Tka Pinnock

Locating[1] Caribbean Studies in Canada, Today: Conversations with Tameka Samuels-Jones, PhD and Audra Diptée, PhD

Preface: An Invitation

What is the state of Caribbean Studies in Canada today? In the spring of 2023, Chevy Eugene—Caribbeanist scholar and activist and doctoral candidate in Social and Political Thought at York University—lamented *The Crisis of Caribbean Studies in Canada.*[2] That conversation brought together emerging and established scholars and activists of the Caribbean in Canada to consider the contemporary question of Caribbean Studies. It served as an anchor for a series of conversations I had with scholars in the Canadian academy in the summer of 2023 on the state and future of Caribbean Studies.

I am deeply invested in these questions "as a reader and writer of the Caribbean" (Scott 2013, 7) but also as a Caribbean person living in the diaspora who is concerned with the thriving of the region. I take heed of Noxolo's warning that we ought to avoid "fixing the region for our own self-definition, staking a double claim to it, both as ancestral homeland and as area of expertise" (2016, 832). Otherwise, we risk reproducing a "colonising scholarship" that leads to "the Caribbean as career" (Ibid). While the neoliberal impetus of the academy compels us to consider these questions about the state and future of Caribbean Studies from a careerist standpoint, I see them echoing those questions we should be asking about the Caribbean itself and the conditions of knowledge production about it. For implied in the question, "What is the state of Caribbean Studies today?" are questions about what Caribbean Studies can tell us about the question of the *present*, and what *is* Caribbean Studies in the present?

What is the state of Caribbean Studies in Canada today?

I posed this meta-question to two Caribbean women scholars working in Canadian universities: Tameka Samuels-Jones and Audra Diptée. They come from different disciplines and scholarly backgrounds: Dr. Samuels-Jones is an Assistant Professor in the School of Administrative Studies at York University and Dr. Diptée is an Associate Professor of History at Carleton University.

Both, however, are uniquely positioned to offer rich insights to the questions posed given their leadership roles in Caribbean Studies at their respective universities. Dr. Samuels-Jones is Associate Director of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean and Dr. Diptée is Program Coordinator of the Latin America and Caribbean Studies. What better perch than the windows through which they look!

I encourage you to consider the interviews as invitations to reflect and meditate on the contours, textures and boundaries of Caribbean Studies and our relationship to/with/in it.

Please note that the transcripts have been edited for length and clarity.

[1] I titled the piece prior to becoming aware of and reading Pat Noxolo's 2016 article, "Locating Caribbean Studies in unending conversation." The title is in fact inspired by an invocation in the conclusion of David Scott's prefatory article to the July 2013 Issue of Small Axe. In "On the Question of Caribbean Studies," Scott concludes with a reminder that the task of making and remaking Caribbean studies requires us to be "attentive to the problem of location in its various instantiations: conceptual, institutional, geopolitical, generational, disciplinary" (2013, 7). While, in other circumstances, I would retitle the piece to avoid any appearance of impropriety or plagiarism, I have decided to keep it because this piece sits alongside and acknowledges Noxolo's and Scott's in the delicate ecosystem of knowledge production on the Caribbean/Caribbean Studies, reverberating questions and themes taken up by both from their particular locations.

[2] The talk is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZQTKCSvolw

Interview with Tameka Samuels-Jones, Ph.D

Tka Pinnock :

Dr. Samuels-Jones, your research interests span environmental crime, Indigenous law in the Caribbean, regulatory law and AI ethics in the Global South. How did you come to your scholarly work?

Tameka Samuels-Jones:

I will start by talking about my positionality. I position myself as a Jamaican born and raised Caribbeanist researcher and scholar. Of course, my lived experiences have guided my research interests and led me to where I am today.

My bachelor's degree, which I completed at the University of the West Indies, Mona, was in Hotel Management. My undergraduate program drew my awareness to how the Caribbean is perceived. First, the media framings of the Caribbean are highly racialized and often negative. So we are perceived as criminals. And paradoxically, the Caribbean is also represented as a luxurious elite holiday destination. So, there are two very different representations, both of which serve to perpetuate the Caribbean as a problematic space. And so I came from that program very aware of what I looked like to "others" and confused about who I was [as a Caribbean person].

