social and political realms of culture and heritage. The promotion and preservation of heritage defined and framed with a monocultural focus was to become a thing of the past.¹

This shift in perspective has had a lasting impact on international treaties and agreements affecting the Caribbean, as we can still see in the SAMOA Pathway (2014) for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and in the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from which the SAMOA Pathway is derived. Under the ambitious umbrella statement “Transforming our World,” the United Nations committed to the SDG agenda as a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity,” which “seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom.” The determination to comply with the SDGs implied a commitment to innovation and the development and use of new tools and methodologies. One of these methodologies is the use of digital humanities.

This chapter studies the use and impact of digital humanities in heritage preservation in the Caribbean, specifically looking at heritage preservation praxis of the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (ABC) within the frame of cultural democracy and social justice.² First, I reflect on the overarching theme of heritage and nation-building, by linking it to cultural human rights. Next I will analyse heritage and digital humanities praxis on the ABC islands from a

comparative Caribbean perspective, looking in particular at the richness of pluricultural realities. In my analysis I focus on two elements of our tangible and intangible cultural archives: language and diaspora. The pluricultural realities of these heritage archives imply threats to and opportunities for social justice. By studying this link, I aim to explore how digital humanities plays, or can play, a role in the advancement of social justice in this part of the Caribbean.

Nation-Building and Human Rights

Nation-building usually encompasses elements of state intervention in a quest for unity and cohesion. Though nation-building may be focused on a wide range of development areas, culture is always part and parcel of it, since unity and cohesion can neither be addressed nor achieved without taking into account aspects of cultural identity. For this reason, some definitions even centre a quest for cultural unity on their conceptualisation of nation-building. Precisely this is a contested area in Caribbean and Atlantic Studies.

In his seminal *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) Paul Gilroy addresses this contestation as a starting point for his research, referring in general to a “fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture.”³ In a transnational postcolonial context, according to Gilroy, a tendency of ethnic absolutism and ethnocentricity can be found in all ethnic groups. A subsequent risk of this tunnelled approach is that of theorising absolute senses of ethnic differences within ideas of national belonging, often used in strategies supporting aspirations to nationality or to local forms of cultural kinship.⁴

In the Dutch Caribbean, the use of the Curaçaoan identity marker “Yu di Kòrsou” (child of Curaçao) can be considered a manifestation of cultural kinship aspiration and illustrates the surrounding complexities of kinship strategies in today’s society. The use of the term Yu di Kòrsou is controversial and disputed when and where it refers to—in short—the alleged implicit tendency of Afro-Curaçaoans to exclusively claim this title. This bypassing or excluding others, amongst whom are citizens with a long heritage line on the island, could be seen as a form of ethnic absolutism and ethnocentricity, as profoundly discussed and challenged by Gilroy. Anthropologists Rose Mary Allen and Francio Guadeloupe wrote a constructive essay on this dilemma, in which they focus on the pragmatic hybridity often seen in societies such as ours, in which people tend to change identity focal points according to their specific situation. “Like all people who have been on the losing end of the last 500 years of global interrelations, [Afro-Curaçaoans] are pragmatists,” they claim. As a consequence, “Yu di Kòrsou for Afro-Curaçaoans is a matter of negotiation that is dependent on where they are, who they are speaking

to, what they daydream of, and what they want to achieve at any given moment in time.” In their conclusion, Allen and Guadeloupe add the interesting perspective that “negotiation does not imply a free-for-all, as there is always a slower-changing context—society understood as a changing same—that cannot be denied.” This approach is meaningful when discussing nation-building, as it not only contextualises the multidimensional reality of identity formations, but also sustains efforts to understand and explain behavioural aspects relative to national identities and nation-building on this Caribbean island.

