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"Selling the Caribbean: An Introduction"

Abstract: Taking the cue from the widespread metaphorical use of economic concepts such as *resources* or *markets* in both sociolinguistics and cultural studies, the present introduction sets out to discuss more literal aspects of the financial value of languages and the economy of the literary marketplace in the – mostly 'Anglophone' – Caribbean. Globalization, in particular a globally operating media and entertainment industry, and increased mobility – both in the shape of migration from the Caribbean and tourism into the region – have led to the widespread commodification of the region's natural, linguistic, and cultural resources. These developments have shaken up the traditional colonial and early post-colonial order but ushered in new inequalities. This introduction and the present special issue of *ZAA* explore the potential and dangers of this state of affairs from a cross-disciplinary perspective, bringing together approaches from (socio)linguistics, literary, and cultural studies.

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1 Background

Loose and metaphorical use of concepts from economics is quite widespread both in linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. Languages, after all, are communicative *resources* which may *compete* in certain linguistic *markets*. These resources have symbolic *value* in expressing their user's style, persona, or identity. Taken up by the foreign-language teaching *industry*, in which the global EFL *business* is by far the biggest player, language becomes an outright economic *commodity* in the literal sense, which is *marketed* and *sold* at considerable *profit margins*. In post-colonial literature, and even more so in the global music industry, we are likewise reminded that the cultural *marketplace* is often not a metaphor but a direct economic reality, such as when the literary canon in the global

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South is determined by *book production* and *sales* in the cultural *distribution hubs* of the North.

All three editors have explored these ideas over the past few years in their own work and shared ideas with each other, for example at conferences or in the frame of joint teaching. What provided the immediate stimulus for the present special issue of *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* was a workshop titled "Selling the Caribbean – Questions of Value in a Globalized Culture," which we organized as part of the 15th Triennial Conference of EACLALS, the European Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.[1] We embraced the opportunity the conference provided to place what had hovered in the background of our research at the center of attention. To the topics of *mobility*, *migration*, and the *media* (the "3 M-s") customarily at the center of our attention, we added two more "M-s," for *money* and *markets*. In the terminology of Appadurai's (1996) model of cultural globalization, we were going to venture beyond the changing global "ideoscapes," "mediascapes," and "ethnoscapes" (i.e., the core concerns of post-colonial cultural studies) to see how they connected to the global "finanscape" and "technoscape." Language and literature in the Caribbean and the global Caribbean diaspora provide abundant material for research, and we see the diverse articles in this issue as contributions to a larger, necessary debate across disciplines.[2]

During the long period of European colonial rule in the "West Indies," the region's Afro-Caribbean folk culture was suppressed and stigmatized, as were the creole languages associated with it. This colonial order was seriously challenged from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, as the movement for political independence and cultural self-assertion began to gather force. The result of decolonization was a complex, partial, and frequently ambiguous revaluation of local cultural traditions. In the twenty-first century, the legacy of colonialism alone can hardly account for the variety and complexity of Caribbean culture today, many aspects of which can be understood far better in terms of current globalization than in the frame of colonial/post-colonial narratives. There is no doubt for us that the contemporary Caribbean has moved from the margins of fading colonial Empires to the center of cultural globalization.

1 The conference took place in Innsbruck, Austria, from 14 to 18 April 2014 under the motto of "Uncommon Wealths: Riches and Realities," which we interpreted as encouragement to probe the connections between the hard (and often harsh) economic facts in the Caribbean and the rich academic theorizing it has inspired in post-colonial studies.

2 One obvious and regrettable limitation of our approach, for example, is that so far it remains largely restricted to the English-speaking Caribbean.

The connected and simultaneously disconnected "archipelagean" condition accounts for the paradigmatic openness and relationality of Caribbean culture, as Édouard Glissant (1989) has argued. This is, for instance, reflected in the region's literature, which is more frequently dealt with as 'world literature' than anything else and which is both written and read not only in the Caribbean, but also in Europe, the US, Canada, and throughout the world. The global success of Caribbean culture is probably even more evident in the domains of music and youth culture. Countries as diverse as Germany or Japan have become important markets for reggae and dancehall music (and have even produced their own forms of cultural fusion based on these imports). Elements of Rastafarian style and slang have found their way into a wide range of youth cultures both within and beyond the English-speaking world. Creole languages, a marginal presence in writing for most of their history, are routinely used on the participatory web by hundreds of thousands of people every day. Evidently, the cultural and linguistic resources of the Caribbean have been mobilized to an unprecedented degree. 'Caribbeanness,' it seems, is an asset.

