History and identity across small islands:
a Caribbean and a personal journey

Abstract

This paper is largely autobiographical: I chart my own intellectual journey across the history, culture and identity of so-called `small` islands, with a special reference to the Caribbean. To do so, I reflect on my own forays into literature that discussed Caribbean history and culture; my own research experience in Barbados in connection with my doctoral research; and coming up to the present with insights that have emerged in the pursuit of an island studies imagination in my professional work. The paper concludes with a calling, and a justification, for the pursuit of island studies.

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Introduction: Charting the Journey

"... we need to know in greater detail where we are and how we got there before we can decide where we are going" – N. E. Harrigan (1980, p. vi)

Nobel Laureate for Literature, and St Lucian national, Derek Walcott, writes that "the sea is history" (Walcott 1986), reminding us of the maritime backdrop to the legacy of Caribbean nations today: be they descendants of British or French plantocrats, African slaves, Indian indentured labourers, escapees from the American Civil War, or more recently arrived immigrants. Perhaps, Walcott would not mind extending his analysis to encompass island peoples from beyond the Caribbean: the story of Omeros is also the story of Ulysses and countless others. Migration and islands are intimately connected, as much today as in the past (King and Connell 1999).

In this paper, I chart my own journey across the history, culture and identity of so-called small islands, with a special reference to the Caribbean. I do so in a number of parallel but inter-related ways: starting with my own forays into literature that discussed Caribbean history and culture; then my own research experience in Barbados in connection with my doctoral research, back in 1992; and coming up to the present with the insights that have emerged in the dogged pursuit of an island studies imagination in my professional work.

As a Canada Research Chair in Island Studies for ten years at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada (2003-2013), I have often been met with envious eyes and comments: statements like 'lucky guy'; 'what a dream job'; 'so, you get to travel to all those wonderful and exotic places'; 'do you need an assistant to carry your suitcase', and so on. Of course, not all islands are warm water places; and most are somewhat different than what the glossy tourist brochures suggest. And yet many island territories are lucky in that their tourist-directed overtures are believed and get translated into tourist traffic and revenue. Tourism remains one of the main income generators for many island states and territories.

Why Study Islands?

One question that I get asked less often is: what led me to pursue the study of islands, and of small states more generally, in the first place? Perhaps the defining moment was in September 1985: I was 25 years old, starting a Master of Arts degree in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, in the Netherlands. The Institute serves developing countries, so most of my student colleagues were from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South-East Asia; and most of the faculty had done research in these parts of the developing world. In the first week of our course, my wife Anna and I attended an informal 'breaking the ice' session for the new students and their partners. We were asked to sit casually on the floor, and to volunteer information about the struggle for independence of our respective country. There was a pattern to these interventions: a rampant history of colonialism was etched into each of our histories and cultures, that much was clear.

But not all colonialisms are the same. Anna and I looked at each other and remained silent. We could not, for the life of us, come up with accounts of the savage repression of independence movements, the exile or imprisonment of nationalist leaders, or

the deliberate exploitation of our country's natural resources, just like the other students were stating. Both my wife and I are born and bred in Malta, a small archipelago state in Southern Europe, and a British 'fortress colony' from 1800 to 1964. As far as we know, Malta had no history of repression of independence movements: rather, the British were concerned that some Maltese had strong loyalties to neighbouring Italy; the most senior political representatives of these irredentist Maltese were interned in a 'prisoner of war' camp in Uganda during the Second World War. Maltese political leaders were keen to pursue full integration with Britain in the 1950s, and it was only when the British authorities decided that an independence referendum did not deliver a sufficiently clear mandate on this contentious issue that the road to sovereignty was adopted. Even then, Maltese politicians engaged in intense negotiations with their British counterparts not to cut short but to extend the date of the departure of the British troops in Malta: the British base in Malta was eventually closed in 1979, a full 15 years after independence. As to the exploitation of natural resources, Malta has a very small land area, no fertile soils, no rivers, no forests, and long periods of dry weather: its key strategic resources were its location and a set of sheltered, deep water harbours.

So: back to our predicament in 1985. What about calling up our own 'independence struggles'? Our first reaction was bewilderment and confusion. Was Malta so different from other former fragments of empire? Were we perhaps not so knowledgeable about what really happened in our own country's history? Had we been duped into thinking that the Maltese were, by and large, loyal and compliant subjects of the Crown? Or, an even worse prospect: were the Maltese a more cowardly breed of colonized people?

