

CHAPTER 1

Nation-Building and Nation-Branding in the Caribbean: Comparative Reflections on National Imaginaries and Their Consequences

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I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
And either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation
—Derek Walcott, “The Schooner Flight”

What more fantasy than the Antilles?
—Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

These quotations, by a Nobel laureate from St. Lucia and an acclaimed Dominican-American writer, reflect the diverse and complex reality of Caribbean ideas on self and nation. They may serve as an entrance point to the question of how different independent Caribbean nation-states have tried to understand and present their societies, and how this has changed over time. In this chapter we analyse the tension that exists between nation-building—aligning populations and societies behind a common set of rules and narratives of uniqueness and belonging—and nation-branding—presenting and “selling” selected elements of a nation’s narrative to outside actors. We not only contend that nation-branding is a logical extension of nation-building, but that these two processes are often intertwined in antithetical ways.¹

Keeping in mind the region’s heterogeneity and myriad experiences of gaining independence, in most Caribbean countries nation-building was (and is) a complex and often contradictory process. Although new ideas of self and nation propelled the struggle for independence, the actual construction of the nation often took place after achieving independence. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson emphasises the importance of culture and emotion to understand how people develop a sense of national consciousness.² He thus draws attention to processes of imagining, remembering, forgetting, and restoring. Anderson also underlines the role of print media in creating communities and building nations through spreading images. This process has always been contested. Groups of citizens may acquiesce,

adapt, or resist, and these reactions will change over time. Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent call these processes “everyday forms of state formation.”³ They assert that the most productive way to conceptualise postcolonial nationalism is as a dialectical contest between the hegemonic project of nationalist modernity and popular challenges to that project at various levels. In short, nation-building is an ongoing and contradictory process, especially in postcolonial, multiethnic societies, where different cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions coexist. Rootedness, economic contributions, (past) experiences of oppression and neglect, as well as loyalty should be considered if we wish to understand claims on the nation by different groups. In her analysis of historical narratives of the history of Trinidad and Tobago, Bridget Brereton pointedly observes that “the past is a key arena for contestation.”⁴

Nation-branding is a more recent phenomenon. Although we can see examples already in the early twentieth century, when islands like Cuba and Jamaica tried to attract well-to-do tourists, it only became a general feature around the turn of the twenty-first century. It is a commercial process highlighting specific national characteristics to promote the country to foreign investors, tourists, or international organisations. Nation-building and nation-branding both consciously foreground *certain* narratives while concealing others, but in branding a key role is reserved for (foreign) consultants who link state and commercial interests to “sell” the client’s country. The influential marketing and policy advisor Simon Anholt coined the term nation-branding in 1998. A few years later he provocatively stated that “brand has become the dominant genre by which the nation is expressed”.⁵ Given Anholt’s own commercial interests, that may not be a surprising position, but what is important to our argument is the notion that branding not only “sells” the nation to outsiders, but also, domestically, allows governments to stimulate the formation of a nationally shared identity, enhance pride in the nation, and promote social uniformity. In this process, they can use nation-branding to suppress domestic dissent and undermine political opponents by foregrounding commercial interests.⁶ In this context, we argue that nation-branding should not be seen as the next phase in nation-building but that these two processes are closely interconnected.

These intertwined processes empower and make visible some groups while at the same time ignoring, marginalising, or exoticising others. The continuous development of visual means of communication, including film and television and the introduction of the internet and social media such as Facebook, exacerbates these developments. This expanded role of media in nation-building, and nation-branding, has intensified the debates over nation and self in the Caribbean. In this chapter we cannot do justice to the entire complexity of this issue. Therefore, we will focus on three independent countries from the former Spanish, British, and Dutch empires to show how cultural expressions and social movement activity were instrumental in shaping the nation.

From Nation-Building to Nation-Branding in the Caribbean

The Caribbean nation-state emerged in many different forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Haiti and the Dominican Republic had already started their path to national independence in the early nineteenth century. Cuba and Puerto Rico hesitantly followed suit in the last part of that century, only to see the sprouts of nationalist movements succumb to the tutelage of the US. Meanwhile, the Dutch, British, and French colonies remained under colonial control until the second half of the twentieth century, or even longer. After the idea of a British Federation collapsed (with the exception of cricket and the University of the West Indies), the British islands fell apart in an amalgam of small (semi-)independent nations under the umbrella of the British Commonwealth. The Dutch colonies remained—in one constitutional form or another—part of a shrinking Dutch colonial empire, with the exception of Suriname, which gained its independence in 1975. The French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe are still French departments but fight for “true equality” with the metropolis, and recognition of their cultural identities.⁷