After completing my undergraduate studies, I started a career in regulatory law. I worked at the Fair Trading Commission and the Financial Services Commission [in Jamaica]. I came to realize that, "okay, this problem also exists outside the sphere of tourism." And when we talk about law, we're talking about how the Anglo-Caribbean has transplanted laws from other jurisdictions, especially England, and just placed them in these previously colonized states and expected them to work.

I returned to the UWI Mona to complete a master's degree in Government because I assumed it would help to answer my question: "How can regulatory law protect our people if these laws were not designed for them in the first place?" In choosing to study Government, I thought I would find out why Jamaica uses laws that do not belong to us. I did not.

I decided to take charge of finding the answers to my question. I imagined others wanted these answers too. So, I embarked on my PhD, and that led me to complete my doctorate in Criminology and Law at the University of Florida.

My desire to conduct this kind of research work started off from a very naive perspective. As with most graduate students I started [with] "I don't like that problem and I want to fix it." As I grew as a scholar, it became a desire for transformative change. There are lot of issues to unpack when we study the Caribbean. I am now coming to terms with the complexity of the region and my ability to implement some kind of change, little by little. This is especially possible because of my role as the Associate Director of CERLAC.

TP:
What is your current research agenda?

TSJ:
My work is interdisciplinary and I think most work within the Caribbean region has to be in some way, even if there is a specific focus. I worked for seven years in regulatory law and my primary research interest is in looking at the ways in which state regulatory law is often at odds with Indigenous or local religious law, specifically within Jamaica.

I work with the Maroons, who, through their 1739 treaty with the British, are legally autonomous, a fact that most Jamaicans do not know. They do not fall under Jamaican state law except for cases of murder. Those are the only cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the state. They have their own political structure and vote for their own political leaders. There has always been conflict between the Maroons and the state, and most recently, the conflict has centered on issues related to extractivism and land dispossession. The Jamaican state is trying to move the boundaries of Maroon land to accommodate extractive industries such as bauxite mining by transnational corporations. This is my current research project.

My overarching interest is to look at the ways in which the elite within the Caribbean, and specifically within Jamaica, uses the law to promote continued neo-colonization.

TP:
There's growing talk about institutional competition between African Studies and Caribbean Studies and now Black Canadian Studies, particularly as the latter has grown as a field in the last few years. What are your thoughts on this competition, and where might there be space for us to be thinking across these fields?

TSJ:
When we think of the Caribbean, its history, its culture, its political affiliations, one can appreciate that it is a unique space, and to suggest that there is homogeneity between the Caribbean, Africa and Black Canada serves as a form of erasure. There is so much diversity within the Caribbean alone that one can hardly speak of us as one group, depending on the research that you are doing.

There is work that can be done across all three fields, but it does not have to be done to the exclusion of any. I do not believe that Caribbean Studies should be removed, nor do I think that Black Canadian Studies or African Studies should be removed. They all have an important role to play. I've never heard it said that we should stop studying Spain or the Netherlands because it's already covered by the study of Europe. It seems there is no problem covering Europe five, six times over. In furtherance of our work as Black people, we must do it all. We don't have to exclude one field in order to raise another. We can all grow together while simultaneously focusing on our field-specific scholarly agendas.

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TP:
You came to Canada from studying in the United States. It seems that in the US, African American Studies has found a way to live side by side with African Diaspora Studies and Caribbean Studies. So what is happening in the Canadian context that we are missing?

TSJ:
At the University of Florida [where I completed my PhD], Caribbean Studies was not underserved in any way. African Studies was quite comfortable with Caribbean Studies having their space and quite comfortable with African American Studies. All understood that they are distinct areas of study, but when required, they come together in a show of strength.

