The social museum in the Caribbean : grassroots heritage initiatives and community engagement

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Case Study: Bengal To Barbados Exhibition, Barbados

> *The process of engagement can be as important, and sometimes more important, than the practical outcome of a heritage project.*
> Laurajane Smith & Emma Waterton (2009: 116)

At the beginning of a community engagement project, participants often have clear ideas about practical outcomes: such as the development of an exhibition or the organization of an event. However, as Smith & Waterton point out (above), the process itself can be of even greater importance. This is because generally throughout a community engagement process, new or unexpected outcomes can be achieved. Many of these outcomes may not be practical in the same way, but might have long term impact on participants, such as with increased social cohesion. These intrinsic values and effects of the process of engagement may be valued much more than practical outcomes by participants.

Following on the previous chapter, the aim of this chapter is also to provide a detailed analysis of a community engagement process, as it is applied in the Caribbean, through a second case study. As mentioned at the start of the preceding chapter, these two case studies are not presented as contradictory examples or dichotomies. Similarly, they do not pretend to cover the entire spectrum of community engagement projects that are taking place in the region. This case study has as its purpose to give a unique answer to the sub question: "how are community engagement processes, including their value and outcomes, perceived by Caribbean communities?" (see *Research Questions and Objectives*, page 13). Once again, this case study must be understood in its specific context: the particular communities that are involved and the specific museum and its history that are the focal point for this engagement. The community engagement project of this second case study differs from the first with regards to its aims and outcomes, as well as the length and scope of the project, and the development of the participatory process.

The focus of this chapter is the case study conducted on Barbados in the Lesser Antilles. Whereas the previous chapter was concerned with the value of a museum within a particular community, this chapter zooms in even further to focus on the collaborative process of co-curation and the roles of the participants involved. This exhibition project was the initiative of a few members of the Barbadian East Indian

community who approached the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) for collaboration. The main aim of the case study was to understand the heterogeneity of the East Indian community along with the participants' diverse goals for and attitudes towards the exhibition project.

The chapter will begin by briefly describing the history of the East Indian community in Barbados and their current position in Barbadian society. Afterwards, the history of the BMHS will be discussed along with its key changes and developments throughout the 20th century. The context of the case study will be expanded by discussing the origins of the co-curation project and how this relates to the New Museology. These theoretical underpinnings are used to explain the interest of the BMHS in participating in the exhibition project and to identify which aims the museum staff and East Indian community had with the project. The undertaken fieldwork will be detailed, with specific focus placed on the goals of this fieldwork period and the actual experiences in Barbados. Implications of specific fieldwork strategies, any adjustments that were made, and the fieldwork experiences will also be visible throughout the remainder of the chapter. The essence of the chapter lies in the fieldwork results, namely the perceptions of participants in relation to the value this exhibition might hold for them. These perceptions provide insight into the heterogeneous identities of the East Indian community, which underlie their differing aims with the project. Ultimately, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of some of the more recent developments of the community engagement project and consider implications for future plans for continued community involvement.

Brief History of the East Indian Community in Barbados

Ichirouganaim, known as Barbados following its Spanish/Portuguese naming, is the Easternmost island in the Lesser Antilles chain. This Arawakan name is often translated as meaning 'red island with white teeth' (the teeth symbolizing reefs), although according to recent research by a Martinican anthropologist, it could also be translated as 'the extremity to the windward,' characterizing the island's extreme position to the East (Honychurch 2016). Whereas most of the islands in the Southern Lesser Antilles are volcanic, Barbados consists entirely of non-volcanic sedimentary rocks, primarily limestone (Fitzpatrick 2011: 598). Barbados was thought to be settled by Amerindians in the Archaic Age around 2000 BC, although a single radiocarbon date may place settlement as early as 3000 BC (Fitzpatrick 2011: 601; Keegan & Hofman 2017: 200-201). While there are only a few scarce remains recovered from this first period of settlement, more complete evidence has been found from a later settlement wave of the so-called Saladoid peoples. These settlers appear to have rapidly spread throughout the Caribbean region, starting around 350 BC from Trinidad and moving towards the North (Boomert 2014: 1222). During the time of the first European voyages throughout the region, Barbados was home to Kalinago people, similar to those who were living in Dominica (see *Brief History of the Kalinago in Dominica*, page 136). They adapted their lifestyles to the particular conditions of the island(s) they lived on. In the case of Barbados, this meant that they used stacked bottomless pots to protect their wells in the dry coral limestone (Boomert 2014: 1223; Hofman & Hoogland 2015: 109). Unlike the jagged, volcanic islands in the chain, Barbados is mostly flat

creating a markedly different landscape which also encouraged different use of the land and surrounding seascapes.

Brief histories of Barbados regularly begin with the arrival and subsequent settlement of the island by the English. In these cases, any preceding Amerindian existence and European interference is simply skipped over: "[Barbados] was originally inhabited by Amerindian Arawak people. When the first English ship arrived in 1625, its crew found the island to be uninhabited" (Russell 2013: 181). Of course, more detailed histories attempt to bridge this gap. Lennox Honychurch has explained the lack of inhabitants on the island in the early 17th century as a result of the Spanish, and to a lesser extent Portuguese, incursions into the Lesser Antilles to raid and capture Amerindians to work elsewhere in the region in mining and pearl diving (Honychurch 2016; *cf.* Martin 2013). Following this line of thought, it is presumed that initially Amerindians in Barbados may have been caught off guard by European raids, leading to their enslavement and forced emigration (Fisher 2014: 103). The largely flat landscape of the island would have made it difficult for them to hide from the Europeans inland in rugged terrain, as was the strategy elsewhere in the Lesser Antilles. Thus, Amerindians may have also emigrated on their own initiative to these other islands, where they could more easily escape from European enslavement. The centrality of Dominica and St. Vincent in the Kalinago islandscape – as bases for survival *and* resistance – may have contributed to their position as strongholds for Indigenous populations (Shafie *et al.* 2017: 67). Ultimately, the fact that Barbados was uninhabited (or at least *appeared* uninhabited) was the result of European interference in the island and the region and certainly no natural situation. Of course, this did make claiming the island for the English relatively 'easy,' as they could argue that it belonged to no one. Settlement was also easier than elsewhere in the region, because they did not have to contend with or defend themselves against an Indigenous population. Instead, they could focus their attention on other European powers or on Amerindian peoples on other islands. In this historical period, Barbados was consistently under British rule until its independence in 1966. During the first few centuries of British rule, Barbados was characterized by a minority population of white Europeans (although not all of these were wealthy whites) who had placed themselves above a majority population of enslaved Africans. Complex race, class, color, and caste issues following from the plantation system have marked Barbadian society until this day (Degia 2007: 23). The perceived lack of continuity with the Amerindian population, which is also reflected in classroom education, has led to Amerindian heritage "not [being] part of the collective inheritance of the average Barbadian" (Honychurch 2016).

East Indians first entered the Caribbean region after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire and the successive abolition of the apprenticeship system in 1838. In this setting, plantation economies were struggling to attract new sources of cheap labor and sought replacement work forces from India. The first indentured laborers from India arrived in Guyana in 1838, and significant populations would be shipped to Trinidad, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Suriname, and other Caribbean islands and countries. After the last indentured transport to the Caribbean in 1918, just over half a million[143] Indian laborers had been brought to the region under British rule (Ramtahal 2013:

143 553,316 Indians arrived in the Caribbean under British rule in 1838-1918.

121). Those of Indian descent who initially entered the region through the system of indentured labor are known as Indo-Caribbeans. In Trinidad & Tobago, this Indo-Trinidadian community has been able to construct a strong collective identity based around 'mother India' as a point of cultural reference (Jayaram 2003: 127). This is remarkable, considering the linguistic, religious, caste, economic, ecological, and cultural differences of the migrants who originally hailed from different areas in India. It has been suggested that the physical isolation and ethnic stereotyping of Indians who were lowest in the island's hierarchy during the period of indenture, effectively kept them from cultural borrowing or creolization, leading to this development of a collective ethnic identity (Jayaram 2003: 124). Particularly in Trinidad & Tobago, the immigration of Indian indentured laborers has had a significant impact on the current composition of the population. In the 2011 census, of a total population of 1.3 million, East Indians constituted the biggest ethnic group at 35.4%, with Africans accounting for 34.2% (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2012: 2 & 15). The desire to strengthen the position of the Indo-Trinidadian community is also reflected in the creation of the *Indian Caribbean Museum of Trinidad and Tobago* in 2006 (Ramtahal 2013: 123).

Unlike Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados did not directly receive any Indian indentured laborers. Thus, the history of the East Indian community in Barbados is characterized by more recent migration, roughly over the last 100 years, of a different nature. Upon closer investigation, it is possible to determine five specific strands of migration, each characterized by the geographic location from which migrants originated, as well as their purpose for migration (see figure 28). In fact, several of the earliest migrations of Indians to Barbados could be called accidental migrations: migrants who intended to travel elsewhere, but ended up in Barbados instead.

Migrations to Barbados have consisted of a combination of both push and pull factors. Push factors for migrants to leave India included general conditions of poverty and famine, specifically for farmers, resulting from colonial land use and policies which had disrupted traditional ways of life in the 19th and early 20th century (Degia 2007). The Great Famine of 1899 was particularly disastrous and pushed many Indians to new ways of life. In the province of Gujarat, the reduction of the role of Surat as a port city played a role as well. In the case of the Hindu Sindhis, the partition of India (see more below) led many to flee from the now majority Muslim population in Pakistan. Pull factors were largely the possibilities to create a better life for migrants and their families (whether by sending money home or by bringing their families with them). Most often, pull was specifically known to migrants through local newspapers advertising the abundance of work elsewhere in the world, for instance in cutting timber in Brazil (Nakhuda 2013: 34). As mentioned, many migrants initially set out for other places (Brazil, Guyana, Trinidad, Panama) and ended up more or less accidentally in Barbados. During later periods of migration, pull factors were strengthened by the possibility to join relatives and kin already located in the Caribbean: to have these relatives arrange necessary permits and help new migrants to find work.

The first Indian migrant, from West Bengal, arrived in Barbados c. 1910 (Nakhuda 2013: 20). Bashart Ali Dewan was a Muslim who had left his wife behind in the village of Jinpoor, India, to travel to Trinidad. There, it is likely that he met other Bengalis who were working in Trinidad as itinerant traders, selling goods door-to-door.

Figure 28: Map showing the areas from which Indians migrated to Barbados, corresponding to four strands of Indian migration to Barbados. First: Jinpoor, West Bengal. Third: Kaphleta & Telada, Gujarat. Fourth: Hyderabad, Sindh (today Pakistan). Fifth: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala & Karnataka. The second strand (not pictured) was Indian migration within the Caribbean.

Travelling on to Barbados, he began working in the same fashion as an itinerant trader, later opening up a small shop. Despite having a family in India whom he supported financially, he married again in Barbados in 1920 (Nakhuda 2013: 21). His new wife and daughter moved to Calcutta, India, a few years later, where his wife passed away in 1925. He travelled to his Indian family in Jinpoor in 1926 where he stayed for a year before returning to Barbados, marrying again and having three more children (Nakhuda 2013: 23). Finally, in 1937, possibly as a result of debt, he left Barbados for good, moving back to Jinpoor and leaving behind his Barbadian family and his business. The history of Bashart Ali Dewan is fairly characteristic of the first strand of Indian migration to Barbados. This Bengali migration, which ended in 1938, was rather small and short-lived. Sabir Nakhuda has estimated that the total Bengali migration consisted of fewer than two dozen individuals (Nakhuda 2013: 28). All the Bengali migrants were Muslim men, none of their female relatives or wives travelled with them to Barbados. Many of these Bengalis married Christian women in Barbados and also

raised their children as Christians (Nakhuda 2013: 30). Although the original migrants remained Muslims themselves, these Bengalis and their descendants rapidly assimilated into Barbadian society.

Around the same time, c. 1910, some Indo-Caribbeans arrived in Barbados from Guyana to work in the sugar factories (Nakhuda 2013: 67). Although there is little documentation of the movement of Indo-Caribbeans within the region, it is likely that for purposes of trade they may have travelled to Barbados earlier as well. It appears that Indo-Caribbean migration to Barbados remained limited, mostly consisting of businessmen arriving in the 1960s and 1970s, primarily from Trinidad. This second strand of migration is poorly documented, with information mainly restricted to the business ventures and lives of a few key migrants from these two decades.

The third strand of migration originated from Gujarat and, more specifically, for the most part from two villages: Kaphleta & Telada. The first handful of Gujaratis arrived in Barbados in 1929 by accidental migration (as had been the case with the Bengalis) (Hanoomansingh 1996; Nakhuda 2013: 34-35). These Gujaratis had initially travelled to Brazil, where they were told that a significant Indo-Caribbean community could be found in Guyana. Travelling on to Guyana, they learned that bringing coal and coconuts by schooner to Barbados was a lucrative trade. They made a number of trips to Barbados, where they met the small community of Bengalis who appeared to be, for Indian standards, well off. The Gujaratis decided to stay in Barbados, picking up the itinerant trade and moving in with the Bengalis. Like the Bengalis, the Gujaratis were Muslim and one of these new migrants was a Hafiz who could lead the group in prayer, strengthening their religious identity and knowledge (Nakhuda 2013: 37). The Gujaratis encouraged more migrants to travel from Gujarat to Barbados, providing entrance permits and setting up new arrivals in the itinerant trade. Gujarati migrants arrived in a number of waves, with the first female migrants arriving in 1948 (Nakhuda 2013: 38). Afterwards, Gujarati migration changed in character from being a purely male migration intent on earning money to be able to support extended families at home, to a migration intent on starting a new life in Barbados. In this later stage, Gujaratis were able to create a stronger cultural community due to the presence of women who were better at upholding various cultural traditions, for instance related to cooking (Degia 2016). Women molded cultural traditions, innovating them and combining them with Barbadian cultural elements. Although the stories of women are particularly difficult to uncover, in part because they often kept to the private sphere of the household, their passivity should not be assumed. Compared to their original roles in India, they expanded their social roles, worked alongside their husbands in trade, and were often responsible for the family's agriculture (Degia 2016).

Roughly simultaneously, a fourth strand of migration began from Sindh (current day Pakistan) in 1932. The Sindhis, in particular those from the city Hyderabad, had been setting up a global trade network since the mid-19th century (Markovits 2000: 110). This merchant network or 'trade diaspora' had its center in Hyderabad, with other branches throughout the world, mainly along maritime routes (Markovits 2000: 125). The network worked under a steady circulation of goods, money, and men. Men were sent out with temporary contracts to work at one of the branches around the world, usually for 5 years, followed by a year at home in Hyderabad with their families (Markovits 2000: 168). These Sindworkies, as the merchants were

known, dealt initially in exotic items or 'curios' and silks (Markovits 2000: 120). Later, they expanded their products to more general goods, textiles, and consumer electronics (Markovits 2000: 194 & 282). The network was based strongly on kinship ties and the Sindhi were predominantly Hindu. By the early 20th century, the network had a truly global reach, with branches and shops in Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, South America, the Caribbean, and Australia (Markovits 2000: 122-124). Within the Caribbean region, Sindworkies were located in Trinidad and Panama at least as early as 1915 (Markovits 2000: 127).

