Consuming the Caribbean Cinematically: The Geopolitical Implications of Global Jamaican Imagery

– And What to Do With It Once You Know

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An account of the modern geopolitical imagination (...) must start with the origins and development of the capacity to see the world as a whole. From this point of view, the "modern" world is defined by the imaginative ability to transcend the spatial limits imposed by everyday life and contemplate the world conceived and grasped as a picture.

John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics*, 1998: 11

The Caribbean (...) matters enormously to an understanding of the modern world, the global outcome of the colonial transaction.

Silvio Torress-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean*, 2006: 18

Setting the Scene

As evening falls on Negril, the many visitors of Rick's Café make themselves ready for Jamaica's world famous sunset at the west end cliffs, including myself. Like several others, I take my digital camera out with the intention to capture this ultimate Caribbean picturesque setting. On the most protruding cliff of the café property there is a reggae band performing under a big straw tarp, and the descending sun is beautifully situated on top of it while the gold sunbeams sparkle on the quiet Caribbean Sea, right through the remaining space between the band and the tarp. While I prepare myself for this ultimate Kodak moment, a middle-aged white woman standing not far away from me with her family, steps up to a young black Jamaican man who is sitting in front of this picturesque scene, and asks him if she can take a photograph of him. It is obvious why the woman specifically requests him, and not his three friends next to him, for the picture. With his yellow Jamaica T-shirt, yellow-black-green Jamaica shoes, blue jeans, orange sunglasses, and yellow hat with underneath his short dreadlocks, the black man is an outstanding figure in the for the rest predominantly white tourist crowd. He agrees to the picture and the woman squats down in order to frame his upper body against the background of the tropical sunset, reggae band, and straw tarp. While the 'photogenic' man gives up his left thumb and looks *irie* into the camera, his three friends turn away from the photographic scene – the two women clearly displeased and the other man somewhat uncomfortably laughing at his friend.

I witness the awkward photographic moment from a little distance, almost literally through my own lens. Feeling the annoyance and discomfort of the Jamaicans, and particularly my own uneasiness and embarrassment as a researcher of Jamaican audiovisual imagery but still fellow white tourist, I in my turn decide to visually record the "western tourist photographs native man" situation with my camera. After her first shot, the woman bends even closer to her "object of interest" so that she can focus on his face in greater detail. This time the man gives up his right thumb as well, lifting it close to his face so that it is still visible within the frame of the picture. The woman and I snap our second picture probably around the same time. After the shot is taken the woman thanks the man and walks back to her family, where she shows the two digital pictures to her children.

The incident at Rick's Café, an important icon of Jamaica's tourism landscape, surfaces several dimensions of the cultural politics of postcolonial space and the global economy of Jamaican imagery. It shows how the Caribbean island – the place, the idea, the commodity – is produced and consumed through various representational practices, and demonstrates that the build environment, visual culture, and popular perception of the island are largely determined by the geopolitical and economic (under)currents that have shaped Jamaica's history from Columbus' discovery to the present-day. First of all, the photographic images – both those captured by the women and by me – are part of the Western art tradition of representing the Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean as a romantic, exotic, and tropical paradise. The Caribbean picturesque is the aesthetic beauty ideal of the "timeless" Caribbean landscape that is traditionally defined, controlled, and consumed by the West. In *An Eye for the Tropics* (2006), a significant study of early tourism and photography in the Bahamas and Jamaica, Thompson describes the picturesqueness in the British Caribbean as

> The landscapes' conformity to these exoticized and fantastic ideals of the tropical landscape. The picturesque denoted a landscape that seemed like the dream of tropical nature. Crucially, 'picturesqueness' also frequently characterized parts of the islands that had been transplanted, ordered, or 'tropicalized' variously by the British colonial government, planters, British and American corporations, and tourism promoters. As such, the picturesque in the context of Jamaica and the Bahamas denoted the landscape's conformity to these colonial, imperialistic, or touristic ideals of the tropics. Unlike eighteenth-century travelers who learned to see the landscape as picturesque (…), in the context of the West Indies at the threshold of the twentieth century, the picturesque signified a landscape made into the fantastic vision of the tropics. The perceived realism of photographs of the tropics offered tourists a confirmation and reinforcement of the very truthfulness of their cultural expectations of the islands (…). Such images were only realistic inasmuch as they were consistent with travellers' dreams of the tropics (p. 21).

