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The Netherlands

We navel-string bury here: Landscape history, representation and identity in the Grenada islandscape

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Citation

Martin, J. A. (2023, October 4). *We navel-string bury here: Landscape history, representation and identity in the Grenada islandscape*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3643183>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

9

Epilogue

“In the World through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.”

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967:229)

In my lifelong journeys across this islandcape I have climbed the heights of its hills and mountains and peered through the mist-covered canopy to see into its past that I might better understand the multiple and diverse journeys that have brought me here. I have hiked into its valleys and trekked alongside its streams and rivers listening to the memories of my father, of my mother, of her mother and grandmother before her, all of whom have fashioned this changing islandcape that I have in turn shaped and shaped me in creating my unique sense of place, and my identities. I continuously walked along its hidden paths into the past that lead me back to the place of identity and belonging, across place and time in the Grenada islandcape where my *navel-string* lay buried, forever connecting me to this island, its people, its society and its ancient history in an intricate web of relations, some of which I am still discovering, and others still left to be uncovered by those yet to be born into this Creole islandcape.

And along this lifelong journey I have watched entranced as the layers of the earth gently peeled away like the pages of a faded book to reveal years, decades, centuries, and millennia concealed within discarded shells, bones, and broken pottery that help rewrite buried stories of those who came long before me and with whom I have a faint, but ancient connection to this Indigenous islandcape. I have hid among the rhizomic roots of black and red mangrove trees peering out to sea, imagining with Kali’nago eyes the ominous arrival of alien mast ghost ships approaching Camáhogne. I felt the unsettling excitement of exploration and the exhilaration of conquest as the French planted their merciless crosses on these shores, proclaiming “*Vive Le Roi*” to the exalting chant of *Te Deum* and cannons blasting as the Indigenous landscape began its violent transformation. In the fading light, I read

determination on the faces of Captains Kairoüane, Duquesne, Marquis, Levera and Antoine armed with their bloodied *butu* (warclubs) and defiant cries as they were hunted into the bushes by armed French settlers, hot on the heels of genocide. And I stood alone on Caribs' Leap, Sauteurs and felt the trepidation of the Kali'nago and Kali'na as they halted in the dark, animated above the precipice before being brutally pushed into mythological oblivion.

I have sat gazing out across the Carenage lamenting the fate of the tens of thousands of tortured, captive souls that beached upon this alien shore in hundreds of overcrowded, stinking prison ships with nothing but anguish and melancholy memories that would somehow nurture this brutalized landscape, yet still never losing a deep desire for a faded memory of distant origins. I have walked across plantations littered with discarded crops, crumbling bricks, and rusted relics of centuries of production, which tell nothing of enslavement, coerced and underpaid labor, exploitation and suffering, but ironically tell a heroic tale of human survival at its best, at its greatest. I have read passionate letters scribbled on fading parchment to loved mothers, wives, daughters and sons in cold climes by men who were cold-hearted and utterly cruel toward their African brothers and sisters smarting in the searing tropical heat. I have hid beneath the bushes in the forest-covered *Bwa-Nèg-Mawon* (Bois-Nègre-Marron) and felt the jubilation and triumph of Pompey, Petit-Jean, Augustine and others as they seized their freedom by taking to the cloude-covered forested hills in the distance. I have walked through tilled gardens clinging to steep slopes covered with hardy ground provisions, vegetables and fruits, imagining the bodies that toiled here for generations, beginning with those shackled hands and feet that fed insatiable appetites. I have held torches in commemoration of that August 1st day when tens of thousands quietly cheered the breaking of their multi-generational shackles that had cruelly bounded their bodies to another.

I stood on the deck of the *Vanguard* commanding Governor de Bonvoust to surrender as *l'isle de la Grenade* was forcibly amended from French to English, creating dual colonial legacies that today linger in the tangled cultural landscape of my body and mind. I have stood on the ruins of the fortified walls of the "Old Fort" imagining the Comte commanding French forces bombarding the retreating British at Fort George into surrendering, a brief victory that would be reversed three years hence for the next 200 years. I have climbed the heights of Fédon's Camp and caught fading shadows of armed rebels disappearing into the trees as they dredged through the mud and rain shouting "*Liberté, égalité ou la mort!*", as British troops, among them (enslaved) "Loyal Black Rangers," followed murderously on their heels.

