Identity and Erasure: Finding the Elusive Caribbean

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– *Caribbean Autobiography: cultural identity and self-representation*, by Sandra Pouchet Paquet. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
– *Decolonising the Caribbean: Dutch policies in a comparative perspective*, by Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003.
– *Ah Come Back Home: Perspectives on the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival,* edited by Ian I. Smart, and Kimani S. K. Nehusi. Washington: Original World Press, 2000.

The Caribbean can be many things to many people: a geographic region somewhere in America's backyard, an English-speaking outpost of the British Empire, an exciting holiday destination for North Americans and Europeans, a place where dirty money is easily laundered, and even an undefined, exotic area that contains the dreaded Bermuda Triangle, the mythical lost city of El Dorado, the fabled Fountain of Youth and the island home of Robinson Crusoe. Enriched by the process of creolization, the cosmopolitanism of the average Caribbean person is also well recognized: 'No Indian from India, no European, no African can adjust with greater ease and naturalness to new situations' (Lamming 1960, 34). As a concept or notion 'the Caribbean' can also be seen to have a marvellous elasticity that defies the imposition of clear geographic boundaries, has no distinct religious tradition, no agreed-upon set of political values, and no single cultural orientation.

What, then, is the Caribbean? Who can justifiably claim to belong to it? Of the various peoples who have come to comprise the region, whose identity markers will be most central in defining the whole? For not all citizens of a nation or a region will be equally privileged and not all will have equal input in the definition of national or regional identity. In other words, because power implies a process of social negotiation, and because power is unequally distributed in social groups, some parties to the process will be more represented than others. This is where the notion of *erasure* is tied to any appreciation of *identity,* and played out in the history and politics of colonization and decolonization in the Caribbean. As might be imagined, the colonially-conditioned divisions of race and gender figured (and continue to figure) prominently in the entire process and bring to mind Bob Marley's advice to Caribbean people: 'emancipate your minds from mental slavery' (*Redemption Song*).

Erasure is in large part the act of neglecting, looking past, minimizing, ignoring or rendering invisible an *other*. Rhoda Reddock (1996) examines the academic and political consequences of erasure at the level of ethnicity, and draws attention to four (among many other) neglected minorities in the Caribbean: the Amerindians of Guyana, the Karifuna or Caribs of Dominica, the Chinese in Jamaica, and the

Sindhis and Gujaratis in Barbados. Although some of these are indigenous and some have lived in the Caribbean for hundreds of years, they are commonly overlooked, even by those who today claim 'authentic' Caribbean roots and a commitment to the region as an integrated whole.

In this essay I focus on three recent studies that address the ways in which identity and erasure have come dialectically to embody several erased peoples and groups of people in the Caribbean. I begin with the contributions of Sandra Pouchet Paquet, who focuses on the heyday of colonialism, slavery and women in Caribbean history, and laments the fact that 'The female ancestor is effectively silenced if not erased' (Paquet 2002, 11) in the writing of that history. To this end she cites Carole Boyce-Davies and Elaine Fido, who, in assessing the literature and historiography of the region, also spoke of '... the historical absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism and decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues' (1990, 1).

Next I examine the contributions of Geert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers (2003), who move from the slave period and colonialism proper and begin to discuss the uneven dismantling of colonialism in the various Caribbean countries, and its persistence in others. In the process they focus on erasure at the wider sub-regional level of groupings of countries. Thus, Oostindie and Klinkers protest the common academic and political tendency to assume that the Caribbean is principally an English-speaking group of countries; a tendency that simultaneously erases or minimizes the presence and contributions of other Caribbean peoples. These authors charge that while this erasure is undeniable in the cases of the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean, it is particularly evident with regard to the Dutch Caribbean. For while much has been written on the wider region generally, it is 'seldom with serious attention to the former Dutch colonies of Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba' (2003, 10). And as they go on to argue, most general histories 'tend virtually to neglect the Dutch Caribbean' (p. 234). This 'neglect' is synonymous with erasure and constitutes a major obstacle for anyone wishing to develop a truly comprehensive understanding of the entire region.