In his *Black Atlantic* Gilroy makes another point relevant to this article. He argues that processes of claiming and excluding based on some form of ethnocentricity result in mutations of identification and nationalism. Instead of trying to prevent or change these dynamics in order to forge unity, Gilroy pleads for overcoming nationalistic perspectives at large, claiming that “modern nation states are no longer exclusive political, economic and cultural units.”⁵ A range of much later studies elaborate on manifestations of political unity in the Caribbean that in a similar way call for a more open approach. In our region, it is generally agreed, the nation-state cannot be considered a default, normative or simply existing condition.⁶ Not only on a state level, but also in island societies and institutions, political communities and pragmatic forms of active citizenship in the Caribbean developed in a hybrid way, at various scales, and in a blurry area between state and non-state.⁷

This is no different in the Dutch Caribbean. Since the constitutional changes of October 2010, Curaçao and Sint Maarten have been autonomous countries within the Kingdom, the same status that Aruba acquired in 1986. The three smaller islands of the former Netherlands Antilles—Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba—are now overseas “special municipalities” directly administered by The Hague. With this new constitutional order, thoughts and attitudes about identification, belonging, and active citizenship are likely to be subjected to individual and collective reconsideration, doubt, or confusion.

How can we link this post-2010 situation to nation-building? For Dutch Caribbean citizens the actual and pressing reality today is what Van der Pijl and Guadeloupe aptly phrase as a “complexity of political subjectivity, nationness and belonging within the context of Caribbean non-sovereignty.”⁸ This observation alone gives a rich ground for problematising nation-building. Nation-building is an ambition and action program at the state level, rooted in acknowledged commonalities relative to national identifications, which are both socially constructed and individually defined. A program aimed at finding commonality in the Dutch Caribbean inevitably draws attention to missing components or a weak foundation—exactly those elements that Van der Pijl and Guadeloupe addressed in their observations of national identity in the post-2010 Windward island reality.

In such fluent and hybrid realities, alternative frameworks for building strong Caribbean societies, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), seem much more attractive and fitting. And even more relevant are the adaptations made to these SDGs specifically for Small Island Developing States, the Samoa Pathway agreed by all SIDS heads of state in 2014.⁹ Being part of an archipelago, having to deal with centuries of intense migration, very often in a postcolonial and diasporic sociohistorical context—these aspects impact how a transnational focus translates into an intranational or local grassroots focus that applies to and fits within our small islandic communities. Specifically, addressing citizenship and cultural identity, as Gilroy, Allen, Van der Pijl, and Guadeloupe have argued, calls for a grassroots and regional approach. It is noteworthy in this context that the Samoa Pathway specifically, though not exclusively, calls attention to the importance of intangible cultural heritage as a powerful instrument to unite through cultural heritage. The Samoa Pathway agreement claims in paragraph 80 that these elements are nothing less than “a driver and an enabler for sustainable development.”¹⁰ Aimed at the operationalisation of this ambition, paragraph 81 pushes for efforts by small island developing states on various levels, including both tangible and intangible heritage practices.¹¹ The vision and ambition conveyed through these articles is coherent and radical. When culture is approached as a driver for the sustainable development of just societies, the active promotion of heritage preservation by definition should be about promoting inclusivity, democracy, and human rights.

Inclusivity and Heritage Archives of the ABC Islands

The impact of looking through an inclusivity lens at heritage archives is that we no longer focus on known heritage remains, or known heritage manifestations, but on the expressions and bodies behind these cultural expressions. First, people are the primary archives of heritage, by thinking, speaking, and writing primarily in their mother tongue. Rarely is this documented in print or other media. Second, people move, travel, and migrate, taking their embodied archives with them, leaving traces in new places. If we want to be inclusive in our heritage policies and praxis, there is much more work to do outside the walls of our institutions, archives, formal language spheres, and even borders, than there is to do within them. This is where digital humanities enters the field.

Digital humanities (DH) can be roughly defined as the use of digital resources, tools, and applications in the disciplines of the humanities, both in education and research. Digitisation of sources and making collections online available through digital libraries are essential first steps. Beyond this, the added value of digital

humanities lies in new forms of co-creation, data generation, data analysis, storyline presentation, and data-enrichment, to name a few actions. A growing body of practices—some of which will be presented later in this article—gives insight into how working cooperatively and digitally implies that institutional, geographical, and disciplinary borders are much easier to cross.

