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REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy
and instructions for contributors:

<http://imagination.csj.ualberta.ca>

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December 7, 2015

To Cite this Article:

Hambuch, Doris. "Caribbean Cinema Now: Introduction" *Imaginations* 6:2 (2015):
Web (date accessed) 4-9. DOI: 10.17742/IMAGE.CCN.6-2.1

To Link to this article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.CCN.6-2.1>



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CARIBBEAN CINEMA NOW: INTRODUCTION

DORIS HAMBUCH

The idea for this special issue originates in the realization that there has not been a follow-up of Mbye Cham's *Ex-Isles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (1992), published more than two decades ago.¹ The book review included in this issue highlights the only exception, but the book in question, *Explorando el cine caribeño* (2011; *Exploring Caribbean Cinema*), edited by Luis Alberto Notario and Bruce Paddington, was published in Spanish and with a very limited number of copies. According to the editors, an English translation of their book is forthcoming soon and, as Kristian Van Haesendonck predicts in the end of his review, such a translation should prove invaluable for future studies in Caribbean cinema. A symposium whose theme was identical with the title of the present issue brought together a series of academic presentations during the recent 10th-anniversary edition of the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (TTFF), indicating a more optimistic outlook for the future of Caribbean film studies.

Scholarship in Caribbean film studies has been scarce even within individual linguistic entities in the region, with the notable exception of Cuba. Important examples of such research include Keith Q. Warner's *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2000), Joaquín 'Kino' García's *Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño (1900-1999)* (2014 [1984]), as well as parts of Carolyn Cooper's *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (2004) and Lieve Spaas' *Francophone Film: A Struggle for Identity* (2000). The essays and interviews included in *Caribbean Cinema Now* highlight that the small amount of widely available Caribbean film scholarship is not due to a lack of material. The combination of the diverse analyses and filmmaker commentaries further emphasizes the benefits of cross-Caribbean exchange between producers, other participants in the regional industries, as well as among critics, whether in the region itself or in its so-called diaspora.

The launch of the first Caribbean Film Mart and Regional Film Database at this year's Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (<http://www.ttffilmfestival.com/>) may be an economic manifestation of the creative vision expressed by Surinamese director Pim de la Parra in the interview with Emiel Martens:

Caribbean cinema consists of all [the] individual initiatives in the region that have brought about, and brought together, a diverse body of films that are somehow connected through our history, culture, geography and climate. There will always be young Caribbean people who will rise and produce films—and so every now and then such a film could reach the whole world. We just have to keep hoping and to keep dreaming. (8 "A Paradox in Caribbean Cinema?")

The fact that the Caribbean Film Database is accessible in English, French, and Spanish but not Dutch reflects a chronic underrepresentation of the Dutch-speaking Caribbean in cross-regional studies. Despite extensive efforts on my part, the present collection was not able to remedy this persistent problem to the anticipated extent. The interview with Pim de la Parra and a comparative analysis of Felix de Rooy's *Desirée* (1984) in Ricardo Arribas' "Hacia una estética relacional del cine caribeño" ("Towards an 'Aesthetics of Relation' in Caribbean Cinema") are in fact the only representations of Dutch Caribbean cinema in this issue.

The combination of interviews and critical essays otherwise provides a diverse and necessarily eclectic glimpse into recent developments in Caribbean cinema. The issue begins with Storm

Saulter's guest artist portfolio, which aptly illustrates the achievements of an impressive career. The subsequent interview with Emiel Martens explains in detail the challenges that apply to filmmaking conditions throughout the region. As a founding member of the New Caribbean Cinema Movement (<http://www.newcaribbeancinema.com/>), Saulter is a model activist whose perseverance and creativity have found yet another well-deserved recognition in his recent appointment as filmmaker-in-residence at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

The third interview places Hyacinth Simpson in dialogue with Frances-Anne Solomon, the founder of Caribbean Tales (<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/>), a registered Canadian charity responsible for numerous opportunities in support of Caribbean

Fig. 1. Caribbean Tales Festival Poster



Fig. 2. Caribbean Film Mart

filmmakers, including scholarships, workshops, and the annual Caribbean Tales International Film Festival (<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/CTFF/>). Like the Trinidad and Tobago Festival, Caribbean Tales celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. Solomon's interview illuminates her dedication to these institutions as well as her own experiences as prolific filmmaker.



