

*APPRECIATING CALLALOO SOUP:
St. Martin as an expression of the
compositeness of Life beyond the
guiding fictions of racism, sexism, and
class discrimination*

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RESUMO

A sopa Callaloo é, simultaneamente, uma comida caribenha e, nacional “outra”. Diferente a sua preparação em outros povos e lugares, Callaloo pode ser compreendida como um convite para apreciar os diferentes mundos interconectados de nossa coletiva experiência do colonialismo ocidental e da resistência que este provocou. Isto pode ser entendido como uma composição natural do mundo e da dinâmica de vida que a triada da discriminação racista, sexista e de classe ocultou e ainda reforça essa situação. Adotando a sopa Callaloo como uma metáfora guia, os autores focalizam novas vias para esmiuçar práticas do ser e outras opressões do povo de Saint Martin. A auto-reflexão e exercícios auto-reflexivos são alimentados pelas experiências da atividade dos autores nos seus espaços de trabalho com estudantes de ensino médio. Os autores elaboraram o texto como um convite aberto a repensar Saint Martin & Sint Maarten (St. Martin) como um caldo de múltiplos ingredientes culturais (tanto de pessoas como de manifestações) e um elemento emergente da sopa Callaloo que é universal.

Palavras-chave: St. Maarten & Saint Martin, diversidade cultural, Escolas Callaloo.

RESUMEN

La sopa Callaloo es, simultaneamente, una comida caribeña y nacional “outra”. Diferente a la elaboración de la sopa en otros pueblos y lugares, Callaloo puede ser comprendida como una invitación para

apreciar los diferentes interconectados mundos que es resultado de nuestra colectiva experiencia del colonialismo occidental y de la resistencia que este atrajo. Esto puede ser comprendido por una parte, como una composición natural del mundo y, por otra, como la dinámica de vida que la triada de la discriminación racista, sexista y de clase ocultó y todavía refuerza el encubrimiento. Adoptando la sopa Callaloo como una metáfora guía, los autores iluminan nuevas vías, desmenuzando prácticas del ser y otras opresiones sobre los sanmartinenses. La auto-reflexión y ejercicios auto-reflexivos en los autores fueron alimentados por sus experiencias del quehacer en sus espacios de trabajo con estudiantes de nivel secundario. Los autores elaboraron el texto como una invitación abierta a repensar Saint Martin & Sint Maarten (St. Martin) como un caldo de múltiples ingredientes culturales (tanto personas como expresiones) y un elemento emergente de la sopa Callaloo que es del mundo.

Palabras claves: St. Maarten & Saint Martin, diversidad cultural, Escuelas Callaloo.

ABSTRACT

Callaloo soup is both a Caribbean and outernational dish. Different wherever and whoever prepares it, Callaloo can be understood as an invitation to appreciate the different interconnected worlds that our collective experience of western colonialism and resistance has brought about. It can simultaneously be understood as the composite nature of the world and the dynamic of Life that the triad of racism, sexism, and class discrimination seeks to obfuscate and yet unwittingly strengthens. Taking the Callaloo soup as a guiding metaphor, the authors highlight new ways of undoing practices of self and other oppressions on the island of Sint Maarten. Their self-reflective and self-reflexive exercises are fed by their experiences of doing fieldwork among students attending a secondary school. The authors envision this text as an open invitation to rethink Saint Martin & Sint Maarten (St. Martin) as both a separate broth with multiple cultural ingredients (persons and their expressions), and as an emerging element in the Callaloo soup that is the world.

Keywords: St. Maarten & Saint Martin, cultural diversity, Callaloo, Schools.