Like many Western image-makers before, both the women and I framed our picture to create the ultimately expected Caribbean picturesque – thereby zooming in on traditional exotic elements (i.e. the tropical sunset, the reggae band, and the straw tarp), omitting objects that could disturb the "authentic" and "peaceful" Caribbean scene (mainly the other tourists, who were all over the place, most of the times intoxicated and loud), and, in the case of the woman, adding a colourful native to the composition in order to exoticize and authenticate the Caribbean landscape even more. In particular the explicit and impudent objectification of the black Jamaican man by the white Dutch woman was, both by his friends and me, experienced as disturbing and degrading "exotic window shopping". However, by taking a picture of the tourist-native interaction – although for different reasons and unnoticeable as I stood at a discreet distance – I of course also objectified the incident, and now even more so as I publish the photographs in a publication for public consumption.

At the same time, the property of Rick's Café has been explicitly constructed to fit the Caribbean picturesque and tourist imagination. The landscape is carefully crafted and marketed for the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990). The location of the reggae band, the composition of the straw tarp, the setting of the café on the cliffs – all are markedly created to be looked at and to make pictures of, in other words, to be a visual spectacle for tourist consumption. Visitors are actively invited to "watch the sunset from one of the most famous spots in the world" (Rickscafejamaica.com 2008), and encouraged to circulate the photographic images of the Jamaican scenery throughout the world. In an almost similar way, the Jamaican man made himself into a visual spectacle as well. By deciding to wear such pronounced yellow-black-green Jamaican attire, he commodified himself into a visual icon of *Jamaican style*. His clothing highlights the consumption of Jamaican imagery through popular culture. In the contemporary global marketplace, Jamaica has become a renowned cultural brand with a strong audiovisual iconography ("Brand Jamaica", "commercial nationalism"). In sum, with the photograph of the tourist-native interaction, I consumed the visual spectacle of the Dutch woman objectifying the Jamaican man, who in his turn commodified himself in a Caribbean paradise landscape which has been especially created to be consumed, objectified, and commodified for global tourist consumption.

Consuming Caribbean Paradise

> The word "paradise" comes to signify much more than the first habitation of Adam and Eve one it is adopted to describe the colonized Caribbean. At various periods in the past five hundred years, paradise has been associated with notions of the primitive, innocence, savagery, and a lack of civilization, as well as of ignorance and nakedness, health and happiness, isolation from the rest of the world and humanity, timelessness, nature's beauty and abundance, life without labor, human beings' absolute freedom and domination over nature as God's stewards on Earth, and connections of paradise with concepts of wild pleasure, perpetual sunshine, and leisure.
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> Ian Gregory Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 2002: 5

The Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world. The sector constitutes over 30 percent of the region's Gross Domestic Product, and "for some Caribbean countries, it accounts for up to 70 percent of the national income" (Kempadoo 2004: 115). Attracting approximately 3 percent of all international tourist arrivals, the Caribbean welcomes nearly 22 million visitors each year. According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization, "more than 80% of these visitors are people of means from the United States (11.4 million), Canada (1.7 million), and Europe (5.3 million), almost all of whom come to the region for the purpose of a holiday vacation" (Hotez 2008). The most popular Caribbean tourist destinations are the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Island, Cuba, and St. Maarten (Kempadoo 2004: 115).

While tourism is generally viewed as a positive generator of economic growth, formal employment, and environmental conservation in the Caribbean, in recent years several studies have emphasized various damage-effects of the industry for the region's environments, cultures, and people. Most of these studies locate Caribbean tourism in the historical continuum of imperialism, and draw direct relationships between the Euro-American colonial enterprise and modern-day global capitalism. In her book *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003), Sheller argues that "Western European and North American publics have unceasingly consumed the natural envi-

ronment, commodities, human bodies, and cultures of the Caribbean over the past five hundred years" (p. 3). She suggests to think of the Caribbean as "an effect, a fantasy, a set of practices, and a context" (p. 5), and claims that "the emotive and figurative moorings of the colonial relations that shaped economic, cultural, material, and human exchanges between the North Atlantic region and the Caribbean in previous centuries continue to inform that relation today" (p. 7). Miller shows how the Euro-American imagining of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise has powerfully shaped the region "in a high-stakes game of making and remaking places, cultures, bodies, and natures" (p. 6).