In these developments, the small and sometimes institutionally weak postcolonial nation states of the region have not been among the major players, as Deborah Thomas has observed:

> The profound restructuring of the link between territory and nationalism throughout the Caribbean by the end of the twentieth century has had ramifications that could not be mitigated by, say, politicians' attempts to encourage dual citizenship or absentee voting. While migrants have historically forged multiple political, economic and social ties across territories [...], because of the intensification of migration, because of P. J. Patterson's [Prime Minister of Jamaica from 1992 to 2006] attempts to incorporate migrated Jamaicans and African Americans into the national body of Jamaica, and because of the greater penetration by US (and in many cases African American) media, *Jamaica is now wherever Jamaicans are*. (Thomas 2004, 259, our emphasis)

With regard to its linguistic outcome, this situation calls for treatment in the framework of the "sociolinguistics of globalization," which Blommaert has defined as the "sociolinguistics of mobile resources and not of immobile languages" (Blommaert 2010, 180). Its social, political, and cultural ramifications are best explored in the deterritorialized global ethnoscapes and mediascapes described by Appadurai in his seminal monograph on cultural globalization (Appadurai 1996). Against these wide horizons, the present collection of papers explores how the mobilized cultural and linguistic resources of the contemporary Caribbean are (or are not) assigned value – be it by Caribbean residents, by Caribbean migrants, or by various groups of outsiders. The value assigned to resources may be monetary and non-monetary, which makes our title ambigu-

ous. On the one hand, "Selling the Caribbean" highlights phenomena such as the ruthless sell-out of natural and cultural resources in the interest of the tourist industry (criticized by writers from Derek Walcott to Jamaica Kincaid), but on the other hand it also highlights the cultural appeal of the Caribbean, which is evident both in the relatively 'elite' domain of World Literature Written in English and in grassroots phenomena such as the global boom of reggae and dancehall. *Value*, in sum, reveals itself to be a multifaceted phenomenon when it comes to Caribbean culture in a globalized world, and a phenomenon which clearly benefits from an interdisciplinary approach – in our case of sociolinguists, literary, and cultural analysts. In the remainder of this introduction, the three editors will briefly sketch their personal take on the project (in alphabetical order).

2 Towards a "Linguistics of Mobility" for Jamaican Creole

The origin of most European-lexifier creoles in the Caribbean can be traced back to the "Black Atlantic" linguistic and cultural sphere and the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While they owe their existence to slavery and the forced migration of peoples, they tended to remain *marginal languages* (cf. Reinecke 1937) during the remainder of the colonial period. On the one hand, their marginalization was geographical: There was considerable migration within the Caribbean basin and the adjoining stretches of the North and South American mainland, but few creole speakers ventured further afield. On the other hand, the marginalization was social and cultural: Though securely established as the mass vernaculars in the region, creoles were on the whole excluded from prestigious uses in the public domain.

This changed during decolonization, when creoles were increasingly being embraced as *Nation Languages* (cf. Brathwaite 1984) for the purposes of postcolonial nation building and cultural self-assertion. This gave creoles open prestige for the first time, however limited and contested it may have been. The geographical confines were broken down by world-wide currents of migration which started in the middle of the twentieth century and have continued unabated since. Mair and Lacoste (2012) have explored some of the transformations which Jamaican Creole has undergone as a "vernacular on the move" in this period. One consequence is that what started out as the (only) vernacular of precisely described local communities in Jamaica itself has become a deterritorialized and increasingly free-floating style resource in the multicultural urban centers of the Global North (usually serving in addition to other languages in

which speakers are more fluent). Where Jamaican Creole (and, to a lesser extent, other creole languages of the region) are taken up by the media and entertainment industries, we have the full cycle of development of creoles in diasporic and mediated contexts: *communicative resource/unselfconscious vernacular use > cultural capital/conscious, rhetorically crafted or stylized use in code-switching with other languages*[3] *> economic commodity*.

