

# I

## The Pan-Caribbean: diversity and semblance

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I have thought about what I would write about the Pan-Caribbean for this introductory chapter for the duration of this whole book project, which can be measured in years rather than months. Each time I feel confident that I have grasped something tangible and meaningful to say about the diversity and semblance in the region, other possibilities crowd in upon me and I lose my grip both of the concept and the words to reflect the intense complexity which constitutes the Pan-Caribbean. The more one learns about, and experiences, the Caribbean, the more one realises it is ever-changing, infinitely varied and yet has a resonance of meaning that lets you know you are 'in' the Caribbean either physically, or tangentially through reading about it.

Working on this book I began to recognise even more the validity (even sanity!) of researchers and authors focusing on one sub-section of the region. Examples include, the English-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean (Payne and Sutton 2001), the Hispanic Caribbean (James and Perivolaris 2000) or the French Caribbean (Aud-Buscher and Ormerod Noakes 2003; Burton and Reno 1995). In this way the subject area is at least geographically and linguistically defined. Another way to 'contain' the complexity of the Caribbean is to focus on a particular theme; tourism (Pattullo 1996), development (McAfee 1991), economics (Alonso 2002), or ethnicity (Oostindie 1996). All of the above are scholarly works and contribute a great deal to our knowledge of the region. In addition there are books which provide highly readable overviews. They are rich in anecdotes and stories which serve to capture the depth of Caribbean pasts and presents (Ferguson 1999; Gilmore 2000). However, a central goal of this book is to provide a range of perspectives from different authors, each focusing on a specific theme, but located within the Pan-Caribbean region. It is therefore an introduction to the Pan-Caribbean through which readers will learn of the diversity across and within the region and the semblances through time and space.

### **Defining the Pan-Caribbean**

Anyone who is familiar with the Caribbean itself or the scholarship about it will realise that defining the region is extremely difficult and also highly varied, and at times

for some it is the greater Caribbean which includes parts of the Americas; for others it is largely defined as the island Caribbean; and for yet others it is the islands and selected countries on the mainland which have traditionally identified themselves as Caribbean rather than Latin American, for example Belize and Guyana<sup>1</sup>. This means that within one book, we examine a wide definition of the region but always maintain a Pan-Caribbean perspective. This representation includes, among other things: an articulation of Pan-Caribbean pre-history; an examination of European colonialism; a consideration of the development factors of the contemporary independent and dependent/colonial Caribbean; an analysis of the migratory patterns and social transformations throughout and beyond the region; and a scrutiny of the region's role in respect of globalisation and tourism. The Pan-Caribbean is represented through time and space but always from the perspective of an inclusive definition.

This movement towards inclusiveness is reflected in some of the most recent political structures and institutions of the region. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) boasts 28 members including France, Mexico, Nicaragua and others in Latin America. It is a clear reflection of the way in which the Caribbean is forging, both from its own choice and through 'encouragement' from the European Union and the USA, a regional identity that brings it closer to the Americas. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has traditionally comprised the English-speaking independent territories (although Montserrat belongs through its membership of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States). Recently though CARICOM has diversified and Dutch-speaking Suriname and French/Creole-speaking Haiti have joined the previous thirteen members. The home page of the web site displays individual country's flags with the CARICOM flag waving in the centre ([www.caricom.org](http://www.caricom.org)). For many in the region this reorientation away from the past colonising powers is a painful and risky process. Old economic securities, however partial, are slipping away or being formally challenged by the hegemonic power in the region, the USA, through international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation. New markets, allies and trade connections must be established, but alongside this, cultural exchanges and a widening of educational curricula will contribute to felt and lived interconnections much more so than the economic linkages will be able to.

