

migration, Trinidad's carnival has spread worldwide. Notably, Nottingham Carnival in London and the West Indian Day Parade in New York both attract millions of visitors. In more literary intellectual circles, Trinidad is known for V.S. Naipaul, a writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

Talking about the influence of multiculturalism as well as sovereignty in Trinidad & Tobago, Cozier, in a conversation with Claire Tancons (*Fillip 16*, 2012), says:

'I am a bit horrified to see the same language of multiculturalism, which was constructed by the Euro-American mainstream, arrive here in Trinidad about twenty years later under the government of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who, when elected in 2010, established the Ministry of Culture and Multiculturalism. But the world is funny in the way in which it retools old notions as new. I recall being in Canada on a panel in 2004 where people talked about creolization as if it could be new and improved multiculturalism. My earlier work dealt with how nationhood constructions require an ideal, an approved subject, or citizen. To me, the concept of nation in the Anglophone Caribbean context is the smallest moment of our more extensive history since the alleged discovery by Columbus in 1493. Trinidad, for example, became independent from the UK in 1962. The island state is one of the smallest locations on the Caribbean map, physically and mentally – perhaps an immature and very aggressive guarded territory that belongs to politicians and their funders. Our populations continue to travel between these bordered territories, be they other Caribbean islands, share a similar history, former metropolitan colonial powers in Europe, or other migrations like the USA and Canada. What we do at Alice Yard is very much a response to these questions of sovereignty through the dialogues we instigate between artists about what they do both regionally and internationally'.

ISOLATION

What strikes me most is the isolation of the islands. There is a lack of infrastructure, communication, and mobility between the various islands. During colonization, empires established their power on each island with the intention that only Europeans would have mobility. Not implementing infrastructure or communication between islands that were administered by different colonial powers was a deliberate choice. The choice served to avoid invasion by rival European empires, and spoke to the constant fear the enslaved populations on the various islands would become a coordinated mass force, fighting as one against the European colonial powers. These decisions still have a considerable effect in the region, on the mindset of its populations, and how they make decisions (Grada Kilomba). It also affects the possibilities for trade and mobility. The inherited, established barriers – borders and passports – from colonial times still complicate mobility. European countries have been developing, executing, and evolving their infrastructures for centuries resulting in the connected infrastructure we see today. Infrastructure in Europe was first created to get to the front during the many wars dating to the Roman Empire. Infrastructure developed and expanded for trading and as alliances were formed over the centuries.

Building an infrastructure between different countries where there was none for

centuries seems an impossible task to achieve in the only fifty years of independence. This is further complicated by the problem of financing it from scratch. The international community finds this to be the sole responsibility of these small singular economies, an inevitable consequence of their independence.

I set myself the challenge to travel in the region without flying outside the Caribbean. I had first-hand experience of the ways the history translates to a lack of mobility in the area. In principle, it is easy to fly from any European country to the (former) colonies and back, but extremely hard to pass from one island to another. Flying to and from Europe or the USA is often cheaper and takes less time than flying to and from a neighboring island, which on a clear day you can see from afar. For example, a flight from Martinique to France costs 400 euros, and a flight from Martinique to Trinidad is at least 1000 euros. There are hardly any direct flights. Sometimes it takes multiple days, and you hop from island to island with flights that don't connect well and are not operated daily. The flight from Martinique to France is direct. Martinique's most affordable flight to Trinidad has one transit per week flying to Trinidad and three to Martinique.

My worst experience was flying from Curacao to Surinam, transferring to Trinidad with Surinam Airways. The airline decided to depart at 10 AM instead of 3 PM, as my ticket said. The airline did not contact me to inform me about the change. When I arrived at HATO airport in Curacao at 1 PM, there was no check-in desk for Surinam Airways or any airline personnel. It took me over an hour to find a man who told me he thought they left in the morning. Most airport personnel just shook their heads and said, 'I don't work for Surinam Airways.'

Finally, a man who worked for another airline took the time to confirm that the flight had indeed left and gave me the office address, suggesting I go there on Monday to speak to a representative. It was Saturday. On Monday, when I went to the office, the representative said in an accusing tone, 'You booked online, not at this office. We have no way of contacting you.' The flight is two times a week, and she rebooks me on a plane four days later.

'No', she says, 'she does not need any information. She has it all.' The printout of my old and new itinerary clearly shows my phone number and my email. No apologies are made.