Caribbean tourism – which emerged as a conflicted and unequal industry rooted in "romantic imperialism" (p. 38) and is nowadays highly controlled by overseas firms – is of course very explicitly based on the notion of tropical paradise. Marketing "Sun, Sand, and Sea", tourism promoters heavily contribute to the destination image of the Caribbean islands as (h)edonistic resorts; an image the islands have become increasingly dependent on. In *Last Resorts: The Costs of Tourism in the Caribbean* (2005), Pattullo states that "it is the fortune, and misfortune, of the Caribbean to conjure up the idea of 'heaven on earth' or 'a little bit of paradise' in the collective European imagination" (p. 173). She underlines the dangers of the region's high dependency on tourism and provides a critical overview of the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact-costs of the Caribbean tourism industry. In *Beyond the Sun and Sand: Caribbean Environmentalisms* (2006), Baver, Deutsch Lynch, and others specifically examine the "political ecology of paradise" in the Caribbean tourism marketplace. They address the environmental problems affecting the region beyond the popular image of tropical paradise, such as "deforestation (…), transition of agriculture to ranching or input-intensive export-oriented agriculture; rapid urbanization coupled with air and water pollution; and the destruction of coastal ecosystems" (p. 5).

In *Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism* (2003), Gmelch mainly assesses the social impacts of Caribbean Sun, Sea, and Sand tourism based on interviews with local people working in the formal tourism and hospitality industry in Barbados, and shows both the benefits and costs of the island's tourism development. Other researchers have focused on the region's informal industry of sex tourism,

described by Padilla (2007) as the "Caribbean pleasure industry". Kempadoo (1999) replaces the three traditional S's of relaxation for Sun, Sex and Gold, and casts the Caribbean sex trade within global contexts of inequality, power and consumption. She draws uneasy parallels between colonial and postcolonial discourse and presents Caribbean sex tourism almost as contemporary slave narratives: "Prostitution in the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the power and control exerted by European Colonizers over black women since the sixteenth century" (p. 5)

The production and consumption of Caribbean landscapes, cultures, and bodies is largely organized through images. The tourist's experience and perception of the Caribbean is significantly shaped by the verbal, visual, and built landscapes created by the tourism industry. However, the image of Caribbean paradise not just informs the tourist enterprise and consciousness, but heavily permeates the Euro-American visual economy and popular imagination at large. In *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2002), Strachan shows how the "paradise discourse" of the Caribbean (p. 3) is reflected in numerous literary texts and graphic images. Examining poetry, novels, travelogues, magazine advertisements, postcards, posters, brochures, stamps, paintings, and illustrations, he presents disturbing links between the myth of Caribbean paradise and colonial ideologies and economics. Strachan considers Caribbean tourism as an extension of the plantation economy – i.e. the "imperialist-colonial economy of wealth extraction and exploitation" (p. 4) – and explores the cultural, economic, and social effects of paradise discourse in the modern Caribbean. In like matter, Thompson (2006) examines the impacts of photographic and postcard images on "both the physical landscape and 'social space' of the West Indies" (p. 4), once again emphasizing the real and material implications of the "imaginary Caribbean and Caribbean imaginary" (Preager 2004).

259

The Popular Geopolitics of Jamaican Cinema

Film and television act as maps for the everyday social-cultural and geopolitical imaginaries and realities of everyday life.

