This article was downloaded by: *10.2.97.136*
On: 22 Mar 2023
Access details: *subscription number*
Publisher: *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK

The Routledge Companion to World Cinema

Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison, Alex Marlow-Mann

Connected in "another way"

Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315688251.ch8
Dunja Fehimovi
Published online on: 27 Sep 2017

How to cite :- Dunja Fehimovi. 27 Sep 2017, *Connected in "another way" from:* The Routledge Companion to World Cinema Routledge
Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

8

CONNECTED IN "ANOTHER WAY"

Repetition, difference and identity in Caribbean cinema

Dunja Fehimović

Introduction: defining Caribbean cinema

There is no defining Caribbean cinema. This task, fundamental to the project of the present chapter, rests on another essential question: What is the Caribbean? Rather than constituting a basis for further intellectual enquiry and artistic creation, however, this deceptively straightforward interrogative is at the heart of unresolved debates and repeated attempts at (self-)definition by Caribbean writers, artists, intellectuals and filmmakers. If we start from the decision, reassuringly grounded in the physical realm, to equate the Caribbean with the geographical feature of the Caribbean basin, we are soon thwarted by the realisation that there are in fact five interconnected basins, covering the islands in the Caribbean Sea and touching on the mainland territories of Central America, Venezuela and Colombia. If this is the case, then should we consider these mainland territories, for example, as Caribbean? Where might we draw the imaginary line between the Caribbean and South or Central American "sections" of the relevant countries? With all this in mind, we might ask, where does Caribbean cinema begin, and where does it end? Which routes does it follow and what forms does it take?

As we delve into this problem, adding racial, linguistic, historical, and cultural criteria to our geographical categories, the Caribbean "in theory" increasingly starts to clash with the Caribbean "in practice", so that inconsistencies emerge and criteria become unclear. Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana, for example, are far more commonly included in investigations of the Caribbean and its cinema than Colombia and Venezuela. The first major study of its kind, Mbye Cham's edited volume, *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, begins by acknowledging that "the Caribbean covers a much wider geographic, cultural, linguistic and racial expanse than covered in this book" (1992: xiii). Cham chooses to focus on the cinemas of Guadeloupe, Martinique, the "Netherlands Antilles" (Curaçao, Suriname, Aruba), Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and their diasporas. He justifies the exclusion of Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic by brief reference to the "significant and fine body of critical works" on these areas (Cham 1992: xii), though it seems that this is only really the case with Cuba. Meanwhile, he omits Britain's Caribbean diaspora because it is discussed in another edited volume, *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema* (Cham and Andrade-Watkins 1988). In this way, Cham, not unlike

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

other scholars, obtains a corpus of Caribbean cinema by negation. A particularly illustrative example of the gap between theory and practice is provided by prominent Guadeloupian filmmaker Christian Lara, whose five requisites for Caribbean film have proven influential: "the director should be from the Caribbean, the subject matter should be a Caribbean story, the lead actor/actress should be from the Caribbean, Creole should be used, the production unit should be Caribbean" (in Tallon 1983). Apart from the fact that "the Caribbean" floats vaguely, undefined, through these stipulations, it is telling that, for some critics, many of Lara's films are themselves "severely limited in their Caribbeanness" (Cham 1992: 11) according to these same criteria.

The ontological uncertainties implicit in these discussions have confounded thinkers not only at the level of the Caribbean as a whole, but also at that of individual Caribbean nations. In a lecture delivered in 1939 and first published the following year, Cuban anthropologist and sociologist Fernando Ortiz took geography as the point of departure for his definition of Cubanness. However, the simple statement with which he began—"Cuba is an island"—was soon troubled by the realisation that "Cuba is an archipelago, that is, a conjunction of many islands, of hundreds of them" (2008: 1, translations author's own). On both the broader and the narrower scales, what begins as a single referent soon starts to multiply, spinning out of control and beyond our grasp. Prefiguring "lines of flight" (Deleuze's term (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) denotes the possibility of unpredictable, potentially liberating mutation), on the one hand, and the transnational turn in cultural and film studies on the other, the Caribbean, its cultures, and its cinemas condemn the enquirer to "an unending search", forever opening onto "other possible voyages, other possible routes" (Benítez Rojo 1996: xi). Just as the Caribbean expands ever outwards in trade, migratory and other routes from its putative roots in the Caribbean basin, so Caribbean cinema constitutes an "expanded" (Huyssen 2002) and ever-expanding field.