What is striking is that, outside the vernacular social context of the island Caribbean, basilectal Jamaican Creole seems to shed most of the stigma attaching to it in face-to-face interaction on the ground. Rather than denote rural origin, poverty, lack of education and general backwardness, it becomes a valuable resource which is freed up for new uses in new social contexts and in various new media (popular music, digital literacy etc.). Outside Jamaica and in media use, Creole generally serves to evoke an atmosphere of *a yaad* ("at home" "among Jamaicans"), as opposed to *inna farrin* ("in foreign" = abroad).

In studies on the use of Jamaican Creole on the World Wide Web, Mair has shown that men may use Jamaican Creole playfully to perform a tough guy persona or to engage in games of mock verbal aggression [Mair 2011, 2013a,b, forthcoming (2015); Mair and Pfänder 2013]. For women, it commonly embodies the down-to-earth common-sense of the strong woman in the Caribbean tradition, as it does in the following example:

> When i go visiting in Georgia and Bermuda, everyone says Hi to everyone they pass. It's so good to see it. I still say hello to strangers of my own colour here in Toronto. Sometimes they answer, sometimes they don't but that won't turn me off. Howdy and Tenky nuh bruk no square. lawx, mi did learn nuh fi eat inna di bathroom, but sometimes mi in dere putting on me makeup or combing mi hair while mi rushing to work and mi have a sangwige ..mi juss rest di egg sangwige pon a piece a tissue while me put apply di make up ..mi eat in btwn.... *sigh* life in di fast lane. (CCJ, [3316])[4]

User metadata and the deictic reference to "here in Toronto" in the text itself help localize this post reliably. Note that the first part of this brief text introduces the Caribbean as a topic. But of course there is no automatic "knee jerk" connection

3 Note that this function of creoles is available to speakers in the Caribbean itself and its diaspora, i.e., the two groups of historically entitled "authentic" users, but also to outsiders who appropriate linguistic resources from Caribbean creoles through (affiliative or disaffiliative) acts of linguistic "crossing" (Rampton 1995).

4 CCJ stands for "Corpus of Cyber-Jamaican," which contains 16.9 million words of forum data covering the years from 2000 to 2008. The corpus is derived from a web-forum; names of contributors have been replaced by numbers in order to guarantee speakers' anonymity once the original post to the forum has been deleted.

between mention of things Caribbean and the use of Creole. When the subject is traditional norms of politeness in the Caribbean, the language is English. Interestingly, the switch to Creole is reserved for the moment the topic shifts to the stressful morning routine faced by the career woman living in the big city. Very likely, Jamaican Creole is not the baseline vernacular of this immigrant anymore, but it has accompanied her as a mobile and flexible linguistic resource in a mobile life.

Note that in the post-imperial "World System of Englishes" (Mair 2013a), the traditional colonial and early post-colonial linguistic order has been turned on its head. Under colonialism, the prestigious linguistic norm was external (British English), and Jamaican Creole had no overt prestige. In the early period of post-colonial nation-building, this linguistic order was modified but not abolished. There was a limited prestige upgrade of Caribbean creole languages as symbols of "we culture," while at the acrolectal end of the continuum an emerging local standard (e.g., Jamaican Standard English) tended to be favored over the colonial British norm. Today this order continues in the communicative domain defined by the reach of the Jamaican nation state and Jamaican island society.[5] Beyond this sphere, however, Jamaican Standard English has become largely irrelevant (in spite of getting token symbolic recognition as an option in the English language settings of Microsoft's *Word* software package). In the unified global linguistic market dominated by (Standard and selected non-standard varieties of) American English, the Jamaican standard commands a low price, whereas Jamaican Creole has generally remained a hot commodity wherever Jamaicans have taken it.

3 From Language of Tourism to Tourism of Languages: Factors of Prestige Change in Anglophone Caribbean Creoles

The linguistic global market does not work independently from socio-economic and cultural factors. The success of selling a language or variety is dependent on its cultural attractiveness and economic usefulness. While Caribbean creoles might not reach high scores on the latter point, their attractiveness is at least implicitly related to associations of the location of the Caribbean with the Garden of Eden and Paradise. The equation of the Caribbean with Paradise has been fostered primarily by the tourist industry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but, upon closer inspection, it can also be traced back to early plantation days. In

5 How the game of Jamaican languages and linguistic codes plays itself out in the medium of radio is shown in Michael Westphal's contribution to this issue.