One of the issues here in Canada is funding. Let's get to the basics; there's only so much funding to go around and everyone wants to ensure that their funding is secure. The best way to secure your funding is to demonstrate that your work reaches the greatest number of people. It is unfortunate that the Caribbean is often showcased as something that's so small that if you're going to get rid of something, you should get rid of it. It's a lie. Though regionally, we may be small, the Caribbean's impact is enormous when you're looking at transnational work and knowledge production. When we talk about prominent scholars in the disciplines of politics, economy, political economy, sociology, history, anthropology, many of these scholars are Caribbean. We should look at the rich and vast bodies of scholarship the Caribbean has produced. If there were adequate resources, Caribbean Studies would be fine, but the truth is there is not, so we have to show the value in what we do and there is a whole lot of value.

TP:
What is the value of Caribbean Studies or in studying the Caribbean? And those might be different things for you.

TSJ:
Caribbean Studies is inherently antithetical to Eurocentric knowledge production and concepts. One of the strengths of Caribbean Studies is that you have a wide variety of people that are connected through birth, through kinship with the region that generates so much knowledge on it. A better understanding of the Caribbean is seen most in our trans territorial connections, the ones that we make, even in places like CERLAC and the Caribbean Studies Association.

Although we seem not to be getting the kind of attention that we deserve, especially from the Global North, it's not necessarily to our detriment. The fact that our work does not suffer from the consistent white gaze gives us the opportunity to do and produce authentic work. When we are competing—as we often do in academia—with scholars in the Global North, we tend to shape and fashion our work to meet their measuring sticks. Doing the work for us has created in us a body of work that is deeply rich and authentic, and when you explore Caribbean scholarship, you cannot help but feel what those readers write. Our intellectual inquiry could have been dominated by the Global North because we have the US in our backyard, who is a powerful influence. Europe still haunts it. What makes us so different is that we're not answering to the Global North.

TP:
Returning to the white gaze. There are white non-Caribbean scholars who have built their careers on researching the Caribbean. In the first couple of years of my doctoral program, I questioned whether studying Jamaica for my dissertation project was the right decision. I wondered if it would be limiting for my academic career because I thought my peers in the discipline of Politics would think the Caribbean "too small" a place to study, and that I should include a Latin American country in my project. Knowledge production is tied up in power, and knowledge produced by a Black Caribbean scholar studying the Caribbean might be received quite differently by academia than knowledge produced by a white, non-Caribbean scholar studying the same topic.

TSJ:
It is important to think about the power relations of knowledge production and this is one reason Caribbean Studies is so important. If we do not have formal Caribbean Studies programs, if we disband them and do not offer some direction to scholars studying the Caribbean, then we may end up with knowledge about the Caribbean that may not be grounded in any truth.

Thinking about my own work with the Maroons, they will not let you in until they trust you. One of the first things they taught me was a saying in their language, Kromanti. During my doctoral research, a community member said something to me in Kromanti and I did not know what it meant. I asked their Minister of Security, "what does that mean?" and he said, "it means we talk some and keep some. We don't know you well enough yet that we're telling you everything, but we like you enough that we're telling you some things." Caribbeanist scholars know that relationship building is one of the most important parts of Caribbean research and to get at the truth, people have to trust you. Caribbean people do not care about your title and where you come from. If they saw you last year and you took care of them, and you return this year and ask them for nothing but visit just to hail them and see how they are, that's when people begin to trust you. That's when you make a friend for life. We know these Caribbean ways of being and center them in our research practices.

Unfortunately, many scholars from outside the region feel justified in developing knowledge and producing it for us. But, if there are enough of us and there are enough of us asking questions, they will stop it. If you have an open space—and remember, the Caribbean has a wealth of data and they know this—who would not want to do research in a beautiful place? They get funding for it. It's a nice place to be. We have to take up that space.

We have to take up more space in academia, in our scholarly work. We have to own it.

TP:
Are you a Caribbeanist or are you a scholar of the Caribbean? And is there a difference?

TSJ:
I most certainly am a Caribbeanist! I think Caribbeanists have lived experience within the Caribbean. They have a deep understanding of the Caribbean and have history with the Caribbean. On the contrary, I think scholars of the Caribbean may lack that, but they are researching within the Caribbean, conducting research in either the region as a whole or one small part of the region.