The current status of digital humanities in the Dutch Caribbean can be best described as a colourful quilt of digitisation initiatives, each fitting a specific purpose or developed as part of a specific opportunity. Digital humanities initiatives on the ABC islands have built on the legendary work of dedicated pioneers in heritage preservation, public history, and oral history, going back as far as the late 1950s. The works of these pioneers—such as Ito Tromp (Aruba), Elis Juliana (Curaçao), and Boi Antoine (Bonaire)—are now key treasures in local digital collections. The National Library of Aruba, the Bonaire Archives, the Dutch Caribbean Digital Platform, the Mongui Maduro Library, and the National Archives of Curaçao are the most advanced in their digitisation projects. Furthermore, in specific areas such as law and language, databases have been developed, and most archival institutes and specialised libraries have started digitisation of photograph or document collections.

Digital humanities as a cooperative effort for and within the Dutch Caribbean has taken shape on two platforms. Through “Wiki goes Caribbean” a substantial number of lemmas about the Dutch Caribbean in Dutch, English, and Papiamentu are added to Wikipedia by a transnational writers collective that will continue this work beyond the initial project phase.¹² A second DH initiative is the development of the Dutch Caribbean Digital Platform (DCDP),¹³ specifically designed for co-creation and data enrichment. It is a community repository for the University of Curaçao (UoC) and for content partners and educators in the Dutch Caribbean in which teachers and researchers, including supervised students, can enrich source material and upload new material such as transcripts, papers, and learning material. The DCDP’s mission is to bring local sources into the classroom to increase historical awareness and decolonise education.

The first DH project in education at the UoC was “Introducing Digital Humanities in Creole Language Teacher Education on Curaçao,” using and enriching the Zikinzá oral history collection in the DCDP.¹⁴ This course assignment started in 2019 with three objectives: catalysing innovation in the language education of Papiamentu; introducing a basic set of DH teaching tools to new Papiamentu teachers; and observing and analysing students’ readiness to innovate their education. By using and studying oral history recordings of Curaçaoan elders of the 1950s and 1960s, the students opened up a language archive—and through this a whole world—unknown to them. A first evaluation showed that students generally enjoy working with local sources and seemed to embrace using digital material, though with a tendency to approach this primarily as something of added value for *them*

in the role of teachers. The course—which will continue with an increased use of DH elements—perfectly qualifies as a “micro digital humanities approach” and testifies to the benefits of a small, local, bottom-up approach for developing digital humanities in heritage education.

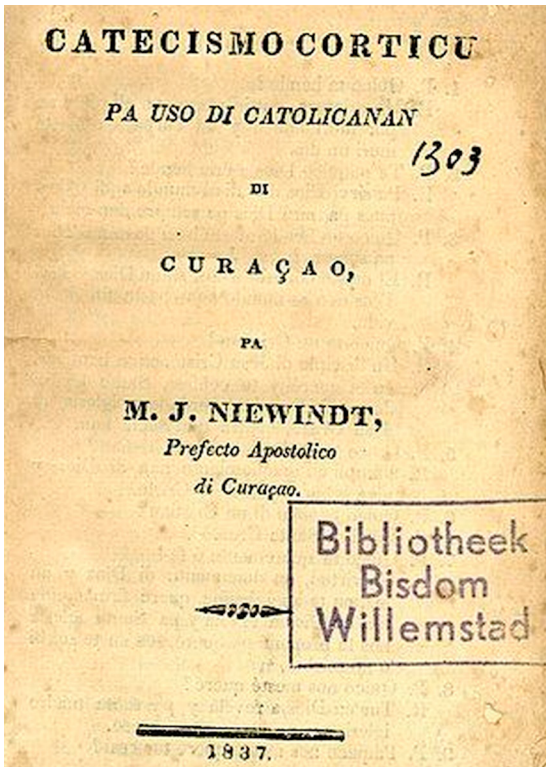
How do cultural democracy and inclusion connect to this? In her seminal work on postcolonial digital humanities, the Indian-American scholar Roopika Risam boldly concludes, “A digital cultural record that puts social justice at its center ... is a matter of cultural survival.” Dramatic as this may sound, the important message for the Caribbean is that if the intention of digital humanities is to empower communities through digitised heritage archives, the impact will not only be in the actual *use* of the digital source material, but also in a *sustainable preservation of marginalised and erased cultural expressions*. Digital humanities thus provides scholars and practitioners in the cultural field with a context, platform, and tools to “reshape the dynamics of cultural power and to reclaim for individuals and communities the humanity that is routinely denied.”¹⁵

With this provocative outlook as a starting point, I will now look deeper into heritage archives that carry a history of marginalisation and erasure in the ABC islands: creole language and people in the Diaspora. In the next paragraphs, I link the current status of (digital) heritage to digital humanities projects in the wider Caribbean, in search of opportunities that support and empower our pluricultural social realities.