To know the Caribbean is to have tasted or at least heard of Callaloo soup. A rich broth produced by mixing various spices, vegetables, roots, meats and fishes, Callaloo soup is both a Caribbean and *outernational* dish. Different wherever and

whoever prepares it, Callaloo can be understood as an invitation to appreciate the interconnected worlds that our collective experience of western colonialism and resistance to that brute social fact has brought about; an embrace of compositeness (c.f. GILROY, 2005, 1995; GLISSANT, 1997, 1989; HALL, 1990; BRATHWITE, 1971; HARRIS, 1971; JAMES, 1963;). Taking Callaloo soup as a guiding metaphor, we intimate new ways of undoing the racial, gendered, and class based practices of self and other oppressions on the bi-national island of Sint Maarten & Saint Martin. We understand these practices of undoing and the highlighting thereof as synonymous with engaging in a scholarship hospitable to the unfolding differentiations between and within self and other; to the compositeness, the implicate order, to Life from whence this emerges.¹ Our self-reflective and self-reflexive exercises in this paper are fed by our experiences of doing fieldwork among students attending a secondary school and coupling these to the insights of the poet-philosopher Edoardo Glissant and physicist-philosopher David Bohm.

This paper is divided in three sections, namely, who are we, where are we, and what are we. Seeking to ground the thinking and daring one finds in this paper, we begin in an autobiographical vein. Our mode of dwelling in the world, and our theoretical commitments, will be illuminated in this section. We then move to introduce and analyze an empirical case of how youngsters make pragmatic use of ethno-racial, class, and gender based markers. Appreciating the identity work of these

¹ We are fully aware of the critical discussion surrounding the concept of Callaloo and other mixing metaphors in combination with hegemonic imaginations of Caribbean nationalism. In the case of Callaloo we acknowledge the contributions of Aisha Khan (2004, p.8) when she alerts us that in Trinidad & Tobago as “nation of coexisting groups, callaloo, symbolizes that felicitous and mutually transforming combinations of cultural, racial, and religious diversity” subsuming and obfuscating alternate Indo-Trinidadian histories of decolonization under the metanarrative of the Afro-Creole intelligentsia. However the point we wish to make diverges from hers, and the project she rightfully critiques, as in the context of Sint Maarten & Saint Martin, the historical antagonisms between Indo and Afro-Caribbeans does not hold. Moreover this paper should not be read as a plea for a nationalist discourse, but rather as a summoning of planetary belonging grounded in the locale of Sint Maarten & Saint Martin (with an alternative mentality that perpetually deconstructs coloniality derived ethnic categorizations). There is no need to throw away an enticing metaphor because it has been used in another context to sanction inequality and racism.

youngsters is coupled to a thorough socio-economic and socio-political understanding of St Martin. An analysis of this case follows employing theory and engaged learning taken from fieldwork conducted at the University of St. Martin. This leads to a provisional conclusion whereby we seek to rethink human subjectivity grounded in an open and awe inspiring sense of place, or rather what we are.

Who we are

One of us (Erwin Wolthuis) migrated from the Netherlands to this, the location from which we write, namely, the Caribbean bi-national island of Sint Maarten & Saint Martin, respectively a constituent state of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and a French collectivite du outre mer. The other (Francio Guadeloupe) began his life's journey on Aruba, another Dutch Caribbean isle that renders sanitized geographies—as in “there lies Europe and over here lies the Americas”—even in these so-called postcolonial times, relative. Decolonization is far from over! Both of us are seekers, restless souls for whom the past and contemporary force of the guiding fictions of “race”, gender, and class based inequalities ought to be a different planet.

We seek to contribute to an island, and by extension a world, where the prevalent forms of inter-human misrecognition and economic abuse are no more. Notwithstanding the bleak contemporary realities, we still contend that in our everyday practices and writing, we can enact a new eco-friendly and spiritually alive humanism as the luminaries from “the hidden side of the earth” (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 76) invite us to do. This dedication should not be understood as willful naiveté as we take seriously the admonition from mandarins of *the acceptable side of the earth* that, “the human race survives and continues to become only so long as it remains true that it has no end in itself” (PHILLIPS, 2013, p. 160). No end we agree, without however canceling the pursuit of the ending of the Wrong produced by Western dominated imperialism. And, an inhabiting of the earth understood as an ever-changing mix.