The first Sindhi to arrive in Barbados in 1932 was a businessman who had retired from a South Asian branch of the network and wanted to set up his own business (Nakhuda 2013: 50). After visiting kin with a shop in Bermuda, he decided to settle in the Caribbean, ending up in Barbados. Unlike the Gujaratis, who had been farmers in India and had picked up itinerant trade in South America and the Caribbean, Jivatram Atmaram arrived with knowledge of trade and ties to an existing network of goods, cash, and employees. He soon set up a shop and regular long-term visits from kin kept the store going until he returned to India in 1937 and fell ill (Nakhuda 2013: 52). This first enterprise opened the way to Barbados for other Sindhi. Still operating on a kinship basis for business, Sindhi migrants encouraged relatives to follow them to Barbados. Today, many of the Barbadian Sindhi can be traced to two families who were at the core of the Sindhi migration in the late 1930s: Kessaram and Thani (Nakhuda 2013: 52). After the partition of India, many Hindus from what had now become Pakistan fled from the country's Muslim majority. For the Sindhi, who had such a well-established trade network, this meant that many families fled abroad in their entirety, often beyond India, to places where Sindworkies were already established (Markovits 2000: 277). Whereas previous Sindhi migrants had all been male, with frequent visits home to their families, in 1947 the first female Sindhi migrated to Barbados (Nakhuda 2013: 56). This also led to a change in the nature of the Sindhi merchant network, from a constant circulation of men to a more sedentary state: Sindhis went from sojourners to settlers (Markovits 2000: 279 & 284). Naturally, this also led to a change in the character of the Sindhi community which now consisted of family groups and not merely male kin. As such, although the network itself may have weakened, the sense of community grew.

Finally, the fifth strand of migration originated from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka in South India. Today, each of these four states has a majority Hindu population (56% in Kerala, over 80% in the other three provinces) (Office of the Registrar General India 2001). Migration from Southern India to Barbados began recently, in 1968 (Nakhuda 2013: 64). These migrants are often known as the South Indian professionals, consisting primarily of doctors, with some migrants specialized in other professions such as I.T., accounting, or banking. This final group of migrants is relatively small: according to Sabir Nakhuda's research, it consists of only about 160 individuals (Nakhuda 2013: 64). The community is predominantly Hindu and has strong ties to India, frequently returning to visit relatives and friends. They tend to teach their children the mother tongue spoken in their state of origin, along with English, rather than Hindi.

These five strands of migration have led to the existence of the East Indian community in Barbados today. Although the Indian diaspora in general has been widely

researched, as has the East Indian community of nearby Trinidad, very little research has been completed on the history and current identity of this Barbadian community. So far, only three researchers have published on this subject. Peter Hanoomansingh conducted an ethnographic study of the Gujaratis and Sindhis in Barbados focusing on their commercial activities (Hanoomansingh 1996). Sociologist Haajima Degia focused her Master's thesis on the contemporary position of the Gujaratis and Sindhis as ethnic minorities in Barbados (Degia 2007). Her PhD dissertation continued on this topic, focusing on identity construction among the Gujaratis specifically (Degia 2014). She is especially interested in uncovering female oral histories to counter the dominance of male migration narratives. Most recently, Sabir Nakhuda published his book *Bengal to Barbados*[144] which includes personal histories from each migratory strand, mainly drawn from oral histories conducted in Barbados and in India/Pakistan. Both Degia and Nakhuda are members of the Gujarati community: Degia is the daughter of Gujarati emigrants, Nakhuda emigrated from Gujarat in 1957.

Today's East Indian community in Barbados is far from homogeneous. Migrants and their descendants have travelled from vastly different areas in India, from different religious, linguistic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the five migratory strands are more or less still recognizable within the fabric of the community (of which the Bengalis are least visible as they were the smallest group and largely merged with Barbadian society or the Gujaratis). Each of these migrations was characterized by a different geographical origin, as well as different professions upon arrival in Barbados. The Bengalis & Gujaratis are predominantly Muslims who were farmers by origin, but who retrained themselves in Barbados to work as itinerant traders. The Indo-Caribbeans, arriving from elsewhere in the region, worked in Barbados following the period of indentureship mainly in factory settings, such as sugar factories, and the inter-island trade. The Sindhis are predominantly Hindu and work in and own stores, a profession they were already familiar with before arrival in Barbados. This group views themselves as businessmen. Finally, the South Indian professionals are also predominantly Hindu but work in highly educated or skilled professions such as medicine and IT. Of all of these groups, the Sindhi and the Gujarati are the biggest in number and also the most visible pillars of the East Indian community in Barbados.

It is interesting to note that these two bigger groups of migrants also held different positions within the stratified society of Barbados which was strongly based on race, color, and class. Bengalis and Gujaratis, as itinerant traders, fit into the hierarchy above the previously enslaved Africans but below the impoverished whites (Degia 2007: 49). With a higher status than the majority black population, these itinerant traders were able to receive goods on credit from white store owners who treated Indians preferentially because of their lighter color. They then sold these goods, again on credit, to rural populations and the working classes living throughout the island, often traveling many kilometers a day by foot (Nakhuda 2013: 40). This population relied on itinerant traders for goods as they often did not have the leisure time to travel to town to the stores, nor could they receive goods on credit from shopkeepers. However, buying goods on credit created debt for these individuals, who were then indebted to the

144 The book itself contains few in text references which makes it difficult to correlate some of its information.

traders, often owing weekly repayments. Certainly, this position in society, as well as their work relying on providing credit and collecting dues, led Gujaratis to struggle with their identity. Much of Barbadian society (their black customers), may have stereotyped the Gujaratis as cunning or shady, suspecting them of adding extra charges to their bill, charging a high markup, or collecting debt after it had been paid off. These stereotypes of East Indians are still voiced by Afro-Barbadians today (Degia 2007: 76). The Gujaratis, however, preferred to see themselves not as exploitative, but rather as heroes or saviors of the black population willing to walk long distances, willing to risk not being paid, and often lenient towards their debtors, sometimes even cancelling a debt when the situation warranted (Degia 2016). From their perspective, it was thanks to the itinerant traders that the Afro-Barbadian population was able to afford clothing and other goods which helped improve their lives.

The Sindhis, upon arrival, immediately set themselves apart from the Gujaratis: the latter were farmers peddling wares on credit as itinerant traders, the former were businessmen who owned shops and participated in an international trade network. Indeed, the Sindhi were often educated and had some knowledge of English (Markovits 2000: 138) whereas the Gujaratis often knew no English at all upon arrival (Nakhuda 2013: 39). It is on these grounds that a distinction in status was made between Gujaratis and Sindhis that is still visible in the East Indian community today. Nonetheless, similarities can, of course, also be found between these two major groups in this heterogeneous community. Primarily, both groups tie themselves to common cultural imaginations of 'mother' India, often essentializing aspects of the homeland (Degia 2007: 50). More specifically, both Sindhis and Gujaratis still frequently return to India to find marriage partners, often finding the local community too small (and consisting of too many kin) to find a suitable spouse (Degia 2007: 50-51). In many cases, these marriages are traditional marriages arranged through the parents. However, within both groups, gender imbalances have been noted, with women being less visible in public society and generally less empowered (Degia 2016; Markovits 2000: 265-276). When asked about value systems contributing to success, both East Indians and other Barbadians noted the East Indians' sense of community as a positive force (Degia 2007: 138). Thus, despite significant differences, it may still be possible to speak of an East Indian community in Barbados.

To conclude, the East Indian community of Barbados is quite heterogeneous, originating from five strands of migration of varying size, from different geographical locations, and with unique histories. Within this community, the Gujarati-Muslims and the Sindhi-Hindus form the two major pillars. In the 2010 census of Barbados, out of a total population of 226,193, 3018 individuals (or 1.3%) self-identified as being of East Indian ethnic origin (Barbados Statistical Service 2013: 51). In the same census, 1055 Hindus and 1605 Muslims were noted (Barbados Statistical Service 2013: 59). Certainly, the size of the East Indian community may be larger if it includes individuals who marked their ethnic origin as 'mixed' or another category. Issues of identity are often sensitive and, in census enumeration, they frequently lead to problems related to the phrasing of the questions as well as the response (Christopher 2013: 327). The intricacies of the identities of the members of the East Indian community will be discussed below in the presentation of the results of this case study (see *Perceiving the Bengal to Barbados Project*, page 161). Despite being a small minority in Barbados,

the East Indian community has (or is perceived to have) considerable influence as well as (disproportionate) wealth (Degia 2007: 28). Although this leads to friction at times, it also provides the community with significant standing in Barbadian society. Ultimately, with their unique yet recognizable history of migration, the East Indian community shares a Caribbean identity founded on a "culture of migration" (Hope, quoted in Premdas 2002: 57).

The Barbados Museum & Historical Society

A history of the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) cannot be separated from its colonial context and its roots in the early collections, Great Exhibitions, and museums which were created in the Caribbean as extensions of empire during the 19th and 20th centuries (Cummins 2013; see *Museum History*, page 13). Alissandra Cummins has extensively researched and written about the history of museums in the English-speaking Caribbean, charting their development in line with historical, political, scientific, and theoretical shifts (Cummins 1992; 1994; 2004; 2012; 2013). Within this framework, she has also specifically investigated the history of the BMHS (Cummins 1998), of which she is currently the director. Thus, this section draws significantly on her research, as well as the publications of others who have been professionally related to the BMHS: current deputy director Kevin Farmer (2013) and previous director David Devenish (1985).

As mentioned above, the development of the BMHS in the 20th century had its roots in earlier centuries and the Enlightenment-model of museums which was applied by the British Empire throughout its colonies (Cummins 2013: 11). These early museums had a number of purposes. Primarily, the predominantly natural history collections were intended to serve commercializing and advertising purposes. Highlighting the natural assets of each colony, these collections were meant to attract investors or to encourage emigration to these areas (Cummins 2013: 15). Thus, many early Caribbean institutions were built around the geological or natural history collections accumulated through systematic surveys of the islands. Similar natural history collections were amassed by agricultural societies and other upper class groups with the aim to contribute to the multitude of Great Exhibitions occurring during the 19th century (Cummins 2013: 18). Again, these collections had the aim to show off the industry of the colony, as well as its products, to the wider Empire and world. In addition to commerce, these early museum institutions also had a 'civilizing' purpose, aimed to educate the 'lower classes' (Bennett 1995; Cummins 2013: 14). As such, they were supposed to be instruments of social salvation, providing (black) working classes with a moral and intellectual culture, all within the system of colonization (Cummins 2013: 33).

It is in this setting that plans were first voiced for the creation of a museum (and library) in Barbados. Lt. Col. Reid, appointed Governor of Bermuda in 1839, created the legislation for the establishment of a public library and a museum (Cummins 2013: 12). The commercializing purpose was dominant in his endeavors: these institutions were deemed necessary to identify, categorize, and promote colonial products and thus to improve the condition of Bermuda's agriculture. Within a few years, he had successfully established libraries with museum collections in Bermuda, the Bahamas, and St. Lucia (Cummins 1998: 2). Reid, who was consecutively appointed Governor

of Barbados and the Windward Islands in 1846, continued to expand this idea and initiated similar bills for the creation of such institutions in Barbados, as well as Grenada and St. Vincent (Cummins 2013: 14). Despite these plans, such a museum was not opened in Barbados. A public library was established only much later, in 1904, and without a museum collection (Cummins 1998: 2).

New plans for a museum were developed in 1910, when a colonial report suggested the acquisition of the former residence of the Governors of Barbados to be used as a museum (Cummins 1998: 2). Although this initiative, again, did not lead to the creation of a public museum, it was noted at the time that several Amerindian collections[145] existed on the island. It is one of these private collections, Rev. N.B. Watson's collection of natural history, that became the seed for the creation of the BMHS (Cummins 1998: 5). In 1926, the Civic Circle of Barbados, a society ladies' organization, became the custodians of this collection and began to raise funds for its acquisition and for a grant to house the collection. Fundraising ran into problems and negotiations stopped, until in 1933 two Carnegie Trust museum commissioners visited Barbados while conducting a survey of Caribbean museums (Bather & Sheppard 1934; Cummins 1998: 6). These commissioners strongly supported the creation of a museum in Barbados based on the Watson collection and in the same year the BMHS was incorporated by an act of legislation and a first exhibition was opened in Queen's Park House. By the next year, government agreed to give the BMHS a long term leasehold of the old military prison at St. Ann's Garrison (Cummins 1998: 7). In this building, the museum was able to finally open to the public in May 1934 (see figure 29).

For the first decades of its existence, the BMHS was frequently debated in terms of its accessibility and representativeness, primarily with the government. As an institution mainly envisaged and run by upper class individuals, it tended to reflect a vision of Empire, rather than represent the emergent West Indian societies which had gained power and a sense of identity since WWI (Cummins 2004: 234; Cummins 2013: 38). The BMHS was deemed Eurocentric, and members of government, such as Sir Grantley Adams, voiced their concerns about the "exclusivity of the Society" and proposed that the museum should be run by government (Cummins 1998: 8-9). It was stated that governmental ownership was necessary in order to have the public in its entirety benefit from the museum, rather than it remain the recreation of a select few (Cummins 1998: 10). Naturally, an underlying sentiment was the understanding that those who owned the museum would have "the power to define cultural and community identities within it" (Cummins 1998: 10).

The conflict about the accessibility/exclusivity of the BMHS continued. The museum attempted to demonstrate its accessibility by providing free entry to school children and tours for school groups, ultimately adding a Children's Museum in 1945 (Cummins 1998: 17). However, its collections (as well as its buildings) remained Eurocentric in focus (Cummins 1998: 11). This focus could be seen on a wider scale throughout the region, when in the 1950s, as a response to the tourist industry, a heritage industry developed focused on the preservation of (European) historical sites (Cummins 1992: 41). National Trusts were formed in the region, with one set up in

145 In 1914, archaeologist Jesse Fewkes reported a cabinet of curiosities at Codrington College, Dr. John Hutson's collection, and Mr. Evan K. Taylor's collection (Cummins 1998: 2).

Figure 29: Entrance of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, Barbados.

Barbados in 1960 (Cummins 1992: 41). Failing to fight the allegations of social exclusivity, the BMHS collections around this time contained only a few brief references to the majority black population (Cummins 2013: 39). The collections did not reflect the significant "black renaissance of political awareness and socioeconomic consolidation" (Cummins 1998: 14) which had been developing in the region and culminated in the independence of Barbados in 1966.