Even though recognised nation-states were slow in emerging, nationalist feelings existed, in very similar ways, in all twentieth-century Caribbean societies. Embedded as they were in the global community of ideas, they were not immune to the “dream” of a new, postcolonial world and were often actively involved in making this dream a reality.⁸ Caribbean intellectuals like George Padmore, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Amy Jacques, José Martí, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Winter, C.L.R. James, and Anton de Kom dedicated their lives, all in their own way, to this dream of decoloniality and independence. Nationalist, often anti-colonialist, movements and ideas emerged everywhere. These took different political, ethnic, and cultural forms, and expressed themselves in various ways, a classic example being cricket, which as C.L.R. James has so convincingly suggested, played a crucial role in the articulation of West Indian independence.⁹ When it concerned social or political issues, these movements sometimes turned to open resistance and violence. This was the case, for instance, in the so-called “Labour unrest” in the British Caribbean between 1934 and 1939 and the 1969 rebellion in Curaçao.¹⁰

These expressions of an incipient social and political discontent were the result of extremely heterogeneous movements which clearly reflected the fragmented reality of the Caribbean. Differences of language, colonial legacies, and culture led to varying forms in which the “dream” articulated itself. Nevertheless, these expressions were important, because they often provided cornerstones of national ideas in the postcolonial era. In that sense, these emerging narratives could be considered the equivalent of the “popular proto-nationalism” that Eric Hobsbawm identified as underlying European nation-building in the second half of the

nineteenth century.¹¹ It is important not to lose sight of these protonational roots when we consider Caribbean narratives of state and nation.

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that the development of Caribbean narratives of the nation developed in different time periods. Where Haiti and the Dominican Republic had already started the search for their national identity in the nineteenth century, other Caribbean nations only started to articulate national (and postcolonial) identities in the twentieth century. The size of the colonies and their populations accounted for another differentiating factor. The larger countries, specifically Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica, could more convincingly claim a strong foundation for their national identity and self-reliance. Smaller island-states cherished their cultural identity but often struggled with the socioeconomic viability of their (semi-)independence. In addition, and partly as a consequence, the relationship with their (former) motherland was, and still is, often ambiguous and convoluted. This became clear recently, when smaller islands were struggling to cope with the disastrous effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria and the Covid-19 pandemic and relied on outside help for solving their most pressing problems.

Despite this heterogeneity, there is no doubt that Caribbean nations are facing similar challenges concerning their national identity and their place in the world. Not only economically, but also culturally and socially, the Caribbean is part of a global community. Many of these nations have economies that are fully dependent on global tourism markets and foreign visitors. A transnational migrant community, both in North America and Europe, is another crucial element with great economic importance and a direct influence on national narratives. As we will show below, transnational communities increasingly came to play an important role in both nation-building and nation-branding. Nation-building and branding in the Caribbean consequently generate fierce debates on the nation's place in the world and the viability of its constitutional independence. We will try to present these contradictions and challenges by focusing on three cases.

"Authoritarian" Nation-Building in the Twentieth-Century Dominican Republic

In 2011, the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana opened in the capital city of Santo Domingo. The original initiative for the museum came from the family of one of the guerrilla fighters who invaded the Dominican Republic in 1959 in a failed attempt to overthrow the dictatorship of General Trujillo. The museum is in private hands and does not attract much attention, as it is hidden in one of the small streets of the Zona Colonial. It meticulously shows the authoritarian nature and atrocities of the Trujillo regime that governed the country from 1930 to 1961. It emphasises Trujillo's *reinado de terror* and highlights the infamous massacre

of thousands of Haitians in 1937 with an immense placard that reads, “Genocidio Haitiano,” explicitly blaming the army and Trujillo himself for the killings. At the exit, the visitors find a cursory reference to two unblemished nationalists from the nineteenth century: Gregorio Luperón, a liberal politician in the Dominican Republic, and José Martí, the Cuban intellectual and freedom fighter.¹²

The museum can be seen as a symbol for the slow and very hesitant transformation of the nationalist narrative in the Dominican Republic. For most of the period from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, Dominican nationalism was based on one dominant narrative, that of a mulatto (*indio* in the local parlance) nation with a predominantly Hispanic culture which was fundamentally different from and opposed to the Black Republic of Haiti and its inhabitants. This narrative especially found traction in the period of imperial dominance of the US, especially as a result of the US occupation of the country from 1916 to 1924. As a result of the simultaneous occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), opposition to US influence in nationalist circles of the Dominican Republic was fuelled by the idea that the US intended to bring together the two countries under one flag. Dominican nationalism and anti-imperialist ideologies thus fed on the idea of the nation’s fundamental difference with Haiti. Still today, many Dominicans tell you that the US does not understand the fundamental difference between the two nations.

In an extreme way, the Trujillo regime expanded and systematised this anti-Haitian nationalism. After the consolidation of his regime, Trujillo employed a considerable number of Dominican historians to describe the “silent invasion” of Haitian peasants in the Dominican border region. At the same time, intellectuals like Manuel Arturo Peña Battle and a future president, Joaquín Balaguer, presented and sometimes fabricated historical evidence, which on the one hand demonstrated the cultural and racial uniqueness of the Dominican population, and on the other demonstrated the mortal danger posed by the primitivism and promiscuity of the Haitian “barbarian” masses.¹³ As if this was not enough, Trujillo ordered the indiscriminate killing of thousands of Haitian and Haitian-Dominican inhabitants of the border region in 1937. Although this was widely recognised as one of the most horrendous crimes in modern Caribbean history, the anti-Haitian emphasis in Dominican nationalism remained a powerful trope until the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, Trujillo’s intellectual servant, Balaguer, stayed on after the assassination of Trujillo and governed the country until 1996. To date, there has been neither an official investigation of the killings nor any official gesture in recognition of the victims’ families.