his *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies (Book V)* planter-historian Bryan Edwards writes an ode to Jamaica with the following opening lines:

> Jamaica's beauteous isle and genial clime
> I sing. Attend, ye Britons! nor disdain
> Th' advent'rous muse to verdant vales that soars
> And radiant realms, beyond th' Atlantic wave;
> Ardent to gather for her Albion's brow
> A tropic wreath, green with immortal spring. (Edwards 1819, 217)

It is clear that this paradisical projection of Jamaica as "beauteous isle" with her "genial clime" was far from reality for at least the substantial part of the population who had to work the land in bondage. Life without labour, human beings' absolute freedom, health and happiness, timelessness, nature's beauty and abundance – all of them part of the notion of paradise (cf. Strachan 2002, 5), are not exactly the conditions which are associated with plantation slavery. Yet they stick to the image of the Caribbean in the same ways as other, even contradictory ideas of paradise such as the primitive, innocence, savagery, and a lack of civilization. The latter associations have a long tradition and are already part of ethnographic romantic accounts in the region, such as in Aphra Behn's descriptions of the "natives of Suriname" in *Oroonoko* (1688):

> And tho' they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance: and being continually us'd to see one another so unadorn'd, so like our first Parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no wishes. (Behn 1967 V, 131)

The seventeenth-century traveller/writer and the present-day tourist apparently share similar fantasies. Modern tourism, one of the main sites of contact and therefore language contact with Caribbean English/Creoles, builds on images of naked laziness, lonely beaches, eternal sunshine and – in the case of Jamaica – great music as the main selling points. This problematic set of images which excludes uncomfortable Caribbean truths of poverty and high crime rates is poetically countered by authors such as Bahamian Patricia Glinton-Meicholas when she writes in her *No Vacancy in Paradise* "Forgive us, though/if our humanity/intrudes/spoiling the fantasies/packaged for you" (Glinton-Meicholas 2001, 49).

Tourism itself, the main selling point of the Caribbean, is by no means innocent or unambiguously beneficial to the region.[6] Apart from ecological damage

6 The ambiguity of the tourist gaze is explored in more depth in this issue in George Zipp's discussion of slum tourism and poverty as a discourse in Caribbean literature and in Stephanie Bender's reading of Stephanie Black's film *Life and Debt*.

and an increase in crime rates (cf. Pattullo 1996), the social impact of "selling out" the country is dramatically felt. The winning Calypso "Alien" in St. Lucia in 1994, sung by the Mighty Pep, is a biting social comment on this:

> All inclusive tax elusives
> And truth is
> They're sucking up we juices
> Buying up every strip of beach
> Every treasured spot they reach
> [...]
> Chorus:
> Like an alien
> In we own land
> I feel like a stranger
> And I sensing danger
> We can't sell out the whole country
> To please the foreign lobby
> What's the point of progress
> Is it really success
> If we gain ten billion
> But lose the land we live on? (The Mighty Pep, qtd. in Pattullo 1996, 80–81)

In the selective perception of the American and European package tourist, the Caribbean is represented by a relatively small assortment of Caribbean islands, with the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, the Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, and Barbados at the center of prototypical Caribbeanness and Haiti or Guyana at the outer margins or even completely invisible. This might be one of the reasons why only a few Caribbean creole languages, most importantly Jamaican Creole, have gained in prestige, popularity, and public profile. Others, like Trinidadian Creole, may have experienced a change in speaker attitudes, too (cf. Mühleisen 2001, 2002), but they lack the brand recognition which Jamaican Creole evokes in non-Caribbean hearers.

Even within the Caribbean, this hierarchy of codes is recognized and, at times, exploited when, for example, a Bahamian employee on a tourist boat who uses Bahamian English with his co-workers puts on a Jamaican accent in his interactions with American tourists. When asked for the motivation of his Jamaican impersonation, he said that "if I speak Jamaican, I get better tips" (personal communication, February 2014). Working for the Yankee dollar, it seems, is more profitable in Jamaican Creole than in any other Caribbean variety. The external recognition value of Jamaican is very obviously related to the (cultural and economic) success of the Jamaican music industry as well as its presence in the diaspora. This even makes it marketable as a code which becomes attractive

for L2 learners. On the website www.speakjamaican.com the reader is told that he or she has "Just Found the Worlds [sic!] Most Comprehensive Course on Jamaican Language and Culture" and is provided with the motivation for learning Jamaican Creole right away:

> Dear Friend,
> Do you want to know what reggae singers, Jamaican locals [...] and maybe even members of your own family are saying? Do you find yourself struggling to follow Jamaican Patois? Do you want to become more familiar with [...] and even integrated into [...] the language and the culture? Or do you just want to have fun with friends by dropping a few sayings here and there that everyone absolutely loves? If you nodded your head "yes" to any of those questions, then I've got great news for you. (*Speakjamaican.com*)

The incentive for learning Jamaican as a second language/variety – a true sign of a world language – again lies in its cultural attractiveness ("reggae singers") as well as in its move to the diaspora, where second and third generation Caribbean migrants might struggle to understand their grandparents and Jamaican cousins ("members of your own family").

But while speakers of Haitian Creole are also present in Paris, Montreal, and New York and Papiamentu speakers might also play great music, Jamaican Creole has an additional and almost unbeatable advantage in that it is seen as part of the 'global' Anglophone culture. There is a striking difference between the linguistic visibility of the Anglophone Caribbean and the Franco- and Hispanophone territories, which is clearly related to the global market value of English. Despite far-reaching phonological and morphosyntactic differences between basilectal Jamaican Creole and international standard varieties of English, Jamaican is by association tied to its lexifier English and therefore a successful shareholder in the global stock market of languages, in which English has an unchallenged top rating backed by ideological factors.

> If, as Anderson (1983, 20) states, religious communities like Christendom or Islam 'were imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script,' the language of the imagined global community is clearly English and the written script is digital. Admission to membership is not tied anymore to the inner circle of the creed but has been extended to speakers of varieties and contact varieties of English as well as second, third, etc., language speakers of English – as long as the profession of faith has been stated. (Mühleisen, in press)

As outlined in Section 2, deterritorialization is the key to success in the linguistic marketplace. While the use of Jamaican and other creoles can now be observed in the deterritorialized digital world, the first step towards a linguistic "colonization in reverse," as the unforgettable Jamaican writer Louise Bennett called it in one of

her poems (Bennett 1989 [1966], 179–180), happened on the *SS Empire Windrush* and other ships which brought large numbers of Jamaicans to the urban centers of the colonial motherland. Here, in the new environment and the contact situation of the urban diaspora, the language of the first generation of immigrants experienced various transformations. It changed structurally (for example, into London Jamaican, cf. Sebba 1993), took on new functions (for instance in writing), and came to be used by speakers outside of the circle of genealogical users in acts of linguistic "crossing" (cf. Rampton 1995; Mühleisen 2002). "Diaspora communities might therefore be seen as ideal exploratory fields where models of identity, language shift and language prestige can be challenged or affirmed" (Mühleisen and Schröder, in press). The importance of the creation of a diasporic literature cannot be overestimated. It was in the urban diaspora that Caribbean writers such as George Lamming and Samuel Selvon first developed something like a common West Indian identity which was worthwhile exploring in fiction and using distinct Caribbean linguistic codes in writing. In the iconic novel of immigration of the 1950s, Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), the author creates something like a pan-Caribbean Creole voice for the group of Caribbean immigrants the novel focuses on as well as for the narrative voice. The linguistic distance between the way "the boys" talk in *The Lonely Londoners* and the language and reaction of the host society is commented on several times in the novel. One of the characters, Big City, reminds his friend Galahad that "[t]he people can't understand you boy [...] Talk good English" (Selvon 1956, 99). In the same line, Daisy, an English girl, complains about the way Galahad speaks:

> 'What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak!'
> 'What wrong with it?' Galahad ask. 'Is English we speaking.' (Selvon 1956, 93)

4 The Currency of the Word: Poetic Counter Value

As the above section and the example of Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* show, Caribbean languages are extremely flexible, display dividing as well as connecting elements in the context of migratory relations and have, in some cases, even become commodities. Édouard Glissant has described this aspect of Caribbeanness – creolization in terms of language, literature, and lived cultural practice – blissfully as "an explosion of cultures" (Glissant 1989, 561). At the same time, it is vital to remember that, in the concrete case of the Caribbean, creolization has been the result of forced migrations, bearing evidence of acts of (linguistic) imposition as well as acts of persistence, resistance, and innovation. Caribbean lan-

guages and cultures are both living memories of colonial violence and evidence of survival through creation. Examples of the ways in which a range of ordinary speakers, media professionals, and cultural practitioners engage with this ambivalent and charged material are given in our contributors' articles, which address novels (Suzanne Scafe and Georg Zipp), documentary film (Stephanie Bender), radio discourse (Michael Westphal), and conflicting language ideologies among the population at large and their governing elites (Joseph Farquharson). As one important form of literary expression, namely poetry, is missing, we shall at least briefly address it in this introduction.