There are recent texts that adopt a Pan-Caribbean context for their subject focus. Irma Alonso's edited collection *Caribbean Economies in the Twenty-First Century* (2002) examines whether the Caribbean island nations are prepared for the challenges of the new century. The book focuses on 24 islands from The Bahamas to Trinidad and Tobago and, although they are called 'nations', even the dependent territories and départements are included. Holge Henke's and Fred Reno's edited collection *Modern Political Culture in the Caribbean* (2003) focuses on the regional differences among the English, French, Dutch and Spanish Caribbean. These texts combined with our *Introduction* to the region (which does not have dedicated chapters focusing on economics and politics but rather intertwines these subjects within other topics) provide an excellent framework for an

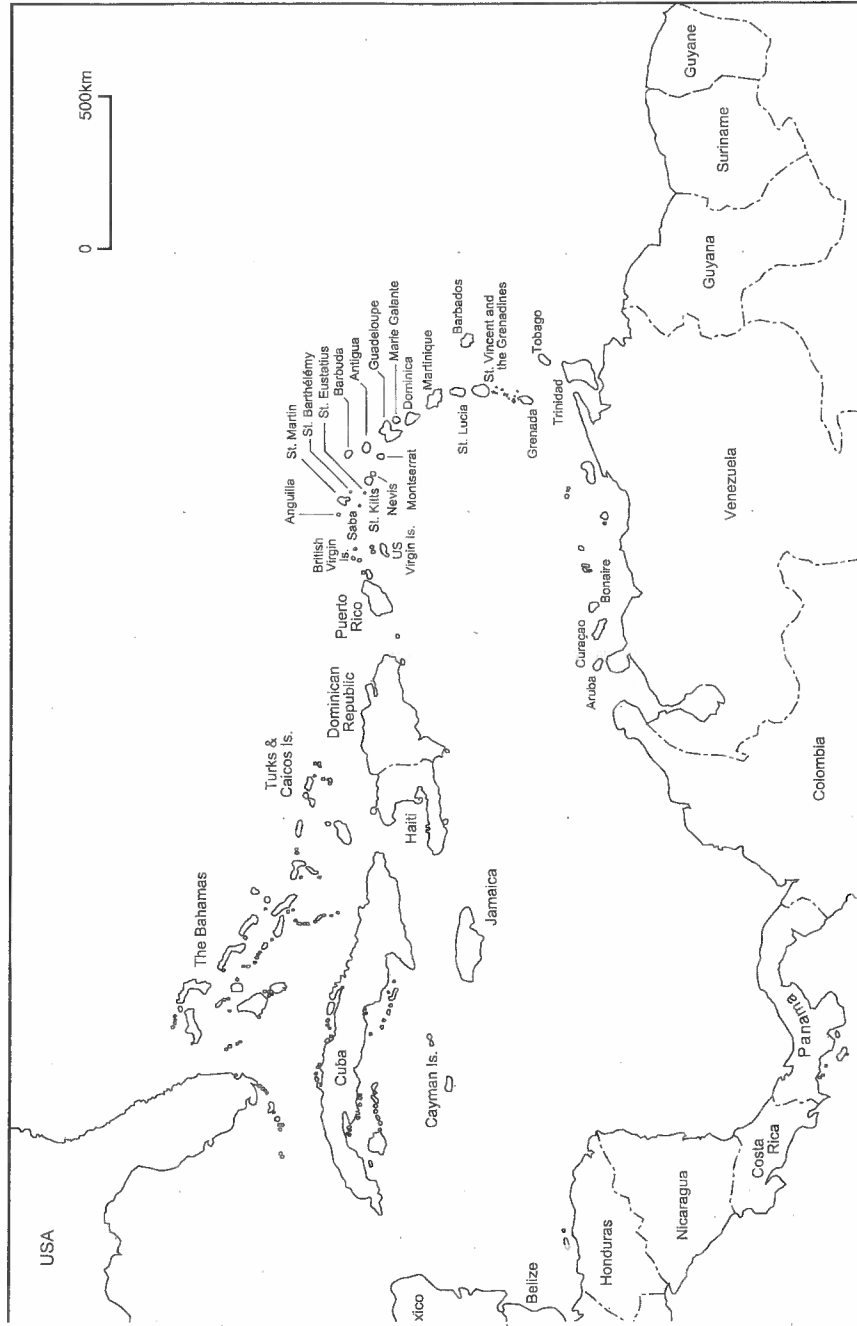
## Mapping the Caribbean

As a geographer I find maps fascinating. They are an intriguing representation of place and often, until I have seen a place on a map I cannot orientate myself; I don't feel as though I know where I am. However, it is essential to remember that maps are not neutral and 'true' representations of a place, but are often translations of bias, political constructions or cultural superiority (Massey 1995). Nevertheless they have always been, and will continue to be, important factors in our 'seeing' of places.