Part of today’s Dominican nationalism still revolves around this mythologised Spanish past and a rejection of (Haitian) Blackness, but the museum makes clear that alternative views have gained traction. The racialised presentation of the Dominican nation is increasingly considered an outdated and, in many ways,

reprehensible narrative for defining the Dominican nation. It may well be that the PLD governments of Leonel Fernández (1996–2000, 2004–2012), although ostensibly supporting anti-Haitian rhetoric, were instrumental in this change of tone. With their propagation of the Dominican Republic as a hub of modern technology (“the Singapore of the Caribbean”), they turned Dominican nationalism away from its racialised relationship with Haiti and toward a mythical future of progress and innovation. His branding project in many ways echoed late twentieth-century positivism in the sense that participation in this grandiose project of modernity became almost an obligation. The president and his followers tended to ridicule and censor critical voices that pointed at the cleavage between this ambitious project of modernity and the state of underdevelopment in which the mass of the population lived.

In this same period Dominican voices started to clamour for a recognition of the Dominican Republic as a multicultural nation and a definitive rejection of Trujillista ideologies. The Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana in its own way contributed to this cause. Its celebration of the 1959 resistance and its explicit rejection of the Trujillo legacy can be considered a similar attempt to break with the past and formulate new and more inclusive forms of national identity. For the moment it is a feeble effort, which reflects a cautious approach to the recent past. It is easier to celebrate the heroism of *Las Hermanas Mirabal* (the Mirabal sisters), the innocent, female victims of tyranny who are presented so movingly in Julia Alvarez’s novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, than to discuss the widespread collaboration of Dominican society with the regime and the continuing salience of its ideology.¹⁴ Today, racist, conservative nostalgia is no longer a generally accepted option, but it has been difficult to straightforwardly reject the ideological legacy of *El Trujillato*. The dictator’s regime is generally condemned (although a certain nostalgia for its “order” remains in some circles), but national memory emphasises the exceptionalism of its extreme repression. It has not led to a national soul-searching that attempts to explain it as a (partial) product of Dominican culture and society. Trujillo has remained a historical persona whose repression is viewed with horror in present-day society, but whose ideological roots in Dominican society have scarcely been considered.

While the Dominican Republic struggles with poverty, emigration, and weak institutions, the debate over its national identity lacks urgency and a clear direction. The promise of progress and development has not yet materialised for large parts of the population and is too ephemeral to sustain modern forms of nationalism. The massive emigration to the US after 1965 and the existence of a huge Diaspora community of Dominican Yorks, as they are commonly called, have posed new questions regarding ideas of nation and self. While it undermined existing nationalist tropes, it created forms of “long-distance” nationalism. This “retorno de las yolas,” as Silvio Torres-Saillant has called this influence of the Dominican Diaspora,



Branding the Dominican Republic for tourists on the official tourism website

helped place the Dominican identity in a wider context and allowed intellectuals and artists to express their identity in novel forms.¹⁵

The migration experience has converted Dominican popular culture into a transnational phenomenon, which has enhanced its acceptance but at the same time made it less adequate for nationalist narratives. Dominican-born writer Junot Díaz tries to connect these two worlds, by looking at the Dominican Republic from the outside and, at the same time, formulating counternarratives of the nation. He stresses the need for a demystification of Trujillo and his legacy in order to create space for new interpretations of twentieth-century Dominican national history and identity.¹⁶ In a 2008 interview in *Newsweek*, Díaz observed, “The concept of a ‘nation’ is definitely problematized in a place like the Caribbean. This myth that nations exist, they have to work overtime in the Caribbean, where you have so many elements, so many mixtures, so much hybridity.”¹⁷ In this one quotation he is

both placing Dominican nationhood in a wider perspective and trying to reframe it. In this respect, it is no surprise that Diaspora intellectuals like Junot Díaz actively rejected the 2007 ruling that would take away the citizenship of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent. Even less surprising is that they were immediately accused in conservative Dominican circles of not being “real” Dominicans.¹⁸ This shows the contested narratives regarding nation and self in the Dominican Republic and the ambiguous ways the Dominican Diaspora is supportive in reframing the debate over Dominican national identity. Intellectuals and activists in and outside of the Dominican Republic are trying to find new terms to present *Dominicanidad*, but their activities are often countered by traditional nationalist tropes in which the legitimacy of the migrant community to speak about nation and self is questioned and criticised.