Independence forced the BMHS to, once again, confront the issue of relevance for this new society and to consider their role in the creation of a national identity in the 1970s and 1980s (Cummins 1992: 47; Cummins 1998: 24). On a governmental level, it had become clear that national identity creation went beyond designing a flag and writing a nation anthem: it "became a core mandate of cultural institutions" (Farmer 2013: 170). Initially, identity creation was by no means intended to be inclusive, but rather relied on the rejection of anything European. Slowly, museums sought to be more accessible to all. Museums were aided by a new generation of Caribbean historians who had stepped away from a perspective of Empire and adopted post-colonial and gendered theories (Farmer 2013: 172). These historians gave voices to the majority population; museums, including the BMHS, were able to expand upon their narratives and be more inclusive. As Kevin Farmer has noted, "Caribbean nationalism, as constructed in the post-independence era, sought to combat the issue of colonial self as inferior, replacing it with a notion of self as superior" (Farmer 2013: 174).

In the case of the BMHS, these new histories and the drive to national identity creation, along with concerns that the museum was not representative of Barbadian life as a whole, led to the establishment of a Museum Development Plan Committee in

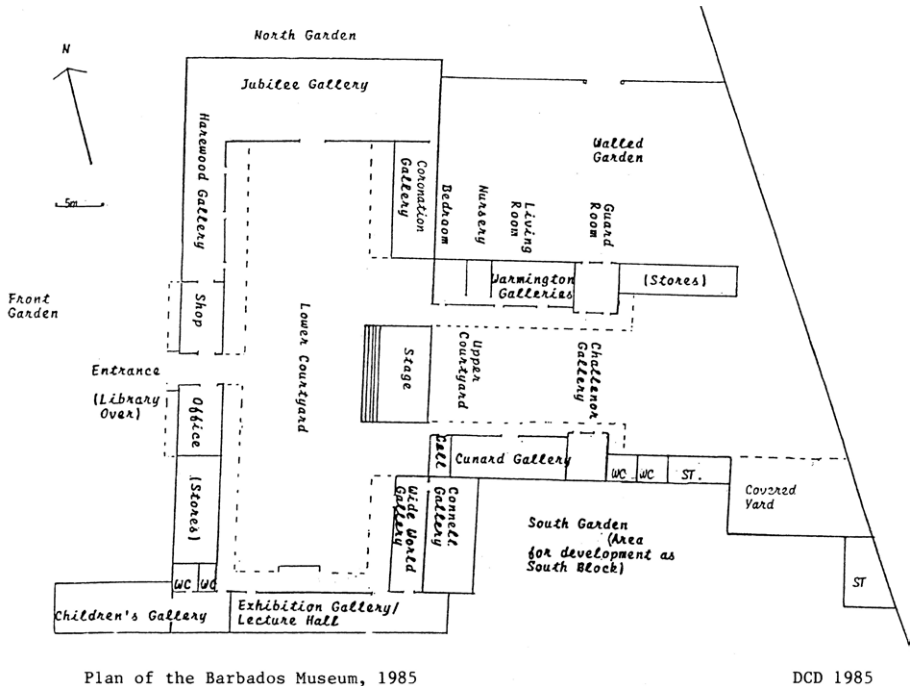


Figure 30: Plan of the Barbados Museum, 1985.

1980 (Cummins 1998: 27). At this time, the BMHS mission was "to collect, preserve, and publish matter relating to the history and antiquities of Barbados, to gather and preserve appropriate articles for collections, and to promote a knowledge of Barbadian history, culture and related matters" (Whiting 1983: 33). Thus, the proposal for development, submitted by the Committee in 1982, was focused on inclusivity and to make the museum more reflective of Barbadian culture. This plan was implemented from 1983-1984, with the appointment of several new staff members, the extensive renovation of the buildings, the construction of new service blocks, and the redesign of some exhibitions (Devenish 1985: 66; see figure 30). The current mission statement was adopted in 1990: "The Barbados Museum is a non-profit institution. Its mandate is to collect, document and conserve evidence of Barbados' cultural, historical and environmental heritage and to interpret and present this evidence *for all sectors of society*" (my emphasis, Cummins 1998: 27). The Children's Gallery was renewed in 1992 (Cummins 1998: 28) and the latest permanent exhibition, called *Africa: Connections and Continuities,* opened in 2005 to emphasize the history of the Afro-Barbadian population (Russell 2013: 182). With each of these developments, the museum has attempted to open itself up towards the wider Barbadian society and to demonstrate its relevance. Yet, Kevin Farmer has warned that the creation of Caribbean national identities, as centered upon an image of the region as consisting primarily of descendants of Africa, has marginalized other ethnic groups (Farmer 2013: 173). To alleviate this marginalization, in the case of the BMHS, social inclusivity has been most visible in the temporary exhibitions "co-created with special interest groups within the community" (Cummins 1998: 29-30) that have been successfully developed since the mid-1980s.

The Bengal to Barbados Exhibition Project

The *Bengal to Barbados*[146] exhibition project was initiated by members of the East Indian community. Their motivations to approach the BMHS with this idea for an exhibition, along with an identification of their desired outcomes for the project, will be explained in more detail below. The willingness of the BMHS to collaborate should be seen within the context of the museum's dedication to temporary co-curated exhibitions since the 1980s. In turn, the BMHS' approach to the exhibition project fits within their own particular history and development, as well as reflects more global museological trends. From the point of view of the staff of the BMHS, it is possible to identify three main goals for participation in co-curation: social inclusivity, multi-vocal national identity, and reflexivity.

As was shown in the previous section, the BMHS historically struggled to demonstrate its relevance for the wider Barbadian society. Writing in 1998, Alissandra Cummins reflected that "the perception of social exclusivity is a stigma which the Museum has fought hard to erase for over fifty years" (Cummins 1998: 11). Thus, it is not difficult to identify social inclusivity as a key motivation for the BMHS staff to engage in co-curation projects such as this one. After decades of accusations of exclusivity, the museum strongly emphasizes that it is accessible (physically, intellectually, culturally) to 'all sectors of society' and that it also presents the heritages of Barbados as a whole. Collaborating with multiple communities throughout Barbados, whether for temporary exhibitions, programs, events, or activities, has been the way in which the BMHS works towards social inclusivity. This approach helps on the one hand to include diverse communities' heritages in the museum and, on the other hand, to reach out to these communities and make the museum accessible to them. The benefits and necessity of social inclusion have been noted within the wider museological field (see *New Museology*, page 24). Carol Scott has argued that relevance and social inclusivity are essential for museums that wish to be sustainable in the long term (Scott 2015: 105). Graham Black noted that relevance and social inclusion are particularly important to reach out to marginalized communities, in particular people who do not visit museums (Black 2015: 136). Certainly, sustainability and widening the audience base of the museum are also reasons for the BMHS to focus on social inclusivity through this exhibition project. In the words of Nina Simon, the aim is "to matter more to more people" (Simon 2016: 21).

Issues of identity, sense of belonging, and community cohesion are particularly relevant in today's world of global human mobility and migration (Black 2015: 126). In the Caribbean, which is characterized by plural societies and diverse, heterogeneous communities, these issues may be even more pressing. National identity has to be constructed multi-vocally. As Rex Nettleford argued, "diversity is one of humanity's greatest strengths" (Nettleford 2008: 4) and museums should especially help to promote "mutual respect and understanding between peoples of differing race, class and creeds within nations" (Nettleford 2008: 17). How, then, can a national identity be

146 At the time of this case study, the exhibition project did not formally have a title. The Exhibition Planning Committee suggested that I could use the title of Nakhuda's book 'Bengal to Barbados' as a working title for the exhibition project.

constructed out of such diversity? According to Alissandra Cummins, the answer lies in shared experience rather than any shared tangible culture:

> *The heritage of the Caribbean is not so much valued therefore for the tangible remains and artefacts which litter the galleries, corridors and basements of so many European museums, but rather is a shared, lived, defining (intangible) experience of Indigenous extirpation, slavery, migration, indenture, plantations and colonial control stretching over a period of some 500 years. It is this shared human heritage of our historical experience which* […] *defines who we are as a people.*
> Alissandra Cummins (2012: 26)

National museums and heritage institutions are key players in creating national histories and, thus, in validating nationally-constructed identities (Cummins 2004: 227). In the case of the BMHS, as can also be seen in its current mission statement, the exhibitions are intended to (re-)present Barbados as a plural society (Cummins 1992: 51). Kevin Farmer has urged Caribbean museums to echo the diverse voices of the people they represent without any bias or favor (Farmer 2013: 176-177). In order for museums to be truly multi-vocal, curators need to adopt participant action: not merely speaking in the voices of others but inviting those others in to speak for themselves (Arnold 2015: 330). Thus, the BMHS' participation in this co-curated exhibition is also clearly motivated by their desire for the East Indian community to represent themselves as an element of Barbados' plural society, to promote mutual understanding, and to highlight the shared experience of migration.

Finally, the BMHS' motivations for participation in the project can also be understood as a desire for greater reflexivity. As part of the school of thought of the New Museology, reflexivity is an important element. Museum staff are encouraged on the one hand to critical self-reflection of their actions and their museum, and, on the other hand, to make museums more democratic by inviting external participation (Butler 2015: 177). As part of the latter, co-curation is seen as one of the most effective, if intensive, processes. Ideally, throughout this process, the community becomes part of the museum, as the museum becomes part of the community (Phillips 2003: 161).

The motivations for the members of the East Indian community can also be identified in their history, as well as in their current position in Barbadian society. The starting point for the exhibition project was the publication of Sabir Nakhuda's book *Bengal to Barbados* (Nakhuda 2013) and its positive reception in the East Indian community in Barbados and in the wider Indian diaspora. Nakhuda, together with his friend Suleiman Bulbulia of the Barbados Muslim Association, approached the BMHS in 2015 to make an exhibition on the same topic. The BMHS staff, Nakhuda, and Bulbulia agreed to work on this exhibition based on the research done for the book.[147] Farmer, as deputy director of the BMHS, was the museum's main contact person and organized two initial meetings with a number of community leaders. Early on, he expressed his concern with the representativity of Nakhuda and Bulbulia (both Gujarati-Muslim men) for the East Indian community as a whole. Thus, he approached Haajima Degia (who has researched the female Gujarati community) as

147 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).

well as Sindhi community leaders to be part of the Exhibition Planning Committee. The initial timeline was to open the exhibition in 2016, marking Barbados' 50th anniversary of independence which the BMHS was honoring with a series of exhibitions and events. Ideas were developed to accompany the exhibition with events tied to different religious feasts such as Eid, Diwali, and Holi. Although possibly unknown to the East Indian community members prior to approaching the BMHS, the museum does have some Indian objects in its collections (Devenish 1985: 65).

The BMHS intended co-curation to be highly participatory, inclusive, multi-vocal, and reflexive. Their view was that "we facilitate, it is driven by them" and that the project would be a test for the museum to see "how open we can be."[148] Regarding the inclusivity of the project, the deputy director was concerned that not all committee members were consistent in attending the planning meetings and he also noted that women did not always speak. The meeting time, which fell on Mondays just after lunch, was frequently reconsidered to see whether more community members would attend otherwise and thus improve the multi-vocality of the process. To assist with the reflexivity of the project, the BMHS had invited me to be part of the project and to "lend your experience in ensuring that it is a community driven exhibition."[149] This idea of the community engagement process aligns with Nina Simon's 'hosted' participatory model in which power lies largely with the community and the museum is minimally involved as support (Simon 2010: 190-191).

The East Indian community, most frequently represented at the planning committee meetings by Nakhuda and Bulbulia, had somewhat different intentions for the project. They preferred a more moderately participatory role, placing more decision-making power with the museum staff. Their ideas were more in line with Simon's 'contributory' participation model in which community members create and submit content, while the project as a whole is managed by the museum (Simon 2010: 190-191). As an example, regarding the panel texts, Farmer suggested that BMHS staff could write an essay text based on Nakhuda's book, which Farmer would then turn into panel texts for the community members to edit and revise. Bulbulia responded that "this is good, since we are unfamiliar with this sort of text, so we can edit and revise."[150] Just as Farmer had, they also expressed concerns with the absence of representatives from other parts of the East Indian community and suggested including additional individuals who might be able to attend the set meeting time. Not particularly concerned with reflexivity, they instead focused on concrete practical tasks: *e.g.* the collection of objects from the community, the identification of exhibition themes, and communication with potential sponsors. A more detailed analysis of the perceptions of the East Indian community in relation to the exhibition project and its outcomes is presented further on in this chapter.

148 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).
149 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).
150 Meeting with Exhibition Planning Committee (Bridgetown, Barbados, 29 February 2016).

Fieldwork: Aims and Experiences

The Barbados Museum & Historical Society was first visited in October 2015, as part of a conference in Barbados. It was during this visit that contact was established with a number of staff members of the BMHS, including the director, deputy director, and curator. As part of the conference, I had held a presentation on the regional museum survey and the case study conducted in Dominica, and showed conference delegates the Caribbean Museums Database. Following this presentation, the deputy director approached me to suggest a number of upcoming BMHS projects that might be suitable as a second case study. In particular, he mentioned that the museum had recently been approached by members of the East Indian community for a co-curation project. Based on the parameters identified for the case studies, this project was ultimately selected (see *Case Studies*, page 58). It would be able to showcase a community engagement process between a national museum and a minority community based on their grassroots initiative and the dynamics of this collaboration would be very different than those of the previous case study in Dominica. The fact that the project was just beginning provided a unique perspective as well. By including such a relatively recent migrant community, additional insights into the diversity of Caribbean communities could be made.

After a number of initial exchanges and online meetings, fieldwork took place on Barbados from February 25th – March 23rd 2016. In the course of this fieldwork, I lived relatively close to the museum, but not in a neighborhood that was particularly associated with the East Indian community. As participant observer, I worked in the offices of the BMHS during this time and took part in a number of museum and community events, as well as joining the Exhibition Planning Committee meetings. For reasons related to access, observations were more often related to the BMHS and museum staff, than to the East Indian community. As such, my contextual perception of the museum staff as participants in the project was more developed than my insights into the East Indian community.

As with the other case study, participatory observation was employed through participatory rapid assessment by preparing clearly defined research questions and a limited amount of variables before entering the field (Bernard 2006: 353). The nature of the case study, focused as it was on a short-term project of a temporary exhibition, was suitable in this respect. Similar to the other case study as well, I prepared a survey to conduct as self-administered questionnaires containing a total of ten questions which can be found in the appendix (see *Questionnaire: Bengal to Barbados*, page 264). These questions were adjusted at the start of the fieldwork period together with the East Indian members of the Exhibition Planning Committee. To exemplify, I had listed many possible categories of response to the question regarding the respondent's identity which they then narrowed down to include only the categories they considered relevant. In the end, the survey contained a mix of open-ended questions, closed-ended questions (with multiple choice options), and 5-point scales (Bernard 2006: 269 & 273). In total, the survey was completed by 51 respondents: 7 of whom were BMHS museum staff and the remainder members of the East Indian community.