Chance and fate, the unforeseen machinations of histories, and our choices, brought us together. We are colleagues working at the University of St. Martin spelled as our fellow inhabitants refer colloquially to the Northern and Southern side of the island. In social and cultural terms our island is multi-multicultural; supra creolized; French and Dutch in constitutional terms, though talking English much, due to the nearly 3,5 million mainly North American tourists that visit annually, and its local history and geographic location. We take our cues from the island's reality that endorses the idea of theorist's who encourage us to provocatively appreciate ourselves as contaminated beings living a world that has always been creolized. We wish not to forget that,

Alexander's empire molded both the states and the sculpture of Egypt and North India; the Mongols and then the Mughals shaped great swaths of Asia; the Bantu migrations populated half the African continent. Islamic states stretch from Morocco to Indonesia; Christianity reached Africa, Europe and Asia within a few centuries of the death of Jesus of Nazareth; Buddhism long migrated from India into much of the East and Southeast Asia. Jews and people whose ancestors came from parts of China have long lived in vast diasporas. The traders of the Silk Road changed the style of elite dress in Italy; someone buried Chinese pottery in 15th century Swahili graves". And the Caribbean from the 15th century onwards is a place where the Nile, Ganges, Yangtze, and Rhine, met the Orinoco. Yes, "the larger human truth is on the side of contamination – that endless process of imitation and revision" (APPIAH, 2006, p. 6).

Let us begin again in explaining who we are, aware that every beginning reveals that the dance of contamination, inter-subjectivity and inter-textuality, creolization, is always already underway. One of us (Guadeloupe) has spent his life studying different cultures born of our planetary creolization accelerated after 1492. The other (Wolthuis) spent his life living and working amongst different cultures wondering why they are so different yet recognizable. Today we live according to the imperial maps in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the French Republic (DE JONG AND KRUIJT, 2005; OOSTINDIE & KLINKERS,

2003). This imperial arrangement, born in violence is susceptible to change, and our commitment to a New Humanism cannot but be unfriendly to this current map (or its alternative, namely, political independence shackled to capitalist dependence). We cannot predict the future, and do not wish to delude ourselves into thinking that we will ever be able to do so, for we are mindful that we partial producers of what is to come (without knowing the outcome). Yet we are hopeful men, aware that “[i]t is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us (BENJAMIN quoted in MARCUSE, 1964, p. 201). The reality of St. Martin, as we experience it among a generation born after we were thrown into life, gives us hope.

Where are We?

A rude awakening during a school trip to Guadeloupe...

I (Wolhuis) cannot exactly tell the time. I am in a bus heading for a museum. It must be seven-ish in the morning. A long night it has been. My body wants to return to my bed, but my mind recognizes that I need to be responsible. My mind wins out, for now that is. There was an improvised party on the local beach of ‘Le Gosier’ last night. I am on the island of Guadeloupe with 21 students.

Last night I spent my hours playing police officer while explaining to my Guadeloupean colleagues the political and economic status of St. Maarten (Saint Martin they know as it was part of Guadeloupe up until 2007). They are puzzled by the fact that these St Martin students (primarily from Saint Maarten) do not feel as Dutch as they expected (they see hints of the manner in which the Saint Martinoise always displayed a rebellious attitude towards Frenchness). I explain as best as I can that unlike French republicanism, the Netherlands prefers to be more candid about the separate but rather unequal approach to managing its overseas possessions. Like Aruba and Curaçao, St. Maarten has been granted the status of constituent state next to the Netherlands which consists of the landmass mainly below sea level in Western Europe and the Caribbean islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and

Saba. I belong to a federation of four constituent states called the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The name of our federation reveals who has more power, as next to the separate parliaments there is the Kingdom Council consisting of 15 members are from Les Pays Bas with only 3 representatives from the Caribbean. With its 18 million inhabitants, 41,543 square kilometers, and its 14th position ranking on the IMF GDP per capita income, the Netherlands in actuality runs the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It decides on matters of the judiciary, foreign affairs, and defense. And even exerts considerable influence on the sectors where Sint Maarten as a constituent state officially enjoys full autonomy.