Today, I know that the struggles, in various forms, against oppressing imperial regimes are the common stuff of histories experienced by many colonised societies. And with this being the case, the first and gut reaction is to challenge one`s own understanding of one`s predicament, and seek to fit someone else's model onto one`s own; if it doesn't fit, then it is not because the model does not suit one`s particular experience, but rather because one`s interpretation is probably wrong. After all, why shouldn't it? Just because one's country is different, does not mean that it has a right to its own particular twist of history. And someone else's model has been proven to work for others; so why not for ours and ourselves as well?

I now acknowledge such and similar attitudes to be demeaning and belittling: they diminish our understanding of our own local condition; they encourage a form of anti-colonial rhetoric that has itself become globalised and nuanced: in historic accounts, in social science, in political economy. The script is a standard one: the main actor is a reckless, profit seeking, powerful colonial power keen to subdue and exploit other peoples by the forces of religion, technology, military prowess and psychological submission. The script is repeated on a daily basis in our curricula: textbooks and narratives are based on models and theories that apply to other, larger places; the assumption is that they also apply to our own. But is that a plausible assumption to make?

Beyond 'Aping Societies'

Back in the 1970's, a voice from the Virgin Islands said 'no'. I came across the work of Norwell Elton Harrigan as I was reading around my doctoral thesis topic in the early 1990s. Here was a person who criticised his own small island society for 'aping' larger ones – a 'raran society', he called it in his PhD thesis - for what today, in the computer age, we could describe as 'cutting and pasting' what applied elsewhere to itself, uncritically and glibly (Harrigan 1972). Not only that, but Harrigan was willing to try and do something about this rampant inferiority complex: thanks

to his vision and efforts, a journal dedicated to the study of small jurisdictions was set up at the College of the Virgin Islands. It was auspiciously called *Microstate Studies*, and ran at least four annual issues, the last in 1981, before it stopped appearing. Dr Harrigan passed away soon thereafter.

Now I know that the late Dr. Harrigan was the first British Virgin Islands native to secure a doctorate, in higher education from the University of Pittsburgh, US. He was a distinguished civil servant and academic, and had, during his career, served as Secretary to Government/Deputy Governor of the British Virgin Islands and, subsequently, as Director of the Caribbean Research Institute at the University of the Virgin Islands. He was co-author with Dr. Pearl Varlack of *The Virgin Islands Story* (Harrigan and Varlack 1975) As I am told by his colleague Dr Jerry McElroy, Harrigan was often impressed with the thick layer of networks in small island social relations; he would remark that leaders had to exercise 'eternal discretion' and caution in public discourse so as not to offend a neighbour, a relative, or a colleague – which would easily comprise half the population.

But why 'microstate studies', some may wonder? 'Raran' means 'dwarf', suggesting that the small are obliged to follow the historical developments, the curricula and the paradigms of the big. And yet, it also suggests that the world's small places, many of which are islands, may have some specific histories to tell; and some specific voices to celebrate. And indeed they do. Grant McCall was to make similar appeals for island specificity, from a largely Pacific island perspective, a few years later (McCall 1994). Harrigan offered this candid and still pertinent assessment:

> "I have quite often been troubled by the decision-making at the policy level where many of the decisions were based on assumptions totally irrelevant to local conditions. The hard fact remained, however, that except for this measurement with someone else's yardstick, there was little except intuition or conventional wisdom on which those decisions could be based" (Harrigan 1980, p. v).

The rigorous study of islands, for their own sake and on their own terms, has hopefully come some way to rectify this deficiency. We can increasingly consider islands – and small jurisdictions – with their own yardstick. And this yardstick is gaining increasing recognition as a legitimate device and perspective. There is still some way to go; but the situation on the ground has changed since Dr Harrigan voiced those nagging concerns over 30 years ago.

Here is one example of how we know islands *can* be different.