Listening to Silenced Voices: Language as Archive

The oldest known document in Papiamentu is a letter that dates from 1775 and was sent by the Sephardic Jewish trader Abraham Andrade to his mistress Sarah Vaz Parro on Curaçao. A more recent discovery is the 1783 letter sent by Anna Charje in the name of her baby Jantje to her husband Dirk Schermer in Rotterdam. Both letters confront us with the rich multiculturalism of Papiamentu and the importance of space in Dutch Caribbean heritage.

In colonial times, European ruling classes generally imposed a single national set of norms and ideas of a single culture and a single language on Caribbean territories. The seminal work of the Trinidadian scholar Mervyn Alleyne (1933–2016) has been particularly instrumental in the recognition of Creole languages in general, and in the appreciation of Caribbean culture and languages as intrinsically plural. Papiamentu—the primary language of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, fits well within this framework of appreciating Creole plurality. This language was developed to be understood by all Creole speakers, whether of European, Jewish or African descent, and for centuries has been the primary language of all classes and ethnicities on the ABC islands and of their extensive diasporic communities.¹⁶



Catecismo Corticu, a Catholic catechism, the first printed book in Papiamentu, 1837

Nevertheless, Papiamentu's history contains narratives of and testaments to oppression and empowerment, of survival *against* the grain and survival *as* the grain.¹⁷

Since the late nineteenth century Papiamentu has been used for a substantial production of poetry and prose, accompanied by a growing body of educational material and linguistic literature.¹⁸ In the 1980s and 1990s, government bureaus for language development, supported by the University of the Netherlands Antilles (now University of Curaçao) and a group of smaller language organisations on Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, as well as in the Netherlands, laid the foundation for Papiamentu study, standardisation, and teacher education.¹⁹ Nowadays, Papiamentu is a prestigious language, thanks to the efforts of activists in the Caribbean, the Netherlands, and beyond. It is used on the ABC islands in all media and in politics, civil society, and the public sector, as well as in theatre, film, and music productions. Not only is it the dominant language in daily communication, it is also incorporated in all primary school curricula, as an optional primary

instruction language in public education and as the only Creole language that can be studied on all academic levels.

Papiamentu is a key aspect of cultural identity for a majority of citizens and is formally acknowledged as cultural heritage of the ABC islands and their Diaspora. As a deeply rooted language, Papiamentu has stood the test of time, yet it is also under pressure. The most powerful impositions to use the language in education took place in the early and mid-twentieth century—imposed by colonial elites protecting growing economic interests through social order. Even though permission to use Papiamentu in the Netherlands Antilles Parliament was granted in 1958, it took Aruba until 2003 and the Netherlands Antilles until 2007 to declare Papiamentu an official language. The need to protect Papiamentu gained urgency in the past decade, not only because of constitutional changes in 2010, but also because of an ongoing diversification of the islands' populations and (sub)cultures due to migration. In March 2021, the government of Bonaire—the only Dutch Antillean Windward Island falling under the rule of The Hague—signed an agreement with the Dutch government to proactively protect the use of Papiamentu. The agreement aims at the establishment of a joint transnational organisation that should commit to the preservation and the further development of Papiamentu as well as the culture that is connected to it.²⁰

A most curious and interesting aspect of Papiamentu as archive is that the language is both vividly alive and productive, as well as under pressure. A wealth of sources could enrich educational, cultural, research, and language development. At the same time, the fact that the language is alive and productive does not mean that the knowledge produced in the language is valued and incorporated on equal terms as knowledge produced in Dutch, English, or Spanish. As a relatively small language spoken on relatively small islands with limited resources, language development, preservation, and improved accessibility to Papiamentu literature and knowledge has taken place on a limited scale and is vulnerable to political and economic tides. The organisation of language planning by Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao governments has suffered from both changes in political agendas and a continuous lack of funding; they can never find an efficient way to cooperate inter-regionally. Digital humanities may be used in this context to overcome some of these challenges to the benefit of preservation in general and language education and research in particular.