Initially, I planned for a similar fieldwork approach as in Dominica, namely a mix of visiting community gathering places and the street-intercept method. However, it became clear in meeting with the Exhibition Planning Committee that such an

approach would not be sufficiently valuable. Primarily, it would not be very useful, as it turned out that the community in general was largely unaware of the exhibition project, whereas the questions were geared towards individuals with a basic awareness of the existence of the project. Secondly, street-intercept surveying was not as straightforward in Barbados as the East Indian community lives spread out over multiple parishes. On the recommendations of the East Indian members of the Exhibition Planning Committee, it was decided to adjust the survey strategy.[151] Copies of the survey were given to three members of the Exhibition Planning Committee who offered to operate as community gatekeepers and survey administrators: Suleiman Bulbulia, Haajima Degia & Sabir Nakhuda. These gatekeepers offered to hand the survey to relatives, friends, students, and attendants at community events whom they were in contact with. They were also asked to make an effort to reach out to other parts of the East Indian community, rather than only their Gujarati group. Gatekeepers were instructed to tell respondents briefly about the exhibition project, if the respondent did not yet know about it, and to assure respondents to fill out the survey as best they could and to skip any questions they could not answer. They were not given instructions to focus on obtaining an age or gender balance, but rather to prioritize persons who knew of the project and/or were from other parts of the community. I approached members of the museum staff directly to fill out the survey. Thus all surveys were completed as self-administered surveys and the majority of these were handed out, supervised, and collected by the three community gatekeepers. In analyzing the survey results, it is possible to identify the perspectives of the respective community gatekeepers as a bias in the responses of their respondents. This is discussed in more detail later (see *Representativity*, page 173).

In addition to the survey, information was gathered from participant observation. Working from within the museum, it was possible to observe the museum staff and to attend meetings of the Exhibition Planning Committee, as well as engage with staff in project discussions. I also attended several public events organized by the museum, such as the *Barbados Museum and Historical Society Lecture Series 'Becoming Bajan'* and the *Heritage Treasures 5K Walk & Run*. In addition, I visited a public lecture held at the University of the West Indies by Haajima Degia (2016) about her research into the ethnic identity of the Barbadian Gujaratis. These events provided greater contextual understanding of both participating communities.

The overall aim of this case study was to understand the perceptions of the East Indian community and the BMHS museum staff in relation to this co-curation project. Firstly, I was interested in charting the communities' awareness of the exhibition project and their involvement in it. Did people know about the exhibition project? Were they able to voice their project ideas or was the project perceived as exclusionary? Secondly, did participants have clearly defined participatory roles? Did museum staff and members of the East Indian community agree in their expectations of what the other party would contribute to the project? Thirdly, to investigate what project aims these participants had. Did different community members have different expectations of the project's aims and its outcomes? Could such differences lead to conflict or friction? Finally, I focused on the identities of the participants, also to assess their

151 Meeting with Exhibition Planning Committee (Bridgetown, Barbados, 29 February 2016).

representativity. At the outset, I had hypothesized that a possibly unequal balance of power between the East Indian community and the BMHS could be a main point of conflict. However, as discussed below, problems seemed to be more often related to the heterogeneity of the East Indian community.

Perceiving the Bengal to Barbados Project

This following section will present and discuss the results of the surveys conducted among staff of the BMHS and members of the East Indian community in relation to the *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project. The categorized and collated survey results can be found in the appendix (see *Questionnaire Results: Bengal to Barbados*, page 264). In total, the survey was completed by 51 respondents, 7 of whom were BMHS museum staff plus 44 members of the East Indian community. As such, results are clearly marked whether they apply to all respondents ('*total*'), to BMHS museum staff only ('*BMHS*') or only to members of the East Indian community ('*EIC*'). Along with the survey responses, this analysis and interpretation of the case study data also draws on contextual information obtained through participant observation. The section begins by presenting the demographics of the survey respondents, afterwards focusing on the heterogeneous identities of the members of the East Indian community. The identities of the East Indian community members are essential to keep in mind for all the following interpretations of results: such as, the awareness of and involvement in the project, the importance and benefits of the project, positive and negative associations with the project, representativity, and the planned outcomes.

Preliminary results were presented for feedback and discussion at a meeting of the Exhibition Planning Committee, held at the BMHS, on 21 March 2016. These initial results were paired with suggestions for the continuation of the exhibition project. Many of these suggestions had already been considered by the committee, but could now be connected to practical approaches and solutions. The committee was happy to hear that community members were positive about the project and agreed to focus their initial energies on expanding their reach and being more inclusive.

Survey Demographics

Respondents were not evenly balanced by gender or by age, due in part to the survey methodology and partially to the nature of the communities surveyed. To exemplify the latter, the BMHS has a majority of female staff, which was reflected – if in a more uneven ratio – in the gender balance of the BMHS survey respondents (6:1). As an example of the former, the community gatekeepers had not been instructed to focus on a gender or age balance in administering the survey, but rather to try to reach out to community members from the five different migration strands and thus from different sub-communities. Although the gatekeepers were all Gujarati, two of them attended Sindhi community gatherings specifically for the survey. Besides this, the gatekeepers handed out the survey to their own students, relatives, and friends who were (nominally) aware of the exhibition project. Thus, they prioritized surveying respondents with some prior knowledge of the project and/or who identified with diverse migration strands. Consequently, the results are not statistically reflective of the

Barbadian East Indian community as a whole.[152] It is also not possible to know whether the gatekeepers consciously or subconsciously focused on gender or age balances in distributing the survey, or whether they were biased towards respondents of certain age groups or genders in collecting survey responses.

The total results show a modest gender imbalance, with more female respondents (59%) than males (see figure 31). As mentioned above, the gender imbalance was particularly pronounced with the BMHS respondents, due to the composition of the staff and ability to participate in the survey. However, the results are more balanced in relation to gender division among the East Indian community respondents, and are therefore able to more evenly reflect any gendered perceptions.

An imbalance can also be seen in the age distribution of survey respondents (see figure 32). Overall, roughly half of the respondents were aged 15-24 or 25-34 (each age group corresponding to 25.5% of the total), with the other age groups being less represented. In order to see differences between 'younger' and 'older' respondents, it was possible to divide them almost equally into two groups with half aged under 35 (n=27) and the other half aged 35 and up (n=24). With the exception of one young family member, children under the age of 15 were not included by the community gatekeepers in the survey. Naturally this age group was not at all represented among BMHS staff; they are all of working age. The relatively small sample size of BMHS staff does not significantly impact the EIC age distribution in relation to the total age distribution.

Community Identities

It became apparent that the heterogeneous composition of the East Indian community, especially along religious lines, had significant impact on the survey responses and on perceptions of the exhibition project. Despite five strands of migration, the current East Indian community in Barbados has two major pillars: the Gujaratis and the Sindhis. The Bengalis historically assimilated with the Gujaratis or mainstream Barbadian society, the Indo-Caribbeans are poorly documented but may have similarly merged, and the South Indian professionals remain primarily aligned with Hindu communities in India and secondarily with the Sindhis because they are often only temporarily in Barbados. Thus, it is possible to tentatively and roughly identify members of these two pillars by their religious identity: Hindus are mainly Sindhi-Hindus and Muslims are mainly Gujarati-Muslims. The respondents from these two religious groups had markedly different perceptions of the exhibition project. This section only focuses on the EIC responses (n=44).

The question related to identity asked: "which communities do you consider yourself a part of?" Respondents could provide multiple answers in three geographic-cultural categories (Barbadian, Caribbean, East Indian), three religious categories (Christian, Hindu, Muslim), indicate that they considered themselves part of 'none' of these, or add 'other' options. As mentioned earlier, these categories had been determined together with the East Indian members of the Exhibition Planning Committee. A few immediate observations can be made regarding the responses (see figure 33). First

152 In the 2010 census, 3018 individuals self-identified as East Indian, 1055 as Hindu and 1605 as Muslim (Barbados Statistical Service 2013: 51 & 59). The 44 EIC respondents represent 1.5% of the total community, or 1.7% (n=18) of Hindus and 1.5% (n=24) of Muslims.

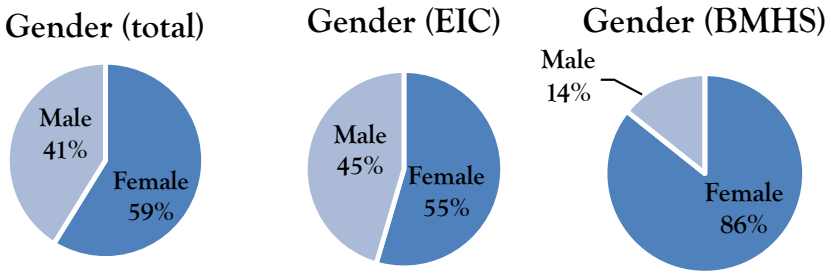
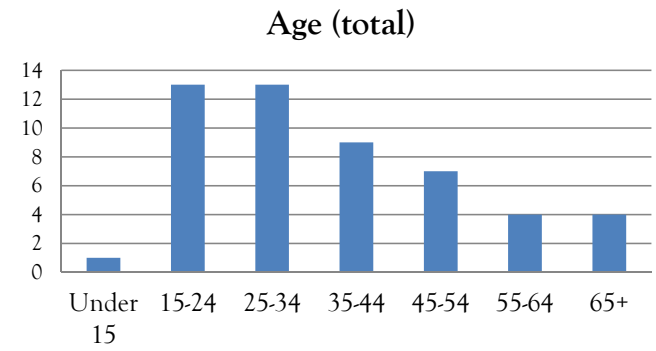


Figure 31: Gender distributions of survey respondents in Barbados: total numbers, only East Indian community members, and only BMHS staff.



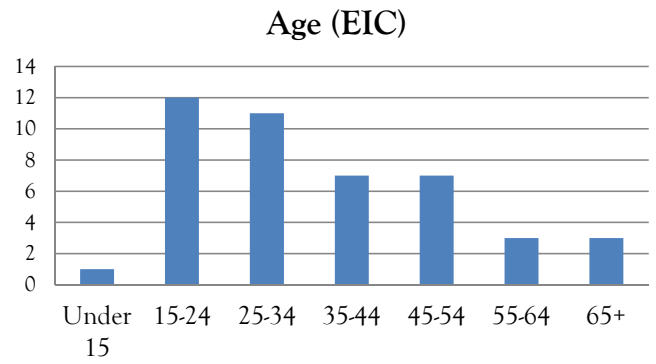
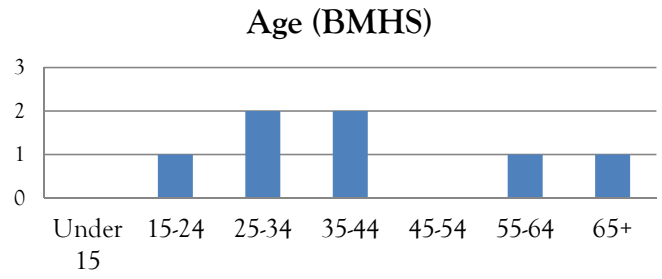


Figure 32: Age distributions of survey respondents in Barbados: total numbers, only East Indian community members, and only BMHS staff.



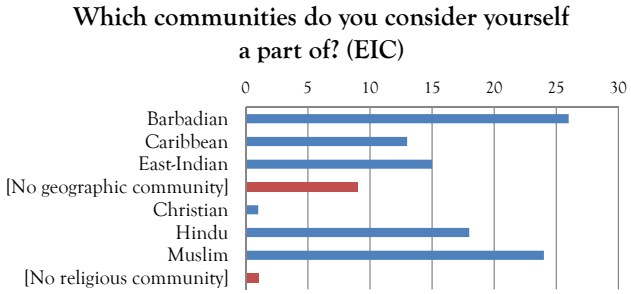


Figure 33: East Indian respondents' self-identification with given communities.

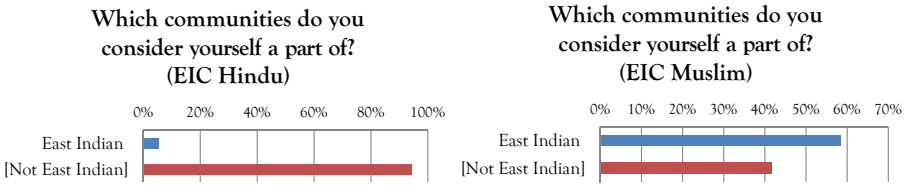


Figure 34: East Indian respondents' self-identification as East Indian, divided by religion.

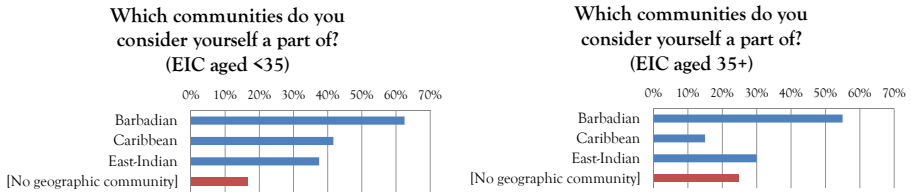


Figure 35: East Indian respondents' self-identification with geographic communities, divided by age.

of all, not unexpectedly, religious identity is an exclusive category, meaning that no respondent indicated to belong to more than one religious community. On the other hand, geographic-cultural identity was not perceived to be exclusive and respondents frequently indicated belonging to multiple categories resulting in a higher amount of responses (54 responses by 35 respondents for these categories). Secondly, respondents were more likely to indicate a religious identity. Only one respondent did not indicate a religious community, whereas 9 did not select a geographic community.

Following these two immediate observations, of obvious interest is the fact that although these respondents had been identified as fellow community members by the gatekeepers, for instance by being their own family members or by attending a community gathering or religious service, only a minority of respondents self-identified as East Indian (34%). One possible interpretation is that this low level of response has to do with the phrasing of the question as one of '*belonging* to a community' rather than as being a matter of ethnicity. Fieldwork supports the notion that this community does not have strong ties of collective belonging. In conversations, community members rather speak of themselves as Gujaratis or Sindhis, for instance, than as East Indians.

This lack of perceived belonging to the East Indian community is furthermore pronounced along two divisions: religion and age. Regarding religion, specifically Hindu

respondents indicated a near total lack of belonging to the East Indian community (see figure 34). Muslim respondents were more divided, with a majority selecting a belonging to the East Indian community. This difference was also supported by further observations, in which Gujarati-Muslims more often spoke as representing the East Indian community, while this was not the case for Sindhi-Hindus. Although both of these pillars may ethnically identify as being East Indian (which seems to be supported by the Barbados census data), the former group has more deliberately constructed a sense of belonging in the form of an East Indian community. In fact, the exhibition project as a whole, aiming to present the history of the East Indian community collectively, was initiated by Gujarati-Muslims and they were, during this case study fieldwork, also more frequently present at Exhibition Planning Committee meetings. Bias due to the community belonging of the gatekeepers who administered the survey might have impacted results as well.