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Now, there are arguments, as there always are, regarding who is a Caribbeanist versus who is a scholar of the Caribbean. Gordon Lewis in his work describes a Caribbeanist not as somebody who is intimately involved with the work of the Caribbean, but as someone who studies the Caribbean as a whole. That is problematic for me and for a number of other scholars, because rarely do you find people studying a region as a whole, especially when there are such differences and distinctions between one country and another.

I am a full-fledged Caribbeanist scholar and I advocate for making linkages between Caribbean countries where necessary and possible. We should always try when we can. Let us say that you are writing a research grant to start a new database in Jamaica that captures the impact of climate change. Once you have secured funding and set-up that database, you should see if perhaps it's possible to get funding to expand to, say, Barbados or Trinidad. That is a true Caribbeanist. You care about the region as a whole, even if the entire region is not your major area of interest.

TP:

I'm glad you mentioned Gordon Lewis. There is a particular Caribbean that I find scholars of an older generation—whether Caribbeanists or scholars of the Caribbean—talk about, and it's the Caribbean on the eve of and just after independence. Scholarly attention is trained on the wave of independence, even in this present moment. For myself and other emerging Caribbeanist scholars who are children of the 1980s and 1990s, we were raised in and are familiar with a different Caribbean space, which gives rise to different questions.

TSJ:

There was a spirit of nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s that the older generation of scholars are so proud of, and there is a lot written about that era. But for scholars like you and I—and I'm an 80s baby—one of the constraints I have always had in terms of Caribbean scholarship, is that so much of the work I see is by people based in that era. Times have changed so significantly, and while you must know the history, that is not the entirety of Caribbean studies.

As part of my role at CERLAC, I am teaching a summer Caribbean Studies diploma course and I am committed to showcasing the breadth of current Caribbean scholarship. There is a resurgence of interest from this generation in terms of Caribbean scholarly work, and we need to showcase the work that is now being produced. It is a new Jamaica, a new Caribbean.

TP:

CERLAC alum Chevy Eugene, professor at Dalhousie University, often reminds me that for many Caribbean/ist scholars, there is a deep emotional attachment to the independence moment and a great despair that results from its failure. But to your point, for those of us born and raised in a firmly neoliberal Caribbean, inundated by American media, who know no other Caribbean, how do we, or do we even, move beyond the "moment of independence?" What are some of the challenges and interventions that we need to make in Caribbean Studies today?

TSJ:

In academia, we stand on the shoulders of scholarly giants who went before us. I respect that a great deal. I believe our history is always important, but at the same time, the old guards need to give room to new(er) scholars coming in. We are experiencing a new Caribbean. While their work is relevant—it serves as a point of departure for current work we'd like to embark on—there are new things to study. In my field of Criminology and Law, for example, our primary focus is no longer on gangs. Criminals are using artificial intelligence now. Crime has changed, so what we study also has to change.

We cannot conflate Caribbean Studies with history. It is not history. One can do historical Caribbean studies. I research regulatory law in the Caribbean, and people often ask me about things from the 1950s and the 1960s. I am floored. I think to myself, "the laws I research were not written then; they were not enacted at the time." That is a problem that we have in terms of advancing the field—not being able to separate Caribbean Studies from history, or only emphasizing culture. We have to open the door a little bit and make room for current work and research on what is happening now.

TP:
Do you think Caribbean Studies today, particularly in the Canadian context, offers an effective understanding of the Caribbean?

TSJ:
There are very effective research units across Canada, but we have to position Caribbean Studies in such a way as to show how it's related to other fields/disciplines. We don't have to prove our relevance because we know we're relevant. But if we want to be funded, we have to demonstrate that we're bringing something to the table. That is where we are lacking in the Canadian environment. We know we're doing the work when people think of a multiplicity of things when you say you study the Caribbean. We are not there yet. We know we have been true scholars of the Caribbean region when we ave motivated people to think beyond the Caribbean as beaches and gangs. We have not done that yet in Canada. We need to hear the fresh voices of emerging scholars.

TP:
Where do we go from here?

TSJ:
Let us expand!

We are so intellectually diverse. We are so inventive. I want us to expand. I want us to develop an appreciation for different aspects of Caribbean Studies and we start by not putting our young Caribbeanist scholars in a box. I promise that if we listen to the younger scholars, it will open doors in terms of funding and showcasing the work of the Caribbean.