Digitisation provides first and foremost opportunities for improved representation in source material and improved access to primary and secondary literature. This is of particular importance for systematically excluded forms of knowledge, such as knowledge available in small and oppressed languages.²¹ A growing body of Caribbean DH projects provide us with interesting best practices, though it is quite clear that there is not a single best practice roadmap.

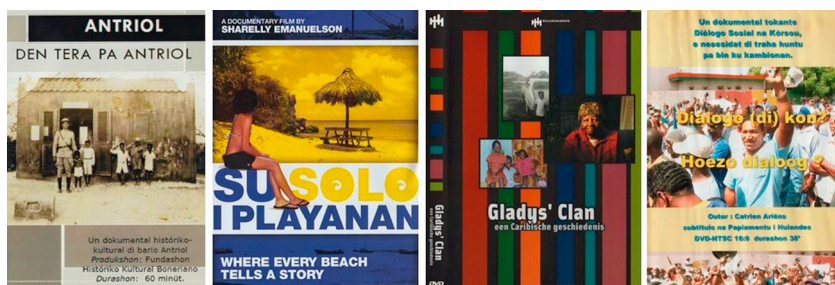
Some major DH projects relative to Caribbean culture and language are realised by an affiliation with, or as an initiative of, larger non-Caribbean institutes. An example is the Duke University trilingual project “Radio Haiti Archive: Audio from Radio Haiti-Inter, documenting Haitian politics, society and culture from 1957 to 2003.”²² From the early 1970s until 2003 Radio Haïti-Inter was the voice of the Haitian people, especially those excluded from public discourse and power. The force behind this station was the exiled journalist Jean Dominique, who developed the station with a commitment to democratic principles and social change. The audio collection is considered the single most important archive of twentieth-century Haitian history. When Duke University Library acquired this collection, they acknowledged the responsibilities attached to this, and thus vowed to create a multilingual digital archive truly accessible, first and foremost, to Haitian people in Haiti. This meant that a vast body of expertise and capital could be channelled not only to the benefit of the research community but also to Haitian communities in the US, at home, and in the Diaspora elsewhere.

The most experienced local Caribbean digital humanities initiative to date is the Create Caribbean Research Institute in Dominica. This is a multidisciplinary organisation affiliated with Dominica State College and dedicated to community-based projects in digital humanities. Working with a “sustained engagement with an ever-widening community of regional cultural and political actors,” their projects are all set up with what Risam calls a “micro digital humanities approach.”²³ This grassroots, imaginative, and resourceful digital humanities practice avoids what Risam summarises as “a directional politics of knowledge that flows from the top down, where the biggest digital humanities centers or best-funded universities are the ones articulating what ‘good’ practices for digital humanities look like.” Instead, local practices *are* the good practices in micro DH. Create Caribbean Research Institute in Dominica built a track record in local DH activities. A well-documented example is the Cariseasland project, based on a social activist agenda to transform paradigms towards a sustainable future for the Dominica community. Participants work collaboratively, using local knowledge, creating new knowledge, and imagining new practices for complex issues, all from an interdisciplinary local perspective. In this practice, teams obviously work with limited resources, and may progress relatively slowly, but, optimally, they tap into local resources and wisdom, creating digital products with sustainable impact.²⁴