When I first went to the beautiful, small island of Montserrat for my Ph.D. research (Skelton, 1989) one of the first things I did was purchase a map. It was not a tourist map, which often show partial and commercially oriented information, but something akin to the detailed maps of the Ordnance Survey. I studied the map closely, traced the roads and rivers, rehearsed the names of villages: Kinsale, Gerralds, Long Ground, Molyneux and tried to conceptualise the physical reality of the heights of mountains such as Chances Peak and the Silver Hills. During the year I spent on the island, conducting my research, I met and worked with people from all over the island and so the map changed in meaning. Now the villages were the homes of people I knew. I learned each curve and twist of the Harris-Plymouth road which I drove almost daily. I had real and vivid three-dimensional images of the island from the top of Chances Peak which I climbed one day. All of these reconstructed what the map meant and brought it to life. At this moment in time, this particular map is an important cultural and historical document. Much of what is shown on that map no longer exists. The volcanic eruption, which began in 1995 and still continues, has totally destroyed large sections of the south, the east and the central parts of the island. Suddenly the places of the north have become important as places of refuge and new home building. The map needs changing in the light of the natural disaster but the original map of Montserrat remains an important representation of memory, place and 'home'. It is a precious artefact which shows what Montserrat once was and indicates what it can re-become in the future.

In a similar way maps of the Pan-Caribbean tell us different stories. They let us see visually which places are included and which left out. They demonstrate geographical and spatial relations between places – which nations are neighbours (Jamaica and Cuba), which share borders (Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Saint Martin and Sint Maartin, Guyana and Suriname<sup>2</sup>), which appear isolated either geographically or culturally (Barbados, Belize). In this section of the book I draw your attention to different representations of the Pan-Caribbean in cartographic form. You will find each of these mappings evident in different parts of the book.

Map 1.1, *The Pan-Caribbean*, is the base map which includes all the islands and mainland countries which form the majority understanding of the Pan-Caribbean for the purposes of this book. Hence the Caribbean coastlines of countries in the Americas and all of the islands are represented here. The Pan-Caribbean is therefore defined as the land masses which meet the Caribbean Sea (although not all the Central