Finally, there are Smart and Nehusi (2000), who invoke the idea of erasure and the attempt by African-ancestored people in the Caribbean, but especially in Trinidad, to resist erasure and reclaim their identity. Smart and Nehusi look at efforts of Afro-Trinidadians to forge a diasporic identity in which culture (Carnival) is the centrepiece of African, ancestral lore. Thus, in describing the trade in African slaves and the institution of New World slavery as 'the largest crime in human history,' Nehusi speaks of the *Maafa,* or the African Holocaust, as a terror that has been hushed up: 'one part of that crime has been the attempt to forget, to pretend that it did not happen and to present a history ethnically cleansed of all traces of this genocide ...' (Nehusi 2000, 8). Very much in line with the thinking of Smart and Nehusi, Paquet views slavery as a crime and speaks of the 'depravity of the slave owner' (p. 42) as she applauds the efforts of Mary Prince to expose the horrors of the system: 'Prince lays bare for public scrutiny the criminality of slave owners and the legal system that endorses their conduct' (Paquet 2002, 41).

In developing his argument Nehusi hints at a conspiracy or historical hoax which witnessed the abandonment of black Trinidadians and their treatment as 'non-persons by a continuing Eurocentric system which refuses to recognize them

and their traditions as valid and refuses to recognize the history of struggle, mainly by Afrikan people.' (Nehusi 2000a, 11). To this Ian Smart adds that 'Africans all over the globe who have been subjected to white supremacy must be engaged unremittingly in the struggle for liberation in order to be made whole again' (Smart 2000b, 199). This notion of being 'made whole again' speaks directly to the idea of erasure and the recapture of lost identity.

Sandra Pouchet Paquet is principally concerned with two things: (a) finding the Caribbean identity and (b) autobiography as a literary genre. She uses the latter to pursue the former. Autobiography does not only tell a story of the biographer, but of the very society and community that shaped and nurtured her/him. So it is not simply a personal recounting of episodes that have shaped one's life; but if properly written, autobiography can give valuable insights into the social worlds of the various storytellers. To this end Paquet exposes the 'historical silencing of the female ancestor' as evidenced in the 'discovery and republication of the nineteenth-century narratives of the Hart sisters (Elizabeth and Ann), Mary Prince, and Mary Seacole between 1987 and1993' (2002, 13). These women bring to light what an inadvertent male scholarship had previously buried: a strong female culture of resistance both before and after emancipation.

Unlike similar approaches, this work is careful not to essentialize women. Instead it is sensitive to their individual differences while weaving together common strands in their biographical experiences and narratives to produce a common story of erasure, resistance and strength. In her words they 'throw light on the idiosyncrasies of a female culture of resistance in the Caribbean before and after emancipation' (Paquet 2002, 13). Focusing on the signal contributions of strong women like Elizabeth and Anne Hart, Mary Seacole and Mary Prince, who prepared the way for future leading male Caribbean writers such as C.L.R. James, George Lamming, Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul, Paquet does not mince words. In fact she openly acknowledges the unconscious impact of patriarchy, even on those men, and the ways in which they too contributed to the alienation, erasure and misrepresentation of women in Caribbean literary culture (p. 73).

Clearly reflecting different social trajectories and individual strengths, the narratives of these four women nevertheless contain and speak to essential elements in the forging of a Caribbean identity. Dialectically, their efforts to reverse erasure through resistance culminated in a powerful story of struggle, setback and triumph of the human spirit. The Hart sisters, whose father was a free black, a plantation owner and a slaveholder, both married white men of influence. This gave them an important measure of social capital and they were able to use their religion (Methodism) and social status as the bases from which to promote ideas about racial equality and the empowerment of women. Mary Seacole was a unique woman for her time. The child of a free black Jamaican woman and a Scottish officer, she always set her sights on the wider world beyond Jamaica, and in time she became a creole 'doctress', a traveller and adventurer, entrepreneur, sutler and hotelier. The idea is not to romanticize her accomplishments for Seacole was human and vulnerable, and she betrayed all the contradictions of a woman placed in that age and time: resistance, accommodation and admiration for imperialism which contained 'the civilizing values she professes to honor' (Paquet 2002, 56). For while she railed against the injustices of race and sex discrimination she did not directly chal-

lenge the idea of a British empire as much as she struggled 'to redefine her place in it' (p. 56). Seacole could thus be seen as a prototype of the modern-day Afro-Saxon.