Fig. 3. Opening Night of the 10th Trinidad and Tobago International Film Festival

Two of the critical essays are island-specific, providing surveys of production efforts in Puerto Rico and Jamaica, respectively. Maria Cristina Rodríguez scrutinizes landmarks of Puerto Rican film production throughout the nascent 21st century. She further traces the debt of young Puerto Rican filmmakers to their late-20th-century predecessors in “The Island Image and Global Links in Puerto Rican Cinema of the 21st Century.” Sabrina Ceccato’s essay “Cinema in Jamaica—Legacy of *The Harder They Come*” underlines the legacy of one particular predecessor for Jamaican filmmakers. Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972) is still a model for Jamaican film production. Saulter affirms Ceccato’s argument towards the end of his guest artist interview, stating that Henzell’s film “still serves as a blueprint for Jamaican filmmakers.” A decade after Jamaica became an independent country Henzell’s film started a movement that challenged representations of Jamaica’s geography, society, and culture in foreign movies. Similar searches for self-representation on screen are detectable throughout the films discussed in this issue. While inspiration and material for indigenous stories abound, the financial burden of high production costs is a prevalent topic throughout the contributions. Do It Yourself (DIY) filmmaking proliferates throughout the region and, as Rodríguez emphasizes, recent technological developments such as digital technology have been conducive to this method.

Christian Lara from Guadeloupe is an exceptional director whose extensive filmography includes comparatively big-budget co-productions. Meredith Robinson’s contribution is a detailed analysis of Lara’s *Sucre Amer* (Bitter Sugar, 1997) and 1802, *l’Epopée Guadeloupéenne* (1802, The Guadeloupean Epic, 2005), both cinematographically impeccable costume dramas. Based in Paris, Lara decided to fill the gap in “commercial Antillean cinema” (Cham 280). In “Christian Lara: Reconciling Vision and Execution in *Sucre Amer* and 1802, *l’Epopée Guadeloupéenne*,” Robinson advocates an interpretation of the interrelated films that allows a postcolonial recovery of Guadeloupean collective memory.

Ricardo Arribas departs from Édouard Glissant’s concept of the “Poetics of Relation” to advocate cross-Caribbean film studies in “Más allá de la fascinación y el horror: hacía una estética relacional del cine caribeño” (Beyond Fascination and Horror: Towards an ‘Aesthetics of Relation’ in Caribbean Cinema). Aided by thoughtful and revealing analyses of representative films by Félix de Rooy, Fernando Pérez, Frances Negrón Muntaner and Luis Molina Casanova, he suggests that Caribbean film criticism better captures the region’s emancipatory potential in light of a relational film aesthetics.

Co-authored by Matthias De Groof and Kathleen Gyssels, “Give Me Back My Black Dolls’: Damas’ Africa and Its Museification, From Poetry to Moving Pictures” adds a final unique angle to this issue’s discourse on Caribbean cinema. Not only does their essay remind readers of the wealth of inspiration found in literary Caribbean heritage for future film production, it also includes an actual example of a short film inspired by Guianese Léon-Gontran Damas’ poem “Limbé.” Many poems, plays, and novels from across the region would lend themselves, likewise, to audiovisual adaptations. Such adaptations, in turn, revive studies of the writers whose texts engender the films. In this vein, the first part of De Groof and Gyssel’s essay focuses on the writer, Damas himself.

Inspired by literary texts or any other source involving Caribbean themes and subject matter, future productions within the Caribbean and its diaspora will certainly benefit from more, and more diverse, widely available Caribbean film scholarship. *Caribbean Cinema Now* will hopefully encourage many other film scholars to build on the legacy of Cham’s *Ex-Isles*, of Notario and Paddington’s *Explorando el cine caribeño*, soon available in English, as well as on the many other sources referred to throughout the included essays and interviews.



Fig. 4. TTFF15 Awards Ceremony

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The Caribbean Film Academy:
<http://caribbeanfilm.org/about-cafa-2/>

Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival:
<http://www.ttfilmfestival.com/>

¹ Many thanks are due to Mbye Cham, Kathleen Gysels, Luis Alberto Notario, Bruce Paddington, Sandra M. Casanova Vizcaíno, Giovanna Montenegro, and Jerry White for their various kinds of support.

Image Notes

Figure 1: Caribbean Tales Festival Poster
(<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/CTFF/festival/>)

Figure 2: Caribbean Film Mart
(<http://susumba.com/film-tv/news/15-features-first-caribbean-film-mart>)

Figure 3: Opening Night of the 10th Trinidad and Tobago International Film Festival
(<https://www.facebook.com/ttfilmfestival/photos/a.10153625311902171.1073741901.20187852170/10153625320452171/?type=3&theater>)

Figure 4: TTFF15 Awards Ceremony
(<https://www.facebook.com/ttfilmfestival/photos/pb.20187852170.-2207520000.1450328682./10153645679232171/?type=3&theater>)