Chris Lukinbeal, "The Map That Precedes the Territory", 2004: 247

In continuation of the above and other studies on Caribbean tourism and visual culture, in my scholarly work I focus on the complex interactions between Caribbean landscapes, audiovisual media, and global mobilities. More specifically, I examine the ways in which films reflect, produce, and inform popular understandings of Jamaica, and aim to uncover the meanings and effects of such understandings on the everyday environments in which the Jamaican people live. In *Cinema and Popular Geo-Politics* (2007), Power and Crampton use the notion of "popular geopolitics" to describe "geopolitical representations found in a variety of cultural forms such as the popular media, novels, magazines and cartoons" (p. 4). They argue that "film is important in the study of critical geographies because it represents a constitutive element of the production of political geographies and because political spaces, places and landscapes are implicit tools in the production of film" (p. 5). Whereas nearly all the essays of the book focus on films which explicitly deal with manifest geopolitical tensions and conflicts, my research is based on the assumption that every film implicitly reflects and produces geopolitical perceptions, agendas, and realities – both as a cinematic representation of political space and a product of cinema's political economy.

Embarking on a "political-economic-textual-anthropological analysis" (Miller et al. 2005), I explore the ways in which different image stakeholders (re)present strategic geopolitical imaginaries of Jamaica through the global cinema industry. In accordance with Cham's categories of Caribbean film practice (1992: 7–10), I identify four groupings of image stakeholders in the international economy of Jamaican film production: (1) films about Jamaica made by non-Jamaican people within the Euro-American industry ("destination image"), (2) films about Jamaica made by non-Jamaican people who inscribe themselves within the tradition of independent filmmaking ("underground image"), (3) films made by Jamaican filmmakers inside Jamaica ("homeland image"), and (4) films made by Jamaican filmmakers outside Jamaica ("border image"). While ascribing agency to all four image stakeholders, I consider the Euro-American image industry of Hollywood – with its long established role as popular geopolitician – as the dominant medium and mediator of geopolitical knowledges about the Caribbean. The audiovisual images produced by Hollywood largely

correspond to the ambivalent destination images generated by tourism promoters. It is in this context that Vickerman (1999) holds that Hollywood films which use the Caribbean as background "not merely recall (i.e. reflect) the images of island paradise that the tourism and entertainment industries find so useful", but "also actively help in the creation of such images by packaging, disseminating, and perpetuating them" (p. 87).

In Hollywood's output of feature films shot/set on or around Jamaica, the action-adventure film has traditionally been the most prominent genre, particularly its subgenres of the pirate film and the (deep) sea adventure film, with seafaring characters exploring and occupying the Caribbean waters surrounding the tropical island – e.g. *Captain Blood* (1935), *Treasure Island* (1950), *2000 Leagues under the Sea* (1954), *Swashbuckler* (1976), *Evil in the Deep* (1976), *Cutthroat Island* (1995), and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2002-2006). Characters going ashore and moving inland usually encounter both romance and danger. The early plantation dramas set in Jamaica commonly centred on amorous intrigue and exotic voodoo, and this thematic mixture has repeatedly reappeared in later features shot on the island, such as *Eureka* (1981) and *Passion and Paradise* (1989). From the 1960s – not accidentally after Jamaica's independence – several crime films in which foreign spies and cops try to bring order in the unruly tropics were filmed on the island, most notably James Bond in *Dr. No* (1962) and *Live and Let Die* (1973). Since the 1980s an increasing number of films (partly) taking place in a Jamaican holiday resort setting appeared in the cinemas, thereby mainly depicting the tropical tourist landscape as either disastrous (e.g. *Club Paradise*, 1985) or romantic (e.g. *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, 1998). Taken together, the various Hollywood genres have, throughout the annals of film history, all imagined the Jamaican landscape as a tropical playground to be enjoyed by all – an image that continues to inform the unequal political, economic, cultural, material, and human flows between the Caribbean and the North Atlantic region.

Since the 1970s, Jamaican filmmakers have responded to Hollywood's industrial and aesthetic dominance by producing homegrown images of the island beyond the hegemonic "sun, sea, and sand" framework. Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1972), the first Jamaican feature film ever to be released, portrayed the socio-eco-

nomic underdevelopment and deprivation among the poor urban mass in Jamaica's capital Kingston. By combining a violent story with in-your-face images of poverty, gritty depictions of ghetto life, raw social-realist aesthetics, and local reggae music, *The Harder They Come* presented an image of Jamaica which was far removed from the tropical-picturesque promoted by the Euro-American tourism and media industries. The alternative ghetto-reggae aesthetics articulated a distinctively Jamaican economic reality, political voice, social space, and cultural sensibility that challenged the colonial order of both mainstream cinema and society.