Then there was Mary Prince, a slave woman who did not have the privileges of the Hart sisters or of Mary Seacole, and thus has a different take on the colonial situation. Comparing the two Marys (Seacole and Prince), Paquet writes that Prince embodied 'an embryonic nationalism formed in resistance to slavery' while Seacole reflected 'an acceptance of colonialism after slavery' (p. 52). Mary Prince was a rebel in spirit and action, and her life story is partly a struggle against erasure that illuminates another dimension of the contradictions of the time: Mary Prince was a 'West Indian slave marooned in England by laws that made slavery illegal in England, while it was still legal in the colonies' (p. 31). And as Paquet reports, the erasure and contradiction continue even in the twentieth-century male texts referred to above that are 'devoid of reference to her resistant, militant spirit' (p. 32). Though generally muted (erased) the voice of the black woman becomes audible in the narrative of Prince whose 'individual life story establishes and validates a slave woman's point of view' while simultaneously serving as the foundation for 'self-identification and self-fulfilment in anticipation of the historical changes' that would later follow in the wake of emancipation (p. 33-4). Thus, viewed together, the autobiographies of the Hart sisters, Mary Seacole and Mary Prince afford us an insight into the practical and intellectual worlds of very different women, and into their multifaceted struggles whether as slaves, as women, as free coloureds, as rape victims, and finally as silenced products of colonial brutality. In humanizing themselves through their autobiographies these women are able to expose the dehumanizing conditions under which so many millions were erased.

Another key motif in Paquet is that of *home* and its relationship to errantry, travel, departure and return. These are central themes in Caribbean literature and reflect the post-colonial condition where the forced migrations associated with slavery and indentureship are the backdrops against which post-colonial peoples now seek to establish diasporic existences and to fashion a new 'way in the world'. The initial trauma of forced removal from their ancestral lands has led to a spiritual yearning for rootedness and symbolic return to *home*. Further, the yearning in question is best represented in the notion of *primordialism,* for it is only at *home* that one supposedly finds the acceptance and security from which to begin to negotiate one's way in the world. Thus, 'travel as exploration and transforming encounter turns on the quest for El Dorado, the lost world, the aboriginal landscape, identity, origins, ancestry psychic reconnection, and rebirth' (Paquet 2002, 196). Viewed in this way the Caribbean is both home and an African diasporic home away from home, and to this end Paquet invokes Wilfred Cartey, Carole Boyce-Davies, Claude McKay, George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite to make the case for a 'holistic Caribbean' that comprises 'a culturally diverse yet traditional' culture block that stresses 'the genealogical connection with Africa' (p. 74-5). While departure could be non-voluntary or forced (slavery), Paquet also focuses on voluntary departure, as in the Caribbean migrant to England or some other metropolitan centre. Often for economic reasons, it is a sort of voluntary exile in Lamming's thinking, that has given rise to scores of Caribbean diasporas in various European metropoles.

This observation is related to the claim that the Caribbean black in New York,

London, Berlin or Toronto is really a twice-migrant; first from Africa and second from the Caribbean. The connection to an African *home* is the centrepiece of much contemporary Afrocentric politics, but that connection is largely mythical and imagined, although many commentators seem willing to forget this fact. This speaks directly to the idea of home and belonging as articulated by two unapologetic Afrocentrists, Ian Smart and Kimani Nehusi (2000). For example, there is Nehusi who sees home as 'a nurturing place, a space of spiritual, psychological, social, and physical comfort, freedom, security and satisfaction, and ultimately confidence, because we know that we will be understood there ... humans feel at home only when they can be themselves in culturally familiar ways. Home is therefore ... a space that not merely permits but encourages us to be our own selves and in which we are 'easy' – not merely familiar, but comfortable too (Nehusi 2000a, 1-2).

This essentialist and romantic theme of 'Africa as home' is picked up by Smart who treats all black people as Africans and affirms that the 'African mind is one that deals with the big picture. The African mind is fundamentally driven by and towards holism' (Smart 2000a, 51). And apparently unmindful of the process of creolization, Smart goes on boldly to assert that '[t]he core of Caribbean culture is the African heritage' (2000a, 70).