These geologically and geographically based enquiries, though refusing to yield absolute definitions, form the substratum of a particularly productive and influential meditation on the Caribbean: Antonio Benítez Rojo's *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (all quotations here refer to James E. Maraniss's translation of the second edition, published in 1996). The Cuban-born writer begins with a "concrete and easily demonstrated" fact: "the Antilles are an island bridge connecting, in "another way", North and South America" (1996: 2). Benítez Rojo's reference to "las Antillas", a term more often used to denote the Francophone Caribbean, itself repeats in another way the instability of the signifier of the Caribbean which we have already seen with reference to geography, reminding us of the region's characteristic linguistic and cultural plurality. Concluding that its connective quality gives the region "the character of an archipelago" (1996: 2), Benítez Rojo reconfigures the insights of Martiniquan writers Édouard Glissant, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant in the key of Chaos theory, which had then recently emerged to posit intimate, unseen connections between the minute and the vast, suggesting that "within the (dis) order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally" (1996: 2). Like Benítez Rojo, therefore, this chapter "aspires to be repetitive rather than definitive" (1996: xi), tracing a Caribbean cinema that emerges through the differential repetition of particular characteristics, anxieties, and themes: identity, independence, fragmentation, connection, and consumption.

Glissant's most influential texts, *Caribbean Discourse* ([1981] 1989) and *Poetics of Relation* ([1990] 1997) elaborate a vision of the Caribbean—albeit with an undeniable focus on Martinique in particular—that rejects totalising projects of knowledge and teleological metanarratives of History and Progress, and is instead characterised by multiplicity, ambivalence and disorder. Writing three years later, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant adopted and adapted Glissant's ideas to produce a manifesto of sorts: *In Praise of Creoleness* (1993). Renouncing the

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

"two incumbent monsters" (1993: 80) of Europeanness (colonisation and the mental alienation of the colonised subject) and Africanness (erected as a new ideal by the Négritude movement led by fellow Martiniquan Aimé Césaire), these authors pointed to Glissant as a foundational thinker of "Caribbeanness" (1993: 83). The cultural heart of Caribbeanness, for Bernabé and colleagues, is *Créolité*: being part of a group that results from "a nonharmonious (and unfinished therefore nonreductionist) mix of linguistic, religious, cultural, culinary, architectural, medical, etc. practices" belonging to the different peoples (Amerindians, Europeans, Africans, Arabs, Asians) brought together by colonisation (1993: 92). In this concept, and in key moments in all of these texts, a particular differential repetition starts to emerge: a "true" Caribbeanness can only be found in and through contingency and relationality—in short, in openness to the rest of the world. As such, Caribbean identity is allied with movement rather than stasis, Becoming rather than Being. This vision is antithetical to any classic "Introduction to", and finds its expression more through a series of tentative, unstable connections than through the comfort of clear definitions, delimitations, and conclusions.

If the Caribbean is characterised by "open specificity", "kaleidoscopic totality", and "the nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity", "[t]o define" becomes "a matter of taxidermy" (Bernabé *et al*. 1993: 89, 88). To the practical resistance of the Caribbean to straightforward definition, then, we now add a political resistance to *definition* as a kind of "bringing to an end". The external imposition and fixing of meaning is a form of symbolic violence associated with death and likened, in the *Éloge*, to "cultural amputation" (1993: 104)—dividing the subject on whom it is imposed. In his two seminal explorations of colonisation and its psychological consequences, *Black Skin White Masks* ([1952] 1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2004), the Martiniquan-born Frantz Fanon explored the related phenomenon of the colonised subject's mental alienation:

> Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"
>
> *(2004: 250)*

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon memorably uses the example of a young black Antillean watching a Tarzan film in Europe: his *de facto* identification with Tarzan becomes much more difficult as the surrounding (white) audience automatically identifies him with the black savages on screen. Through this "conclusive experience" (1967: 152–153) it becomes evident that the black subject, like the colonised subject more broadly, is subjected to and by the knowledge and representational systems of the coloniser. He is thus split from himself—a condition memorably described by Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant as a state of being "fundamentally stricken with exteriority", only able to "perceive [. . .] one's world [. . .], with the eyes of the other" (1993: 76).