In the field of literature, no examples are known of Creole language literature digital humanities, other than the UoC initiative to start small DH projects in the field of Papiamentu education. Some of the known Caribbean literature and language DH projects in the coloniser languages of English, French, Spanish, and Dutch have chosen a broad approach, reaching out to a large public, whereas others chose a narrower approach, aiming at more concise and profound research

and education. An example of a narrower initiative is “Digital Grainger: An Online Edition of ‘The Sugar-Cane’ (1764).” This project is inspired by Caribbean traditions of critical postcolonial scholarship.²⁵ The website presents readers with the original full-text edition of James Grainger’s famous poem “The Sugar-Cane” paired with a section entitled “counter-plantation,” comprising excerpts that highlight counter-plantation themes within the poem. This “counter-plantation” presents elements of agency and emancipation. By presenting the poem in this way, with additional study texts and questions for further discussion, the reader is inspired and equipped to read and process the contemporary portrayal of plantation life from various angles and viewpoints. It thus uses the flexibility of the digital platform to present text in a new order and with cross-references, stimulating critical and multidimensional study of the images of plantation life in the eighteenth-century Caribbean. The approach used in Digital Grainger could serve as an interesting example for Papiamentu literature, for example to study the critical nineteenth-century publications of Abraham Mendez Chumaceiro, or the early twentieth-century Papiamentu writings published under the guidance of an enlightened Catholic bishop, Monseigneur Verriet. Both can be considered testaments to the social complexity of the small colonial society, and could well serve as a digital playing field for young generations to identify conflict and resistance, related to the past, and “talk back to history.”

In literature and language education digital humanities entices new pedagogy. An inspiring example is portrayed in the article “Teaching without a Text: Close Listening to Kamau Brathwaite’s Digital Audio Archive,”²⁶ in which Jacob Edmond argues “for a larger overturning of critical, pedagogical, and essayistic conventions in literary studies through a methodological turn away from the page.” What Edmond discovered while teaching Caribbean poetry to undergraduate students in New Zealand was that the close listening approach empowered students “to be



From left to right: digital stories on a Bonairean neighbourhood, an anthropology of Curaçao beaches, an oral history of a migrating family and a video report of a process of social dialogue in Curaçao

not just better listeners but better readers.” Furthermore, in the particular case of teaching the work of Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite, close listening enabled students “to explore Brathwaite’s intertwining of performance, versioning, sound, music, and vernacular with his political, historical, and social concerns.”

This pedagogy of moving away from the text seems in many ways relevant to the teaching of Caribbean literary works in general. It brings to mind the qualities of what Gilroy calls the “self-consciously polyphonic” of black literary modernity. Writers in this tradition express free of form, easily combining poetry, biography, and history in one coherent text.²⁷ Edmond points at a wide range of perspectives and elements that come to life when listening closely to text, drawing attention to all of the dynamics taking place in speaking and listening, invoking all senses to participate. As is often the case, the DH element in this *best practice* is not high-tech, expensive, or otherwise difficult to develop, obtain, or apply. What stands out and makes a difference is the teacher’s receptiveness and reflexivity to address the classroom’s needs and explore available means not only in the interest of that particular course, but in the interest of heritage education at large.

People on the Move: Diaspora as Archive

Just like Caribbean people and history, Caribbean heritage is defined by movement and migrations. Whether looking at artifacts from Pre-Columbian times, ego documents such as letters, or contemporary music styles from the islands, they all testify to a history and culture that can only be understood in a context of people on the move. With migration being a defining sociocultural phenomenon for the region, and with diasporic connections everywhere, the Caribbean as a field of study expands beyond geographical boundaries. Likewise, Caribbean studies inherently takes an interdisciplinary approach in order to profoundly address languages, histories, and relationships. Because of this, and given the wide spatial and disciplinary distribution of scholars and librarians, collaboration in Caribbean studies is key.

These circumstances and this hybridity set the scene for Caribbean heritage archives and Caribbean digital humanities. The beauty of having this open field is that whatever lens is used will reveal a pluricultural mosaic. Digital humanities gives ample opportunity to discover this mosaic and enhance the picture by filling in missing pieces, finding new relationships, and uncovering purpose and meaning. This can be done through infrastructural enhancements, digitisation programs, and regular education programs, but can also take the shape of special courses, research initiatives, extracurricular projects, and cultural activities.

The relevance of this work for cultural identities and cultural expressions of the Dutch Caribbean on a global diasporic scale cannot be underestimated. In our

discussion of Allen and Guadeloupe's take on the complexities of kinship strategies in today's Curaçaoan society, we have seen the pragmatism surrounding identities as areas for negotiation. Exactly because of this hybridity and fluency, there is as much richness to be discovered as there is a risk of losing aspects of heritage. How could a DH approach support the Dutch Caribbean transnational cultural field to prevent loss, explore and preserve richness, and create new textures in the cultural landscape? Over fifteen years of DH experiences in the region has produced examples that could serve as best practices, illuminating the path and highlighting opportunities as well as warning signs.