All of this is by way of setting the stage for the claim that Trinidad is an African country whose central cultural marker is the Carnival. According to Smart, Nehusi and several of the contributors to the volume in question, Carnival is an African festival that has become the national festival of Trinidad: 'Carnival is "a black thing", a Wosirian (Osirian) mystery play that was celebrated annually in Kemet (Ancient Egypt) from the very dawn of history' (Smart 2000a, 29). Lamentably, however, the African origins and the signal contributions of Africans are bring *erased* by a class and colour conspiracy to wrest the festival from its original African founders. In essentialist language, these authors assume that Trinidad means African, that African means black, and that black means poor or working class (Smart 2000a, 63). Thus, the non-black presence in the Carnival, whether as masquerader, bandleader or owner, or costume designer, is all part of the Eurocentric (which is code for white and upper class) attempt to silence and erase the African.

For one contributor, Pearl Springer, the consequence is that the Carnival has been reshaped in such as way that the African presence in the national festival is erased or reduced to that of a street vendor and 'hired hand' that does the physical labour in making the mas (Springer 2000, 22). Nehusi is in full agreement with this take on erasure of the black person: 'Afrikan Trinidadians have been abandoned, declared nonpersons by a continuing Eurocentric system which refuses to recognize them and their traditions as valid and refuses to recognize the history of struggle ...' (2000a, 11). Another contributor, Patricia Alleyne Dettmers, invokes the universal African and has no difficulty speaking of 'Africans ... born in Trinidad and Tobago' (2000, 132). Of particular significance here is the fact that these Afrocentric commentators who rail against the erasure of Africans and the suppression of African identity, simultaneously engage in their own erasure of the East Indian, the Chinese and other ethnic groups in Trinidad (Allahar 2004, 129-33). Thus, in the same volume, Patricia Moran, affirms that 'the Caribbean woman is basically African' (2000, 169).

As is clear, like the wider Caribbean region as a whole, the books and authors under review here are not free of contradiction and ambivalence. For the Afrocentric case put forward by writers like Smart and Nehusi (and their five co-authors) clearly looks past the well known erasure of the East Indians' presence and contributions they have made to such countries as Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. For this reason David Trotman wrote sarcastically of Trinidad's supposed multi-racial paradise on the eve of independence (1962) and the racially coloured anticipation that filled the Trinidad air at the time: 'it was a multi-racial picture from which the Indian seemed strangely absent' (1991, 393). Trotman speaks of the privileging of African traditions to the neglect of Indian ones, and takes issue with one calypsonian, whose calypso titled 'Portrait of Trinidad' only identified the Afro-associated elements of steelband, calypso and carnival as national cultural achievements. This led Trotman wryly to observe: 'In this portrait the Indian is painted out' (p. 394). Paquet also laments this erasure as it is articulated by George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul (2002, 176, 189-90).

The authors of the studies contained in Smart and Nehusi (2000) speak ideologically to what *supposedly* binds the community together, for example, common blood lines, common ethno-cultural experience, common collective memory, common African origins and so on. I say *supposedly* for much of this idea of community cohesiveness is rather mythical or fictional. It is part of the essentialization of Africa and Africans that is common among Afrocentrist commentators, and in the process all others are erased. Further, in the move to homogenize and essentialize Africans, they conveniently ignore those social and structural features that divide the community. I am thinking here of internal, class, colour, economic, and political inequalities within, say, the so-called African diasporic community, not to mention ideological cleavages related to religion, inter- and intra-ethnic rivalries.

Given the role played by myths of ethnic descent in the invoking of national unity and cultural identity, Smart and Nehusi problematize the political dimensions of cultural nationalism as it applies to the Trinidad carnival. They give cultural nationalism a colour – black – which means there are major implications for those who are defined out of the societal culture, for example, those who claim East Indian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, etc., descents. To affirm that Carnival is Trinidad's *national* festival implies that the so-called Indo-Trinidadians, who, for whatever reasons, do not see carnival as their national cultural marker, are somehow less than full Trinidadians. In the minds of black nationalists, then, the carnival, which was born in Africa, is the supreme African festival and belongs entirely to black people, who, regardless of where they were born, are Africans! Africa is *home* for all Africans.