I have another problem with a ticket I booked in advance to get a reasonable price. By the time I was to fly, the airline had gone out of business, which happens all the time. Granted, there are airlines this happens to back home in Europe. However, in the European market of millions of travelers with easy, fast, and affordable access by car, bus, or train to airports in Amsterdam, Frankfurt, or Paris, airlines compete with ticket prices. Tickets in Europe can be as cheap as 50 euros. I lost 500 euros on a ticket considered a 'good price' to an island I arguably can swim to, were it not for the suitcase and hand luggage I need to bring with me. At that moment, I decide to book my tickets as close to departure as possible.

By booking at the last moment, I also ran into another problem. For the research, I flew from island to island, so I bought one-way tickets. I have done that before, but since 9/11, immigration rules have gotten tighter everywhere. I learn the hard way there are

an increasing number of islands you can only enter by showing your round-trip ticket. In Kingston, Jamaica, an immigration officer guided me to the detaining area after arrival without a departure ticket.

Question: Why am I here?

Answer: I am researching contemporary art.

[Facial expression: disbelieve]

Q: Why and for who?

A: I work for myself. I want to deepen my practice.

[Mouth drops]

Q: What will I do?

A: I will be interviewing artists and arts institutions like Edna Manley College and the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston.

[Face blank]

Q: Where will I stay?

A: I will stay with a friend and colleague on the campus of the University in Kingston.

[Approving head nod (thank god this is where my host lives!)]

Q: How much money do I have, and who is paying for this?

A: The government in Holland via Mondriaanfonds, the public fund for the visual arts.

[She looks up at me and thinks out loud: Only in Europe.]

I apologize and explain to the officer why I buy last-minute tickets. She understands. I give her the websites of Mondriaanfund and myself and show my credit card, suggesting I'll buy a ticket right then and there. I'm guided out and ordered to wait. After some time in the waiting room, she calls me back in and says, 'Booking is not necessary, I believe you. I will give you a six-week entrance, and I trust you will be done with your research and leave the island then?'

'Yes, of course, officer!' After arriving in Kingston, my host Annie Paul shakes her head. She confirms that without my European passport combined with my white ass/blue eyes privilege, they would have deported me.

Columbus lied...

Nowadays, you enter a strange land.

They call you an alien

You have to explain to immigration.

What is your intention?

The isolation of the populations in the Caribbean is created by the visa requirements to enter other countries. If passports, regardless of where they were issued, gave equal rights

and obligations to all, the movement of Caribbean citizens would be free and unlimited, which is not the case. Having a European or USA passport comes with the privilege of being able to enter 186 of the world's 195 countries without a visa. Passport holders from countries in the Caribbean cannot enter those 186 countries without a visa (*Henley Passport Index*, 10 July 2018). Even in the twenty-first century, the Caribbean continues to suffer from systems left over from the region's colonial history. Some countries in the region remain overseas territories (OST), while others, though independent, have never had the wealth to create an infrastructure that supports more than tourism. Tourism privileges tourists, so implicitly, if not explicitly, Europeans and Americans can navigate the region with more ease than the citizens of any other Caribbean nation can.

My travel and research made me aware of a fundamental problem for contemporary artists and art professionals in the region, who want a sustainable art practice while being based in the area. Flying in the region is costly, and connections, bluntly said, suck. There are only a handful of affordable ferries, like the ones between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic; and from St. Martin to various neighboring islands. I took the 45-minute ferry from St. Martin to Anguilla. It costs US\$20 one way. You would think for US\$20, people can make a flash decision to travel. However, suppose you are a passport holder of Dominican Republic with a work permit for St. Martin (OST of France), and you want to take the ferry to Anguilla (OST of the UK). In that case, you need to go through an expensive and time-consuming visa application process. Without it, you are not allowed on the ferry.

The influence of Europe and the USA extends across the borders of some countries. The Dominican Republic (DR) is a large country with a population of eleven million people, three million of who live in Santo Domingo, the capital. DR, Haiti and Cuba are the three largest countries in the region. DR shares an island with Haiti which became independent from France in 1804. Haiti fought Spain after which this part of the island became independent from Spain in 1821. The former Spanish part separated from Haiti in 1844 and became Dominican Republic a political and military battlefield between Haiti, France, Spain, and the USA until 1922. It was under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo from 1930 until 1961, when it became a democracy after Trujillo was assassinated. It is considered a middle-income country by the World Bank. It is the most popular tourist destination in the Caribbean and is home to the second-largest number of Major League Baseball players, second only to the United States.