These complex and ambiguous debates about the Dominican national identity in and outside the country and the hesitant reframing of the Trujillo heritage and its anti-Haitian nationalism, occurred when the country experienced enormous growth in international sun-and-sand tourism. This transformation was accompanied by state attempts to rebrand the nation. The Dominican government and the country’s corporate sector attempted to steer away from the country’s painful past and “sell” the country as a Caribbean paradise. These attempts to rebrand the nation aimed at hiding the country’s complex and painful challenges but also led to the exacerbation of problems such as prostitution, exclusion, and pollution. This led to new debates, inside and outside the geographical confines of the Dominican Republic, concerning new expressions of nationalist identity and changing ideas about the desired future for the country.

The Quest for Harmony in Suriname

“Do you see how much I love my country? Look, I eat my land, look!”

In a celebrated scene in the classic film *Wan Pipel* (One People), protagonist Roy Ferrol (Borger Breeveld) exclaims these words while eating a good chunk of Suriname soil. Roy is an Afro-Surinamese migrant in the Netherlands who returns to his homeland to bid farewell to his dying mother. He falls in love with Rubia Soekdew, a woman of Indian descent, and decides to stay in Suriname, as he feels a need to contribute to his birth country. The film, by Pim de la Parra and Wim Verstappen, was released one year after Suriname’s independence (1975) and is still a staple of the country’s independence celebrations on November 25.¹⁹ Yet what is now seen as an icon of nation-building was a source of controversy in the early years of independence.

Roy and Rubia's interethnic relationship was a sensitive topic at a time when close to a quarter of the population left for the Netherlands in anticipation of the country's contested independence. Relations between the two largest population groups, Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani (of Indian descent), were fragile. In the movie Rubia is expelled from her family; in real life Diana Gangaram Panday, who plays Rubia, was repeatedly threatened by more conservative Hindustani who labelled her a "whore" because of her relationship with a "Negro."²⁰

Artists like De la Parra, at that time living in the Netherlands, wanted to overcome the existing divisions in their multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious homeland in order to build a truly Surinamese nation. The film's title is taken from the final words of what is probably the most frequently quoted Surinamese poem, by Dobru (the pseudonym of the nationalist poet Robin Raveles), entitled "Wan" (One): "Wan bon/someni wiwiri/wan bon ... Wan Sranan/someni wiwiri/someni skin/someni tongo/wan pipel."²¹ This idea of one nation was first expressed by writer and activist Anton de Kom. His *Wij slaven van Suriname* (*We Slaves of Suriname*) was the first history of Suriname written by a Surinamese author adopting a Surinamese perspective.²²

Why did Dobru and De la Parra stress the idea of *wan pipel*? Early post-war nationalism in Suriname was mainly cultural rather than political, and once independence was achieved, the political tensions ran so high that artists stepped into the breach once more. In the 1950s, a largely urban Afro-Surinamese movement, called *Wie Eegie Sani* (Our Own Things), with strong roots in the Diaspora, focused on a re-evaluation of Afro-Surinamese culture and a rejection of Dutch linguistic domination and Christian values. In this cultural renaissance, the emancipation of Sranan Tongo, the country's lingua franca, was of utmost importance. Cultural emancipation was seen as a first step toward political emancipation. The Hindustani philosophy, most eloquently expressed by intellectual, writer, and politician Jhan Adhin, was summarised as "unity in diversity," celebrating cultural diversity based on a "deeper unity."²³ For Hindustani activists *Wie Eegie Sani* (and Dobru as well) served as sources of inspiration to write poetry and stories in Sarnámi, the language of the Hindustani population.²⁴ Slowly, political nationalism gained prominence in certain circles in the early 1960s. Not surprisingly, given Suriname's cultural diversity and political fragmentation along ethnic rather than ideological lines, this movement did not have great appeal. Instead, its Afro-Surinamese stamp led to a backlash of intensified ethnic consciousness within other ethnic groups that were alarmed by these nationalist ambitions and their possible outcomes: independence and Afro-Surinamese dominance.²⁵

It was indeed an Afro-Surinamese-dominated government headed by Henck Arron that paved the way for independence, alienating large segments of the population who felt excluded from the decision-making.²⁶ In turn, the politicisation and

polarisation of the independence question effectively killed any opportunity for the Arron administration to engage in nation-building. This is when artists such as Dobru and De la Parra stepped in with their call for one nation.²⁷

The post-independence period was dominated by Desiré (Dési) Bouterse, who came to prominence during a 1980 military coup that removed the Arron government. For four decades he remained a prominent on- and off-stage presence in Suriname. The military intervention was supposed to break the political stalemate in post-independence Suriname. Importantly, as was to be expected from a national army, the military soon declared its support for all Surinamese, regardless of ethnic background. The military allowed the use of Sranan Tongo in parliament for the first time, and Dobru, as state secretary of culture, became one of the defenders of the military regime and its attempts at “Surinamization.”²⁸ Paramaribo’s Independence Square featured Cuban-style billboards depicting the heroic history of the Surinamese people in its centuries-long struggle for freedom. This type of propaganda made nation-building and Surinamisation after the fall of the military regime a poisonous issue for many years to come. The dictatorship, and Bouterse in particular, were associated with human rights violations, corruption, drug trafficking, and economic chaos, resulting in widespread poverty and food shortages. The great majority of the population equated nationalism with this unpopular regime that left the country in ruins.²⁹ In 1987, with the return of democracy and the old ethnic parties, Dutch—considered ethnically neutral—was reaffirmed as Suriname’s official language. Sranan Tongo continued to be viewed as principally part of Afro-Surinamese culture.³⁰