Map 1.1 The Pan-Caribbean

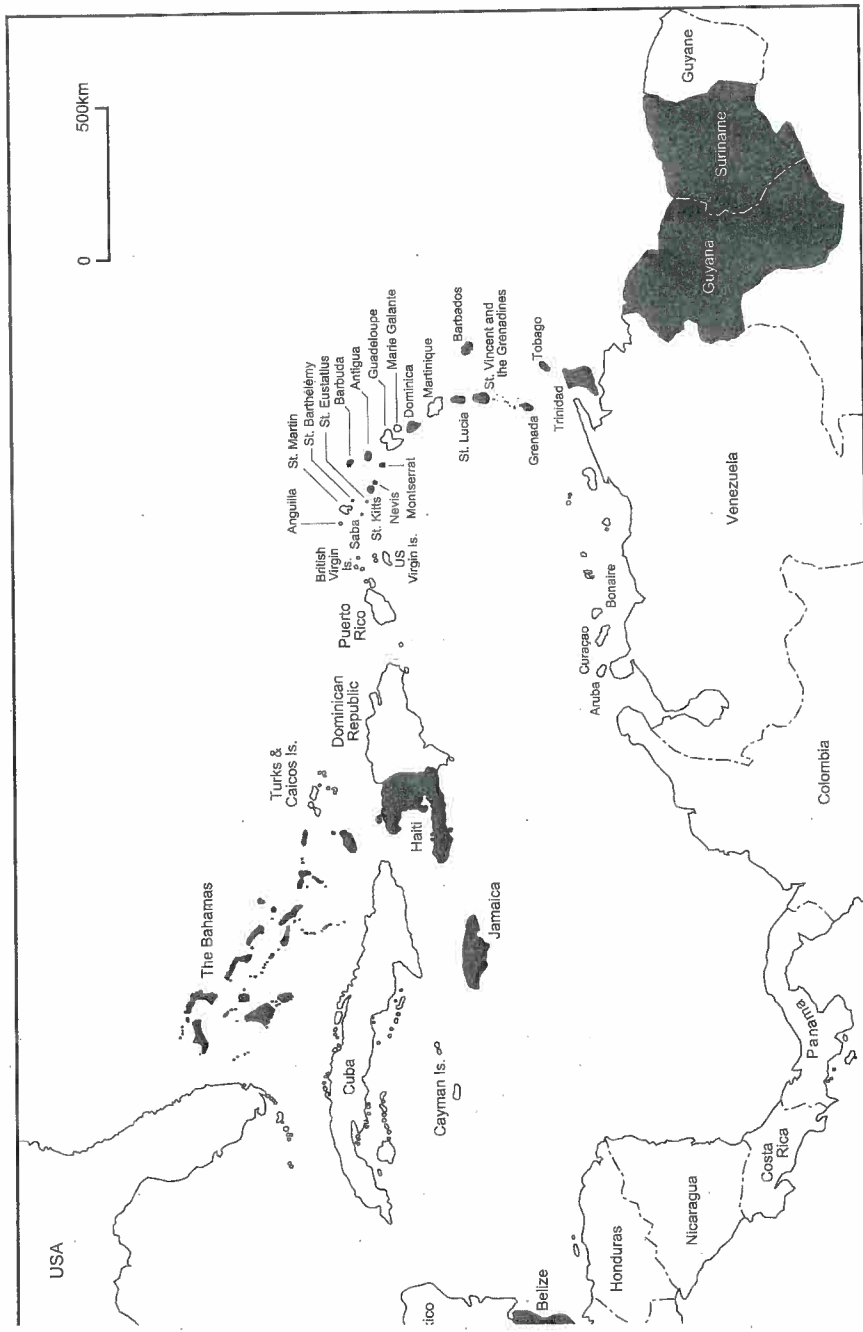
From this base map there are thence a multitude of ways in which sub-definitions of the region can be cartographically laid down. It is possible to layer different groupings, clusters and collections of places in the region to show diversities and semblances. For the purpose of this book three layerings have been selected: economic, political and socio-cultural. There could be many more, and each map would represent subtly different information. However, this is not a book of maps but rather of scholarly analysis and discussion of key themes at play in the Pan-Caribbean. The particular maps drawn for this book will help us visualise the region, but they necessarily construct it in a particular way.

Map 1.2 *The Caribbean Community (CARICOM): an economic definition* shows the largest economic clustering of nations in the Pan-Caribbean. It is important to bear in mind that CARICOM also has a political purpose (see Chapter Four). Caribbean economic structures show obvious similarities. Agriculture for the majority remains an important source of employment and foreign exchange earnings. Small-scale farming and gardening is a common feature of rural Caribbean people's lives and provides an important base for household economics and survival. The various attempts at industrialisation are evident in the presence of factories and the lists of export commodities produced in the region. Tourism is ever present and plays a significant and highly visible role in economic structures. Services in the form of offshore banking and data processing are extremely important aspects of the economy for some of the smaller, non-independent islands. The necessity and urgency of diversification is a substantial part of the region's current economic discourse. In addition, when we consider economic structures we can see a striking difference between one country and the rest. Cuba has a socialist state-run economy and is blockaded by a US embargo<sup>3</sup>. The other countries are now all constructed as open economies following the neo-liberal economic models.