On the one hand, the film's ghetto aesthetics – as a derivative from the "aesthetics of garbage" championed by the New Latin American Cinema movement – expressed the dystopian experience and metaphor of underdevelopment in post-independent Jamaican society. Stam (2003) indicates that "for filmmakers without great resources, raw-footage minimalism reflects practical necessity as well as artistic strategy. (…) The garbage metaphor captured the sense of marginality, of being condemned to survive within scarcity, of being the dumping ground for transnational capitalism, of being obliged to recycle the materials of the dominant culture" (p. 35, 42). On the other hand, the utopian reggae aesthetics embodied the creative energy, vibrancy, and spirit of the Jamaican people: "*The Harder They Come* was a 'reggae film', not simply because of the use of reggae music as part of the soundtrack, but (…) above all [because of] all the dynamic creative energies which were emerging from the "grassroots" of urban Jamaican society. (…) The reggae was not simply a backdrop to that film, it was integral to the landscape and the film's inner structure and defined its distinctiveness, as coming from a completely different aesthetic source" (Kwame Dawes 1999: 27, 29).

In the decades after the national and international success of Henzell's film, the genre of the "ghetto-reggae" film has often been employed by Jamaican low-budget filmmakers who want to tell a Jamaican story set in contemporary Jamaica. Homegrown and diasporic Jamaican films such as *Rockers* (1978), *Kla$h* (1995), *Dancehall Queen* (1997), *Third World Cop* (1999), *Shottas* (2002), *Rude Boy* (2003), and *Gangsta's Paradise* (2004) all presented urban Jamaica society in the local context of protest, violence, and advocacy. However, paradoxically, in the era of consumer capitalism

the genre of the Jamaican urban film and its accompanying ghetto-reggae aesthetics have been largely incorporated in the global flow of commercial images. As "innocent" cultural commodities, Jamaican ghetto-reggae films (and music videos) offer international audiences appealing glimpses of violent but vibrant ghetto life. The popularity – and vitality – of these audiovisual homeland images largely depends upon the voyeuristic appetite among affluent consumer audiences across the world for "the perceived depth and authenticity of black urban experience and lifestyle" (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2003: 7).

Like the tropical-picturesque aesthetics of Euro-American cinema, the ghetto-reggae aesthetics of Jamaican cinema are integral parts of the cultural logic and geopolitical order of late capitalism. According to Jamaican director and producer Lennie Little-White, "the Jamaican aesthetic is submerged within the economic reality of the world situation. (…) I think it's going to be difficult for it to have any kind of currency in the long term way because we don't control our money" (personal interview). In my research I investigate the economic realities of global Jamaican imagery, and aim to expose the underlying geopolitical imbalances of global commodity culture.

What to Do With It Once You Know

> A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings. The meanings of verbal, visual and built landscapes have a complex interwoven history. (…) And of course, every study of a landscape further transforms its meaning, depositing yet another layer of cultural representation.
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> Daniels and Cosgrove, *The Iconography of Landscape*, 1988: 1

Having briefly outlined my research project and presented some of the preliminary findings regarding the global imaginary of the Caribbean, it is worth asking the question: how to move from here? During my fieldwork and data collection I have acquired knowledge of the often disturbing ways in which global geopolitical economics "fashion"

Caribbean landscapes, livelihoods, and industries, but what to do with this knowledge once back in the Netherlands? How do I bridge the gap between the world of the academia and the world of the practitioners? My answer is: by walking ambivalently and creatively in both worlds.