The "Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Migration, Money, and the Making of Modern Caribbean Literature" project is one of the earliest education-oriented Caribbean studies digital humanities initiatives. The project started in 2012 and was framed as "an experiment in decentralised, collaborative, blended learning using technology and open-access resources." As University of Florida scholar Leah Rosenberg recalls, it was Rhonda Cobham-Sander, a leading scholar of early Caribbean literature and a professor at Amherst College, who suggested "develop[ing] a course that would teach students how to use archival materials in analyzing literature and how to produce digital scholarship that would explicate the holdings and increase the visibility of the collection."²⁸

The project centred on the migrations of indentured Asians to the Caribbean (1838–1917) and that of Caribbean individuals to Panama to work on the US-owned Panama Canal (1904–1914). Both migrations were part of a larger pattern of migration on a very large scale, involving hundreds of thousands of people, and both were transformative not only for the Caribbean but also for the societies of origin. Crucial to choosing these migrations as a central topic was that scant digitised literature and archival material existed for either. Therefore, a key objective was to produce more inclusive narratives of Caribbean literary and social history. Looking back on the project, Rosenberg identifies as a major added value that "we were not teaching students to critique the colonial archive as a fixed object; rather, we were in an ongoing relationship and negotiation with the archive which supported the class in manifold ways even as it imposed its imperial framework and gaze on the subjects we sought to make visible."

The first course, "The Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Migration, Money, and the Making of the Modern Caribbean," was collaboratively created and taught in 2013 at Amherst College, the University of Florida, and the University of Miami. In 2016 a new course version, entitled "Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Reimagining Diasporas, Archives, and the Humanities" was developed and taught, this time also with the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados. The project today is still a major focal point for digital humanities in the Caribbean, setting an example with its transnational collaborative approach and its distinct focus on breaking archival

silences. Students enrolled in “Panama Silver, Asian Gold” used the collections of the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), hosted by the University of Florida. In 2011–2012 the university’s George A. Smathers Libraries, which houses the dLOC’s administration, acquired the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC). Upon this acquisition, the library digitised material, collected and digitised additional items, and entered into the “Panama Silver” project in which students would enhance and deploy the material within the context of their research assignment. The project, which has since ended, is well documented online. Its syllabi offer “multiple points of entry into the study of transnationalism, intersectionality, and cross-institutional collaboration through digital pedagogy.”²⁹

When incorporating the Diaspora in a heritage project, it is easy to get overwhelmed. Precisely because of this, as we have seen, micro digital humanities is put forward by some as the best approach for small communities with a potentially extensive reach. This way they can at least begin to experience at the grassroots level the potential impact of digital humanities on heritage preservation and education. However, there is much more to say about how to deal with the largeness of scale. Practitioners have emphasised the importance of “thinking big,” precisely because of the potential size of transnational heritage archives. This was the experience of the Slave Societies Digital Archive (formerly the Ecclesiastical and Secular Sources for Slave Societies). The archive currently holds more than 700,000 digital images drawn from nearly 2,000 unique volumes dating from the sixteenth century through twentieth century, which document the lives of an estimated four to six million individuals.³⁰ Facing many negative consequences of explosive growth a few years into the project, the team planned to transform the platform in order to improve functionality, sustainability, and accessibility.

As Angela Sutton shares in *Archipelagos*, the platform’s transformation sparked conversations that were not only about size and scale.³¹ The group started to look, for instance, at using technology in a way that would centralise underrepresented historic actors. In hindsight, according to Sutton, thinking big and anticipating the best possible scenarios would have been the optimal approach. This would have allowed the team not only to plan better and apply optimal uniformity but empower them to reach out with confidence to new sources and partners.