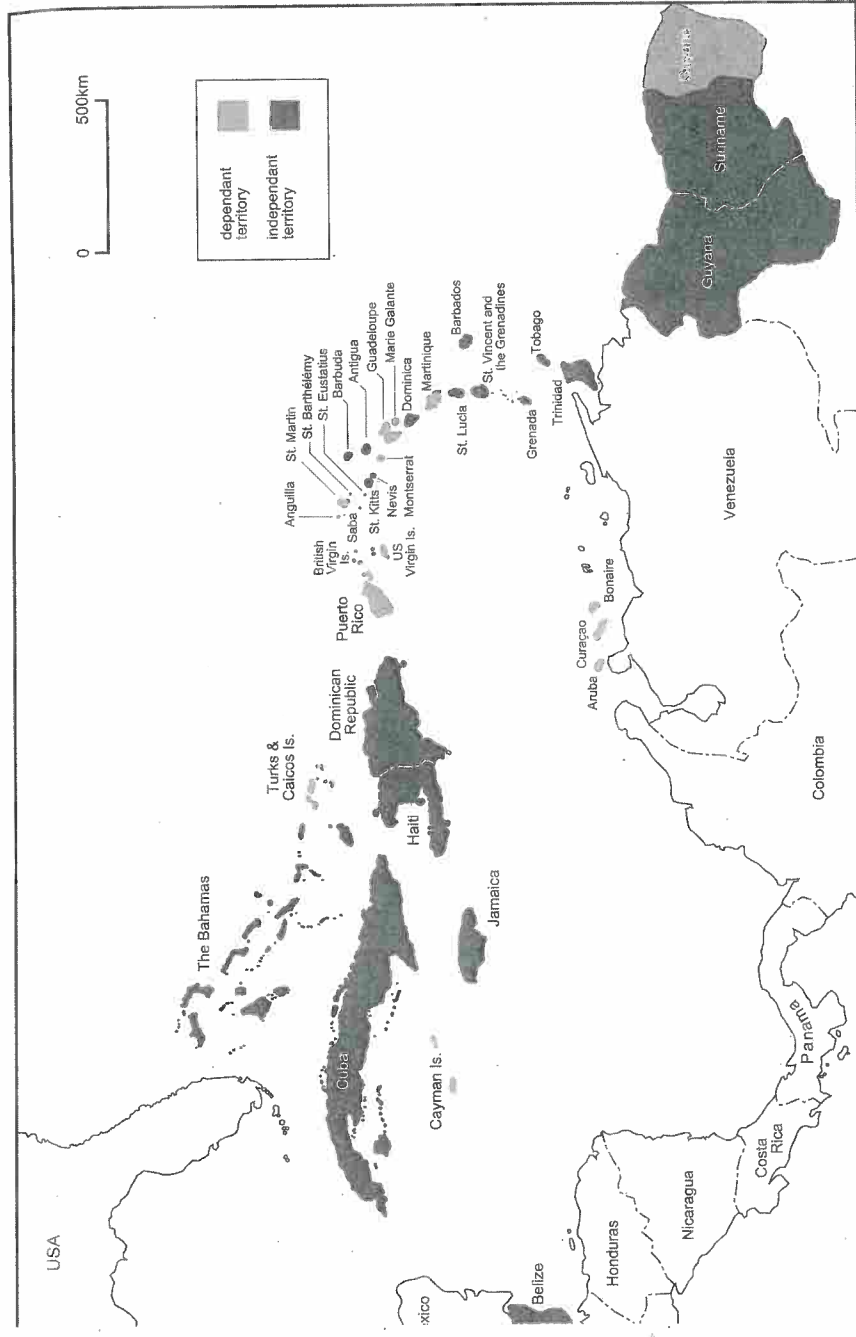
Map 1.3 *A political interpretation of the Pan-Caribbean*, illustrates one of the most politically interesting aspects of the region. The Caribbean is the site of the largest number of non-independent/colonised states in the world. There are 12 non-independent<sup>4</sup> and 16 independent 'nations' constituting this particular definition of Pan-Caribbean. This political anachronism contributes profoundly to the diversity of economic and political structures as well as to the social and cultural development status of the different 'states' (see Chapter Three). The non-independent territories face complex political dilemmas in similar ways to their neighbouring independent states but their continued colonial status creates a very specific dimension (see Gamaliel Ramos and Israel Rivera 2001).