Decades later, the political chameleon Bouterse, now as an elected president, urged the nation to live in “unity and harmony.” In 2014, Niermala Badrising, then Suriname’s Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States, explained how her country was a model “for how a healthy diversity can bring about a peaceful and accepting society.”³¹ The themes of diversity and harmony also defined nation-branding efforts to attract foreign tourists and investors as well as how the nation was, and still is, performed in official shows, festivals, and tourist entertainment. Theatre maker Sharda Ganga critically assesses the “parade of traditional costumes, song and dance [of each ethnic group], in the end there is a coming together in a climax of all ethnic groups—a spectacle of unity.”³²

Almost half a century after independence Suriname has gradually adopted an “accommodationist” approach to nation-building: differences are authorised by the state, as it permits schools, places of worship, sociocultural associations, and celebrations and commemorations of the various ethnic groups on an (almost) equal footing. While respective Surinamese governments have allowed different population segments to retain their cultural traditions, in return they expect and even demand loyalty to the state, its institutions, and the general law.³³ As a result,



Material example of nation building and nation branding in downtown Paramaribo (photo Rosemarijn Hoeft 2016).

nation-building in Suriname has not aimed to weaken cultural and ethnic identities; instead, the relatively harmonious relations between different Surinamese groups are highlighted and serve as a source of national pride. Adhin's idea of unity in diversity seems to have gained the upper hand while at the same time *Wan* and *Wan Pipel* have achieved an iconic status in Suriname and in the Diaspora.

Fragmented Nation-Building and Popular (Counter)Cultures in Jamaica³⁴

Hanging out in Kingston, visitors may end up in Tracks & Records, a flashy place to have a beer or dinner. Huge screens project all the well-known races of Jamaican sprinting hero Usain Bolt, who is the owner. The chain also has locations in Montego Bay, Ocho Ríos, and London. The pubs advertise their Jamaican vibe and tell potential visitors: "Jamaica, the home of Bob Marley, Blue Mountain Coffee and Bolt. At every Tracks & Records you get to experience a truly authentic combination of the best that Jamaica has to offer through our music, sports and of course amazing food." Immediately in this text, the other world-famous representative of Jamaica is mentioned: reggae singer Bob Marley. Amidst the omnipresence of his music in

Jamaican society, his cultural legacy is safeguarded in the Bob Marley Museum, run by the singer's heirs, and, to a lesser extent, the Trench Town Culture Yard Museum, where many of the most memorable moments of Marley's life took place.

In these few commercial lines, two Jamaican heroes are presented as the most appealing symbols of the Jamaican nation. Indeed, today there is no doubt that Bolt and Marley are Jamaica's best-known representatives. Orlando Patterson notes that both Marley and Bolt represent the island's "rural heartland."³⁵ But are they also accepted symbols of the Jamaican nation? This is a much more complex question. It is clear that the building of the nation, which began in the twentieth century, was based on anti- and postcolonial symbolism much more than on national cultural heroes. It could be said that the struggle for independence from British colonialism was not solely a Jamaican but a West Indian issue, which was fought as much in the Diaspora as in the Caribbean. As Stuart Hall observes, "Colonialism condensed the diversity of global complexities and temporalities into a single narrative" which "framed your very existence."³⁶ At the same time, every part of the colonial empire, every island, every society, fought its own particular struggle, geared toward local circumstances and narratives. Following independence in 1962, cultural and political policies in Jamaica were geared toward the development of a "creole multiracial nationalism" reflected in the country's motto: "Out of many, one people."³⁷ Connor Doyle writes that the myth of racial harmony was ubiquitous in official expressions of the Jamaican "national ethos" in the 1960s.³⁸

The Jamaican nation developed a political system that was dominated by the "creole" nationalism of two nationalist parties, the PNP and the JLP. Underneath these clear-cut political dimensions social and racial fault lines existed which were informally appropriated by these parties. However, they were never fully integrated, coopted, or even accepted. As Stuart Hall observes, "[T]hose marginal of the political system were harnessed to the formal parties through informal rather than conventional means: through religious affiliation, the politicization of rival, and increasingly militarized 'garrison' no-go areas, petty and organized crime, gang and community loyalties and the 'Don' system of patronage."³⁹ This led to complex and oftentimes ambiguous efforts to build the Jamaican nation, which in part entailed celebrating and appropriating living popular culture, promoting its African heritage and Black pride, and at the same time rejecting it as dangerous and vulgar. It was clear, however, that these nationalist ideologies mainly represented the interests of the ruling groups.⁴⁰ Most Jamaicans were all too aware that their society was divided not only by class lines but also in terms of race.⁴¹