The box is the problem, so we leave the box alone. We just open the door to people who want to do new and diverse things. That is where we go from here.

Interview with Audra Diptée

Tka Pinnock:

Dr. Diptée, you self-describe as a historian, author and educator who studies the ways in which historical thinking can advance contemporary social justice issues. Tell me more about your scholarly work and how you came to it.

Audra Diptée:

I started my intellectual journey at York University. It feels like I am coming back full circle by having this conversation with you.

My introduction to Caribbean Studies at the university level was really at York, where I was introduced to history courses, literature courses, and various interdisciplinary courses in Caribbean Studies. Those courses are what laid the foundation for my journey. I would not be a professor today, if I did not go to York University. I was very fortunate to be in a space that allowed Caribbean Studies to flourish at a high level, and at the time, it was at a level that exceeded other universities. I was very fortunate that way.

I went on to do my PhD at the University of Toronto and my dissertation looked at the Atlantic slave trade. At that time in the early 2000s, there was a resurgence in scholarly interest in slavery and Atlantic history. I was very interested in the connection between the ways in which events in Africa had influenced the lives of enslaved people as they made the journey and were forcibly inserted into Caribbean societies. For me, the question was about this larger Atlantic connection between these forced immigrants being put into a created society and what that meant and wanting to put a face to these people.

My current project, though, is a project I could only do now at this stage in my career, and it comes out of my experience as a racialized faculty member in the Canadian university system and largely through observation and participating in the politics of university life.

I have decided to take my intellectual interest and really channel it towards understanding something that many Caribbeanists of earlier generations did, which was to explore the ways in which power—and the university is an institution of power—shapes knowledge production. So whose voices are legitimated, just off the top, and whose voices are questioned and seen as not having legitimacy? And, what does that mean for the ways in which we tell stories, in general, or about the Caribbean specifically? My current project, called Chained in Paradise, examines how history was used to change the Caribbean future. It is looking at the ways in which Britain controlled documents—they did not want Caribbean people to access certain documents—and what that meant for the kind of stories we could tell about ourselves.

Because I think this is such an important topic that needs to be accessible to as many people as possible, I publish my research findings through a newsletter and on the website https://www.chainedinparadise.com.

This is fascinating, because the Caribbean has produced world-class historians. Think Eric Williams, C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, and Elsa Goveia. These people understood that history was crucial to making any kind of revolutionary or fundamental change in the region. Understanding the Caribbean past was essential, but unbeknownst to them, while they are fighting the anti-colonial fight in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, Britain had begun a practice, and eventually developed a formal policy called Operation Legacy, to remove and destroy documents so that Caribbean people could not access them. Colonial governments in general do this. We have evidence of it happening in France. I am sure it happened in Spain and Portugal. It is just remarkable to see that there was a formal policy called Operation Legacy, and what made it particularly interesting is that they denied it until 2009. At that time, they had no choice but to admit it and eventually put the documents in the British National Archive. Now historians can access these documents, but it still requires a trip to the United Kingdom, which presents other sorts of challenges.

TP:
History is political.

AD:
Yes, exactly. Very well said. The relationship between politics and history is intimately intertwined in the intellectual history of the region. There is no single Caribbean historian from the 40s to the 60s who did not think of history as something that needed to be used to change the political situation of the day.

They were anti-colonialist; they didn't have the luxury of saying, “I'm really curious about this, I'm going to just go write it and then bury it in in a box.” They were studying, reading, and writing to get the kind of knowledge necessary to make change in the region.

TP:
You and I are Caribbean peoples in the diaspora producing knowledge about the region. In your position as the coordinator of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Carleton University, I imagine you work with scholars and students who are studying the region who may not have a connection to it. What are your thoughts on knowledge production about the region by non-Caribbean scholars?

AD:
We used to have this conversation when I was a graduate student: who gets to study what? On one hand, I think everybody has the right to study anything. If I wake up tomorrow and decide I want to study ancient China because I have an intellectual curiosity, I do not want anyone saying, “You don't have a right to study ancient China You're not Chinese.” think everyone has a right to study anything and everything. I also think people bring different perspectives and if we allow for those perspectives, and we listen to them and consider them, then, perhaps, we will come to a higher level of understanding.