This is far from being a surpassed stage of development. In addition to a common past of colonisation, much of the Caribbean continues to occupy complex and often uncomfortable positions in relation to former (and newer) "colonisers"; this is the case of France's Overseas Departments (*département d'outre-mer* or *DOM*) in the Caribbean—Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana; the British Overseas Territories, including Anguilla, the Cayman Islands and Montserrat; and Dutch territories such as Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Marteen. From the negotiation of its independence between Spain and the US at the Treaty of Paris, to US military interventions allowed by the Platt Amendment, to more recent attempts to bring down the Revolution, Cuba has a long history of struggles for national sovereignty. Meanwhile,

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

the oxymoronic quality of Puerto Rico's official name, *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, but literally "The Associated Free State of Puerto Rico") indicates its ambivalent, problematic status vis-à-vis the US.

The Caribbean in cinema

Given the manifestation of these formative experiences of colonisation, post-, and neo-coloniality in distorted self-perception and uncertain identity, we must think not only about Caribbean cinema, but also, and—given the fact that "filmmaking in the Caribbean by Caribbean people" is a relatively recent phenomenon (Cham 1992: 1)—perhaps first, about the Caribbean *in* cinema. Artistic, literary and filmic representations can cement and contribute to the effects of colonisation, reinforcing the Caribbean subject's mental alienation and "exteriority" by imposing the deathly stasis of reductive stereotypes. As Aimé Césaire has noted, the kinds of foreign films to which the Caribbean is exposed contribute greatly to the fact that "[t]he Antillean being is a human being who is deprived of his own self, of his history, of his traditions, of his beliefs" (in Sephocle 1992: 360). Typing "Caribbean film" into an internet search engine, I find myself scrolling through dozens of pages before I can locate a result that does not relate to Jerry Bruckheimer's multi-million-dollar film franchise, *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003–2017). The film series' origins in a theme-park ride designed by Walt Disney on the basis of a hodgepodge of "general Pirate narratives" (Petersen 2007: 67) speaks eloquently to the way in which it exoticises and objectifies the region for capitalist consumption. Like Disney's ride, which first opened to the public in 1967, the film exemplifies "the Disneyland simulacrum" (Baudrillard [1981] 1994), recreating "a history that never truly existed" (Petersen 2007: 64)—one that is, moreover, problematically "blanketed in whiteness" (with the one exception of an archetypal tragic *mulata*—Calypso/Tia Dalma [Thomas 2014: 187]).

While cinematic exploitations of the Caribbean often reinforce existing problematics of sovereignty, identity and self-worth, they also shore up the "superiority" of "the West". Tellingly, Mimi Sheller's analysis of the construction of Western Europe and North America's modernity through the consumption of Caribbean environments, commodities, bodies, and cultures opens with a cinematic metaphor: "Despite its indisputable narrative position at the origin of the plot of Western modernity, history has been edited and the Caribbean left on the cutting-room floor" (2003: 1). The remaining frames and sequences have tended to foreground stereotypes of the exotic or folkloric, usually only portraying locals as "picturesque native types or servants of one sort or another: human exotica, local color" (Thelwell 1992: 177). It is unsurprising then, that this complex intersection of consumption, commodification, identity, and alienation might feature in Caribbean films from the Caribbean. Indeed, it comes memorably to the foreground in Jamaica's first fiction feature, *The Harder They Come* (1972, Jamaica). Released in the years following the island's independence, Perry Henzell's film quickly established itself not only as the foundation of a "national" cinema, but also, for many, as "the quintessential Caribbean film" (Paddington and Warner 2009: 100). Its portrayal of country boy Ivan's move to Kingston, foray into the music industry, and involvement in the drug trade was pioneering in its celebration of working-class Jamaican culture and language (Creole/Patois/Patwa), but also attracted criticism at home for its "representation of ganja consumption and [. . .] 'glamorous' Jamaican gangsters"—stereotypes that normally plagued foreign depictions of the island (Ceccato 2015).