Apart from providing Jamaican nation-building with a clientelist and often violent tinge, it also led to political and symbolic struggles about nation and nationhood. These struggles were accompanied by the growing presence of Rastafari ideas about racial "downpression" and the global popularity of reggae

music that criticised Jamaican inequality.⁴² The conflict came to a head during the 1972 election. The war of words between politicians Michael Manley and Edward Seaga over the “Rod of correction,” a stick said to be a gift from Haile Selassie, the hero of the Rastafarian movement, can be seen as one example of this politico-cultural war.⁴³ It symbolised the increasing importance of Rastafarian symbolism in Jamaican politics and a new search for the foundations of the Jamaican nation. The elite’s attempts to create a shared colonial culture and the subsequent colonial and postcolonial “culture wars” did not lead to a unified Jamaican national identity, but rather to a number of contested and often contesting narratives and practices.⁴⁴

Many observers today suggest that Jamaican nation-building fell apart with the collapse of two peace processes that sought to end the internal political warfare.⁴⁵ The first started with the famous 1978 One Love Peace Concert in which Bob Marley forced opposing leaders Manley and Seaga to, uncomfortably, hold hands. The second occurred in 1999 when community leaders tried to stop the violence in their communities. It failed because a new generation of local gang leaders were no longer interested in the state as a solution. Deborah Thomas suggests that in this development the content and direction of Jamaican nationalism was transformed.⁴⁶ In her eyes, by the late 1990s, creole nationalism was superseded by “modern blackness”—an urban Blackness rooted in youth culture and influenced by African American popular culture. Expressions of Blackness that had been marginalised in national cultural policy became paramount in contemporary understandings of what it was to be Jamaican. This process was neither controlled nor centralised in a coherent movement and therefore led to fragmented narratives of self and nation. Bagues wryly observes, “The Jamaican postcolony therefore faces a unique situation. Not only is there no hegemony from the rulers, but subaltern radical counter-hegemony itself has also collapsed or has diminished in influence.”⁴⁷

This situation obstructed a coherent narrative of the Jamaican nation. Today, different social and political groupings, often informal, present their ideas of Jamaicanness. The state may still hold on to the narrative of creole nationalism, while large groups of the population have concocted their own narratives, either connected to Rastafarianism and Black nationalism or to cultural phenomena like sports or music. Young Jamaicans today easily fall back on street dance culture, which dates back to the 1960s, or present-day dance hall culture to perform a new found spirit of nationalism. These narratives are heavily influenced by the migration experience in the Diaspora, where counternarratives emerged that express anger or frustration with Jamaican problems of poverty and violence and look for new ways of representing postcolonial Jamaican society. A poignant example of this may be the revaluation or even celebration of Jamaican *patois* in the work of novelist Marlon James, which he uses to break through colonial stereotypes about language and identity. These Diaspora narratives are often very strong and

poignant but, as with all long-distance nationalism, they have limited influence on society back home.

One of the ironies of present-day Jamaican nationalism is that the brand that is most famous, the person and music of Bob Marley, has been implicitly or explicitly rejected by successive Jamaican governments. The same could be said about *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, the acclaimed, Booker Prize-winning novel by Marlon James, which according to Laëtitia Saint-Loubert “repoliticizes Brand Jamaica and the figure of Bob Marley (‘the Singer’).”⁴⁸ Bob Marley is conspicuously absent in the National Heroes Park in Kingston, but he is celebrated in the city’s many murals alongside other popular culture (national) heroes, varying from dons in the garrison communities to sporting heroes in stadiums.

Jamaican politicians want to present their nation as a safe haven for tourism, an example of racial democracy, and a modern nation. In this sense, they are uncomfortable with popular culture and Rastafarianism, which are associated with poverty, drugs, and crime. On the other hand, politicians and intellectuals cannot ignore these popular landscapes. They also need popular culture and are in constant need of confirming their neighbourhood affiliations and affinity with popular culture. This permanent ambiguity may well be the crux of Jamaican debates about nation, race, and identity today.

Branding and Selling the Nation

Dominican President Fernández hoped to turn his country into “the Singapore of the Caribbean.” He certainly is not the only one. But what did the president have in mind? Singapore as a small economically powerful postcolonial nation—a city-state—is an example for many Caribbean countries and beyond of how nation-building and branding are intertwined. It was one of the earliest nations to actively brand itself internally and externally as efficient, well-organised, confident, hardworking, and technologically advanced.⁴⁹ The admirers of the Singapore model seem to focus on its economic success, but seldom mention the flip side of authoritarianism and social engineering in the city-state’s nation-building and nation-branding.⁵⁰

Essential political and sociocultural variables in Singapore are different from those of the Caribbean cases discussed here. So how do Caribbean countries actually brand themselves? And, more complex, how does this branding interlace with and affect nation-building? It is not our intention to examine the nation-branding efforts of each of our three case studies; we instead will analyse some of the trends we have observed while studying these countries. It is important to understand that the branding of Caribbean nations often clashes with narratives and ideologies of nation and self, often with unintended or even pernicious consequences.⁵¹