Regarding the division of identity along age lines, it was hypothesized by Degia,[153] based on observations from her own research, that younger East Indians more strongly self-identify as Barbadian and less often as East Indian. She suggested that this might be due to the fact that they will more often have been born and raised in Barbados and thus have weaker ties to India. With these survey respondents, this hypothesis did not hold true (see figure 35). In fact, while the respondents aged under 35 did more frequently self-identify as Barbadian, they also more often self-identified as East Indian. Especially pronounced is this group's sense of Caribbean identity. The older respondents, aged 35 and over, less frequently indicated a sense of belonging to Barbadian, Caribbean, or East Indian communities. On the whole, this older group was more likely not to select any geographic community at all. In conclusion, it can be tentatively interpreted that the younger members of the East Indian community have stronger, and more often plural, geographic-cultural identities.

To summarize, the discrepancy between the low amount of responses regarding self-identification to the East Indian community, by individuals who were nonetheless all perceived to be part of this community, can be explained in three ways. Namely: first of all, ethnic origin may not lead to a sense of community belonging, secondly this sense of belonging seems to lie almost exclusively with the Muslim part of the community and, finally, older community members identify more moderately on a geographic-cultural basis. These three reasons may also have implications for estimating the overall size of the East Indian community, as certainly the earlier mentioned numbers from the 2010 Barbados census could similarly be affected by these dynamics.

Despite being able to identify some of the reasons for this discrepancy, it still raises the question whether it is relevant at all to speak of 'an East Indian community' as a collective group. Although in some respects it might seem more accurate to polarize the community into a Gujarati-Muslim and a Sindhi-Hindu pillar, in other respects it is still useful and valid to speak of an East Indian community. The latter is true particularly with regards to similarities in histories of recent migration, their particular relationship to the topic of the exhibition, as well as when one considers how this group is seen

153 Meeting with Degia (Bridgetown, Barbados, 10 March 2016).

by outsiders or its separation from other Barbadian communities. Nonetheless, in the remainder of this chapter, the reader should be aware of the fact that the East Indian community should be seen as heterogeneous with segments that are more strongly or more weakly tied to the group as a whole. Where relevant, community perceptions that differ strongly between the two pillars will be highlighted.

Project Awareness & Involvement

The *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project, at the time of this fieldwork, had not been publicly announced. Despite the desires of the whole Exhibition Planning Committee to work inclusively and participate with many members of the East Indian community, involvement in the project was still limited. The gatekeepers administering the survey focused on including those who were already aware of or involved in the project and explained the project to those who were not. Even within the walls of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, some staff members were not aware of the project until asked to complete the survey. In total, only 12 respondents indicated that they were involved in the exhibition project (see figure 36). Of the 39 not involved in the project, when asked why they were not involved, many provided no explanation (15) or indicated that they were not aware of the project (13). Some stated that they had not been asked to be involved (6) or were not aware how they could be involved (2). A lack of project awareness was apparent, with respondents stating that they were "not aware of the project,"[154] that it was "not known to me,"[155] or that they "had no idea about it."[156]

Certainly, the lack of project awareness had direct implications for the amount of participants the project could hope to engage. Despite this low level of awareness, verbal and written responses indicated that there was a *potential* for participation and that respondents were positively inclined to being involved (if only they knew how or were asked to). As one respondent noted: "I'm not directly involved but should the opportunity arises [sic], I would like to be involved."[157] When this was discussed with the Exhibition Planning Committee, some plans were made as to how public awareness of the project could be improved and how community involvement could be increased.

Respondents who indicated that they were already involved in the project were asked in what way they were involved. Both involved BMHS staff members stated that they were researchers for the exhibition, whereas the East Indian community members noted a diversity of involvements, from being on the Exhibition Planning Committee, to transporting donated artefacts, or assisting with culinary aspects of the exhibition.

Imbalanced community engagement projects can lead to participants feeling that their voices are not being heard or that their actual involvement is tokenistic. As such, the Exhibition Planning Committee and I wanted to know whether participants were pleased or dissatisfied with their degree of involvement. Thus the survey asked those who indicated involvement in the project: "do you feel that your voice is being heard?" Of the involved BMHS staff members, one refrained from answering and the other

154 Survey BtB#39 (Barbados, 12 March 2016).
155 Survey BtB#26 (Barbados, 8 March 2016).
156 Survey BtB#45 (Barbados, 15 March 2016).
157 Survey BtB#38 (Barbados, 12 March 2016).

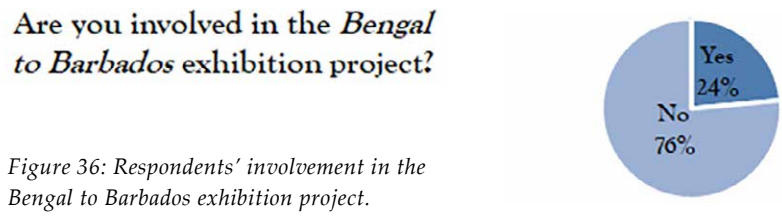


Figure 36: Respondents' involvement in the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project.

responded positively, elaborating that "I've only recently become involved in the project, so thus far I haven't been able to contribute as much as I possibly can."[158]

Among the involved members of the East Indian community, responses were more divided. The majority responded *yes* (6), with the remainder stating *sometimes* (2) or *no* (2). Although not all of these respondents elaborated, a tentative explanation is possible due to additional observations. As had been indicated within the Exhibition Planning Committee, East Indian participants expected to be consultants within the project with a limited decision-making role. As such, they anticipated to have relatively less decision-making power within the project as compared to the BMHS staff. The point of contention, instead, seemed to be in the balance of power *within* the East Indian community, rather than between the community and staff. Positive responses all echoed expectations of consultation that were met: "I offer suggestions that are taken into consideration"[159] or as another respondent said "I am told of the plans & ask [sic] for opinion."[160] The one negative response is specifically about power imbalances between community members: "generally, at the meetings, certain individuals monopolise the discussion."[161] Although one could assume this power imbalance within the community is due to the two pillars, this is not the case. In fact, all 10 involved members of the East Indian community were Muslim and may tentatively be identified as Gujarati-Muslims. Instead, the imbalance in power might be based on gender. Those who felt their voices were being heard were mostly male (5:1), while both of those who indicated that their voice was *not* being heard were female. This concern had already been voiced by the BMHS prior to this fieldwork.[162] Renewed efforts were planned to improve inclusivity of female East Indian community members.

Exhibition Aims, Importance & Benefits

Making sure that co-curation participants are aware of their respective project aims is an important step in avoiding possible conflict and misunderstandings while working towards desired outcomes. Thus, as part of the survey, respondents were asked "what do you hope the exhibition will achieve?" and asked to pick up to three of the twelve listed aims or to add 'others.' In general, East Indian community members and BMHS staff prioritized similar project aims, although there are also some notable difference in responses between the two (see figure 37).

First of all, despite the instructions given on the survey, many respondents (16) picked more than three exhibition aims. This over-selection of exhibition aims was

158 Survey BtB#1 (Barbados, 3 March 2016).
159 Survey BtB#35 (Barbados, 12 March 2016).
160 Survey BtB#29 (Barbados, 9 March 2016).
161 Survey BtB#49 (Barbados, 15 March 2016).
162 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).

particularly pronounced among BMHS staff, with 6 out of 7 respondents indicating more than three aims. The East Indian community members selected 3.8 aims on average (167 responses for 44 respondents), while BMHS staff selected 7.1 aims on average (50 responses for 7 respondents). In comparing the results, the relative importance should be kept in mind rather than the percentage of responses per se.

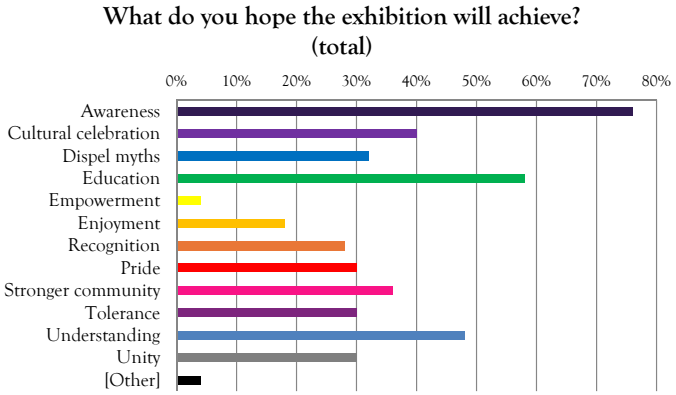
BMHS staff members indicated that *awareness* (100%), *education* (86%), and *understanding* (86%) were the most important outcomes they hoped the exhibition would achieve. Of secondary importance were a *stronger community* (71%) and *unity* (71%). BMHS staff considered *enjoyment* (29%), *empowerment* (14%), and *pride* (14%) to be the least important aims of the exhibition. The East Indian community also indicated that *awareness* (70%), *education* (52%), and *understanding* (41%) were the most important outcomes they hoped the exhibition would achieve. However, of secondary importance they indicated different aims namely *cultural celebration* (39%) and *pride* (32%). Finally, the East Indian community similarly considered *enjoyment* (16%) and *empowerment* (2%) to be the least important aims of the exhibition.

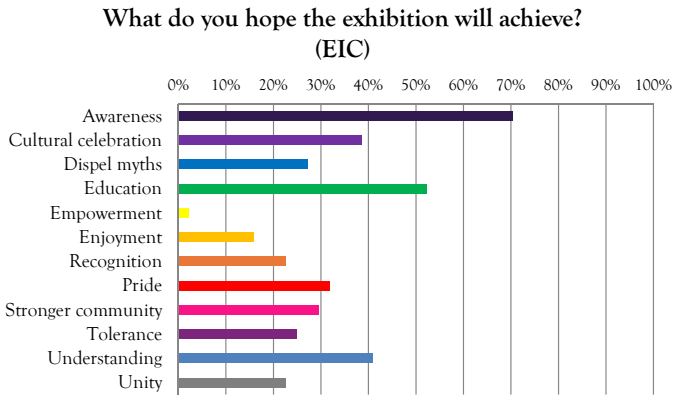
For both the East Indian community and BMHS staff, the three primary aims of the exhibition were the same: awareness, education, and understanding. At the opposite end of the scale, both groups of respondents also agreed that the least important aims were empowerment and enjoyment. Differences occur primarily in the medium ranges of the results. For instance, whereas pride was of secondary importance to the East Indian community, it was deemed of little importance to BMHS staff. On the other hand, while BMHS staff considered recognition and dispelling myths to be secondarily important outcomes of the exhibition, these were valued lower by the East Indian community.

Thus, in the eyes of all the respondents, the primary aim of the exhibition was educational and outward focused towards Barbadian society as a whole: to raise awareness and to educate. As one respondent argued, "this is an opportunity for us to educate, enlighten fellow Barbadians about us."[163] A BMHS staff member noted that "this would enable the general public to be more educated about the customs and the culture of the East Indians."[164] Of secondary importance, and more inward-looking, was the aim to celebrate East Indian culture and to build a stronger community. Some respondents specifically commented on inter-generational education: "it will be nice for the young ones to know the history of our arrival here."[165] Finally, it was clear that the exhibition should not be geared towards political aims such as empowerment, nor that it should focus especially on enjoyment. These interpretations had clear implications for the exhibition development process by indicating that the primary tone of the exhibition should be educational and that the primary goal audience would be 'the Barbadian public' at large, with the East Indian community as a secondary audience for the purpose of community bonding.

Beyond exhibition aims, respondents were also asked to evaluate the exhibition based on how they perceived its importance and its potential benefits. On a five-point scale, the survey asked participants "do you feel that this exhibition is important for

163 Survey BtB#36 (Barbados, 12 March 2016).
164 Survey BtB#6 (Barbados, 10 March 2016).
165 Survey BtB#19 (Barbados, 8 March 2016).





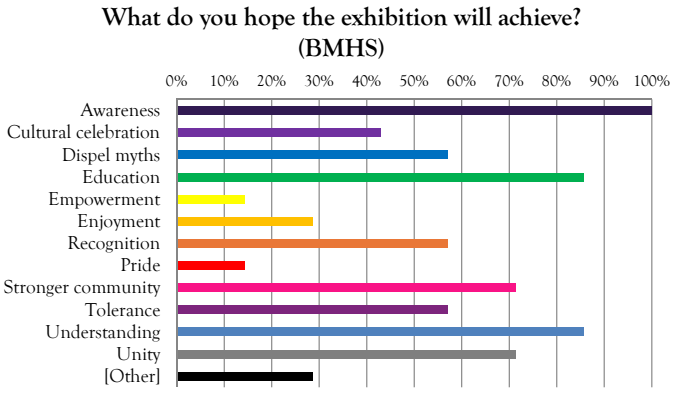


Figure 37: Respondents' expectations for the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project: total numbers, only East Indian community members, and only BMHS staff.

your community?" (see figure 38). Responses greatly differed depending on which community or pillar they belonged to. BMHS staff in general were quite positive about the importance of the exhibition, mostly stating that it was "a lot" or "extremely" important. These respondents noted that educating Barbadians about the East Indian community was important, arguing that this would "provide an opportunity for greater communication & understanding between the different cultural groups"[166] and thus, hopefully, lead to more tolerance. These explanations largely echoed the main exhibition aims presented above. The East Indian community was highly divided between those who felt that the exhibition was "a lot" or "extremely" important (n=23), and those who were more skeptical and felt that it was "a little" or neutrally important (n=21). Those who were positive repeated outward-focused educational outcomes in elaborating this question, noting again how this would educate and enlighten the wider Barbadian public. Those who were more negative about the importance of the exhibition were often uncertain ("not sure") or questioned the reach and therefore the impact of the exhibition. One respondent said "it might bring awareness, but only a few people come to these exhibitions."[167] Another respondent noted neutrally that "some will be interested and others will not."[168]

On closer inspection, this divide in the perceived importance of the exhibition can be interpreted as being influenced by identity (see figure 39). The division is characterized by religion as well as by a stronger or weaker sense of geographic-cultural belonging. Those who perceived the exhibition to be of less importance were more often Hindu than Muslim (14:6) and less likely to have indicated belonging to a geographic-cultural community. Only 43% of this group self-identified as Barbadian and even fewer noted Caribbean (24%) or East Indian (24%) community belonging. On the other hand, those who perceived the exhibition to be of greater importance were more often Muslim than Hindu (18:4) and also more often indicated a geographic-cultural belonging. Of this group, 74% self-identified as Barbadian, with also more frequent selections of Caribbean (35%) and East Indian (43%) community belonging. As discussed above, this division aligns with the two pillars within the community, as well as by the fact that the Gujarati-Muslims have constructed a stronger sense of belonging to the East Indian community than is the case for the Sindhi-Hindus. Beyond this, the division can also be explained due to a greater awareness of and involvement in the exhibition project by the Gujarati-Muslims. This group is both more aware of the project, increasing their sense of the project's importance, as well as more involved in it, quite possibly as a result of their already perceived importance of the project. Additionally, the group who indicated less frequent belonging to geographic-cultural communities, thus may have a weaker sense of community and therefore is less likely to indicate that the exhibition is important "*for your community*" as the survey question was phrased.