I listened to the heart-wrenching stories of those laboring men and women who lit the sky red with *Flambeaux* (torches) that burned the pillars of colonialism and ushered in universal adult suffrage, and ultimately statehood and independence, but still, oddly, celebrate the royal visits of (British) queen, princesses and princes. I have witnessed those weary bodies bathing in the warm sulfur springs at River Sallee and Clabony in the hope of washing away the shame and stench of enslavement and colonialism that still linger in the moist tropical air almost two centuries on, though visitors innocently insist that all they smell is a whiff of spices wafting through the midday air. I have beheld entranced bodies move to the pulsing beat of the African nation dance, rhythmically circling the drums and embracing the songs and dances of Coromanti (Akan), Ibo, Kongo and Temne ancestors caught in this never-ending dance circle. I sat transfixed as Uncle Nadley narrated tall tales of *Compere Zayeh* (Anansi the trickster spider), and supernatural stories of *Lajablesse*, *Sukuyant*, *Papa Bwa*, *Dwenn* and *Mama Maladie* as they fought over dominance of the mythical nocturnal landscape, making sure wayward husbands and boyfriends were scared enough to not go galivanting into the night. I have trailed disguised masquerades of *Djab-Djab*, *Shortknee*, *Shakespeare Mas* and *Veko* as they paraded through the streets rehearsing diverse narratives of culture, beliefs, memory and artistry shrouded deep within glistening blackened bodies, colorful baggy costumes, and stylized movements.

Too young to fully grasp, I watched as my sister, brother and father marched through the streets of St. George's singing "We Shall Overcome," with my father carrying a cross declaring "WE ARE BURDENED BY GAIRYISM," and demanding an end to police brutality and "NO" to independence under the GULP government of Eric Gairy, as the state disintegrated into blood, chaos, and looting on that "Bloody Monday." Sleepy-eyed, I stood on the slave-built bastions of Fort George in the imposed darkness that February 6th anxiously awaiting the lowering of the Union Jack at the stroke of midnight as the red, green and gold nutmeg-emblazoned flag was hoisted, proclaiming "...liberty, justice and equality for all." I cheered the armed revolutionaries descending Freedom Hill with the hopes and dreams of so many Grenadians that March 13th (1979) would birth a new nation, a free nation, a nation moving "Forward Ever, Backward Never!" and in "Nobody's Backyard." Yet the memory of the bloody, bullet-riddled wall at Fort Rupert overwhelms, and the anguished cries and searing pain of betrayal on that "Bloody Wednesday" still engulfs the tropical air trapped within its 18th-century walled courtyard. I heard harrowing stories of bombs and bullets shattering the pre-dawn quiet on that 25th October (1983) morn as swarms of helicopters

buzzed overhead in an “Urgent Fury,” as the US Intervasion¹ blasted away the decaying remains of a revolutionary experiment gone awry.

I stood perplexed at the panoply of ceremony at the new Houses of Parliament with its 18th-century Mace branded with its anachronistic imagery of slavery and colonialism proudly carried aloft by a white-wigged clad Grenadian as a symbol of Grenada’s parliamentary democracy.² I watched heartbroken as the library’s doors shuttered, its broken sign barely held up by a rusted nail, this lone symbol of learning and knowledge of my youth now the refuge of bats. I screamed silently as the shredded pages of centuries-old documents, the records of who we are, disintergrates before my eyes, taking with it the genealogies of my mother and father, and their fathers before them. And like a recurring nightmare, I hear the faint echoes of the vanquished French *Patwa* of my grandmother Aunty Maud crying out *bon djé!* (good god!) in a desperate plea to be heard before the stories of so many fading voices disappear into the darkness, into the past, deeper and deeper into the palimpsest landscape... forever lost... if we do not bear witness to and safeguard our changing cultural landscape for the future identities of this Grenada islandscape and its heirs!

¹ *Intervasion* is a contraction of “invasion” and “intervention,” and coined by a Grenadian (journalist Alister Hughes according to Tung 2013) in the aftermath of the 1983 US Invasion. Its use became popular in the 1990s to reflect its ironic perspective by different segments of the Grenadian population and how this complex event is remembered. There is also “rescuvasion” after “Rescue Mission,” reflecting the linguistic gymnastics to find an appropriate name to best understand and explain this controversial event officially termed “Operation Urgent Fury” by the US military.

² The white wigs once worn by the President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives and others were discontinued in 2018.