Given the importance of tourism in the Caribbean it is not surprising that nation-branding strategies are geared toward attracting (more) foreign visitors.⁵² Taking advantage of the centuries-old, explorers' lure of paradise, branding companies present Caribbean societies as places of relaxation, where the local populations (of course, no longer called "natives"!) are ready to serve the needs of foreign travellers. The promise of sun, sea, and sand is still a main selling point for the region. In the Dominican Republic there is "white sand beaches that seem to endlessly run into the horizon, punctuated with slim coconut trees reaching the skies." It states that "paradise has never been easier to explore."⁵³ Suriname may be a Caribbean exception as far as the importance of tourism goes,⁵⁴ but the country also has its eyes on the tourist dollar and euro to diversify its economy. Common themes in the branding of these three nations are nature, hospitality and friendliness of the people, gastronomy, and history and culture. Yet the tourism boards of all three countries also diversify their offerings by marketing other activities ranging from playing golf to city trips to "inland safaris."

The focus on fun and relaxation thus does not preclude inserting elements of national culture and history in the country's brand. Branding can also imply presenting an attractive and interesting image of a nation's history, society, and culture. Central American countries, for instance, have successfully promoted indigenous heritage to foster cultural tourism.⁵⁵ In the same vein, Caribbean nations have celebrated cultural and ethnic diversity and harmony as a unique feature of the region. This often implies very simplified versions of national culture and selective presentations of the past. Contesting narratives on the past and national culture are condensed and homogenised into sellable and uncontroversial products. Often these elements are greatly simplified and uniformly presented to create a commercial image of the country and its people. In other words, branding normally produces an "essentialized image of the nation that influences conceptions of the place *at home* and *abroad*".⁵⁶

Branding analyst Melissa Aronczyk compared the introductory texts of different official tourism websites (Ireland, Jamaica, Poland, Senegal, and Turkey).⁵⁷ She concluded that the five texts—all extolling natural beauty, hospitable people, a colourful history, and unique culture—are interchangeable, despite these nations' very different histories, cultures, and socioeconomic conditions. The common language of the foreign branding experts who stereotype local societies and their populations homogenises the supposedly unique brands. In the Jamaican case, Hume Johnson and Kamille Gentles-Peart argue that the authorities have decided to exclusively brand the "sun, sand, and sea" part of the island. They do not include "other aspects of Jamaica's global reputation (such as successes in music, sport, and fashion), nor do they address the less favorable reputational issues (such as crime and homophobia) that also circulate about Jamaica."⁵⁸ The inclusion of

Bob Marley in the national imagery in Usain Bolt's establishment diverges from the official branding because it does not comply with the harmonious, modern (and not Rastafarian!) image that the branding tries to promote. This is different from, for instance, the case of the much more uncontroversial musician Juan Luis Guerra, who figures prominently on the first page of the official tourism website of the Dominican Republic.⁵⁹ Thus nation-branding picks those elements from the national imagery that are most easily and successfully sold to a foreign audience.

This leads to a second, perhaps even more important consequence of nation-branding. The simplified image of service-oriented Caribbean societies can have profound consequences. In the first place, entrepreneurs and state authorities want their country's population to comply with these stereotypes that stress the servicing of foreign visitors. This will—intentionally or not—exclude certain sectors of the population and place them, as it were, outside the nation. This often implies the reproduction of racialised and gendered colonial perceptions in which local, especially female, populations are reduced to catering to (White) foreigners. Steven Gregory describes the Dominican *zona turística* as “a theme park where men rehearsed and reiterated the privileges of economic, racial, and geopolitical power.”⁶⁰ This is at its clearest in the case of sex tourism. As Kamala Kempadoo rightly observes, this tourism is based on imaginations where Caribbean men and women are constructed “as racial-sexual subjects/objects ... whose main roles are to serve and please the visitor.”⁶¹ We may see this erotic and exoticising imaginary as an (obviously) hidden but important subtext of many nation-branding efforts.⁶²

These stereotypes may also lead to the implicit exclusion of “undesirable” elements among the popular classes, as we have noticed in Jamaica. These elements, who do not directly cater to tourists or are even perceived as damaging the nation's paradisiacal image, are presented as anti-national and undesirable.⁶³ While they will often be simply ignored, in some cases they are disciplined or even repressed in the name of safeguarding the nation's reputation. This has led to heavily secluded luxury resorts or protected tourist ghettos in colonial zones in cities such as Havana, Cartagena, and Santo Domingo, with twenty-four/seven police surveillance to safeguard the historical and harmonious image that the branding presents.

These processes may also have more subtle consequences. For example, in Suriname, recent official tourism branding transmits the national trope of racial democracy by lauding the country's multiethnic “peaceful harmony.”⁶⁴ But official guides also inform us: “In Suriname you encounter jungle that has not previously been entered, Amerindian and Maroon populations that have retained their centuries-old traditions ...”⁶⁵ The Maroon and Indigenous populations are thus exoticised as peoples with well-kept ancient traditions and habits, and apparently their presence does not count, as the jungle has not “been entered.” The presentation of Suriname's apparently timeless tribes as exotic and distant not only leads

to voyeurism but also excludes the Maroon and Indigenous populations from the general (“civilised”) population/nation.⁶⁶

Nation-branding thus often replaces, at least partially, nation-building. However, the building of a nation is put here at the service of enhancing the nation’s reputation and the commercialisation of its natural and social assets. In the words of Dominican Minister of Tourism David Collado, his country’s brand strategy “is divided into five pillars: investment, industry, tourism, culture and people. The objective is ... to improve reputation, provide certainty and confidence to attract investment, generate jobs and above all promote national pride.”⁶⁷ Thus national pride, generally recognised as one of the cornerstones of nation-building, is also the key objective of nation-branding.