First of all, within the academic world, I use my knowledge and experience to teach my students at the University of Amsterdam in various courses about media, power, and space, and try to make them aware – and critical – of the political economy and postcolonial discontents of global media. Also, I present my findings at various relevant conferences in the Caribbean, the United States, and, particularly, Europe – such as the Voice in Tourism Development conference in Breda, the Netherlands. However, as a privileged western researcher I always feel somewhat uncomfortable to talk about the Caribbean within a western academic arena which sometimes seems to use the region as to-be-studied playground. I form part of the western academic tradition of doing ethnographic research in a non-western society and explaining its postcolonial phenomena from a (white) outsider perspective, thereby "helping turn marginality itself in a valuable intellectual commodity" (Huggan 2001: viii). I make use of the infrastructures available to me as a western researcher and I can afford travelling to and through the locations and sites under investigation. Eventually, my work is above all the creative product of my access to funding and privilege to mobility. From this perspective, my entire research undertaking could be seen as a reflection of the ongoing domination of the First World over the Third World and its "profound hegemonic influence on the information orders of the Western world (...) and its specialized institutions and academics" (Bhabha 1994: 30).

My feeling of unease is also fuelled by my own consumption of the Caribbean through tourism and popular culture. During my seven months research period (February – August 2006), I extensively travelled through the island, participated in various tourism activities, visited various cultural events, and took many pictures of renowned historical sites and lush island sceneries. Since a Jamaican friend of mine was working at the all-inclusive Sandals resort in Ocho Rios at the time, I was able to gain some free one-day admissions to the luxurious North Coast tourist property and observe

the double-edged inner workings of Jamaica's leading package holiday business. It was there, inside the "gates, patrolled perimeter walls, and barbed wire fencing" witnessing the "politics of enjoyment" (Kingsbury 2005), that I felt most uncomfortable and conflicted. However, as I showed in the introduction, also in the less exclusionary and more informal tourist setting of Rick's Café the politics of enjoyment are very much at work. Although I had a great time jumping from the cliffs, looking at other people's jumps, watching the beautiful sunset, and absorbing the relaxed atmosphere, I simultaneously experienced great discomfort observing the Caribbean "pleasure" environments and bodies-in-performance – particularly the young local kids who spectacularly yet seemingly dangerously dived from a rocky outcrop in an effort to get some American dollars (see pictures). In disturbing tourist settings like this I always try to justify my presence by foolishly telling myself that I am there as a researcher, but of course I cannot avoid being just another link in the global consumption chain of the Caribbean.

Still, despite my situatedness in the ambivalent realities of today's international marketplace, I very much value my participatory and mobile approach. The aim of my scholarly work is not to uncritically confirm the audiovisual regimes of the postcolonial Caribbean, but to provide critical insights into its (historical) workings and examine its (contemporary) effects on the physical landscapes and lived environments in the region. Bhabha (1994) argues that "there is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that (...) the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West" (p. 28). He indicates that a committed theoretical perspective which takes "the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world (...) as the paradigmatic place of departure" could successfully subvert and replace the hegemonic (Western) language of theory (p. 31). According to Bhabha, the "committed intellectual" abolishes the division between theory and politics and uses his writings to take a political position dedicated to social transformation: "It exists side by side with it – the one [politics] is the enabling part of the other [theory]. (...) 'What is to be done?' must acknowledge the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the 'social' and makes it available as an objective of and for, action" (p. 32–34).

265

From several online traveller reviews it appears that most visitors obliviously take pleasure from the diving Jamaican youths at Rick's Café: "I enjoyed watching (...) the young local kids having fun diving in the water"; "even a little future diver was hitting me up for a couple bucks to watch him dive... lol he was probably only 10 yrs old"; "Take lots of change as the little kids diving off the cliffs cry if you can't share your money around fairly" (TripAdvisor).

I consider myself a committed intellectual for the fact that I, with my writings and teachings, seek to foster critical awareness of the power and impact of audiovisual imagery, and question the geopolitical asymmetries of the global "free market" economy from a devoted postcolonial perspective. Furthermore, as part of this perspective, I integrate the ideas, reflections, and opinions of Caribbean scholars and practitioners in my research. In this sense, following Slater (2004), "it can be restated that the subaltern not only speak, act and write back – they also form intrinsic part of the globality of knowledge" (p. vii). During my fieldwork period in Kingston I interviewed many Jamaican directors, producers, actors, policymakers, and representatives of cultural organizations. I learnt about their practices, motivations, and struggles, and subsequently formed a conceptual framework based on the many stimulating conversations. Throughout the years I also travelled to Miami, Los Angeles, New York, and London to interview Jamaican (diasporic) filmmakers there, as well as to gain insights into the urban Caribbean communities in North America and Western Europe. All these travels, experiences, and knowledges have significantly shaped and guided my research