Altos de Chavón School of Design and Art in Altos de Chavón, La Romana, in the Dominican Republic is a private school. It offers a two-year associate degree in arts and it has a 2+2 affiliation program with the Parsons School of Design in New York. Students from Altos de Chavón School of Design and Art can get a BFA degree if they continue their studies in the USA for two years. The top students are awarded a scholarship for Parsons School of Design/The New School, in New York. I know about Altos de Chavón School of Design and Art because it collaborates with the Davidoff Art Initiative (DAI), funded by Davidoff, one of the world's best cigar-makers. The famous Davidoff cigar factory is located in Santiago, DR's second largest city. The Altos de Chavón School of Design

and Art receives six international art professionals for three months every year through the DAI exchange program. I make an appointment by phone with Raul Miyar, the dean of the fine arts department at the school.

We set a day and time two weeks later, He says, 'My assistant will send you some paperwork that you need to fill out.'

The next day I received the email and opened the attachment. I found a form similar to a visa application. I had to answer a list of questions and send it back with a copy of my passport. On the form, it says it will take at least a week for them to review my application. It feels like I have made a request to visit a high-security prison. A week later, I receive the paperwork that allows me to enter the area for one day. The assistant tells me I have to print it out and bring it with my passport and hand this all over upon my arrival on the confirmed date. I can enter the DR without any paperwork. Still, for this specific area in DR I need 'a visa.'

Now, I am even more curious to visit this place than I was before. The town Altos de Chavón, La Romana, where the school is located, is in a remote rural part of the Dominican Republic. However, it feels like I am in Las Vegas. It has Swiss-looking houses and a Greek amphitheater; it makes no sense at all.

'What is this place?' I ask Miyar.

He explains, 'The area was bought by the American Charles Bluhdorn, former CEO of Paramount/Gulf Western. Gulf Western made part of its fortune on sugar. Dominican people and contract workers from Haiti worked on the sugar fields in this province, up until the '70s for US\$2.50 a day. Bluhdorn loved the area. When the company decided to abandon the sugar plantations, he kept some of the lands and built a home.'

Now some of his property has been sold, and there are more mansions. I look around and see green as far as my eyes can see. The mansions are hidden somewhere; I see nothing. We walk over to the school buildings. There are wood and ceramics workshops, a film department, classrooms to draw and paint. There is an outside space with a traditional palm leaf roof where sculptors work. We arrive at a building with six high ceilinged studios divided by walls that can be removed and turned into bigger studios for artists in residence. We sit on rocking chairs on the porch in front of the studios. Miyar explains:

'Dominique, the daughter of Bluhdorn, founded the school. It was set up as a school for talented youth from a background with little to no financial means. They don't pay tuition. A few years ago, we opened another campus in Santo Domingo.'

The school and its facilities look great. A gated terrain for wealthy, influential foreigners and a school with students from working-class backgrounds are an odd pair. I ask how the school and its students are perceived by the owners of the new mansions.

Miyar says, 'There is a heavy push back. The new owners are against the school. They are not comfortable with the students, who live here amongst them, during their years of study.'

We stroll over to the theater. It seats 5,000 people, and the late Frank Sinatra, Julio Iglesias, Santana, and many others have performed there. I sit in the semi-circular amphitheater a fake ancient Greek replica in the middle of DR. I wonder who is allowed

to enjoy the music here. Since my visit, The Altos de Chavón School of Design and Art in Altos de Chavón, La Romana has been closed down. Its department, teachers, and students have been transferred to the campus in the capital, Santo Domingo.

For art professionals in the Caribbean to obtain a visa, each is required to prove a steady income that meets the standard of the country they want to visit, have permanent employment, a saving account, and preferably a family that stays behind in their home country when they travel. They are also asked for a sponsor/guarantor in the visiting country to take full financial responsibility during the time abroad. Being a European passport holder, I was never asked to meet any of these requirements. This system limits, and often disqualifies, artists and art professionals from the Caribbean from accepting last-minute invitations to art fairs, from collectors, to conferences, to give University lectures, and other possibilities. This failure to create equality – or even equality of opportunity – benefits artists and art professionals with ‘preferred’ passports, who are often not even aware of their privilege.

My case in point: I was not asked for any of the requirements asked of people in the region if they want to travel to the Netherlands, my home country. If the countries I visited applied the exact requirements for entry to me, I would not be, and have never been, able to meet those standards at any point in my life. I would not have been able to do the research, and this book would not have been written. European passport in hand, I hardly ever had to explain my intentions. When they asked in Jamaica, and I didn’t meet the regulations, I gained entrance nonetheless.