A partial representation of social and cultural heritages of the islands is demonstrated in Map 1.4 *A map to show the linguistic diversity of the Pan-Caribbean*. This map shows the remaining legacies of European colonialism. However, it also shows the linguistic heritage that was interlaced with that of the dominant power, that of African

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p 1.2 The Caribbean Community (CARICOM): an economic definition



tp 1.3 A political interpretation of the Pan-Caribbean

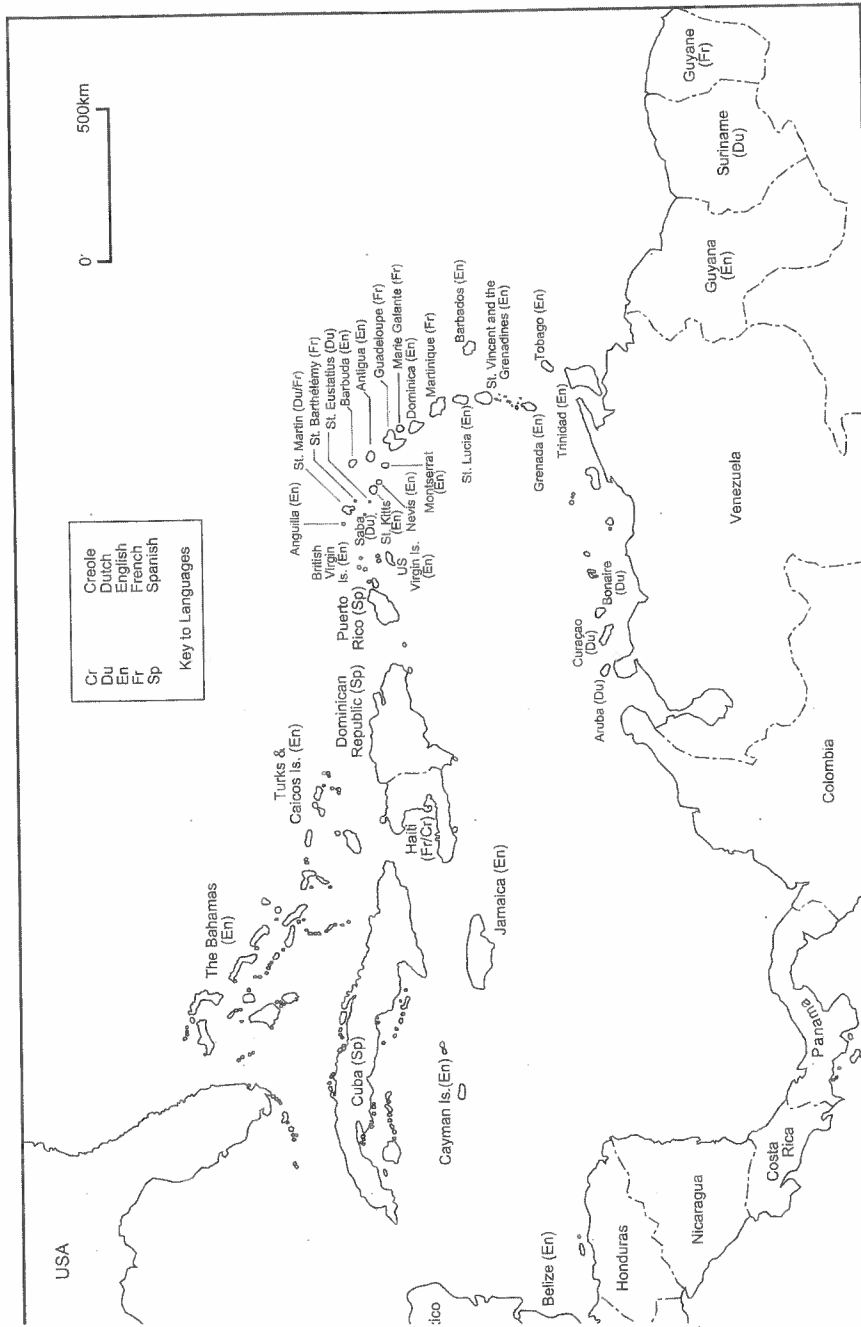


Figure 1.4 A map to show the linguistic diversity of the Pan-Caribbean

West African languages. In the Dutch Antilles of Aruba<sup>5</sup>, Bonaire and Curaçao, Papiamentu (Papiamentu) is widely spoken and is generally accepted as a linguistic meeting of Portuguese and West African languages. Even where islands are listed as speaking English the diversity of dialects and accents of each country are audible and expert listeners can invariably place speakers to their 'home' islands. Islands such as St. Lucia and Dominica, which had periods of French colonialism, are officially described as English speaking but the everyday language spoken there, especially in the rural areas, is in fact a Creole that has more affinity to French than English.