As a follow up question, respondents were also asked "do you think the exhibition will benefit your community?" (see figure 40). In general, responses to this question were more evenly divided among the four points on the scale, ranging from "a little"

166 Survey BtB#1 (Barbados, 3 March 2016).
167 Survey BtB#49 (Barbados, 15 March 2016).
168 Survey BtB#26 (Barbados, 8 March 2016).

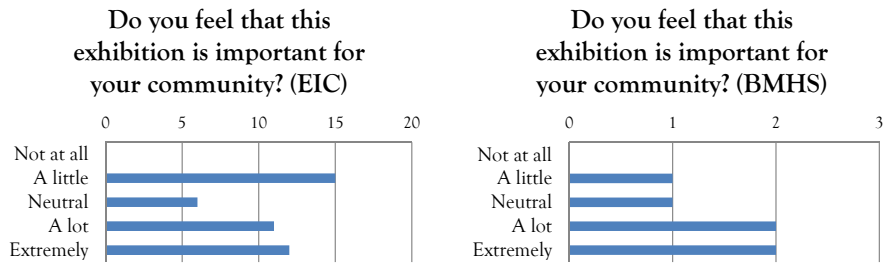


Figure 38: Respondents' assessment of the importance of the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project: only East Indian community members and only BMHS staff.

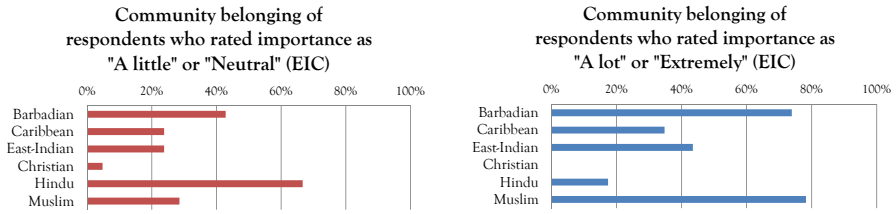


Figure 39: East Indian respondents' self-identification with given communities, divided by the extent to which they rated the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project as important.

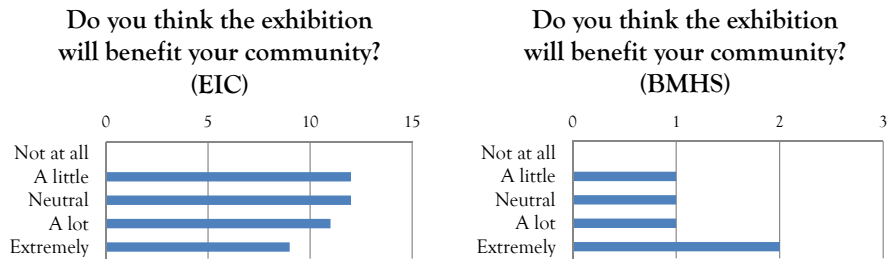


Figure 40: Respondents' assessment of the benefits of the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project: only East Indian community members and only BMHS staff.

to "extremely" beneficial. The respondents overall were slightly less positive regarding the benefits, but at the same time fewer respondents were as negative and more were neutral. BMHS staff noted that the exhibition could benefit the Barbadian public and that the content would benefit the East Indian community. However, one staff member questioned the scale and impact of the exhibition, saying "I think a lot will depend on marketing and communication in order to achieve a significant audience size for maximum impact."[169] The East Indian community was divided almost evenly as well and several respondents commented that they were "not sure about benefits."[170]

169 Survey BtB#4 (Barbados, 9 March 2016).
170 Survey BtB#47 (Barbados, 15 March 2016).

One respondent also noted that benefits would depend on the content and style of the exhibition: "it all depends on what is being exhibited. Will there be literature or/and audio visual aids that the targeted audience can easily understand?"[171] Of those respondents who elaborated their response, many presented inward-focused benefits noting that it would improve tolerance of the Indian community, build bridges between communities, help to dispel myths, and "help preserve our history."[172]

To summarize, BMHS staff and members of the East Indian community had similar views on the aims and importance of the exhibition, although there were some differences between these groups and more notably among the East Indian respondents. Primarily, both groups were concerned with educational exhibition aims and had outward-focused perspectives to educate the Barbadian public at large. The East Indian community also found cultural celebration and pride important, showing a secondary need for the exhibition to result in community strengthening. These aims were largely reflected in the perceived importance of the exhibition, although respondents were greatly divided in this matter between those who were largely positive and those who were more skeptical of this importance. This divide could be explained partially along the religious divide of the two pillars of the community and also by a distinction between stronger and weaker perceived belonging to the East Indian community as a whole. In addition, BMHS staff was more positive regarding the exhibition's importance. Finally, responses were overall more evenly distributed regarding the potential benefit of the exhibition, with fewer negative & positive responses and more neutral responses. In answering this question, respondents were alternatively more uncertain about possible benefits or were more inward-focused on benefits for the East Indian community specifically.

Project Associations

The perceptions of the survey respondents towards the exhibition project were also evaluated by asking them for their positive and negative associations. The survey asked respondents to "please say three positive things about the exhibition project" and followed this up by asking them to do the same for negative keywords. The question was intended to specifically get insight into the perceptions of the respondents towards the project and therefore to understand some of the dynamics of the collaborative process. However, during the course of the fieldwork it became apparent that a significant amount of respondents were not, or only minimally, aware of the project. Therefore, they found these questions particularly difficult to answer and many did not submit any responses to these two questions. Of all the respondents, 23 did not indicate any positive associations and an even higher number of respondents, 41, did not submit any negative associations. Those who noted positive associations frequently wrote down terms which had been listed as multiple choice options to the previous question "what do you hope the exhibition will achieve," thus repeating their aims for the exhibition as project associations.

To begin with analyzing the positive responses, 28 respondents (55%) answered this question and the majority indicated three positive terms, with an average of 2.5

171 Survey BtB#7 (Barbados, 4 March 2016).
172 Survey BtB#38 (Barbados, 12 March 2016).

positive terms per respondent (see figure 41). BMHS staff and members of the East Indian community responded relatively equally often to this question. Respondents primarily associated the exhibition project as being educational and creating awareness, echoing the main exhibition aims. Another major grouping of association were general positive comments about the project as an idea. Respondents noted it was *interesting*, a *good idea*, *fun*, *inspirational*, and *exciting*. Beyond these general positive comments, a few respondents noted that the project was *innovative* and that such a project had not been attempted before. Some also stressed that the project was *timely*, *needed*, and *important*, stressing the necessity of the project being undertaken.

In analyzing the negative responses, it is apparent that negative associations were mentioned exclusively by members of the East Indian community. Negative responses were given by 10 respondents, corresponding to 23% of the respondents from the East Indian community. Most of these respondents only indicated one negative term, resulting in an average of 1.3 negative terms per respondent (see figure 42). There are two primary points of contention which were given as negative associations. First of all, respondents felt that the project was *biased*, *one-sided*, or *monopolized* and therefore did not reflect the community as a whole. Secondly, and closely related to the first point, respondents noted that the project was *unknown by many*, stating that it was *private* and *exclusive*. Two respondents also noted that the project was *overdue*.

To summarize, many respondents were unable to provide their associations with the project, primarily due to their lack of familiarity with the project. Those who did respond noted mainly positive associations, with negative associations only being mentioned by members of the East Indian community. Whereas the positive associations were concerned with the project as an *idea* or its aims, the negative associations point towards conflict related to the *process* of the exhibition project. Again, responses indicate friction within the East Indian community and point towards the fact that certain community members felt either excluded from the project due to the low awareness of the project or that the project was monopolized by some community members at the expense of others. Thus, whereas respondents felt that the idea of the project was good and timely, the process was deemed biased and exclusive by some members of the East Indian community.

Representativity

The representativity of the East Indian community members involved in the project was a point of concern from the outset, for three reasons. First of all, the heterogeneous East Indian community was not sufficiently represented by the members of the Exhibition Planning Committee. Secondly, not all community members who are in fact involved in the process felt equally heard. Thirdly, the personal perceptions and associations of the three community gatekeepers biased the respondents they administered the survey to.

The first two points have already been brought up. Despite efforts by the members of the Exhibition Planning Committee, not all parts of the heterogeneous East Indian community are sufficiently represented or can equally participate in the project. There are multiple reasons for this. The heterogeneity of the East Indian community makes it particularly challenging to find persons who can be representative along multiple dividing lines (female/male, Hindu/Muslim, Gujarati/Sindhi, young/old). Even though individuals representing some of these segments of the community

sit on the committee, due to the meeting time and location (at the BMHS) not all members are able to be present for all meetings, therefore in effect giving those who can be present more decision-making power. Certain members, even when they are present, do not feel that their voices are being heard, indicating that community members are not equally valued or equally listened to. Representativity was highlighted as a major concern for the success of the co-curation project in moving forward. Committee members were also concerned with this issue and agreed to work on making the project more inclusive by expanding the amount of East Indian community members involved through wider public events and consultation. It was noted that these events should happen in locations that were more central to the residential neighborhoods of the East Indian community. They also agreed to look into the meeting times and locations, to try to attract new members to the committee, and to encourage attendance of existing members.

The final point is related to bias due to the perceptions of the community gatekeepers. Bulbulia & Nakhuda visited community events and gatherings and administered the survey together at these events and also individually to family members and friends. Degia administered the survey independently among students, family members, and friends. When introducing the survey, the gatekeepers explained the exhibition project and the aims of the survey in their own words. It was apparent, already in my first observations, that Degia's stance towards the project was different than that of Bulbulia and Nakhuda. Whereas Degia experienced friction in the co-curation project between East Indian community members and described the project in both negative and positive terms,[173] Bulbulia and Nakhuda were overall more positive and did not recognize any conflict, only the low meeting attendance.[174] Some of the survey results, related to the perceived importance and benefit of the exhibition project and specifically the question about negative project associations, could be read as having been influenced by the differing perceptions of these gatekeepers. It is likely that survey respondents, when introduced to the exhibition project by the gatekeeper administering the survey, understood the project to some extent in the tone in which the gatekeeper chose to describe the project. There is a marked difference in how Degia's survey respondents (n=8) indicated the exhibition project's importance and its benefits, as opposed to Bulbulia/Nakhuda's respondents (n=36) (see figure 43). Namely, Degia's respondents were more negative.

The differences in perception were also visible in the question related to negative project associations. Of the 10 respondents who gave any negative associations, 7 of these were Degia's respondents (or 88% of her respondents). Degia's respondents were those who noted that the exhibition process was biased, monopolized, exclusive, and private. The remaining 3 respondents, who had been surveyed by Bulbulia/Nakhuda, noted negative associations of a different kind, namely that the project was overdue and that it was unknown by many. In presenting the preliminary survey results to the Exhibition Planning Committee, this issue was discussed and a suggestion for mediation was made. Different participants presenting the project differently to outsiders – influencing public perception of the project – could lead to conflict as the project progressed.

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173 Meeting with Degia (Bridgetown, Barbados, 10 March 2016).

174 Meeting with Exhibition Planning Committee (Bridgetown, Barbados, 21 March 2016).

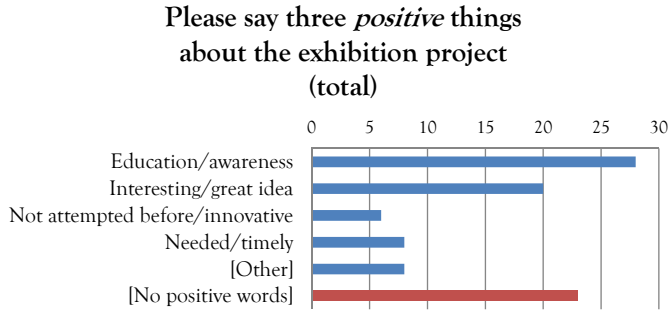

Figure 41: Respondents' positive keywords for the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project.

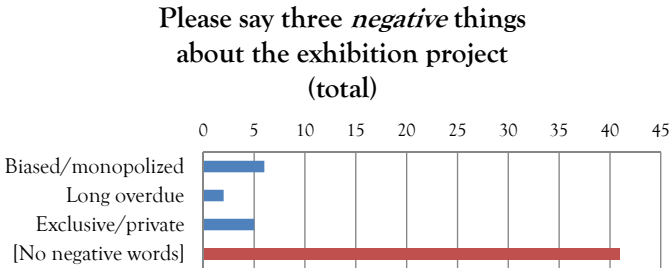

Figure 42: Respondents' negative keywords for the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project.

Project Development

Since finalizing this fieldwork, development of the project has continued. In discussing the preliminary survey results, the Exhibition Planning Committee noted the need for wider engagement with the East Indian community and mediation between participants; thus more time would be needed to build connections with potential participants and bridges between current participants. A decision was made to push back the date of the exhibition opening (originally 6 July 2016 – now proposed August 2018). Initially the exhibition was planned within Barbados' yearlong celebration of 50 years of independence, with the opening of the exhibition falling on the last day of Ramadan. It would be open for three months, with events and programming continuing for longer and the exhibition potentially traveling throughout the island afterwards.

At the time of writing (fall 2017) the plan for the exhibition opening is for it to take place in August 2018 to coincide with the start of the school year.[175] Programming will specifically focus on allowing Barbadians to engage with the East Indian community and their heritage. As part of the efforts to make the exhibition project more inclusive and to reach out to a wider audience and potential participants, a meeting was held at the BMHS to invite more East Indian community members to provide their input into the project. 12 persons attended this meeting and left inspired to encourage friends and family to become involved. One of these persons will be doing research to provide a gendered understanding of the community. A follow up meeting will be planned in a more neutral location. Although they had not had meetings in a while, the Exhibition Planning Committee members are in regular contact, deepening their relationship into one of trust. They are working primarily on content research and object collection. In

175 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (St. Croix, 28 July 2017).