and thinking on geopolitical conceptions and north south relations in the context of postcolonial globality. At the same time, they inspired me to found the Caribbean Creativity Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of Caribbean cultural creativity and entrepreneurship. The foundation exists not outside but *besides* my academic activities, thereby merging the theoretical, the political, and the economic into one "committed enterprise" (Davidson 2005).

The Committed Enterprise of Caribbean Creativity

> Caribbean cultural industries are a critical catalyst for identity formation, nation building and (...) cultural confidence of the region and diasporic communities. Investing in the cultural industries provides worthwhile return because the sector generates new, high-value added and indigenous forms of employment, production and exports, aids in the diversification of mono-production economies and facilitates a more competitive development platform. Cultural industries should be viewed as a critical strategic resource in the move towards creating sustainable development options.
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> Keith Nurse, *UNESCO*, 2005

Carrying the thoughts of bridging the gap between the academic world and the practical world, redressing the imbalances of the global cultural industries, and creating spaces for Caribbean cultural expression, in 2008 I initiated the Caribbean Creativity Foundation (www.caribbeancreatvity.org) together with some like-minded people. We adopted the following mission statement: "to support and promote cultural-entrepreneurial creativity by people from (and/or committed to) the Caribbean in order to accommodate their cultural practices and expressions as well as to strengthen their economic capacity and competitiveness in today's diverse world." We mainly focus on the converging cultural fields of film, photography, fashion, but also incorporate the traditional visual arts, music production, print and electronic publishing, and digital media creativity. Moreover, Caribbean Creativity aims to encourage creative ventures (in research, education, entrepreneurship, and business) in Caribbean culture, and to stimulate cross-cultural understanding and creative exchanges between the Carib-

bean, the Netherlands, and the rest of the world. While acting as facilitator, intermediary and distributor, we aims to provide a creative network of artists-entrepreneurs, academics, organizations, and corporations to "push"" the Caribbean both culturally and economically forward to the world (hence our logo).

The push cart vendor is a very visible and significant figure in modern Caribbean society. Using a cart to sell low-cost goods along the road (usually local foods such as coconuts, apples, plaintains, breadfruit, yams, ackees, and jerk chicken), the street vendor conducts a small informal business that provides him alternative employment and economic survival in the urban marketplace. As a central actor of Caribbean's postcolonial environment, the push cart man embodies the spirit of resistance to corporate capitalism and its "global, national, and urban systems of race, class, and gender inequality" (Karides 2006: 28). The Caribbean push cart vendor represents creativity, commitment, assertiveness, determination, independence, and entrepreneurship – all values that the Caribbean Creativity Foundation aims to communicate, foster, and promote.

To fulfil our mission we have set eight interrelated objectives:

- To create opportunities for Caribbean (diasporic) artists-entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their work online through a digital platform and web shop;

- To create opportunities for Caribbean (diasporic) artists-entrepreneurs to showcase their work offline at festivals, galleries, exhibitions, shows, and other events in the Netherlands and the rest of the world;
- To (co-)organize a Caribbean film festival in Amsterdam, the Netherlands;
- To link Caribbean film and other (audio)visual projects with potential investors throughout the world;
- To provide guidance and training for Caribbean (diasporic) artists-entrepreneurs in fund recruitment, business management, and project planning;
- To establish an (academic) network of experts on the Caribbean in order to enhance knowledge and awareness of the Caribbean through interviews, workshops, lectures, and seminars;
- To establish a partner network of organizations, companies, and individuals committed to the Caribbean as to enable productive creative connections between them;
- To set up a Caribbean research centre and library in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and to realize student and trainee exchanges between the Caribbean and the Netherlands.