Generally regarded as the most self-conscious form of verbal art, poetry habitually addresses positions of enunciation. As an "element of a social formation," poetry "is subject both to the laws of its own nature *and* is a term in social relations" (Easthope 1983, 22). It is therefore under a double challenge: that of coming to terms with a complicated reality and with linguistic determination. "How can I face such slaughter" *and* "choose the English tongue I love?" one could rephrase the Caribbean poet's dilemma, using the famous lines of the early Derek Walcott (Walcott 2007, 6). As the St. Lucian poet has explained on a more recent occasion, the poetic material itself can sometimes be rather stubborn, holding the poet in check and pulling him in a certain direction when writing. Poetry emerges from the tension between two forces, the poet and the linguistic material, which exists autonomously of, and exercises power over, the poet. Walcott referred to his own frequent experience of having to deal with insistent Creole words that "would not go away" and thus had to be integrated in the otherwise English verse he was writing (Walcott 2013). The force of language and form every verbal artist grapples with and the poetic reinterpretation of subject positions is complicated for those who work with language in post-colonial situations and in a globalized world, in which the possibility of individual subjectivity and agency seems to have become a secondary concern in light of the experience of economic injustice. So the question arises whether the work of the poet can really be seen as evidence of Glissant's "explosion of cultures," a celebration of relationality. Does it not rather have to be conceived as mourning work or a "litany of survival," to use the words of poet Dorothea Smartt? (Smartt 2008, 81)

Both perspectives are invariably present in Caribbean poetics, no matter what precise linguistic background and aspect of creolization is at work. This way, its achievement is exemplary: In a world in which only stereotypical and monodimensional markers of Caribbeanness are seen as profitable, as has been shown in Section 2, Caribbean poetics refuses to cast the Caribbean experience in simple ways. As Martiniquean writer Patrick Chamoiseau has pointed out, it is vital for Caribbeans to infuse their narratives of themselves with an essential notion of complexity in which contrasts and antagonisms are allowed in a dynamics that

has to be continuously reconsidered and renegotiated (Chamoiseau n.d.). The act of grappling with this kind of complexity is not only an external or superficial mark of Caribbean poetics. It is a core value that does not lend itself to quantitative (economic) calculation.

Walcott's epic *Omeros* is a long engagement with these different kinds of value. Omaar Hena has shown that it is saturated with images of *economic* value (Hena 2013); this becomes immediately clear in the tourist guide Philoctete's promise that "[i]t have some things [...] worth more than a dollar" (Walcott 1990, I.I.1; l. 21). "It" can mean Philoctete's eloquent wound, but it can also refer to the seven books of verse that the reader has just opened. The *value of verse*, then, is more substantial than that of hard cash. It is negotiated with regard to the preciousness of a viable identity built on a coherent memory – an asset which cannot be taken for granted – for instance in poem I.XII.1.

Here the (autobiographical) speaker, in an attempt to regain a sense of the past, visits his long-lost childhood home. Access is not easy: the house looks different, naked, uninviting ("the bougainvillea [and] the front porch gone," ll. 1–2), the staircase is narrow, the ceiling low, the place crammed with people and objects. The first tercet is overclouded with an air of uncertainty and reluctance, which is lifted when the speaker has left the stairs behind him, enters the first room and, at the outset of the second tercet, "sees"

> [...] the small window near which we slept as boys,
> how close the roof was. The heat of the galvanize.
> A desk in my mother's room, not that bed, sunlit,
>
> with its rose quilt where we were forbidden to sit. (ll. 4–7)

A concrete memory of the way the room felt when "we" were sleeping there (manifest in the sensation evoked by the elliptical sentence "The heat of the galvanize") sets in with the perception of the window and marks the beginning of a complex juxtaposition of past and present visions. As "our house" (l. 1) in the first tercet has been replaced by "a printer" (l. 2), "that bed" (l. 6), already suggestive of a memory which surfaces in the next tercet ("where we were forbidden to sit," l. 7), has been replaced by "a desk" (l. 6). A full stop marks the end of the memory flash, and attention is drawn to the action in the room at the time of the visit:

> Pink handbills whirred under their spinning negative
> and two girls stacked them from their retractable bed
>
> as fast as my own images were reprinted
> as I remembered them in an earlier life
> that made the sheets linen, the machines furniture,

her wardrobe her winged, angelic mirror. The hum
of the wheel's elbow stopped. And there was a figure
framed in the quiet window for whom this was home. (ll. 8–15)

Whirring, spinning, stacking – the exuberance of verbs, noise, and activity introduce the section in which the printing process in the room and the remembering process in the speaker's mind are maximally intertwined. "Bed" (l. 9) at the end of the third tercet now refers to a part of the printing machine whereas instances of memory ("images as I remembered them in an earlier life," l. 11) are reprinted. The printing sheets have become bedsheets ("linen"), the machines "furniture" (l. 12), and indeed not just a random piece of furniture, but a three-panel mirror, reminiscent of a triptych. What happens next is left enigmatic. Is it in one of the mirror's frames where the figure appears, or in the small window, or even in its reflection in the mirror? The figure of the ghost, who is holding a book and "for whom this was home" (l. 15), in contrast to the "two girls" in the print workshop (l. 9), actually speaks.

Before this happens, the noise in the room is blanked out or stops ("The hum of the wheel's elbow stopped," l. 14), indicating that the speaker might be entering a different state of consciousness:

'In this pale blue notebook where you found my verses' –
my father smiled – 'I appeared to make your life's choice,
and the calling that you practise both reverses
and honours mine from the moment it blent with yours.' (ll. 22–25)

These lines engage directly with the poet's vocation, "the calling," a legacy passed on by the poet's father, himself an artist and poet. In *Omeros*, autobiographical references and the use of the first-person pronoun are prominent features, marking it out as the work of a poet who is sure of his place in the world, although this world, albeit recognizing his merit, does not seem sure about the place from which this poet hails.[7] An engagement with, and indebtedness

7 In the Nobel Committee's press release *Omeros* is described as "a work of incomparable ambitiousness" whose "weft is a rich one, deriving from the poet's wide-ranging contacts with literature, history and reality." Among the contacts enumerated in the press release are well-known icons of Euro-American culture: "Homer, Poe, Mayakovsky and Melville, [...] Brodsky, and he quotes the Beatles' 'Yesterday.'" The image that makes its way into the press release as example of a poetry that "acquires at one and the same time singular lustre and great force" is not particularly linked to a Caribbean context either: "He captures white seagulls against a blue sky in the image 'Gulls chalk the blue enamel'" ("Nobel Prize in Literature 1992 – Press Release"). This makes one wonder whether the value attributed to this poet in a global context can only be argued, to a global audience, by recognition of his capacity to invoke Western chiffres.

towards, the place is central to his poetics, though. Accordingly, the ghost in the section above can also be read as a figurative father, as a legacy and obligation. This obligation is specified later in Book I, after the speaker has heard about the coal women of previous generations, who had climbed the hills "with their hundredweight basket, every load for/one copper penny" (I.XIII.2.; ll. 40–41), and is admonished: "They walk, you write;/[...]/[...] no one knows them/[...] and your duty [...] is [...] to give those feet a voice" (XIII.3; l. 27; ll. 33–36) – an enterprise that is destined to fail, but has to be undertaken nevertheless. In his collection *White Egrets*, Walcott returns to the notion of the poet's duty. The first poem evokes the Terracotta Warriors, each of whom "gave an oath [...]/to die for his emperor, his clan, his nation/[...]. If vows were visible they might see ours/as changeless chessmen in the changing light/[...] where bannered breakers toss/and the palms gust with music that is time's [...]" (Walcott 2010, 3, ll. 6–7; ll. 11–14).