Kenneth Harris reads the film in terms of racial, sexual and commodity fetishism to conclude, somewhat cynically, that its underlying purpose is "the commodification of reggae for white consumers" (1992: 214). Despite the film's prominent soundtrack and its protagonist's musical aspirations (rising international reggae star Jimmy Cliff played Ivan and sang on

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

the soundtrack), this reductive view overemphasises the film's collusion in fetishisation; after all, the protagonist's spectacular death warns that (mis)identification with (foreign) images—in Ivan's case, with the cowboys he watches at the cinema (specifically Sergio Corbucci's *Django*, 1966, Italy: a spaghetti western that thus also revolves around (mis)identification with foreign images)—is a mirage that will end in violence, be it symbolic—alienation and "mimicry" (Bhabha 1994), or literal—death. The film quickly became a "cult classic" abroad, where it appealed, ironically, for its attractive and exotic "Jamaicanness" (Paddington and Warner 2009: 101), but it was particularly important in Jamaica, where for the first time a film had "reveal[ed] [the] country to itself" (Césaire in Sephocle 1992: 365). Though some critics have interpreted its use of Hollywood techniques as a kind of betrayal to the black Jamaican experience (Yearwood 2000: 161), its enthusiastic acceptance by national audiences and filmmakers alike confirms Bruce Paddington and Keith Warner's suggestion that "Caribbean film continues to survive and its identity, as with the Caribbean itself, has been forged as a result of these interactions and negotiations" (2009: 92). In this way, Victoria Marshall's designation of Jamaican film as "likkle but tallawah" (1992: 99) (a Jamaican Patois phrase meaning "small but strong") remains valid today, as Henzell's classic continues to provide inspiration for a steadily growing number of Jamaican cineastes (not least Storm Saulter, whose *Better Mus' Come*, 2010, Jamaica, is a kind of indirect sequel to Henzell's film).

"[A] country without images is a country that does not exist"

Given the evident implication of cinema with hegemonic geopolitical systems and racial, sexual, and gender inequalities, it is perhaps hardly surprising that artistic modes, from visual art to poetry and cinema, have sought to reclaim the Caribbean through an ongoing quest for authenticity, a search for self on individual, national, and regional levels. In such a context, cinema is important because, in the words of prominent Cuban filmmaker and intellectual Julio García Espinosa, "[a] country without images is a country that does not exist. All that we do, all that we want to do, is to have the right to be the protagonists of our own image" (in López 2007: 186). In Cuba, the foundation of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC—The National Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) shortly after the 1959 Revolution bore witness to a political commitment to national sovereignty and a cultural commitment to the development, promotion, and celebration of national culture and identity. The films ICAIC has produced have varied widely in their themes, aesthetics, and approaches, but a common thread of critical questioning can be found in their portrayals of Cuban history and reality, the quintessential example of which is arguably Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968, Cuba).

Set during the 1962 missile crisis, the film explores the tense uncertainty of the post-Revolutionary, Cold War period through the psychological paralysis of the white, bourgeois intellectual Sergio, who remains on the island after all of his friends and family have left. Speaking eloquently about his country's underdevelopment, in which "nothing has continuity, everything is forgotten [and] people aren't consistent" (all translations my own), Sergio nonetheless fails to identify his own faults, which ironically take the form of another of his pronouncements on underdevelopment: "the incapacity to relate things, to accumulate experience, and evolve". Although he is aware that he is experiencing the birth of a new era, and critiques the old, bourgeois order to which he used to belong, he also bitterly repeats the same stereotypes that mark Cuba as part of the underdeveloped "tropics", recalling the multiple forms of consumption of the Caribbean: "That's what backward countries are for: to kill things, to fish, and to sunbathe. There you have her, the beautiful Cuban *señorita*."

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

As Julianne Burton points out, the film's opening sequences combine documentary footage and fiction to simultaneously reference and undermine cinematic representations of Cuba—and the Caribbean—according to stereotypes of exoticism, sensuality, rhythm and racial otherness ([1977] 1990: 236). Working through a dialectics of identification and distanciation, the film is exemplary in its questioning of notions of modernity, development, coloniality, Caribbeanness, and Cubanness. According to Ana López's influential reading, for example, "*Memorias* should also be considered as the first Cuban film of exile, marking the disarticulation of an 'inside' space for nationness and the re-articulation of a transnational (or at least, north–south) mode of a more ambivalent 'Greater Cuban' identity" (1995: 7).