My Guadeloupean colleagues understand, though they still feel that when compared to them, whereby metropolitan Frenchmen see France wherever they are, politically Sint Maarten is in a rather luxurious position. Everything is relative I retort. I explain that we did not have an Aime Cesaire nor did the Netherlands explicitly invest much time producing loyal évolués that would reinforce Dutchness. The Dutch Kingdom is an arrangement that came about as the Netherlands sought to comply with the UN regulations to decolonize whilst maintaining its imperial image and possessions—the ploy to keep Indonesia Dutch. The scheme backfired. Here is how a renowned Dutch historian characterized the matter:

The Netherlands was occupied by the Germans in 1940, while Japan took over the Dutch East Indies ruled by the government in exile. During the war, the London-based Dutch cabinet finally came up with proposals for colonial reform, including autonomous rule in the various territories. All of this would have been too little, too late for the major colony. On August 17, 1945, two days after the Japanese capitulation, Indonesian nationalists Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed independence. It would take a full four years of bitter warfare and thorny negotiations before the transfer of sovereignty was accomplished by the end of 1949. New Guinea (Papua) was left out of this deal but to great Dutch resentment would be added to the Republic of Indonesia in 1962. In

the lee of this violent and to all parties traumatic episode, the first phase in the decolonization of the Kingdom, both Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles attained autonomy within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This constitutional status would prevail for Suriname until the full transfer of sovereignty in 1975. The Statuut still holds the six islands to the Netherlands in an ambivalent postcolonial imbroglio not because the Dutch wanted to retain their former colonies in the Caribbean sea, but rather because they found no valid arguments and effective to impose independence on populations consistently refusing the gift of sovereignty (OOSTINDIE, 2008, p. 98-99).

Indonesia did not take the bait, and Papua and Suriname eventually left the Kingdom, leaving the Netherlands with six tiny Caribbean islands. This is an uneven Kingdom with the per capita income in The Netherlands of \$ 47.355 in 2014. According to the IMF this amounts to twice as much as that of the average St. Maartener. Still I have to admit that when compared to the mean of \$15.147 dollars worldwide, again IMF figures of 2014, St. Maarteners aren't doing too badly. They have some autonomy within the kingdom and economically are doing better than Indonesia and Suriname. Today the local politicians and the population in general guard this political status jealously.

And you they ask rather cynically, noticing my critical stance that they identify as that of a true Sint Maartener. I tell them that I too guard the status quo, however not necessarily for the same reason as the academics from the Netherlands claim that most Sint Maarteners do! Having moved from The Netherlands to St. Maarten, I did indeed experience the rather drastic change in income, as expressed in the IMF figures. However, I never had the feeling I got 'poorer'; in 'buying power' yes, for sure, but when it comes to the quality of life; no, not at all. Perhaps this is because I travelled quite extensively, and as a part of that have lived in Malawi for close to four years, a country that is almost at the bottom of the same IMF list on the 185th position with a GDP per capita of \$ 780. So, indeed, as the figures also express, when compared to the rest of the world, St. Maarten is a heaven. However, the reason for not feeling 'poorer' is, more likely,

because living on St. Maarten exposed me to a whole different concept of ‘richness’. St. Maarten has a unique richness where it comes to its diversity in people; with a population which consists of more than 63% of immigrants and with residents of more than 100 different nationalities the diversity is mindboggling. This is multiculturalism I tell them! Though Dutch is still the official language, everybody speaks English, but also languages like Spanish, French, Hindi and Cantonese are heard everywhere. With churches and restaurants representing the vast majority of the present religions and cuisines related to diverse national traditions, St. Maarten and Saint Martin feels like experiencing the whole world on this 37 square mile rock. To a certain extent, it feels better than the ‘whole world’ actually. This, since all these different cultures, religions, races and ethnicities are living peacefully together most of the time. This is the kind of ‘richness’ I am referring to and that is what I gained since I moved here; and defending the current autonomy (always seeking more that won’t lead to indecency²) is my political stance. So like the politics of Cesaire they remark as though they have finally cornered me. I answer yes but only more radical and diverse like St. Martin! They agree and begin telling me about the rebellious St. Martinoise they knew in France and encountered in Guadeloupe. They made little distinction Frenchness and Dutchness, preferring to highlight being from St. Martin. I nod that I feel the same way. I however listen with half an ear, observing my group of students.