That the act of writing poetry creates an alternative value to that which can be measured and calculated; that it is a necessary engagement with language and a vital cultural work – this is emphasized in an almost excessive manner by Walcott. It is also implicated in the works of many other poets across the Caribbean. In the space of sometimes just a few lines of verse, they draw attention to the complexity of the 'Caribbean condition,' its geographic, historical, economic, and aesthetic dimensions. The Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, of Glissant's and Walcott's generation, has often chosen more open and experimental forms to convey a sense of this conditionality. His frequently anthologized poem "Calypso" from *Rights of Passage* (1967), the first part of the *Arrivants* trilogy, is a case in point (Brathwaite 1973, 48–50). Opening with the image of a stone that "had skidded arc'd and bloomed into islands" it follows the broad trajectory of the term *Caribbean*, which simultaneously implies insular "enclosedness" and oceanic openness. Like the missing comma between *skidded* and *arked*, the skidder – Creator God? Volcanic activity? – is omitted. The islands "roared into plantations/ruled by sugar cane" (ll. 10–11). The ironic personification of sugar cane as "ruler" reduces the unnamed, profit-chasing investors (ll. 12–15) to puppets in a scheme beyond their control. The feel of the cutlass (ll. 4) and other forms of humiliation, such as poverty (ll. 25–29), dependence (ll. 53–55) and having to endure the tourist's gaze (ll. 44–46), is formulated as appeal to generate an alternative, subversive system of control in the language of the drum and the dance that virtually beats a complex order into the poem. The Caribbean space opened up by Brathwaite is populated by suggestive (and perhaps representative) stories of oppression such as that of "black Sam" (ll. 25–29) or "John with the European name" who, when sacked by "the boss," sees no future for himself on the island and is heading for an uncertain future, "nigratin, overseas" (ll. 30–34; ll. 54–57).

Four decades after the publication of Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage* "a text message beeps" on the cellphone of a Londoner with a Caribbean 'connection' in Dorothea Smartt's poem "just a part: sacrifices":

> A text message beeps,
> Riding the packed bus from work:
> "wen can u sen £."
> [...]
> diaspora lines,
> weave you in a world wide web
> of phonelines, airlines,
>
> money-transfer lines.
> Pounds fly home quicker than you
> could get there. Back home's
>
> always in mind. Home's
> time of day, rates of exchange
> you know, like your PIN. (Smartt 2008, 79; ll. 1–3; ll. 16–24)

Smartt, a Black British poet, engages with concrete, economic, and financial relations between the Caribbean diaspora and the Caribbean. The text message reads: "wen can u sen £?" (l. 3). In today's world, innovative and ever cheaper and more accessible communication technologies add to a widespread sense of acceleration and connectedness. But – as the poem shows – the gains of such smoother operation of relations are ambivalent. Increased opportunities for long-distance communication may mean increased financial and emotional pressure. Conditions in many a Caribbean space are still marked by glaring economic injustice and a sell-out mentality that shows no interest in the creation of sustainable value. The continuing work of poets in drawing attention to these ills and creating alternative kinds of value is thus direly needed – in the Caribbean and, of course, beyond.

5 Outlook

The contributions to this special issue approach the notion of value and price from different angles and disciplinary backgrounds, the majority of them focusing on Jamaica. Joseph Farquharson writes about the continuing need to re-value the island's Creole linguistic heritage, advocating a new type of language planning which brings the quest for cultural and economic self-assertion into closer alignment. Michael Westphal gives a decade-by-decade account of how ver-

nacular Jamaican voices have gained public visibility and prestige through the medium of radio broadcasting in post-Independence Jamaica. In her reading of Stephanie Black's documentary film *Life and Debt*, Stephanie Bender draws attention to the stark contrast between economic relations and the sights offered to the Western tourist in Jamaica. Suzanne Scafe examines sites of wealth and poverty in Kingston and their representation in the works of two Jamaican novelists, inquiring into the potential of fiction to create viable spaces of empathy. In a similar vein, Georg Zipp examines slum tourism, discourses of poverty, and the moral pitfalls of representing poverty in fiction. Two of the papers establish links between Jamaica and spaces outside the region: Stephanie Bender compares Black's *Life and Debt* to Brazilian director Sergio Bianchi's *Cronicamente Inviável*; Georg Zipp's discussion of Edwige Danticat and Junot Díaz offers a glance at Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

As all contributions show, the Caribbean is a complex cultural space with a geographical center in the Island Caribbean but ever shifting diasporic margins. Its linguistic influence and cultural output is impressive and varied, defying simplistic academic analyses. We wish for more academic engagement with this space, and engagement that looks beyond simple projections.

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