As Cham has pointed out, outside of Cuba, the emergence of Caribbean films in the 1970s and 1980s was a product of similarly significant social, political, and economic developments, such as Jean-Claude Duvalier's dictatorship in Haiti, Michael Manley and Edward Seaga's governments in Jamaica, and the nascent pro-independence movements of Guadeloupe and Martinique (1992: 2). Though Cuba is historically unique in the Caribbean in terms of the level of state support dedicated to local filmmaking, official backing and funds also proved crucial to the production of Euzhan Palcy's *Rue cases nègres* (Sugar Cane Alley, 1983, Martinique/France)—a Martiniquan film which has similarly acquired the status of a "classic". Adapted from Joseph Zobel's novel (1950), the film owes its creation in large part to the personal, political, and financial support of Aimé Césaire, who was serving on the Regional Council of Martinique at the time, and whose cultural initiatives (such as SERMAC—Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle) Palcy credits with laying the foundations for her film's success (in Givanni 1992: 295). Set in the 1930s, *Rue Cases-Nègres* deals with slavery's aftermath through the story of young José and his grandmother, Amantine (Figure 8.1). The two live next to a sugarcane plantation, but when José is presented with a scholarship to a city school, they must both face new difficulties in Fort-de-France. In line with Nègritude's goals of reclaiming blackness and African heritage as sources of pride and strength, the film uses the protagonist's only father figure, the

Figure 8.1 *Rue cases nègres* (Sugar Cane Alley, 1983, Martinique/France, Euzhan Palcy) deals with slavery's aftermath through the story of young José and his grandmother. ©NEF Diffusion/Orca Productions/SU.MA.FA.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

storyteller Medouze, to highlight the importance of Africa to the development both of José and of Martinique (Antoine-Dunne 2010: 103).

Importantly, this political and cultural commitment to a recovery of African heritage also manifests itself through a particular aesthetic. Indeed, the film's use of light "adds to the creation of an image grounded in an idea of blackness, in particular, since light intensifies the concentration on skin colour, especially in the portrayal of Medouze and José" (Antoine-Dunne 2010: 103). Its focus on a Caribbean, tropical light has a long creative tradition, the latest interpretation of which is perhaps to be found in the films and theorisations of contemporary Trinidadian filmmaker, Yao Ramesar. Reflecting on the Caribbean sun as "a centrifugal force and aesthetic" in regional cinema, Ramesar has developed a natural approach to lighting that he believes favours dark skin-tones and resonates psychologically with local audiences (in Chong 2015: 127). Over time, and through the production of feature films such as *SistaGod* (2006, Trinidad and Tobago, Yao Ramesar) and *Haiti Bride* (2014, Trinidad and Tobago/Haiti, Yao Ramesar) (Figure 8.2), this practice has crystallised into a very deliberate quest to develop an "eyealect": a Caribbean "visual vernacular" (in Chong 2015: 122) that corresponds with the region's many linguistic variations. This aesthetics is thus part of a wider philosophy of filmmaking that Ramesar calls "Caribbeing"—a commitment "to reflect our realities in life and our culture on screen" (in Raphael 2014) that we might apply to many of the films discussed here. Importantly, Ramesar's focus on representing and celebrating Caribbean identity on screen does not constitute a retrenchment in some narrow sense of self. Rather, his claim that his work is "creolisation squared" (in Chong 2015: 122) resonates with the ideas of open, unfixed Caribbeanness and *Créolité* explored above.

More specifically, we might align Ramesar's approach with Gilberto M. Blasini's insightful exposition of a "Caribbean cinematic créolité" (2009). Analysing the syncretic and never complete process of creolisation in relation to "the tactical inscription of diasporic African cultures into cinematic texts", Blasini shows how blackness and Africanness become "symbolic sites where social, cultural, and political elements converge and transform into a discourse that can be called 'Caribbean *créolite*'" (2009: 71, 73). His reading of key films such as Palcy's *Sugar*

Figure 8.2 *Haiti Bride* (2014, Trinidad and Tobago/Haiti, Yao Ramesar) illustrates a very deliberate quest to develop an "eyealect", a Caribbean "visual vernacular". ©Caribeing.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

Cane Alley, and Curaçaoan filmmaker Felix de Rooy's *Almacita di Desolato* (Almacita, Soul of Desolato, 1986, Netherlands Antilles/Netherlands) demonstrates the way in which a focus on the specific and apparently narrow quickly starts to open out, as "*créolite* not only documents the continual transformations of the Caribbean but also reinvents its geocultural scope by expanding beyond the Antilles" (2009: 73). The syncretic content, form, and aesthetics of these films encourage us to make connections with the south-eastern coast of the USA, the north-eastern coast of South America, and the Caribbean diaspora's host countries, amongst other places. In this way, a turn to specificity soon becomes a call for connection, as it grows increasingly difficult to categorise and contain Caribbean cinema according to national, regional or other criteria.