In general terms it can be concluded that if inclusion is central to a DH project, then scalability is a basic project need. This may come at great cost in terms of money, time, and expertise, as was the experience of Duke University when digitising the Radio Haiti archive.³² Several extra steps were made here to make the archive as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, particularly in Haiti. All digitised files were divided into small MP3 files, obtainable on small devices with low internet bandwidth. Next, a relatively high level of description was used with not only rich but also trilingual metadata. This was done because of

the importance of the archive: it contains first-hand accounts of events that are not documented elsewhere as well as the voices of underrepresented people.

In making historical records and other heritage items available to the communities of origin, as the Radio Haiti project did, archives no longer serve only research communities. They become involved in *travail de mémoire* (memory work), which in theoretical discourses is often positioned in relation to identity and oppression. In this context the historian's work is closely linked to, or can be actively pursued as, social activism. As Jacques Derrida argues: "Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."³³ Duke University's Radio Haiti project, as Wagner reflects, aspired to Derrida's ideal imperfectly, "since the day-to-day function of a university library is by its nature hierarchical, placing the power of description and naming in the hands of very few."

Not all memory work projects are radically following Derrida in his quest for democracy through the archives. Mostly, as is the case in Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire, a repository is set up as a branch of a larger platform. Addressing a larger scale by joining a larger platform implies concessions concerning control over stored files and metadata. Again, pragmatism and negotiation prove to be central to surviving small-scale realities.

Just as technology, content, and metadata are of major importance, so is usability within the local context, which is what Ramble Bahamas set out to prioritise. A platform of The Oral and Public History Institute at the University of The Bahamas, it was designed specifically with the Bahamian user in mind, inspired by the concept of rambling: a meandering and unhurried journey of discovery. It invites the audience to explore via multiple paths. Like many smaller DH projects in the region, Ramble Bahamas' aspiration to bring heritage "home" inspires and gets things moving, resulting in feasible small-scale projects driven by less lofty but nonetheless laudable ambitions and strategies.

An Agenda for Social Justice and Digital Humanities

Pluricultural realities of heritage archives in the Caribbean imply threats to and opportunities for social justice in the Caribbean. We have seen in the Caribbean studies digital humanities projects studied and presented here that the room for experimentation in digital form is often used to break with dysfunctional, unwanted, and even oppressive barriers of a physical, mental, or emotional nature. This results not only in interesting collections and presentations, but in particular in new pedagogy and engagement.

Community-based approaches, sensitivity to language, and actively reaching out to underrepresented and silenced groups are crucial elements to success in our Caribbean pluricultural postcolonial context. As most Caribbean DH projects are initiated outside the Caribbean, these elements as yet seem to be less prominently developed. DH initiatives in the Caribbean can and must engage with this reality. They can aspire to fix and heal what went wrong in the past, by adding material, contextualisation, and narratives to the collections, or projects can be set up to just “do it right this time” from the start—thinking and acting big and inclusively.

A growing body of Caribbean DH projects provide us with interesting best practices, though it is quite clear that there is not a single best practice roadmap. The instant and empowering gratification of a successful micro digital humanities approach—working *with* and *for* the community—justifies prioritising such projects in all educational institutes throughout the region. It should furthermore be recognised on the other end of the spectrum that the Caribbean region holds many audio and video collections that should be digitised with exactly the same rigour as the Radio Haiti archive, for exactly the same reasons. It seems pointless to design a roadmap excluding either the small or the large, the local or the foreign—what is needed is a broad and clever approach.

The mosaic landscape of digital humanities on the ABC islands could be analysed as a manifestation of nationalism—or at least island pride. Of course, even on this level, heritage digitisation and other DH projects may very well be approached by the state as efforts in support of nation-building. This, however, is hardly the case, if only because of scarcity and small scale. Current DH initiators are operating resourcefully at the institutional level with the support of external nongovernmental funds, introducing transnational actors and long distance forms of nationalism to their island realities. In all these cases, attempts to address and overcome silences in the archives are nevertheless made, contributing to the reimagination of the past and the creation of new narratives. Thus digital humanities collections and activities on the ABC islands are supporting, and may further support, social justice causes, both on a large scale and in micro DH projects. However, as we have seen in various practical examples from our region, to move to the heart of attaining and experiencing equity through heritage praxis, a radical change of pedagogy will prove crucial.

