

Epilogue

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Stuart Hall once observed that ‘People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in *the idea of* the nation as represented in its national culture.’¹ One key notion about a nation is that it should have a history, a national narrative to which all citizens subscribe. Even though there has been a broad orientation away from the primacy of the nation-state unit over the last three decades, this volume acknowledged the continuing resonance of these concepts, particularly amongst the Papiamentu/o speaking people of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao—the ABC islands—who engage with what the editors termed ‘the question of the nation’. What do/es the nation/s stand for? How is it/are they constituted? What implicit/explicit meanings do/es it/they hold? And: how does the nation speak itself in the light of tourism and diasporic identity politics?

Benedict Anderson notably argued that ‘nationality ... as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy’.² This book, gathering together experiences from multiple perspectives in the ABC islands and their Diaspora represents a critical moment for the rest of the region to take stock and reflect on their own involvement in ‘participating in the idea of the nation’ through the uncertain steps towards nation-building and nation-branding, particularly in the post War period of the 1940s onwards.

Ultimately what this publication has offered is a compilation of contextual frameworks and distillations of evaluations by a group of knowledgeable authors by examining what (might) actually constitute ‘Dutch Caribbean’ nationality/ies (or perhaps more to the point— Dutch/Caribbeanness) in which the population ‘believes and identifies with’ and/or is satisfying a ‘need to at least be seen and recognised by others’. The contributors addressed the development of ‘national’ ideologies and identities through multiple mirrors and research methodologies in both social history, memory and heritage tourism research. In an attempt to comprehend the inherent intricacies of identity in the present Caribbean state, these were measured against the largely independent Hispanophone and Anglophone Caribbean (and to a lesser extent the largely territorialised Francophone countries).

The preceding fourteen chapters of the book offered compelling case studies and comparative analyses to interrogate the constructs and the perceptions of nation and nationhood, and examined this key question through the framework of a plethora of markers and signifiers: through nation branding for tourism (Baud and Hoefte; Ridderstaat); the slavery and reparations debate (Allen, Oostindie and Smeulders, Van Stipriaan); archaeology (Sankatsing Nave et al.); arts (Perrée and Van Stipriaan); language (Pereira and Alofs), literature (Florian); music (Granger), sports (McCree, Guadeloupe), nature preservation (Mac Donald and Ferdinand); the archive(s) (Groenewoud); and migrations and heritage politics (Guadeloupe and Oostindie). The authors presented themselves variously as dis/passionate observers, neutral analysts, or determined activists, whose varying positionalities produce an effective *mélange* of strategies when it came to addressing the central questions of the volume. This volume provided the basic infrastructure of an interdisciplinary exposition of Dutch Caribbean identity/ies and its/their dilemmas.

Commodification And On a Happier Note

Ironically as a result of the twentieth century experience of extractive industrial production, the three Dutch Caribbean islands, like many of their southern neighbours, Trinidad and Guyana in particular, find themselves caught in a “Bermuda” triangle of disappearing resources, following the implosion of their industrial sector/s. This has left these formally strong economies with a high social index and standard of living with virtually nowhere to go once global markets no longer needed them. The loss of both human and financial resources within this spiralling process has forced the islands into ‘performances’ of different kinds which also permeate chapters focused on nation-branding and tourism by Baud and Hoefte and also Ridderstaat. On a happier note perhaps, other contributors contemplated the importance of the ‘performance’ of music (Granger), sports (McCree), and baseball (Guadeloupe), as part of both activities of nation-branding and nation-building within these tiny territories. Punching above our weight has sometimes been a phrase admiringly applied to island nations in relation to various factors, yet the undertones of wonderment are alternately gratifying and grating in their insinuation. As Lilian Guerra posits: “While countries of the Caribbean may be geographically tiny, their impact on the development of global economies and political thought has been fundamental.”³ The continued tension between commercial interests and the potential commodification of these phenomenal figures, often runs counter to local efforts to support intergenerational memorialising and mentorship, a process which requires sustained socio-political policy and practice to achieve desired results.

Narratives and Silences

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's thesis was that: "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)... To put it differently, any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly"⁴.