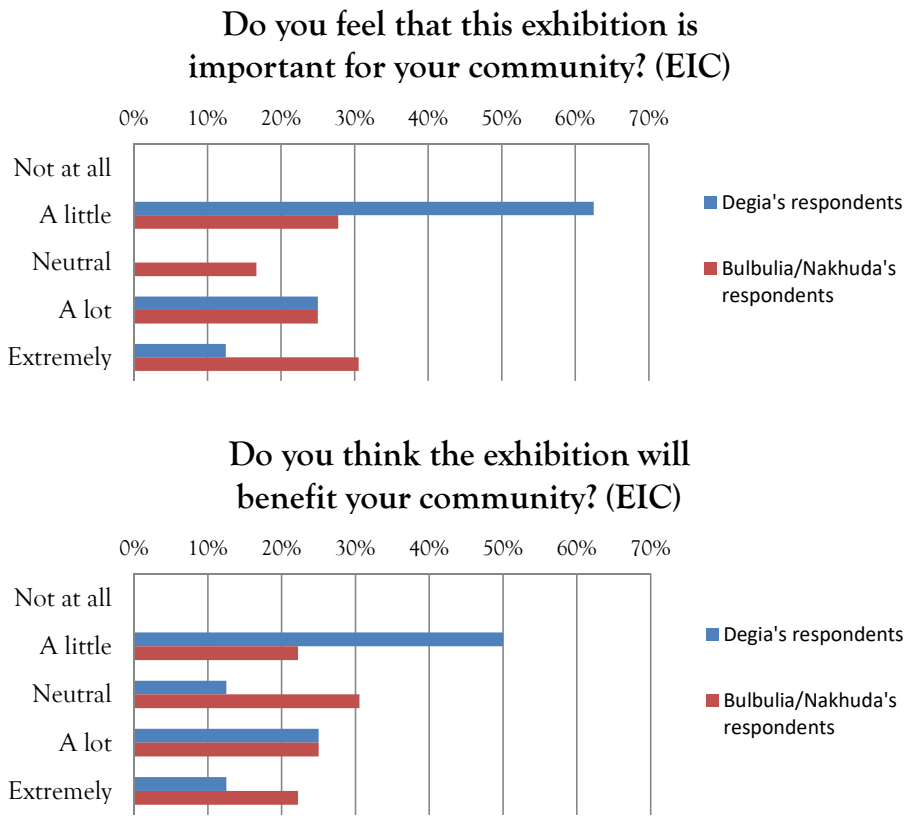

Figure 43: East Indian respondents' assessment of the importance and the benefits of the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project: divided by who administered the survey.

addition, some of the participants have begun working on their own genealogy projects alongside the exhibition project. BMHS staff stressed that buy in from the whole community is essential, so that neither the museum nor the East Indian community is pushing the project down an isolated path. For all of these reasons, additional time was invested in the project to ensure that nothing happens until all participants feel ready: "the key thing for us is not to try to impose that curatorial rigor, but to be a bit more organic and flexible in order to engage."[176]

Summary

> *We're learning as we're going on, we're not doing it the traditional way.*[177]

This chapter took the *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project as a case study of an ongoing Caribbean community engagement process and attempted to provide and

176 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (St. Croix, 28 July 2017).
177 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (St. Croix, 28 July 2017).

illustrate an answer to the research question: "how are community engagement processes, including their value and outcomes, perceived by Caribbean communities?" (see *Research Questions and Objectives*, page 18). The idea for the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project resulted from the publication of Sabir Nakhuda's book (2013) of the same name and was initiated by his subsequent request to the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) to co-curate a temporary exhibition. Centered on the topic of this book, the focus of the proposed exhibition would be the five migratory strands through which East Indians travelled to Barbados, their 100 year history on the island, and their current role within Barbadian society. The exhibition project was conceived in 2015 and is currently still in development, scheduled to open in August 2018. It is co-curated by staff of the BMHS and members of the heterogeneous East Indian community, who are learning to adjust and adapt the process flexibly along the way. Originating as a grassroots initiative, the exhibition project is co-curated by a national museum and a minority community.

How is the *process* of the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project perceived by the East Indian community and by BMHS staff? Due to the limited awareness of the project and small number of project participants at the time of this study, many community and staff members could not comment deeply on the process of the exhibition project. Of those who could, BMHS staff was generally positive about the process, although they noted that wider community participation was necessary and they hoped to place more power and responsibility with the East Indian community. East Indian community members were generally positive about the collaboration with the museum and preferred the museum to have relatively more decision-making power, as they felt that museum staff had more appropriate expertise. However, some community members were negative about the collaboration process within the East Indian community, noting that conversations and decision-making could be biased or monopolized by certain individuals.

How is the *value* of the exhibition project perceived by the East Indian community and by BMHS staff? The East Indian community saw the aim of the exhibition to primarily be an outwards-focused one, namely to educate the Barbadian public about the community's history and heritage. As a secondary aim, cultural celebration and pride were noted, indicating that inward-focused aims were also seen as an integral part of the exhibition. As an idea, the exhibition was generally valued positively. However, in valuing the importance of the exhibition, the community was deeply divided between those who felt that the exhibition was of little importance and those who felt it was very important. This separation aligns with existing divisions within the community: partially between the two pillars of Gujarati-Muslims and Sindhi-Hindus, partially between respondents with stronger or weaker ties to the East Indian community as a whole, as well as along age and gender differences. BMHS staff was overall positively inclined towards the exhibition project, primarily also stating the aim to be educational for all Barbadians. Secondarily, they hoped the exhibition would lead to unity and a stronger (Barbadian) community. Generally, staff rated the importance of the exhibition to be high and were also positive about the idea of the project. As outsiders, BMHS staff was not personally conflicted about how the history of the East Indian community should or should not be told, as long as this was balanced and correct.

How are the *outcomes* of the Bengal to Barbados exhibition project perceived by the East Indian community and by BMHS staff? As the project was still in a very early stage during the course of this fieldwork, project participants and survey respondents were largely uncertain about the outcomes of the project. At the time, they rather noted the potential benefits of the project and how it could support bridging between communities and increased tolerance among Barbadians. However, respondents did say that benefits would be highly dependent on the process of the project, as well as the actual outcomes in terms of the resulting exhibition and related programming. Those involved in the process emphasized that any outcomes would depend on how inclusively or exclusively the project would progress. In general, both East Indian community members and BMHS staff had a rather undecided outlook on the outcomes of the project.

Ultimately, the positive continuation of the co-curation process depends on the extent to which the project is successfully made more inclusive (and thus more representative of the heterogeneous East Indian community) and the successful mediation by BMHS staff between East Indian individuals separated along dividing lines of identity, religion, age, and gender. Contention and sources of conflict in this exhibition project do not lie *between* the museum staff and community but rather *within* the community. In order for BMHS staff to take on the role of mediator, it is instrumental that more time is invested to understand the dynamics of the East Indian community and to be able to work towards bridging. Participating East Indian community members will need to be equally invested in bridging and willing to shift the power balance within the community. With continued and increased inclusivity and mediation, the Bengal to Barbados exhibition has significant potential to not only educate the wider Barbadian public about a specific history, but also to strengthen the bonds of the East Indian community and encourage a more tolerant Barbadian society. Along the way, flexibility and adaptation are necessary, constantly learning as the process continues. If successful, the exhibition could form the beginning of an East Indian community museum in Barbados.

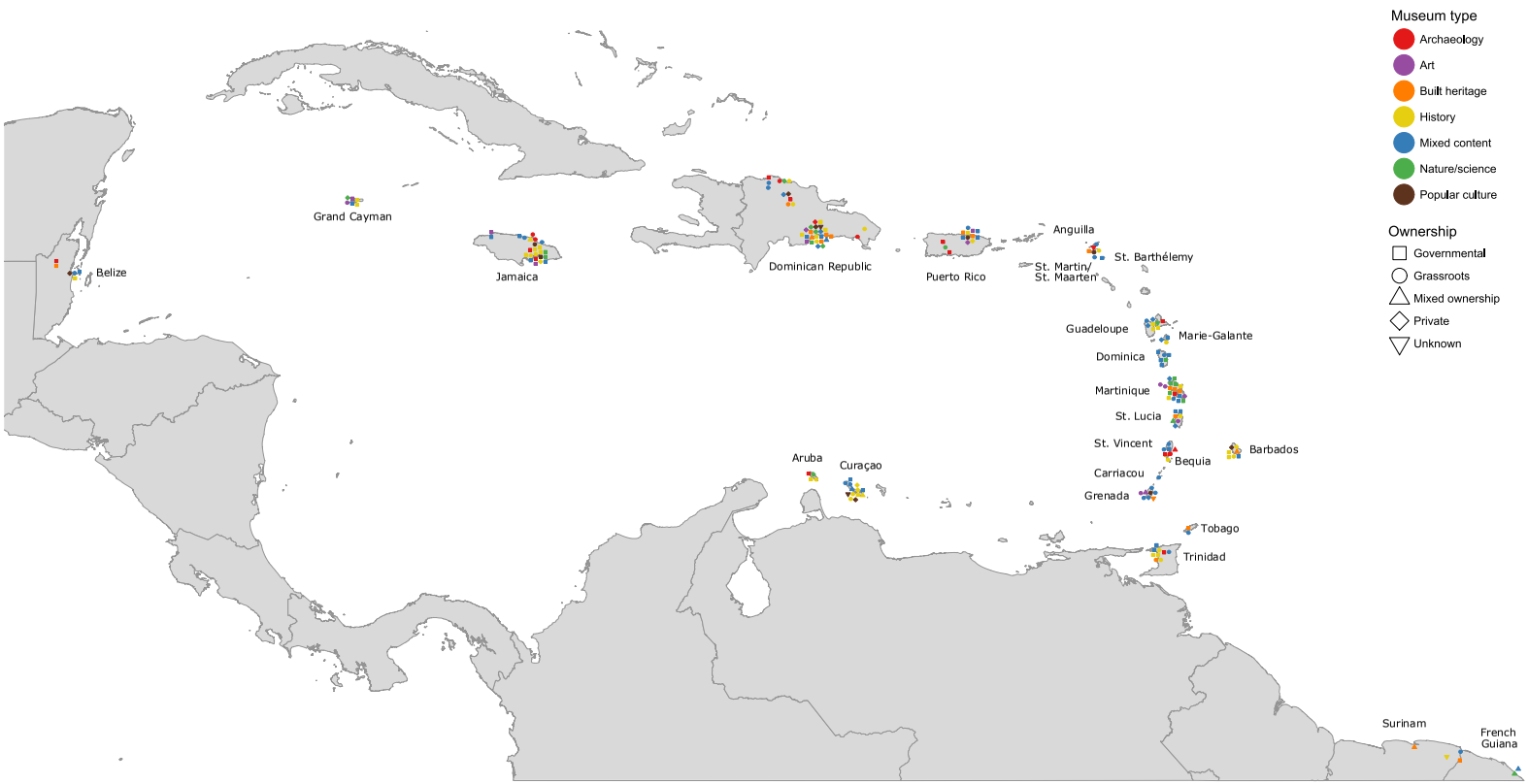

Figure 44: Map of the studied museums in the Caribbean.