This problem of categorisation is evident in the emergent canon examined here—a Cuban film that has been associated with Latin America and the *New Latin American Cinema* movement of the 1960s and 70s, a Martiniquan story that speaks broadly to the postcolonial experience, a Jamaican "classic" in critical dialogue with Hollywood practices and images, and a Trinidadian–Haitian exploration of "Caribbeing", all of which are of uncertain or mixed genre. Unsurprisingly, then, the question of where studies of such films *fit* has manifested itself in scholarship on Caribbean cinema, which, with the exception of a few more comprehensive volumes, is scattered among collections or texts dedicated to more or less broad concepts such as Third Cinema, World Cinema, Francophone Cinema, or Black Cinema. This fragmentation of the scholarly corpus is apt in its reflection of the geographic, cultural, and linguistic fragmentation that characterise the Caribbean, and it can at times encourage readers and viewers to adopt a relational perspective that reflects on the understandings of Caribbeanness outlined here. However, some of these approaches also limit connections and comparisons in a way that—albeit unwittingly—reinforces the historic marginalisation of Caribbean cultures.

Caribbean cinemas as "cinemas of relation"

We have seen this debate play out in more general terms around "Third" or indeed, "World Cinema", whose frequent construction in opposition to the hegemonic forces of Hollywood or "mainstream" commercial film reinforces the kind of binary that has long relegated the Caribbean to the margins of history and civilisation. However, recent explorations of Caribbean cinema have sought to redress this imbalance; by "not only recovering but also reimagining the parameters of the missing archives of the Caribbean's transnational history with motion pictures" (Francis 2014), issue 17 of *SX Salon* proposes a new angle that focuses on Caribbean film archives. A special issue of online journal *Imaginations* entitled "Caribbean Cinema Now" (2015) gathers scholarly presentations from the tenth anniversary of the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (TTFF) to "[indicate] a more optimistic outlook for the future of Caribbean film studies" (Hambuch 2015). Meanwhile, a special issue of *Caribbean Quarterly* seeks "a multifaceted approach to the Caribbean as a whole", juxtaposing essays on diasporic film with studies of "national" or local films (Antoine-Dunne 2015: 4).

While acknowledging the importance of critiques of centre/periphery theories by critics such as Teshome Gabriel (1982) and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994), we must acknowledge that the categories of "Third" and "World" cinema are useful in the way that they force us to recognise the inequalities and imbalances that shape Caribbean geopolitical and economic realities, and, therefore, cinemas. After all, Caribbean nations and dependencies are small, and limited internal markets mean that film production is expensive and therefore often impracticable. The "isolation" of much of the Caribbean makes it more expensive and challenging to obtain necessary equipment and technology. While the dissemination of video and digital technologies has greatly improved this situation, the still-difficult access to the latest equipment is

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

further complicated by the fact that many elements, from training to post-production facilities, are unlikely to be available close to home. As a result, production capacity is further restricted, and the pool of qualified and experienced individuals remains small. Those who have the requisite skills and know-how often stay abroad, where there are more funds, more networks—in short, more opportunities to produce. At the same time, the absence of a local film *industry* proper is both cause and effect of the dominance of Hollywood productions and foreign-owned cinema complexes in many parts of the Caribbean. Given these characteristics, we might usefully see much of the region in light of Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie's discussion of "the cinema of small nations" (2007). Importantly, the category of "small nation" relies on relation and relativity, since physical, political and economic "size" can only be determined in comparison with something else (2007: 2).

Given the importance of the relational in Caribbean culture, Erling Bjöl's suggestion that "a small state should be [. . .] considered shorthand for a state in its relationship with greater states" (in Yoo 1990: 12) could be put to productive use in an analysis of Caribbean cinema. However, the characteristic of "small nationhood" also risks resonating too strongly with the binaries often common to ideas of Third and World Cinema—binaries that paradoxically restrict rather than facilitate relationality. Alert to Paul Willemen's warning that the international focus in Western cinema studies tends to result in the neo-colonial imposition of Euro-American paradigms on non-Western films (2006: 34), we might therefore adapt Bjöl's thought to do greater justice to the intellectual history and creative reconfigurations of the region. Taking the lead from Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, I propose a renewed exploration of Caribbean cinemas as "cinemas of relation"—that is, cinemas that express their particularity and authenticity not through retrenchments in the national or the local or through straightforward opposition to a hegemonic "centre" but by constantly making and reconfiguring multiple connections. In the cinema of relation, "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 1997: 11). Such a reframing makes the important political move of shifting Caribbean cinema from the margins to a position, if not of centrality, then of exemplarity, where its rhizomatic (rather than arborescent, hierarchical) roots and routes speak eloquently to the state of an increasingly transnational cinema in an increasingly globalised world. This approach would therefore reflect the identification—signalled by writers such as Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, that the Caribbean is "the anticipation of the relations of cultures, of the future world whose signs are already showing" (1993: 88).