This is why Smart depicts the Trinidad carnival as 'the quintessential African festival' (2000a, 72), and Nehusi sees the street parade segment of the celebration as symbolic of the Africans' reclaiming their physical, spiritual and cultural freedom: 'Possession of the streets was a sign of Afrikan possession of self, a spiritual re-connection with ancestors through millennia of cultural practice, a liberation through expression of impulses carried in genes for uncounted generations ....' (2000b, 96). Some critics have charged that the foregoing constitutes part of the larger racist agenda of those black nationalists who want to define carnival in ethno-racial terms: 'Trinbagonians can then rightly claim their festival as "we

thing" only because it is a "black thing"' (Smart 2000a, 72). The loose invoking of the royal 'we' must not be taken as referring to all Trinbagonians, however, for it is tied to the deliberate erasure of the East Indian.

Thus, the contributors to the volume in question can be seen as endorsing the *myth of merry Africa* and spinning tall tales of racial identity and solidarity among Africans the world over. They are unequivocal in their claim that Africa is the cradle of human civilization and the source of ancient human history. In spite of these facts, however, contemporary history is said to be written and produced by white supremacist barbarians bent on erasing the major contributions of Africans. Thus, Alleyne-Dettmers essentializes 'barbaric Europeans' (2000, 139), and both Smart (2000b, 199) and Moran (2000, 174) condemn what they refer to generally as 'European barbarism', while Olaogun Adeyinka speaks more specifically of the 'heroic struggles of Africans' to liberate themselves 'from Spanish, French and British barbarism' (2000, 111). Patricia Moran wants to rewrite history for she fears that there is a conspiracy on the part of what she calls 'white bandits' and those 'Aryan marauders' (p. 175), who, even today, would steal 'we thing', which is carnival and steelband! In the assertion of an absolute African identity there is the absolute erasure of the East Indian and other ethnic groups that comprise the society.

As the foregoing assessment of Smart and Nehusi (2000) suggests, in the public's mind, the term Caribbean brings immediately to mind the English-speaking countries of the region and their African-descended populations. Somewhat less immediate are the Spanish-speaking countries of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Even less immediate are the French countries (provinces) of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the independent, French-speaking country of Haiti. Then there is the almost forgotten, *erased,* Caribbean: the Dutch-speaking Netherlands Antilles and Suriname.

Although scholarship on the Caribbean has devoted considerable attention to the situation of East Indians in Trinidad and Guyana, and their erasure at the hands of both the colonial authorities and the various 'black' governments that inherited the seats of power following independence, not much is known about their counterparts in Suriname and other parts of the Dutch Caribbean. In fact, when addressing Caribbean studies generally, Suriname and the other countries of the Netherlands Antilles are usually an afterthought; a curious appendage of the better-known English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. This leads to an incomplete picture of the region for if one were to assess the situation of the East Indians in the Caribbean, the Surinamese case seems to parallel that of Trinidad and Guyana, but the lessons learned in the latter were lost on the former. Indeed, in the years leading up to Suriname's independence (1975), the East Indian population had the same fears and misgivings as their counterparts in Trinidad and Guyana a decade and a half earlier. And if political independence in these two countries was black in complexion, the social and political erasure of their East Indian populations could be expected to be repeated in Suriname. Thus, Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers wrote that: 'quietly the Hindustani population were only afraid that those who would receive independence (i.e. the Afro-Surinamese) would use this for the enlargement of their own political power' (2003, 112). As a consequence the East Indians generally opposed independence and opted for continued colonial dependence on the Dutch (p. 103, 112).

For Oostindie and Klinkers (2003), then, this is only one reason why any comprehensive attempt to understand the history and sociology of the Caribbean must include the contributions that the Dutch countries have made to the shaping of the region's wider culture and politics. Yet one must not homogenize all the Dutch countries, for Suriname and Aruba, for example, are quite politically, socially and culturally distinct. And whereas the sentiments of 'black power' informed the political sensibilities of Curaçao's population, the 'political elites of Aruba had always tended to emphasise the Euro-Amerinidian roots of their island as opposed to the African character of Curaçao' (2003, 122).

Indeed, as these authors point out, after losing Indonesia the Dutch lost most of their appetite for empire and appeared to retain their Caribbean possessions only reluctantly. And after the independence of Suriname, an unusual situation was presented whereby the mother country seemed willing to free itself from the responsibilities of Empire, but the colonies in question would not let them off the hook (p. 116, 145). This is reminiscent of what Rosemarijn Hoefte and Gert Oostindie call 'an example of upside-down decolonization with the metropolis, not the former colonies, pressing for independence' (1991, 93).