I am not advocating for some sort of exclusivity—saying this is ours; you do not have a right to this.

That said, I believe scholars from the Caribbean, generally speaking, are better able to write from a/have a Caribbean perspective. They are rooted in the region. Even though we are in the Diaspora, we still try to understand the Caribbean as a Caribbean person.

A non-Caribbean scholar might go there and spend six months, but they are outsiders looking in and that creates a different kind of perspective. Again, I'm not dismissing that perspective because they have a toolbox that's different and can offer us points of comparison.

I am not interested in writing Caribbean history for the sake of writing Caribbean history.

I am interested in writing history that I think will serve the region and shape how people of the region see their past and how they can use that past to influence the present and the future.

TP:
Do you think there's a difference then between a Caribbeanist and a scholar who studies the Caribbean?

AD:
I think I would be both. I do have an intellectual interest in the region. I want to come to this with a certain objectivity and commitment as a Caribbeanist, as a scholar, as a historian. There are certain methodologies that we [as historians] have to follow and I have fidelity to those methodologies.

I also, as a scholar of the Global South, understand the importance of questioning those methodologies. As a Caribbean person, I understand that those methodologies come out of very Western epistemologies and they tend to exclude many voices and perspectives. They privilege certain kinds of evidence.

I do not think there is a single definition of a Caribbeanist. I think if you ask different people, they are going to give you different responses. For me, a Caribbeanist is someone who is interested in producing knowledge that serves the region, takes a Caribbean-centered perspective, and is committed to Caribbean ways of knowing.

TP:
In 2013, the journal Small Axe published an issue on what is Caribbean Studies, and it interrogated the question of Caribbean Studies in that temporal and political moment. I must credit that issue with sparking this question, "What is Caribbean Studies today?" in me and a few of my colleagues. How do you define Caribbean Studies?

AD:
Caribbean Studies by definition, for me, is a commitment to an interdisciplinary framework. It is also a commitment to a pan-Caribbean perspective—so a willingness to look at the French Caribbean, the Spanish Caribbean and the Dutch Caribbean. Even if you do not have the expertise, you have to be aware that there are strong parallels. Some Carbbeanists argue that the imposed linguistic barriers should not divide us. So for me, very simply,

it is a commitment to the study of the region through interdisciplinarity and one that transcends the linguistic boundaries. Caribbean Studies also understands the Caribbean region as unique in many ways. In part, this uniqueness about the region comes from the ways in which these societies were created. We have the massive marginalization, destruction and removal of the indigenous population. Caribbean societies are built on that foundation. Beyond that, we have these societies that were created to be exploited, to send profits back to Europe.

In a way, that exists elsewhere, but those societies in Latin America and North America were still settler societies. Caribbean societies were designed for people to come, generate as much profit as possible and then leave. The people that were meant to stay were the unfortunates that were brought there to be super exploited. Caribbean Studies recognizes this.

"I am not interested in writing Caribbean history for the sake of writing Caribbean history. I am interested in writing history that I think will serve the region and shape how people of the region see their past and how they can use that past to influence the present and the future."

TP:

I am glad that you have signaled the uniqueness of the Caribbean space, particularly as one for intellectual theorizing and examination. It is very common to see the Caribbean tied to Latin America in academic settings. What does this institutional linkage offer to Caribbean Studies and what does it foreclose?

AD:

If you have a program that is "Latin America and the Caribbean" and you have 20 Latin Americanists and two Caribbeanists, you are going to have a difficult time negotiating for the intellectual space that the Caribbean deserves. Yes, Caribbean Studies exists in these programs, but it is generally marginalized.

When I was applying to PhD programs, I applied to a program at a university in Florida. The program was promoting Atlantic studies and the study of the Caribbean, but as I sought more information, they made it clear that I could only do my comprehensive fields in Latin America.

They did not see the Caribbean as an important field and they were not interested in trying to help me expand my knowledge of the Caribbean.

They actually said to me, "you will never get a job as a Caribbeanist. Universities only hire in Latin American history."