Conclusion

This redefinition necessitates, in further and more extensive studies of Caribbean cinema, the adoption of a more thoroughly comparative approach, less limited by the linguistic or geographic parameters that have characterised scholarship to date. In this sense, Kristian Van Haesendonck and Theo D'haen's tellingly entitled *Caribbeing: Comparing Caribbean Literatures and Cultures* (2014) provides a potential model to follow, in which it becomes clear that a comparative aspect is indispensable if we are to discover similarities and differences between various sites of Caribbeanness, and do justice to the suggestive overlaps and disjunctures between Caribbeanness, *Créolité*, postcolonialism, and globalisation. Working thematically, the collection shifts the diasporic from its habitual position of marginality or supplementarity, integrating it into explorations of "Caribbeing"—defined (in a different but not incompatible way to Yao Ramesar's idea) as a "state-of-being where the very name Caribbean is overdetermined with new meanings that exceed a clearly delimited geographical space" (2014: 11).

Such a move outwards to perceive Caribbean cinemas in multiple relations with others echoes the desire for connection evidenced by initiatives such as the CaribbeanTales Incubator and

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

Worldwide Distribution company (Simpson 2015), or recent calls by Cuban filmmakers for a film law that will allow them to reconnect with Latin America and the Caribbean (Anon. 2015). However, it is also hampered by the precarious and limited availability of Caribbean cinema; the same problems that plague production affect distribution, so that (with the exception of Cuba) local films are rarely shown in cinemas, and even then have short runs, while only very few are available for purchase on official DVDs. More common, but still limited, is circulation via bootleg copies, internet streaming, illegal download, and USB (in Cuba, entertainment circulates through the so-called "paquete semanal", or "the weekly package"). Although dedicated film festivals such as TTFF and CaribbeanTales do provide opportunities to see Caribbean productions, it is an irony befitting the region's complex history and geopolitics that the distribution, circulation and consumption of Caribbean cinema is currently characterised by both (industrial, commercial) isolation but also the kind of multiple, unofficial, unpredictable connections fostered by digital media and the internet. Nevertheless, if these modes of circulation were to be harnessed to allow a study of these films and their itinerant, rhizomatic afterlives, the examination of an "expanded" Caribbean cinema might reinforce the ongoing reconfiguration of "World Cinema" as a study of cinemas of relation, emphasising migrations, returns, connections, and relationships in film history, practice, distribution, consumption, narrative and aesthetics. Such a film studies would undoubtedly benefit from the new perspectives afforded by a characteristically Caribbean "errantry" (Glissant 1997: 18), revealing cinemas to be intimately connected, albeit "in another way".

References

Anon. (2015) "Por una nueva ley de cine en Cuba", *Cine Cubano, La Pupila Insomne*, 1 November, https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2015/11/01/por-una-nueva-ley-de-cine-en-cuba/.

Antoine-Dunne, J. (2010) "Sound and Vision in the Caribbean Imaginary", *Journal of West Indian Literature* 18 (2): 95–114.

—— (2015) "Introduction: Back and Beyond—The Context", *Caribbean Quarterly* 61 (2–3): 1–6.

Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*, Faria Glaser, S. (trans), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Benítez Rojo, A. (1996) *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Maraniss, J. E. (trans.), 2nd edn, Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press.

Bernabé, J., Chamoiseau, P. and Confiant, R. (1993) *Éloge de La Créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, Taleb-Khyar, M. B. (trans.), Éd. bilingue français–anglais, Paris: Gallimard.

Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.

Blasini, G. M. (2009) "Caribbean Cinematic Créolité", *Black Camera* 1 (1): 70–90.

Burton, J. ([1977] 1990) "Memories of Underdevelopment in the Land of Overdevelopment", *Cineaste* 8 (1): 16–21. Reprinted in Chanan, M. (ed.) *Memories of Underdevelopment*, New Brunswick, NJ; London: Rutgers University Press, 232–246.

Ceccato, S. (2015) "Cinema in Jamaica—The Legacy of *The Harder They Come*", *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 6 (2): 54–67.