As a starting non-profit cultural organization dependent on funding, donations, and volunteers, we seek to slowly but consistently work towards the realization of our mission and objectives. So far we have mainly focused on event organization, opportunity creation, and project support. In the next few years we aim to gradually expand our activities and scope, and to ensure our sustainability and independence (we hold the belief that, over time, we can become self-sufficient and develop into a profitable enterprise since we consider the cultural industries, with its convergence of creativity, innovation, and business, as a significant sector of the future global economy).

The first accomplishment of Caribbean Creativity was the composition of a Jamaican film and music programme for the 2008 summer edition of the Shoot Me Film Festival in The Hague, the Netherlands. I served as curator of this programme and selected eight Jamaican and Jamaica-themed films to be screened. I was also able to bring Rick Elgood and Joel Burke, two directors working in the Jamaican film industry, and beginning reggae artist Iya Ingi from Jamaica to the event. A few months later I

ventured into Jamaican film production by becoming an active participant in the first feature film project of Jamaican filmmaker and personal friend Mary Wells. Apart from financing a part of the shooting costs of this low-budget urban noir thriller, I contributed to the creative elements of the filmmaking process as well, such as the script development process, business plan, investment prospectus, and official website. Shooting will start in early 2009, and if the film – and thus the investment – proves to be a success, it will provide a business example for prospective investors in Jamaican film and as such hopefully stimulate the island's cinematographic industry. Besides this initiative, Caribbean Creativity is currently involved in assisting the manuscript preparation for a forthcoming "Jamerican" novel, developing a web shop selling Caribbean cultural products, organizing various Caribbean film events in Amsterdam, and enhancing our creative network of affiliate partners.

By venturing into the Caribbean cultural industries, we inevitably participate in the global marketplace and its geo-cultural logic. A similar line of self-effacing theoretical reasoning as that described earlier in relation to the academic world could therefore be applied to the practical world as well. Again, knowledge and financial resources are transferred from the North to the South, and the Caribbean cultural products are circulated (and adjusted) as commodities for predominantly western audiences. By geographically grouping, packaging, and promoting Caribbean popular culture for global (western) consumption, Caribbean Creativity seems to actively contribute to the exotic imagination and commodification of Caribbean marginality. However, it is the question to what extent such theoretical reasoning, however legitimate, is productive and helpful in the hands-on world of economics and politics. While the capitalist world has many postcolonial discontents, its "grammar of commerce" (Luttwak 1990) constitutes the everyday reality in which millions of people earn a living and shape their livelihoods. They are surrounded by the global economic environment and dealing with it on a day-to-day basis. How useful, then, is it to "voice" the underlying geopolitical discourses when the global industries of tourism and entertainment provide thousands of Caribbean people an income for themselves and their families? Is it not more pertinent to look at the capabilities, resources, and activities required for a means of living *within* the existing capitalist world-system? According to Torres-Saillant (2006), "liberatory projects and discourses here [in the Caribbean] seem to

awaken increasingly less enthusiasm as the lives of people appear to revolve primarily around the business of material survival in dependent and declining economies that offer the Antillean person no social guarantee" (p. 28). In this regard, as Gmelch (2003) shows, workers employed in the Barbadian tourist industry "all spoke favourably about their jobs" (p. 193), and also most Jamaicans I spoke to considered tourism as a positive contributor to socio-economic development.

Likewise, as emerged from my interviews, most Jamaicans working in the entertainment industry are in the first place concerned with their struggle for economic survival and looking for commercial opportunities within the global cultural industries. To use Little-White's words again: "Is money run things. (...) That's what I see. (...) It's the world situation. Economics, that's what it comes down to. It comes down to a straight situation of how can I survive, how can I keep ahead of the game and at some stage they *gong* you up. (...) But you recognize, as they say in Jamaica, that is the runnings [it's the way it is]. It's just runnings..." (personal interview, 29-06-2006). By combining a critical postcolonial perspective and conscious participatory approach, I both theoretically and practically situate myself within the complex runnings of geopolitical boundaries, economic activities, and cultural images – creating a committed enterprise that serves the converging purposes of awareness raising, sustainable development, and "brand new justice" (Anholt 2005) in today's global commodity culture.

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