That was the perspective of some Latin Americanists almost in the year 2000.

TP:

A struggle for me when I entered my PhD program—my work focuses on Jamaica—was whether I should include a Latin American country. I thought that Political Science departments would not find the Caribbean sexy enough and so if I paired it with a Latin American country, then that would be my way in. If we can be frank, many white non-Caribbean scholars in Canada who study the region seemingly do it without the kind of fear that perhaps Caribbean and racialized students carry with them. It is a fear that our work might not be taken seriously in the (intellectual) endeavor.

AD:

Junior scholars should have a certain level of fidelity to their intellectual interests but also be strategic. I was strategic. I knew I was interested in the Atlantic slave trade. I was interested in picking up Africa. I was also very aware that at the time there was a resurgence in Atlantic Studies. I told myself, "I am going to make this happen. I am going to pursue this project."

I would say go forth with courage on the Caribbean project.

TP:

I wonder, from where you sit as somebody who is administratively responsible for a Caribbean Studies program, what are some of the challenges you are seeing on that front?

"I would say go forth with courage on the Caribbean project."

AD:

In the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program which I coordinate, there are very few Caribbeanists and many more Latin Americanists. The program itself is very small, and I am committed to advancing the cause of both.

The challenges are cyclical and so you have moments where you get support and then you have moments when you have to fight. During those moments when you get support, you have to do as much as possible and prepare for the period when you are not going to get support. That is the challenge, generally speaking, for administrators.

The enrollment numbers for our program are not very high, but a big part of it has to do with, I believe, underfunding. Fledgling programs need investment and institutional commitment. The problem with universities is that they have to keep showing that programs are generating revenue. It is very rare that they are in a position to give long-term funding of say 5 to 10 years, because for every dollar spent, they need to show that it is pulling in students. A challenge for us is getting the kind of resources necessary.

I happen to know that my university has a large contingent of students from the Caribbean and large contingent of students from Latin America. There is no reason our Latin America and Caribbean Studies program should not be thriving. It just requires resources to reach the students. It is a resource issue.

TP:

I have a colleague who attends the University of the West Indies, Saint Augustine, and he once asked if Caribbean Studies in the Canadian context was elucidating anything new about the Caribbean for students in the diaspora or from the Caribbean, that they could not get beyond their lived experience. Is Caribbean Studies helping [Caribbean] students to understand the contemporary Caribbean and the relationship between contemporary Canada and the contemporary Caribbean?

AD:

Academics need to consider that question. Based on anecdotal evidence, I think students take courses that help them understand the contemporary. They take courses in subjects that pique their curiosity and help them understand the world around them.

Popular culture also influences their choices. I will give you an example. When the CSI series hit the air, there was a spike in Criminology Studies at the university level. I cannot prove that there is a direct correlation, but popular culture seems to influence what students can imagine as work and the kinds of questions they ask about the world. With that in mind, I am of the opinion that then there is a certain hegemonic influence coming out of the Global North—out of the United States—that shapes the way Caribbean students imagine the world. This has always been the battle for the Caribbean. This is a big part of my current project. The battle for the Caribbean imagination. Colonial Britain wanted to make sure Caribbean people could not imagine anything beyond what was convenient for Britain. They did this through propaganda, the education system, the radio . . .

There is a different battle now where people in the Caribbean have about 150 television channels of which the vast majority are American. While some might see that as a positive thing, it leads to a specific way of imagining the world and the kind of assumptions we make about how the world works.

It takes a lot of willpower and critical thinking and reflection to be able to divorce yourself from perspectives coming out of the United States.

TP:

There is a generation of Caribbeanist scholars who came to adulthood and intellectual maturation during the wave of independence in the region.

You, like my cohort of scholars born in the 1980s and 1990s, grew up in a Caribbean that was firmly entrenched in neoliberalism. We grew up with deep access to American culture. The independence moment had passed for us, and we knew nothing else.

How do we start to talk to our generation of Caribbean people, both in the region and the diaspora that existed outside and beyond the independence movement?

Can we divorce Caribbean Studies and how we think about it, from how the Caribbean is globally situated and our ongoing and almost unbreakable connection to American empire?