As colonisation retreated after 1945, it left in its wake small puddles of jurisdiction, with the largest territories obtaining sovereignty first. The sequence of decolonization during these past seven decades suggests that territories with larger populations – and their elites – were much more eager to struggle for, and achieve, independence. The smallest colonies took the longest to achieve independence, also because their colonial masters had serious doubts regarding their presumed viability, stability and reliability as independent states in a 'cold war' world (Diggines 1985, Pirotta et al. 2001, Plischke 1977, pp. 9-10). But some of the smallest colonies – practically all of which (apart from Gibraltar and French Guiana) were islands - were not interested in independence *at all.* Malta only followed that route begrudgingly; Cyprus as well. And Dutch scholars observing the unfolding situation in the Netherlands Antilles, in the Caribbean, had to admit that it was the metropolis, and not the former colonies, which was pressing the latter for independence (Hoefte and Oostindie 1989). This is described as "an unusual situation" (Allahar 2005, p. 132) whereby the mother country seemed willing, even anxious, to free itself from the responsibilities of empire;

but the colonies in question would demur and not let the mother country off the hook (Oostindie and Klinkers 2003, pp. 116, 145). The persisting seven colonial powers – Australia, Denmark, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States – find themselves in an "*enforced* colonial condition," while their territories "*opt* for dependency status" (Skinner 2006, p. 185; my emphasis).

Such a situation has been described as 'upside down decolonisation' (Hoefte and Oostindie 1991, p. 93). For all its quirky suggestions, it is neither unusual nor paradoxical. We need no longer feel confused or embarrassed that our small island homes have a different history to tell. Places like the British Virgin Islands did not even affiliate themselves to the West Indies Federation in the 1950s, deciding that they would have better prospects either as a lingering overseas territory of the United Kingdom, or perhaps in some kind of association (USVI style?) with the United States, rather than as a federated Caribbean state, let alone as a sovereign nation. And the story repeats itself: in the Caribbean, Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda, the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Saba, Curaçao and St Eustatius, Guadeloupe and Martinique . . . all had opportunities to seek or vote for independence – but none did; where referenda were held in these territories, the independence vote garnered 15% support *at best* (Baldacchino 2010, p. 45).

In light of the unfolding political economy of recent decades, I trust that such a decision has not been regretted. The economic development of subnational island jurisdictions has been much faster than that of sovereign states: moreover, the protection and oversight afforded by, and the access to the larger and richer markets of, the metropole is such a significant resource: a privilege that sovereign nations have forfeited. This link with a powerful and benign patron may yet prove to be the deciding factor in the perseverance of an offshore finance industry now under considerable pressure from the G7, the EU and the OECD. It also confirms that island political cultures often maintain a keen interest in affiliation with larger, stronger, richer powers, thus being able to piggy-back on their resources: security, finance and diplomacy related.

For a small island perspective

And so: small islands may experience a different set of situations that determine different historical outcomes. Echoing Harrigan, deploying someone else's yardstick does not necessarily work. Sounds like common sense – but common sense is not necessarily good sense (Baldacchino and Greenwood 1998). Once this principle is accepted, then there is every reason for extending this analysis to other fields, while always keeping an open and critical mind as to whether a small island perspective works, or doesn't work.

Consider the following scenarios. Those interested, or immersed, in the politics of small, often island societies, often find themselves in scenarios where they are trained in and taught about the Whitehall-Westminster model and the lauded division of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary, even though their own small island world does not function with such an elegant separation; indeed role conflict and ambiguity are rife and unavoidable (e.g. Benedict 1967; Singham 1968). Those interested, or immersed, in a small island economy are trained in, or taught about, the virtues and dynamics of freely competitive markets and private enterprise; when imperfect competition, oligopolies and natural monopolies, as well as strong state involvement, are more likely to explain operations on the ground (Armstrong et al. 1993). They are also lectured on the rampant vulnerabilities of such economies, forgetting that the relative economic fortunes of small island developing states have been consistently better than those of their larger counterparts, or of similarly sized territories