As Oostindie and Klinkers convincingly argue, whereas in the British West Indies (BWI) the sentiment for independence was strong in the 1950s and 1960s, this was not the case in the French West Indies and the Dutch West Indies (2003, 46-7). Suriname was the exception, but it was continental and not part of the so-called Antilles or Netherlands Antilles. In the case of the United States, Puerto Rico was a mixed bag with a significant proportion desiring statehood and an equal number preferring the continuation of the status quo, while an insignificant minority has always favoured independence. The US Virgin Islands, on the other hand, has never had any pretensions at independence of any kind. What is most striking about all these non-sovereign Caribbean states today (the remaining British Overseas Territories, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, St. Martin, Martinique and Guadeloupe, Curaçao, St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius, Bonaire and Aruba), is that they have a higher standard of living than the independent states, which leads some to make the perverse claim for continued colonization. The fact of the matter, however, is that all the economies in question are almost totally subsidized by the mother countries so local or indigenous economic development is virtually non-existent. The higher standards of living are thus quite precarious and artificial and could crash any time the colonial power decided to withdraw. This led to the obvious conclusion that because: 'from the Dutch side, millions of guilders are pumped into the Antilles and Suriname on a yearly basis,' it would be far more preferable that 'today rather than tomorrow that the Netherlands would get rid of the Antilles and Suriname' (Oostindie and Klinkers 2003, 116).

But as noted by Paquet earlier, decolonization is intimately tied to identity, whether juridical or socio-cultural, and wrapped up in the complex Caribbean traditions of errantry, travel, migration and return. So following the insights of Derek Walcott, after all the travel is over, return to *home* is on the agenda; but 'home' is a nuanced Caribbean with African sensibilities. Further, because finding self is the prerequisite to finding *home* (Paquet 2002, 171, 173, 186-7; Smart and Nehusi 2000), and because self- knowledge leads to self-realization (Paquet 2002, 184, 187, 191), identity and belonging are inextricably tied to (political) action.

Thus, in the case of the remaining British Overseas Territories, there is the on-going debate over citizenship, passports and legal rights that led to the clumsy creation of a category of 'British dependent territory passport holders'. This has given rise to what Oostindie and Klinkers call a group of persons with 'a form of paper identity' that has turned them into 'citizens of nowhere' (2003, 195). The same applies to the Surinamers and other Antillean peoples, who want to retain their distinctive Caribbean cultural identities, but who, mainly for economic rea-sons insist on retaining Dutch passports, Dutch citizenship, and all associated rights and privileges. And just as growing economic problems (unemployment) and social problems (racial discrimination) led the British in the 1960s to restrict free movement of British subjects from the former colonies to the metropolis, the French sought to encourage economic development in Martinique and Guadeloupe in order to reduce the numbers of those emigrating to France, and The Hague has made similar attempts to limit the numbers of Surinamese and Antilleans who have claims on Dutch citizenship. Once more the parallels are compelling but the conse-quences of erasure prevent them from being fully grasped.

Another instructive parallel that seems lost in the erasure of the Dutch Carib-bean concerns the idea of regional federation or integration. When Jamaica decided to pull out of the federation of the ten British West Indian territories in 1961, Trinidad's Eric Williams announced that 1 from 10 leaves naught, implying that the idea of federation was dead (Knight and Palmer 1989, 14-15). For their part the Dutch Antilles, which are composed of six islands, were faced with an almost ex-act dilemma when Aruba was granted 'separate status' in 1996. With continental Suriname already independent, Aruba's *status aparte* led to a virtually identical sentiment of 'one out of six would leave nil' (Oostindie and Klinmkers 2003, 122), and seemed to end all hope or talk of Antillean independence.

Based on the forgoing it is clear to see how the Caribbean, both historically and in contemporary times, is a political project subject to the power politics of en-trenched interests, whether of a class, race or gendered nature. Further, as social groups strive to root themselves and to establish identity markers, such politics will see the erasure of some and the promotion of others. The three studies reviewed here highlight dimensions of the colonial period in the Caribbean as well as the politics of decolonization and the politics of nation building in the modern age. While recently the latter has tended to assume clear ethnic dimensions, considera-tions of class, race and gender are not to be minimized or ignored, for the modern Caribbean was constructed on the politics of social inequality that are directly tied their statuses as dependent capitalist satellites of imperialist centres in an increas-ingly globalized world.

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