AD:

If we are talking about American imperialism and its continued influence in the region, that is one thing. Frankly, it is a continuation of the same problem that challenged the region under colonialism. It is the same sort of asymmetries of power at play and same ambitions to exploit the region.

But there is another problem, which is the way in which we talk about the region. I do not have an answer, to be clear, but there is a certain problem.

I am implicated in the problem along with others from the Caribbean who completed our studies abroad. So, what's the problem there? The problem is we are taught about the Caribbean from a Western perspective, from a Global North perspective . . . We start to repeat certain narratives and scholarship coming out of the Global North. We return to the region with a Global North lens because that is the scholarship to which we were introduced. That is a problem.

Caribbeanist scholar Dr. Kamala Kempadoo has an article in which she talks about the ways in which Global North narratives around human trafficking have become “indigenized” such that Caribbean intellectuals, policy makers, and politicians have started to adopt—uncritically—the vocabulary and assumptions, and narratives of the Global North.

I will give you a second example. An earlier generation of scholars from the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Jamaican criminologist Ken Pryce among others, argued that crime in the Caribbean needed to be studied from a perspective that highlighted the kind of structures that the Caribbean had inherited under colonialism. Pryce and others, asked questions about the ways in which colonialism created societies in which acts of crime were more likely to be committed. They examined crime from a structural and institutional perspective and argued that changes needed to be made at those levels.

Then a new wave of scholarship comes out informed by psychology. These psychologists start to talk about the deviant Caribbean person and inclinations towards crime.

The problem of crime now becomes the Caribbean person. From this perspective, we no longer have to do the difficult work of dismantling the structures and institutions that lead to inequality and arguably heighten levels of criminality.

This made it possible to just blame Caribbean people. In other words, the problem of crime was taken out of its historical and current context—which is, among other things—a context of colonialism and imperialism.

Instead, we have people in the Caribbean repeating imported narratives of deviancy and worthlessness. These narratives are taken up uncritically and they are "indigenized" to again borrow from Kamala Kempadoo.

It is vitally important that the current generation of Caribbean scholars understands the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. It is important that they approach Global North perspectives critically and with skepticism.

To do otherwise is to play checkers when the game is chess.

TP:

You may have been asked this several times before because it is a very current conversation in the Canadian Academy. There appears to be institutional competition between African Studies and Caribbean Studies and now the growing field of Black Canadian Studies. Scholars and students alike are claiming their stakes in the conversation. Where do you sit?

AD:

There is a competition for resources. It does not serve us to pit these intellectual interests one against the other. There is a reason why anti-colonialists of the earlier period from the Caribbean were engaging with intellectuals in Africa and Latin America. They were talking to each other all the time. Their position on the matter was "your problem is my problem. My problem is your problem. How do we speak to each other and figure this thing out? We must develop a strategy to fight the 'divide and conquer' tactics that are in place." They were very aware of the importance of collaboration.

I hope that more scholars understand that these are all marginalized areas, and we should follow in the tradition of that earlier generation of scholars who understood that if we are not careful, we will find ourselves in a race to the bottom. We need to collaborate and unite and advocate for all of these fields as being legitimate.

We can support each other through collaborative events. We can support each other administratively. We can support each other in different kinds of ways and not give in to the temptation to try and claim one field as more legitimate than the other.

TP:

To end on a hopeful note, where do we go from here?

"It is vitally important that the current generation of Caribbean scholars understands the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. It is important that they approach Global North perspectives critically and with skepticism."

AD:

You want a hopeful note? The optimistic outlook on this is that there is a generation of young people like yourself who are here to carry the torch. I have been carrying the torch given to me by my mentors. You are going to carry the torch given to you by your mentors. The challenges you face intellectually as a scholar are going to be different from the challenges I face, but we have to keep carrying that torch and trying to avoid the inclination to divisiveness that comes during times of scarce resources.

Also, there is a responsibility to find the generation who will be coming after you. Find them, support them, and then when the time is right pass the torch on to them. This is going to be a long and ongoing battle. That is the only way forward. If each of us moves this battle one centimetre, and each generation moves it a full metre, eventually we are going to find our way to a very good place.