The processes of narrativising Caribbean identity and memorialising Dutch Caribbean identity are subjected to critical introspective analyses of power, hegemony, and the historical and continuing dynamics of internalised and systemic oppression which often results in the reproduction of colonial logics of commodifying human beings, labour, space, and knowledge. These issues were explored in differing contexts in chapters on indigenous and African heritage. Notwithstanding the insistence on a primordial indigenous heritage, Sankatsing Nava et al. discussed the exclusion of African-Caribbean and Asian presences in archaeological research and archaeological museums. This argument speaks volumes about the persistence of racialising archaeological practices and identity policies within the region and the deliberate silencing of significant evidence to the contrary. More or less in contrast Allen, Oostindie and Smeulders scrutinised the multiple islands' slavery past linked to 'contemporary problems of racism and white privilege' mainly through the lens of intangible heritage of carnivals and commemorations which exposes the incipience of the (both European and Caribbean) Dutch's self-image still struggling as it does with the incompatibility of exemplars such as *Zwarte Piet*. Pereira and Alofs documented the suppression of public education systems and defining the struggles and survivals of the nation Language Papiamentu/o against obstructionist colonial and postcolonial metropole state policies. Guadeloupe and Oostindie confronted issues of identity through the lens of migration and diaspora. The tensions that arise between what persons and polities variously consider the artificial and the authentic, as played out in the genealogies of multigenerational families are defined firstly by processes of inter-regional and intra-regional migration, of deliberate deculturation and at the same time acculturation, or cultural change defined as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups".⁵ From yet another angle, Florian discussed similar insular and metropole identity ambiguities in Dutch Caribbean literature.

Moving back into the arena of the museum, Van Stipriaan drew comparisons with the representation of slavery, already acknowledged as central to the national

hi/stories of the Anglophone and Francophone territories. The author referenced the lack of 'a coherent narrative of slavery'. He concluded that this is due to the potential risks 'to national cohesion and the tourist industry'.

However, another argument can be made for what Mary Louise Pratt has observed. 'In the last decades of the twentieth century, processes of decolonisation opened the meaning-making powers of empire to scrutiny, as part of a largescale effort to decolonise knowledge, history, and human relations.'⁶ The reality is that many of these Caribbean institutions were born of the concept of the modern museum institution as a colonial inheritance. Historian Richard Drayton was prescient in his rumination on this consideration observing that: "Time is of the essence of the colonial idea. The time of colony condemns the colonised, to a perpetual anachronism, always out of time with the mother/master time, of being 'late' to history, to science, to art, with lateness taken always as a condition of inferiority. The non-white, lined up in a queue behind the chariot of history ... is perpetually delayed ... and so long as they accept this location, they are simultaneously out of place in the country they inhabit".⁷ Ariese and Wróblewska have articulated six areas where changes must be made in order for decolonisation to take place (and take hold) in the museum, including creating visibility, increasing inclusivity, decentring, championing empathy, improving transparency, and embracing vulnerability as the pathway to effective decolonisation.⁸ These criteria might serve as a draft design brief for the next stage in this process.

This accords well with Groenewoud's perspectives on the value of digital humanities, which through educative and creative practices can serve as a means of reinvigorating UNESCO's mission to utilise culture as a part of a reparative justice framework.⁹ In much the same vein was MacDonald and Ferdinand's approach to addressing the global ecological crisis in the French and Dutch Caribbean. Primacy of place must be given back to local communities by 'unsilencing' and revalidating their voices, so long ignored in the debates and decision-making process around these issues.

A New Narrative

So how can the ABC islands construct a new narrative of the past that imagines the future? Art historian Grant Kester has opined (though in a different context) that "Knowledge is reliable, safe and certain as long as it is held in monological isolation and synchronic arrest. As soon as it becomes mobilised and communicable, this certainty slips away and truth is negotiated in the gap between self and other, through an unfolding, dialogical exchange." He finds hope in Avant Garde art, which for him, "...constitutes a form of critical insight; its task [being] to transgress

existing categories of thought, action and creativity... to constantly challenge existing boundaries and identities.”