that are landlocked (Armstrong and Read 2006). Those interested in the organisational sociology, human resource management, auditing and public administration of a small island society are expected to understand the benefits of specialisation and the legal-rational basis of organisational life, when their own 'real' world is driven by personal contacts, messy role overlaps, a 'soft state' where decision-makers are known, role and occupational multiplicity, and a frenetic networking involving 'friends of friends' (Atchoarena 1993, Baldacchino and Bray 2001, Baldacchino and Higson 1993, Bennell and Oxenham 1983, Boissevain 1974, Crossley and Holmes 1999, Richards 1982). Those interested in development studies would be told about, and trained in, the virtuous imperatives of industrialisation for modernisation and job creation; when in actual fact their small island state may typically avoid and leapfrog any industrialisation phase, and concern itself rather with the potential of the services sector (which does not suffer as much from diseconomies of scale), as well as huge expanses of territorial waters, given very limited land areas (Baldacchino 1998, Dolman 1988, Streeten 1993). Those interested in informational technologies and communication studies are taught and trained to appreciate the importance of the media in political campaigns; when it is the very personal touch and intimate rapport between voter and politician that still rules in the small state, and can explain typically high voter turnout (Hirczy 1995). And, to reconnect with my own personal journey, those interested in the history and political sociology of small islands would study about violent struggles by colonised peoples pressing for independence; but many small territories today remain stubbornly and proudly articulated with metropolitan powers (Baldacchino and Milne 2008). A grand sweep of all these nuances suggests that a 'small scale syndrome' might be validly conceptualised: a behaviour package that gravitates around the three interrelated dynamics of intimacy, monopoly and totality; and where the only realistic exit option is emigration (Hirschman 1963, Baldacchino 1997) or exile/ex-isle (Bongie 1998).

I came to this personal understanding – and made peace with my earlier anomie, pains and tribulations – in the course of my doctoral research which investigated the practices of corporate hospitality management in two, foreign-operated, five-star hotels, one based in Malta and one in Barbados. These two small island states are former British colonies, but differ sharply in geographic, economic and historical detail; and yet, their locals shared this uncanny flair in how they went about contesting, out-manoeuvring and eroding top-down, corporate intent. The two human resource directors of these five-star hotels, both expatriates from larger countries, were somewhat at a loss to explain a cocktail of pesky endeavours: a pervasive conspiracy of silence; the stubborn lack of staff mobility, a preference for trade union representation; the absence of secrecy and confidentiality; the erosion of personal and professional barriers; the ease of becoming big fish in small ponds; the nibbling away at legal-rational authority; and the impossibility of preventing relatives from finding employment within the same firm, with all the consequences that follow (Baldacchino 1997). Sounds familiar?

Place and Scale Matter

These are very real exasperations that follow from brave attempts at imposing a scientific, Western management style on turbulent and unsettling subject matter. Such is small island life shorn of its paradisiacal trappings. We know this to be so; and academic scholarship was initially keen to acknowledge hints of environmental determinism on human behaviour. To the extent that islanders were deemed to be easily typed, their traits listed and categorised. For example, both philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1765) and geographer Eileen Churchill Semple (1911, p. 426) argued matter-of-factly that ethnic and cultural divergence is more marked amongst islanders than mainlanders. Such pseudo-

scientific writings however quickly fell out of favour in academe since they tended to stereotype, essentialize and mythologize their subject matter. Not all islanders are the same. Islandness is perhaps best understood as some kind of intermediate variable that does not, in itself, cause anything. But, the proverbial baby may have been thrown out with the bathwater: the roles of place and scale were rendered suspect and even summarily dismissed as useful conceptual notions, while mainstream geography and social science generally rushed to embrace the tenets and promises of globalisation and post-structuralism. Everything around us was now to be seen as a social construction, an epi-phenomenon. People are now invariably 'on the move' and 'out of place', creating (rather than occupying) space, rendering it through diverse senses, and ascribing it with meaning and history, in progress.

But: considerations of 'place' are coming back with a vengeance. First, in the suite of 'area studies' initiatives since the 1980s – whether as urban studies, regional studies, rural studies, gender studies – all of which started to acknowledge the specificity of the local even if threatened by an ocean of encroaching sameness. Second, encouraged by the renaissance of post-colonial and sub-altern studies, which gave a badly needed voice and presence to even the world's smallest jurisdictions and their silenced populations, including aboriginal peoples. Third, and more recently, by a 'spatial turn' in the geo-humanities, a reconnection with the material and the grounded.