### Representing the Pan-Caribbean

The Caribbean struggles to resist external representations which reduce it to sun, sand, surf and sex (see Chapter Five). The Caribbean is sold, marketed and stereotyped as a paradise for play, an idyll of adventure and a construct of consumption (see Sheller 2003). While parts of the Caribbean are indeed extremely beautiful and there are stunning beaches lapped by gorgeous turquoise seas, this is not all that constitutes the Caribbean. It is essential not to perpetuate persistent and uni-dimensional stereotypes of the Pan-Caribbean, but it is also important to remember why the places are so loved, enjoyed and admired by people who reside there and people who are privileged enough to visit. The three images selected for this chapter show some of the natural beauty of the Caribbean landscape and vernacular architecture, but at the same time, along with other images used in the text, serve as a reminder of the complex differences within the region. It is important to recall that, for many, behind the beauty lies persistent poverty (see Chapters Three and Five). Plate 1.1 is a photograph taken in



Plate 1.1 An ox and cart being used to collect sugar cane and wood in rural Cuba.



contemporary Cuba and shows an ox and cart being used to collect sugar cane and wood. Sugar represents a great deal in the Caribbean context. It was the subject of an economic and agricultural system which exploited slave labour; it was the reason for complex labour migrations and it remains an important cash crop. In the Cuban case it was the main commodity of economic exchange with the USSR in an attempt to beat the post-revolutionary US embargo (see Chapters Two, Three, Six and Seven).

The second image (plate 1.2) is a view of English Harbour and Falmouth, Antigua. At first glance it is the 'typical' representation of the region: sea, sun, sand, but it also represents more than this. Historically, the coves and bays would have been essential havens for ships in the wars between different European powers waged for territorial dominance in Caribbean waters. It shows the importance of tourism for the island state of Antigua and Barbuda, but makes us think of the environmental problems tourism brings. Nevertheless, the image can serve to show some of the natural beauty of the Caribbean landscape and hence remind us of the need for tourist development that is sustainable (see Chapters Two, Three, Five, and Eight).

Plate 1.3 shows a part of the Caribbean that is not often represented, the Dutch Caribbean. The careful decoration and design of this house front shows both a pride of place and a sense of hybridity as the designs are both Caribbean and Dutch.

The chapters which constitute this book provide an intellectually pleasing circularity and continuity. In Chapter Two, Cleve McD. Scott presents an historical analysis and Lennox Honychurch, in the final chapter, analyses cultural formations in the Caribbean beginning with the pre-colonial historical context. Circularity is a pervasive discourse in Caribbean writing, especially in relation to movements of people (Pessar 1997; Puri