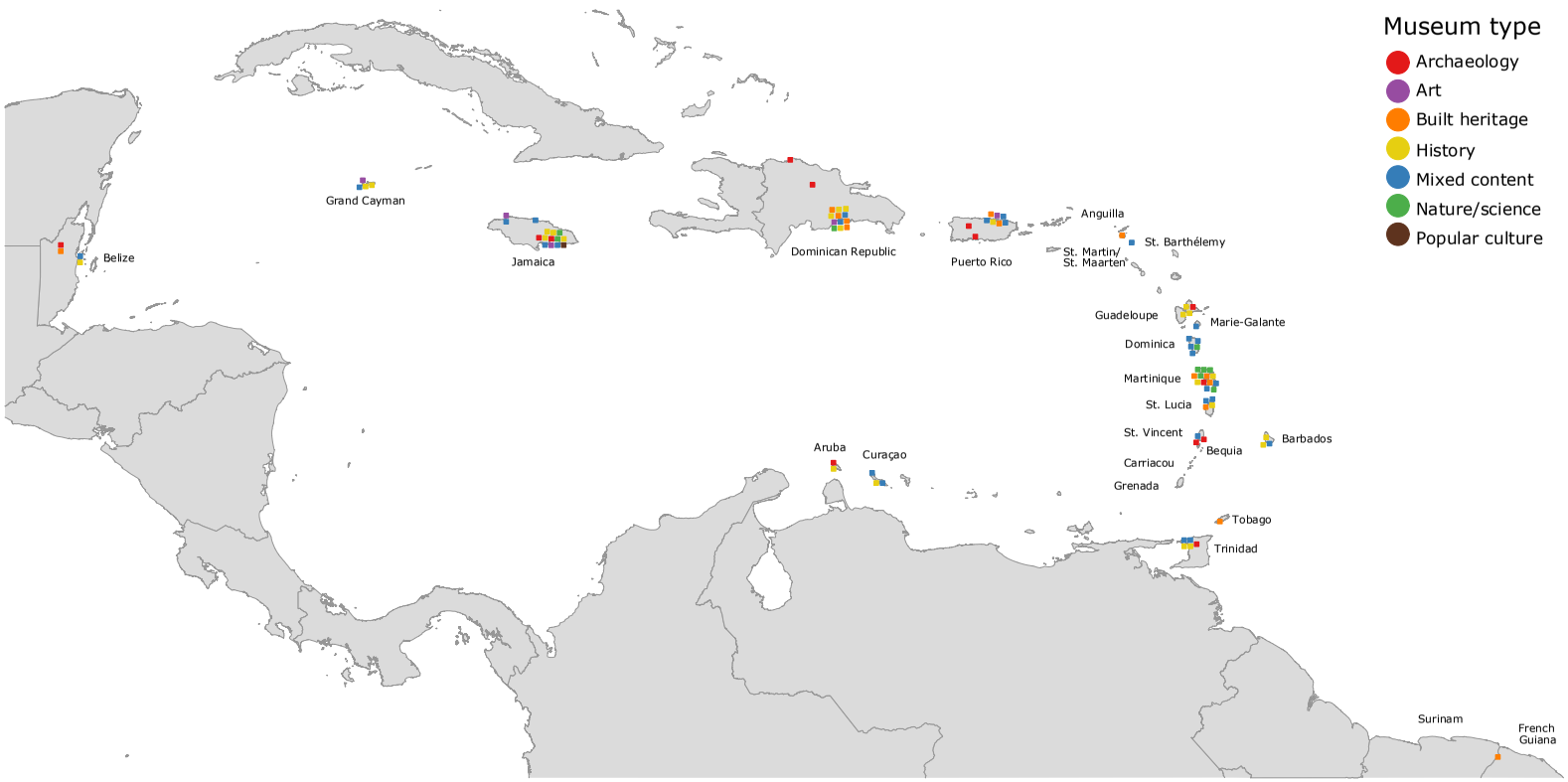

Figure 45: Map of the studied governmental museums in the Caribbean

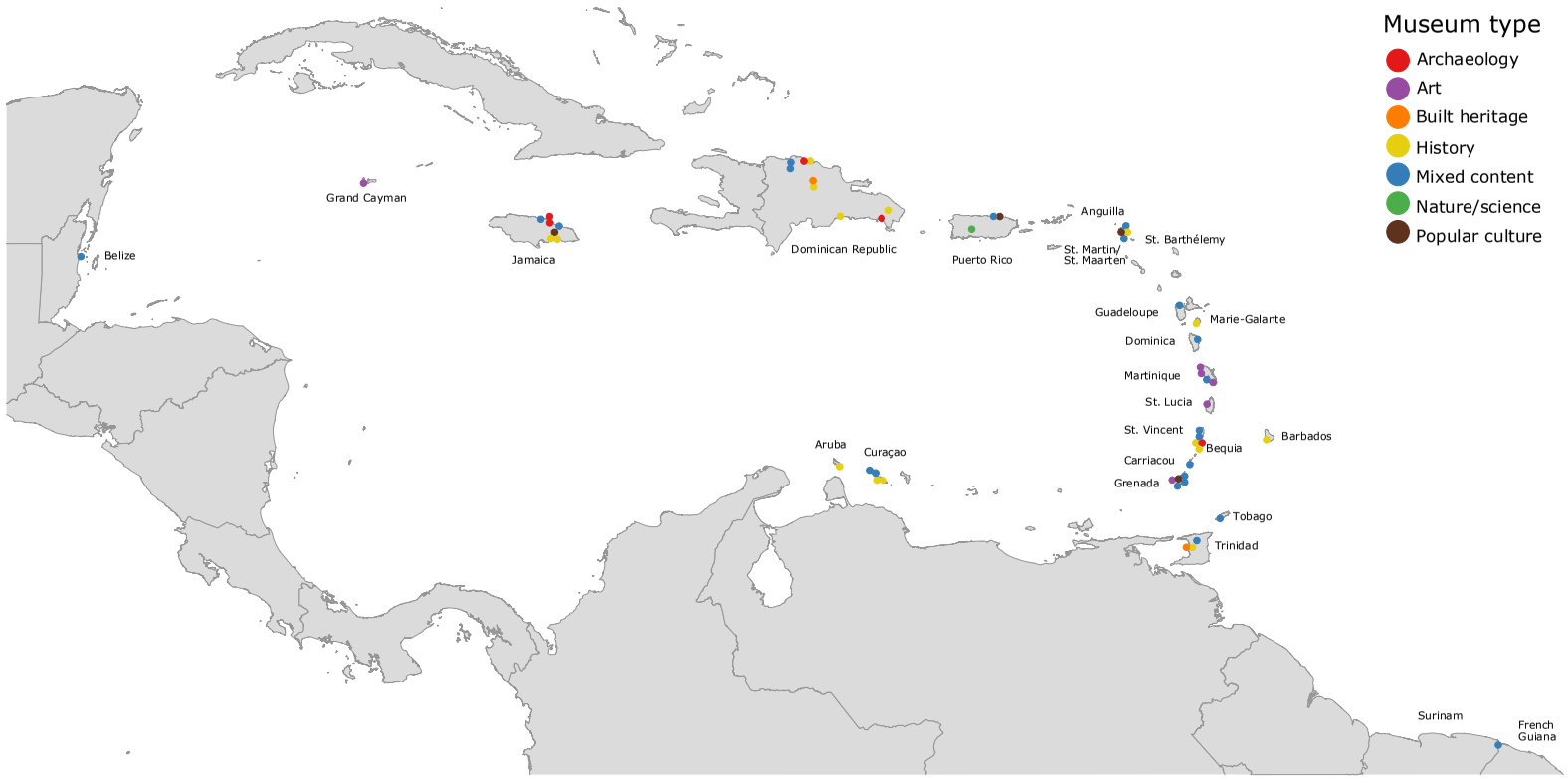

Figure 46: Map of the studied grassroots museums in the Caribbean.

Figure 47: Map of the studied museums of mixed ownership in the Caribbean.

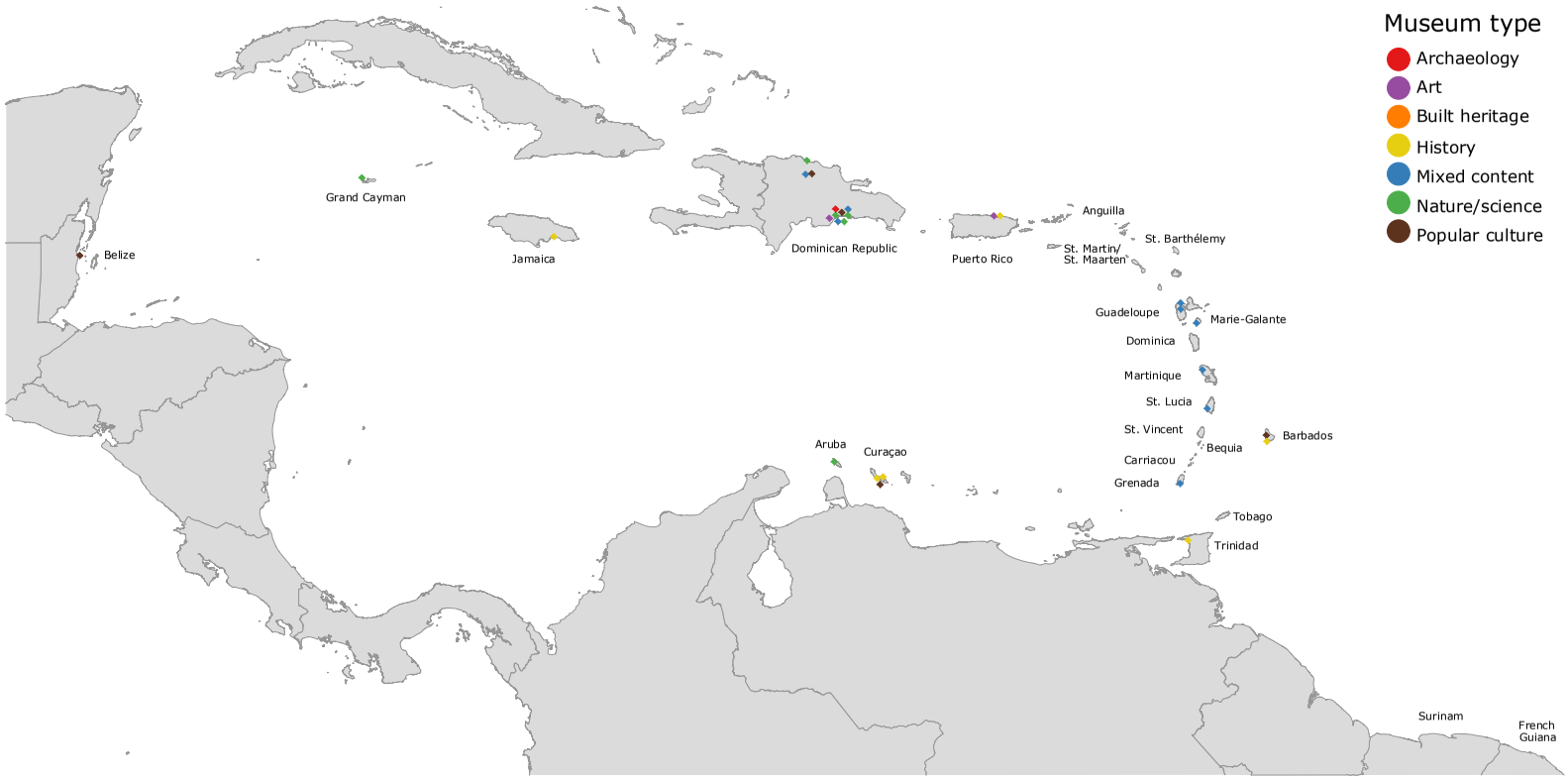

Figure 48: Map of the studied private museums in the Caribbean.

Figure 49: Map of the studied museums of unknown ownership in the Caribbean.

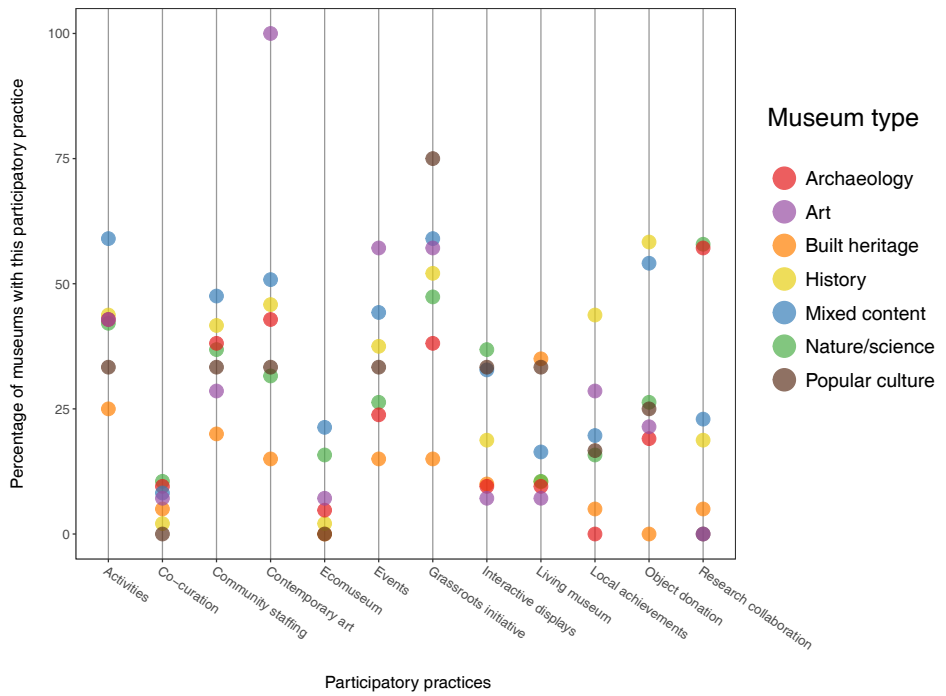

Figure 50: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices. Museums are separated by type (of content).

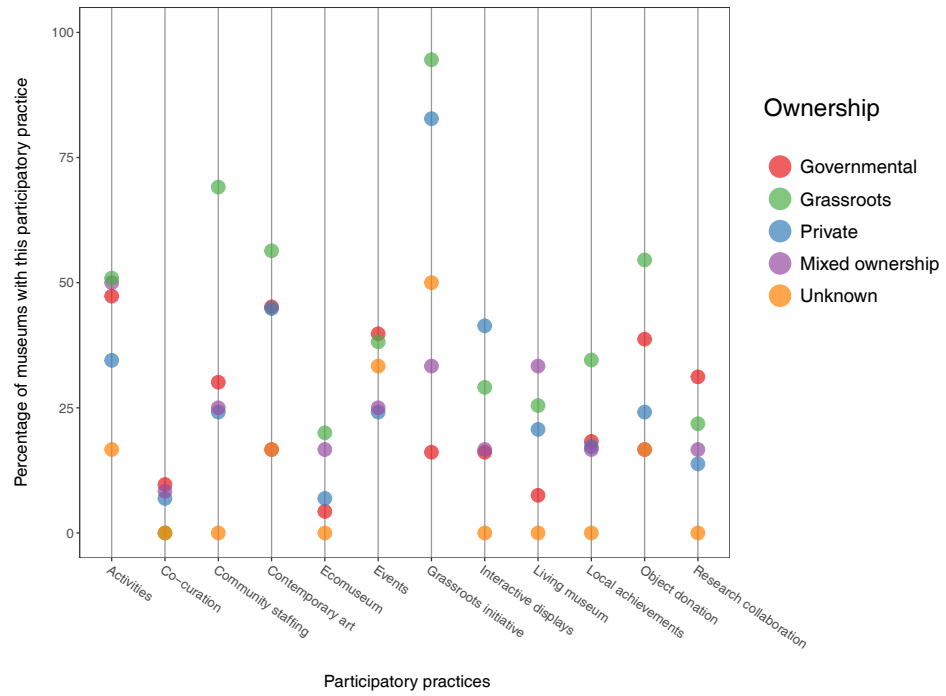

Figure 51: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices. Museums are separated by ownership.

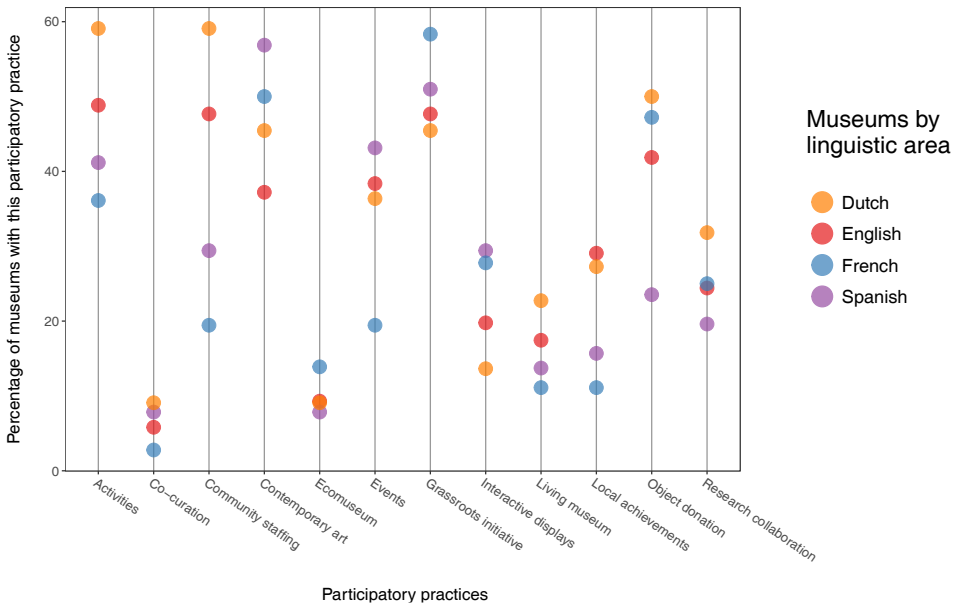

Figure 52: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices. Museums are separated by the linguistic area they are located in.

Figure 53: The studied museums per place and by type.

Figure 54: The studied museums per place and by ownership.

Figure 55: The studied museums per type and by ownership.

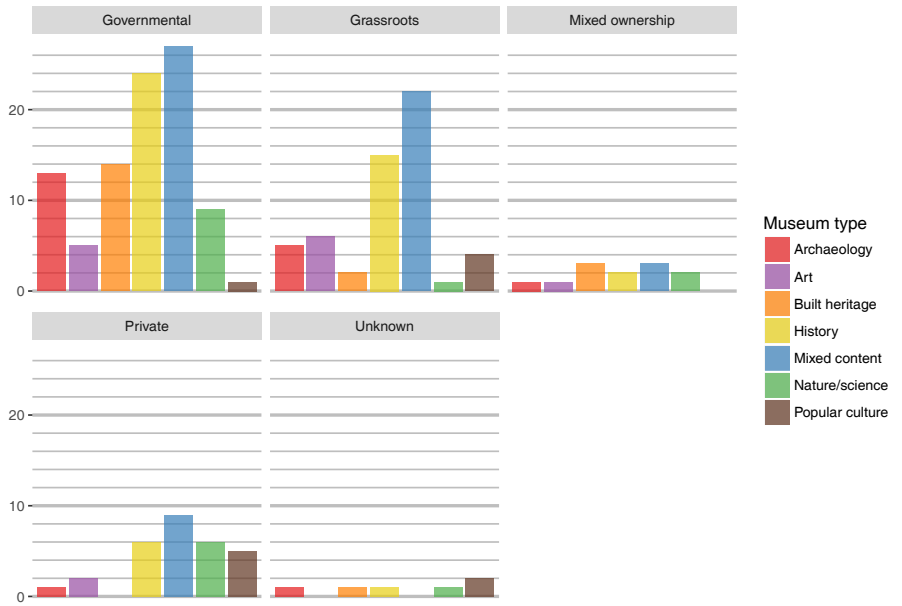

Figure 56: The studied museums per ownership and by type.