Venturing between hard-nosed empiricism and ethereal phenomenology, one can perhaps safely hypothesize a melding of the real and the virtual, whereby each becomes folded and imbricated in the agency of the other. Places would not just be attached to spaces; but nor do they just travel with us. Islands, like other places, also partake and exist through and with the materials, technologies, symbols and discourses by which they are articulated. Material resources, spaces and mobilities are much more than the affects and effects of human intent and action; they also structure, define and configure interaction; even as they themselves are, in part, outcomes of decisions, choices and interventions made by people. Small islands are places that are captive of such moments of 'living in-between'; their bounded geography, longitude and latitude gives them an alluring finality and materiality that satisfies the human search for meaning, stability and safe anchorage. They are fathomable "emotional geographies" (Stratford 2008) that attract visitors yearning for healing, and residents desirous of community; but they can also foster cabin fever and vicious politics, encouraging the dissenting, the ambitious and the political losers to leave, perhaps never to return.

Texts

A strong anti-colonial rhetoric has gripped the Caribbean region for many decades: it has been the dominant discourse in articulating and making sense of the long colonial experience, inspiring trade union movements and eventual independence movements throughout the region. That particular discourse was rendered mainstream by the New World Group in the 1960s, which started off at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. It continues to hold higher education institutions in the Caribbean in its thrall. In fact, there is no shortage of powerful models, concepts and explanations for the political economy of the Caribbean. These are perspectives dominated by analysis of social class, colour (negritude) mobile capital, and big stakes imperialism, and where there is hardly any role for the small and the insular but to resist and write back. (A similar class-driven discourse has also dominated the French Caribbean: e.g. Aimé Césaire 1955.) Indeed, references to such things as islands can easily be construed as an alienating

distraction, dangerously shifting focus from what is the heart of the matter, and which remains "the sugar plantation variant of the colonial mind" (Best 1967, p. 7). Today, perhaps many Caribbean academics who are critical of capitalism are less enamoured with the Cuban development model than they were in the 1970s. But, there nevertheless remains very little scholarship today about and from the Caribbean that explicitly adopts an island studies and/or a small state perspective. The dominant paradigm in the region is the radicalism set out by Eric Williams, the charismatic prime minister that led Trinidad and Tobago to independence almost fifty years ago, and articulated in his political history treatise *From Colombus to Castro* (Williams 1970). From this perspective, recent Caribbean history is conceived in terms of international rivalry, and is nurtured in an environment of power politics and a lingering neo-colonial hegemony.

Some attempts to tease in the small and insular within the radical and ideologically left template were made. Vaughan Allen Lewis, seasoned St Lucian politician and political scientist, tried to reconcile these different approaches in his landmark edited text *Size, Self-determination and International Relations in the Caribbean* (Lewis 1976). He resented that smallness was often equated with weakness and a piddling and irksome diplomacy. He is also aware that, in a region gripped by nationalist identities, considerations of geography (as with islands) invariably come to play second fiddle to considerations of politics (as in statehood). He is also aware of the "Singapore paradox": a country can be highly exposed to exogenous shocks, and yet still manages to become prosperous (Briguglio 2004). Not all small island states are doomed to play victims and pawns in regional or international regimes. Writing a powerful preface to a book exploring small state diplomacy in 2009, Lewis recognizes that resilience is as much part of small island life as its much more touted opposite: vulnerability. At least the talk about the presumed non-viability of small island states that was so pervasive in the 1960s has now been silenced. Statehood does not have a right size (Lewis 2009).

At around the same time, the Caribbean began experiencing a massive interest from the developed world – its association with fun and frolic, its salubrious climate, and its proximity to the affluent middle classes of North America in particular, made this region a premier site for the development of mass tourism. Sun, sand and sea, at times accompanied by sex, turned the infertile beaches of the Caribbean into the playgrounds of millions of lethargic and tanning bodies. The infrastructure to meet and attract this clientele exploded, along with all the artefacts and symbolism to match – pirates, music and paradise in particular. Yet, the limitations of the model were also soon readily apparent: decaying reefs, waste management issues, traffic congestion and pollution, reproduction of racial power relationships in the service industry, dependence on foreign capital, airlines and hospitality know-how, and rapidly disappearing 'windows to the sea' for the locals, cheated even from glimpsing the sea, let alone enjoying it, given the rate of beach concessions (e.g. Hutt 1979)**.** John Bryden spelt these issues out starkly in his timely book *Tourism and Development: a Case Study of the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Bryden 1973). Yet, tourism remains today a vibrant industry and a natural fit with Caribbean culture; the danger, as elsewhere, is to follow the numbers rather than quality. Smallness and isolation can help to engineer a more selective and niche driven tourism industry: but this takes political leadership. In democratic polities, where various stakeholders all expect to share a piece of an always growing tourism pie, the switch from mass to niche tourism is easier said than done.