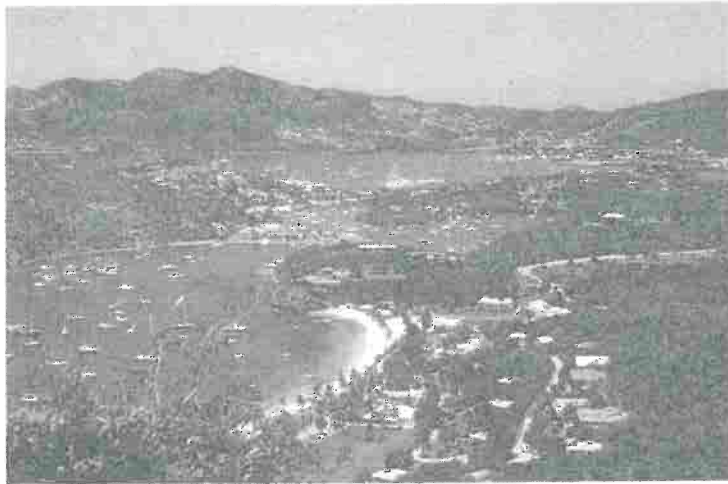


Plate 1.2 English Harbour and Falmouth, Antigua

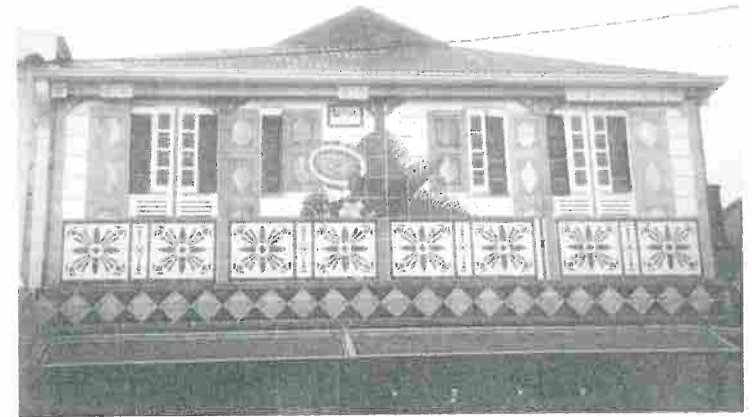


Plate 1.3 House design and decoration in Sint Maarten, Netherlands Antilles

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2003) and in the telling and retelling of stories through literature, song, dance and theatre. Tracey Skelton, in Chapter Three, critiques the notion of development, which threads on through to Jessica Byron's critical commentary on globalisation and its impact on the region (Chapter Four) and Beverley Mullings' insightful take on tourism (Chapter Five). The complex circles of movements and identities of Caribbean people are described and analysed by Laurence Brown and David Howard in Chapters Six and Seven respectively.

This book can be read as a whole and as such provides a nuanced and complex insight into a region which is at once highly different and similar. The holistic reader will come across what appears to be snippets of repetition. For example, there is history in Chapter Six and stories of migration in Chapter Eight, tourism appears in Chapter Three as well as in greater detail in Chapter Five. This overlap is intentional. It can be thought of as a parallel to the Caribbean Sea which laps at the edges of each of the countries in the Pan-Caribbean. However, each chapter can be read independently as the contextual elements so necessary for understanding each subject remain present in each. This is similar to the way in which living in or visiting one Caribbean country can provide a distinctive experience but also an insight into the Pan-Caribbean. Living in, or visiting, one Caribbean country often stimulates a desire to live in, and see, others, especially in the Eastern Caribbean where neighbouring islands are visible on the horizon. We hope that reading one chapter of this book will stimulate you to read the others. We also trust that this book will serve as an intellectual map through one of the most fascinating parts of the world, through the Pan-Caribbean.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the apparent omissions to our definition of the Caribbean is the island of Bermuda, which isn't mentioned explicitly in any of the chapters, but which is sometimes defined as Caribbean. It remains a British Overseas Territory but it is located in the North Atlantic rather than the Caribbean Sea. It has some commonalities of history and has been a site of Caribbean migration over time.

<sup>2</sup> In many Caribbean texts, on web sites and maps there are two ways of spelling Surinam/Suriname. Throughout this text we use the spelling Suriname. I have been unable to find out why there are these differences in spelling.

<sup>3</sup> In the June and July of 2003, the reality and far-reaching aspects of the US embargo became apparent to other committee members of the UK-based Society for Caribbean Studies ([www.sconline.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.sconline.freereserve.co.uk)) and myself. Each year we award a travel bursary in the name of Caribbean scholar and former member of the society, Bridget Jones, to a Caribbean-based artist, arts practitioner or arts researcher. For the conference of 2003 a Cuban academic, artist and activist, Felix Kindelan Delis, was the successful recipient of the award. As part of the bursary we needed to send him money via his bank account to pay for travel documents and visas. None of the usual companies would transfer the money because of the US embargo. This demonstrates two things. Firstly how the US embargo serves to stifle Cuba, Cubans and all aspects of Cuban life. Secondly how powerful the US is forcing even apparently non-US companies to obey its economic embargo. As I write this introduction we were still not sure whether Felix would make it to the UK and to our conference.

<sup>4</sup> The 12 non-independent territories are: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands; Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane; Aruba and the Dutch Antilles; Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking Aruba is no longer one of the Dutch Antilles but it is not fully independent either; it has autonomous federation status but remains an integral part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Alonso and Hicks 2002).

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