Affirming the continued importance of remembering Papiamentu/o through continuous usage in the ABC islands (and amongst their diasporic communities), I subscribe to the position taken by Rickford and Rickford in *Spoken Soul*: “... As the African concept of *nommo* asserts, spirits are conjured by the saying of words. Ancestors are invoked by the speaking of words. If our enemies can make us forget these words, and then make us forget that we have forgotten, they will have robbed us of our ability to honor and summon our ancestors, whom we so desperately need now more than ever.”¹⁰

And further, as Cándida González-López has asserted regarding the use of traditional and creolised Caribbean languages, particularly in the context of spiritual power as a way in which “... enslaved Africans and African descended peoples have had recourse in order to empower themselves and resist oppression” and goes on further to affirm that “such cultural and linguistic resistance was also present in the plantations in the covert form of spiritual practices, a sort of *spiritual marronage* which included dance, music, singing and special uses of language that have been preserved in today’s African descended spiritual practices all over the Americas”.¹¹

In recognising that today’s society “faces a broad and complex set of urgent socio-environmental challenges that have no easy solution and are difficult to govern” and that “these challenges, as well as the strategies that the international community have developed to tackle them—Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—are characterised by complexity, uncertainty, disputed facts, conflicting values, high stakes and a pressing need to act”, in an insightful analysis of these issues Joosse and her fellow scholars called for an entirely different governance approach, one that is critical, engaged and change-oriented scholarship which promotes “the idea of research as an embedded and reflexive practice that cannot stand on the sidelines of society.”¹² They aim at contributing to a methodological discussion, by presenting “six methodological dilemmas as reflexive devices for thinking about what critical, engaged and change-oriented Eastern Caribbean scholarship might entail in practice. These dilemmas are (1) grasping communication; (2) representing others; (3) involving people in research; (4) co-producing knowledge; (5) engaging critically; and (6) relating to conflict. Rather than offering solutions, we present dilemmas and suggest that they can be used to think through critical, engaged and change-oriented research practice.”¹³ One key point that these authors highlight is “that when we aim to give voice, we also risk silencing perspectives and experiences that do not fit the categorisations and process of our research. *Discursive colonisation*, i.e. the reproduction of the interests of the powerful through certain forms of knowledge and scholarship ...also remains a risk when Eastern Caribbean scholars challenge flawed representations. Indeed,

any representation of, and mediation on behalf of, others risks subjectification and exclusion in processes of knowledge production. One way to address this dilemma is to involve people through collaborative research or action research. Such involvement presupposes relations of trust and engagement.”¹⁴

In their analysis of what these perspectives have to offer I find many resonances with this book, its agenda, its agency and its authors’ activism in their various fields. However, in creating/disseminating what Aja Martinez terms the *Counterstory*, which recognises the need for educators and academics to struggle through narrowly defined forms of knowledge and scholarship, she articulates a “methodology that functions through methods that empower the minoritised through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardised majoritarian methodologies.”¹⁵ In this respect the suggested six dilemmas posited by Joosse et al. “as reflexive devices with which to think through what such scholarship can mean in our research practice, and a set of questions to help translate the dilemmas to the specificities and contingencies of research projects” may sustain and support such methodologies, in that they opine that “There is still much to explore, for example from what position we are critical (of what and what is our role?), engaged (for and with whom?) and change oriented (what and whose imagined futures do we aim to support?)”¹⁶

The final answer may lie within the transgression (or the potential for it) of thought, action and creativity, and challenging the boundaries and identities where, as Stuart Hall already posited in 1990 “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a dynamic ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term “cultural identity” lays claim”.¹⁷ Hall was inviting the Caribbean to do critical work on the *idea* of the nation. As he challenges us to find sustainable ways of living with difference, Hall gives us the concept of diaspora as a metaphor with which to enact fresh possibilities for redefining the project of nation building and branding in the twenty-first century Caribbean. The chapters in this book dedicated to the ABC islands and their Diaspora recognise Hall’s call as they foreground the incomplete and dynamic nature of the question of the nation in the Dutch Caribbean.