One of the classic studies of political leadership in the Caribbean is undoubtedly that of Eric Gairy, the 'big man' of Grenada politics, by Archie Singham. In his book *The Hero and the Crowd in a Colonial Polity*, Singham (1968) traces the rise and fall

from power of a trade union leader turned father of independence and of anti-colonial resistance. He analyses the continuing role of charisma in both working the crowd and the constituency to political advantage, and how power can get concentrated in the hands of rulers via institutional convergence, in spite of the hallmarks of democratic governance.

But perhaps it is the concept of chronic vulnerability that remains etched so powerfully in the psyche of many island politicians and educators. In pushing for the recognition and acceptance of a condition, policy makers and academics may be merely replacing one set of hypes and stereotypes with another. Indeed, the two are not so different: from one of dependency and marginality as a function of colonialism and international political economy, to one of dependency and marginality as a function of diseconomies of scale, remoteness, economic openness. These are presented as structural constraints, chronic conditions of small island jurisdictions that cannot be usurped or turned into opportunities by savvy governance, only somehow mitigated and temporarily kept at bay, at best. The Commonwealth Secretariat has published a whole series of texts on this subject, and couched in this way, including Lino Briguglio and Eliawony Kisanga's *Economic Vulnerability and Resilience of Small States* (2004). We are to believe that the destiny of islands is one of drifting and rudderless vessels, lurching dizzily and continuously from one crisis to another, and requiring international lifelines to survive. True: change is endemic to island life; especially that forthcoming from across the horizon, and over which islanders have little control. But: living with the ever-howling winds of change breeds a survival strategy that most islanders are familiar with. This includes "rapid response capability" (Bertram and Poirine 2007, p. 333) at the policy level; and international (often circular) migration as well as inter-occupational mobility at the household level. In the Caribbean, sociologist Lambros Comitas (1973) should be remembered for suggesting 'occupational multiplicity' as a key survival strategy from his fieldwork in Jamaica. Economic geographer Richard Frucht (1967) argued that a 'part peasant, part proletarian' disposition still made sense in the context of erratic booms and busts of small and open Caribbean island economies. And anthropologist Karen Fog Olwig (1993) candidly admitted that it was simply impossible to fully understand and research the island community of St Thomas without looking at its extensive diaspora in North America. If we wish to embrace the concept of 'resilience' to represent these responses, then we need to move far away from simply looking at this concept as the flip side of chronic vulnerability (Baldacchino 2011). I agree with Ryan Peterson (2011): on the concept of resilience, we have barely started to scratch the surface in terms of understanding that indigenous knowledge which enables islands and islanders to avoid, anticipate, withstand and/or recover from shocks; even though this is the story of their lives.

Conclusion: A Global Calling

I will conclude with an appeal to the global calling of the Caribbean, and perhaps of all oceans and waters, as a single archipelagic sea; a stretch of water that reflects the commonality of our 'world of islands' (Baldacchino 2007). I do so by referring to the richly comparative book by literary scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey *Routes and Roots*. Island literatures are often gripped by islanders' intimate connection with a tradition of movement and exchange: one that goes far beyond the current academic fascination with diaspora studies. Hence, the need to celebrate, as this book does, a 'genealogy of place': a historiography that positions islanders as vessels of embedded layers and strands of heritage, movement and consciousness that defy categorisation, whether by time, space, ethnicity, nation or jurisdiction (DeLoughrey 2007).

The connecting thread in this book's elaborate and systematic critique is the notion of the dialectics of the tide, or 'tidalectics', after Barbadian poet and culturalist Edward Kamau Brathwaite. He defines tidalectics as a feature that draws upon "the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic motion, rather than linear" (Brathwaite 1983). While acknowledging the differences between islanders of different regions and countries, there is an affinity with the tracing of long lineages of movement, bound together by three core elements which both envelop, and are in turn contained by, their human subjects: blood, sperm and (sea)water. Life is ultimately one grand cycle of liquid consummation: the sea gives life, tosses us here and there, and then takes life away. We are not surprised that many protagonists of Caribbean literature, as with Pacific literatures and those from other island societies, are not just inherently nomadic but also intimately amphibian.

Acknowledgements

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