National pride is not a stated objective in Suriname’s branding strategy, but in the 2015 campaign #WEARESURINAME a key feature was a video literally singing the praises of Suriname. The video was produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and targeted an international market. In spite of this objective Dutch and Sranan Tongo, and not, for instance, English, were used to convey the message. Moreover, the video’s key song seemed to be directed at Surinamese people in Suriname rather than at outsiders, as evidenced by lyrics such as: “Born and raised/Tied to where I am” and the celebration of “our” Suriname. #WEARESURINAME suggests that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs actually engaged in nation-building rather than branding.⁶⁸ Where nation-building was meant to create Anderson’s famous “imagined community,” branding is a commercial, economy-driven venture that promotes national pride but tends to create a simplified framework, which should be respected and supported by the population for the greater good of international reputation and the development of the nation.

Branding and Building! What Nation ...

In this chapter we have discussed how nation-building and nation-branding are in complex and often contradictory ways intertwined. They tend to use the same lexicon and symbolism, but they serve different goals. The common denominator in both processes is national pride. We demonstrated that there is a clear temporal sequence between them. Nation-building efforts took place from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century. Nation-branding is a more recent phenomenon, and it influenced and redirected continuing efforts of nation-building. Increasingly, we see nation-branding efforts influence the tradition of nation-building. Because branding is a commercial activity, it weakens the exclusive relationship between state and society, at the expense of increasing, often foreign, corporate control. We may point to a statement by a consultant regarding a

non-Caribbean postcolonial state, Botswana, to illustrate the potential sociocultural impact of nation-branding: “[A brand book] will be used by teachers in schools, it will go to kids to take the brand book home to their families [to teach them how] to become more on brand.” The book’s print run was supposedly in the tens of thousands.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, branding efforts found traction in the high period of neoliberalism, which also tended to diminish the authority and legitimacy of the state. In the words of Sue Curry Jansen, “[N]ation branding is an engine of neoliberalism that explicitly embraces a reductive logic, which privileges market relations (market fundamentalism) in articulations of national identity.”⁷⁰ Nation-branding is not a neutral commercial venture; it has a variety of symbolic and practical consequences for national policies and societies. Branding the nation may well result in “burning” the nation.

Of course, these are complex processes, but in the case of Jamaica and the Dominican Republic we may conclude that the exclusive promotion of their cheap tourism attraction, based on sun, sea, and sand, has caused or reinforced problems of social fragmentation, criminality, drugs, and prostitution. We should certainly not exaggerate the merits of nation-building, but at least it took place in enshrined socially defined legal and political frameworks. Branding is a commercial enterprise that normally does not depend on democratic control and that ignores the pernicious social effects its activities may have, as the focus is exclusively on economic gain. This is not only important in a sense of political accountability but also affects society’s relationship with its past and cultural heritage. The commercialisation and simplification that define branding tend to ignore and even reject the nation’s history, thus leading to repressing or ignoring its historical and cultural heritage. Even in the few cases where this heritage is celebrated, it takes place in simplified (“disneyfied”) and biased forms, which tend to ignore or exclude certain sectors of society. Both building and branding tend to ignore “negative” societal elements such as the poor, the “socially deviant,” or sex workers. As Kempadoo observed above, in the Caribbean this is directly connected to colonial racism and racial exclusion, which, however, have acquired new forms and meanings in nation-branding.

It is interesting to note that simultaneous with this increased importance of commercially driven image-making a new stream of critical intellectual work is appearing. Caribbean intellectuals, often moving in transnational networks, are trying to find answers to the silences and simplifications visible in nation-building and branding. As we have noted, they present new versions on nation and self, which find international audiences but at the same time provoke national debates on race or ethnicity, identity, and nation in many Caribbean societies. While branding efforts present and strengthen simplified notions of history and cultural heritage, Caribbean intellectuals are trying to find new ideas and lexicons to overcome historical exclusionary processes and structural inequalities.

Such processes are clearly visible in the Curaçaoan case: the chapters in this volume by Guadeloupe and Oostindie and Van Stipriaan show how professionals and activists are trying to lure foreign tourists away from the beaches and to interest them in the island's inconvenient history, including slavery and other forms of subjugation. Intellectuals, professionals, and activists are thus pushing beyond tropical clichés to show who actually was forced to build and yet not allowed to become part of "paradise" in the Caribbean. But given existing commercial interests that promote the tropes of paradise and hospitality, it seems unlikely that these complex histories will become integral parts of Caribbean nation-branding in the near future.