Cham, M. B. (ed.) (1992) *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Cham, M. B. and Andrade-Watkins, C. (eds) (1988) *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chong, D. P. (2015) "Alighting on a Language of Caribbean Film: A Conversation with Yao Ramesar", *Caribbean Quarterly* 61 (2–3): 119–133.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2013) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Massumi, B. (trans.), London: Bloomsbury.

Fanon, F. (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Markmann, C. L. (trans.), London: Pluto Press.

—— (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Philcox, R. (trans.), New York: Grove Press.

Francis, T. (2014) "Unexpected Archives: Seeking More Locations of Caribbean Film", *SX Salon* 17, 22 October, http://smallaxe.net/wordpress3/discussions/2014/10/22/unexpected-archives/.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 06:14 22 Mar 2023; For: 9781315688251, chapter8, 10.4324/9781315688251.ch8

Gabriel, T. H. (1982) *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press.

Givanni, J. (1992) "Interview with Euzhan Palcy [1988]", in *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Mbye, B. C. (trans.), Trenton: Africa World Press, 286–307.

Glissant, É. (1989) *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, Dash, M. J. (ed. and trans.), Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

—— (1997) *Poetics of Relation*, Wing, B. (trans), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Hambuch, D. (2015) "Introduction: Caribbean Cinema Now", *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 6 (2), http://imaginations.csj.ualberta.ca/?p=7880.

Harris, K. (1992) "Sex, Race, Commodity and Film Fetishism in *The Harder They Come*", in Cham, M. B (ed.), *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 211–219.

Hjort, M. and Petrie, D. J. (eds) (2007) *The Cinema of Small Nations*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Huyssen, A. (2002) "High/Low in an Expanded Field", *Modernism/Modernity*, 9 (3): 363–374.

López, A. M. (1995) "Memorias of a Home: Mapping the Revolution (and the Making of Exiles?)", *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 20 (1): 5–17.

—— (2007) "Cuba: A Porous National Cinema", in *The Cinema of Small Nations*, Hjort, M. and Petrie, D. J. (eds), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 179–197.

Marshall, V. (1992) "Filmmaking in Jamaica: 'Likkle but Tallawah'", in Cham, M. B. (ed.) *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 98–105.

Ortiz, F. (2008) "Los Factores Humanos de La Cubanidad", *Perfiles de La Cultura Cubana* 2: 1–15, www.perfiles.cult.cu/articulos/factores_cubanidad.pdf.

Paddington, B. and Warner, K. Q. (2009) "The Emergence of Caribbean Feature Films", *Black Camera* 1 (1): 91–108.

Petersen, A. (2007) "'You Believe in Pirates, Of Course …': Disney's Commodification and 'Closure' vs. Johnny Depp's Aesthetic Piracy of 'Pirates of the Caribbean'", *Studies in Popular Culture* 29 (2): 63–81.

Raphael, C. (2014) "Robert Yao Ramesar: Caribbean Film Takes Off", *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper*, www.guardian.co.tt/news/2014-01-05/robert-yao-ramesar-caribbean-film-takes.

Sephocle, M. L. (1992) "Interview with Aimé Césaire", in Cham, M. B. (ed.), *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 359–369.

Sheller, M. (2003) *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, London; New York: Routledge.

Shohat, E. and Stam, R. (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London: Routledge.

Simpson, H. (2015) "The Caribbean, On Screen: A Conversation with Frances-Anne Solomon", *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 6 (2): 98–111.

Tallon, B. (1983) "L'An II Du Cinéma Antillais [Interview with Sarah Maldoror and Christian Lara]", *Autrement* 49: 242.

Thelwell, M. (1992) "The Harder They Come: From Film to Novel", in Cham, M. B. (ed.) *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 176–210.

Thomas, T. (2014) "Race and Remix: The Aesthetics of Race in the Visual and Performing Arts", in Navas, E., Gallagher, O. and burrough, x. (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, London: Routledge, 179–191.

Van Haesendonck, K. and D'haen, T. (eds) (2014) *Caribbeing: Comparing Caribbean Literatures and Cultures*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Willemen, P. (2006) "The National Revisited", in Vitali, V. and Willemen, P. (eds) *Theorising National Cinema*, London: BFI, 29–43.

Yearwood, G. L. (2000) *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African American Aesthetic Tradition*, Trenton NJ: Africa World Press.

Yoo, C. Y. (1990) *The International Relations of Korea as a Small State*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.