Being on Guadeloupe with this group of students is exemplary of the place I defend. Their parents are from India, Pakistan, China, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Dominica, St. Christopher & Nevis, Sint Eustatius, and the United States of America, to name but a few. They prove CNN, BBC, NBC, Al Jazeera, or academic exponents of the message that ethnic and religious diversity in one place is a recipe for perpetual strife and war wrong³. The only war of worlds, I

² See Margalit (2009) for the notion of a decent society as one where institutions do not systematically humiliate human beings.

³ An influential proponent of this thesis is the political theorist Samuel Huntington (1997) who has consistently argued that the world will be riddled with clashes of civilizations, and even worse a silent war in countries that endorse multicultural conviviality within their territorial boundaries.

have experienced so far is the one in terms of students against management and teachers when they cannot get what they want; in other words, the usual strife between generations that is part and parcel of modern life. Outside of that struggle, diversity seems to be a given and a matter of negotiation. I smile at that thought as this is precisely what is unfolding before my very eyes this morning. Two of the ringleaders, Peter and Sai, and their devilish third, when they allow him to join them, Aahil, are about to do the ethnicity-matters-but-not-when-it-doesn't-suit-rhetoric that I have gotten accustomed to.

Peter: "Wow, is that bacon I smell?"

Sai: "Yes, it is. I've made some BLT sandwiches"

Peter: "Great, thanks man!"

Aahil: "BLT? As in Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato? You know I can't eat bacon Sai!"

Sai: "Hey Aahil, I am sorry man, I am not the cook here okay, I just made some sandwiches, if you want them fine, if you don't, fine too!"

Peter: "Aahil, why don't you make it a LT sandwich?"

Aahil: "I am a Muslim okay, not a rabbit!"

Pranav: "Oh yeah, of course, the 'no-porc' thing"

Aahil: "Yeah, just like your guys 'no-beef' thing, so what"

Daniel: "That's why it so great being a Christian, we eat anything"

Peter: "Yeah, but you still need to vast. Be like me: 'Nothing', you can eat anything anytime!"

Aahil: "And it shows!"

Pranav: "LOL!"

Peter: "Hold on, that's not from eating, that's my drinking trophy!"

Sai: "How about that Aahil? I thought you guys are not supposed to drink either?"

Aahil: “What happened in Gwada, stays in Gwada remember!”

Daniel: “It sure was a great party last night!”

Pranav: “Yeah, Aahil and Sai really blew away those Gwada guys”.

Peter: “They had no clue what they were doing. None of the girls was digging their music.”

Aahil: “Jean said he wants to bring us back here and do a gig in one of the clubs”

Pranav: “St. MAARTEN RULES, BRRRA!”

BRRRA, brothers they were, even if from different mothers. St. Martiners, political rebels united against France and the Netherlands, in the eyes of my Guadeloupien colleagues. All this politics was not what directly occupied my students, at least most of the time. What did for them was the other sex that resided on Soualiga and those in Gwada. And it was in their talk about, talking to, and overall treatment of the other sex, which is the first sex, women, that the active potential of a radical politics of conviviality and diversity resided.

I was at first surprised at how openly the male students would comment on who of the Guadeloupien ladies they considered “hot-or-not”. It speaks for itself that each of the guys had his preferences and a mental picture of what the perfect woman should look like; but what surprised me was that there turned out to be a very strong common denominator in the concept of beauty. When one of them would express to really like the looks of a young-lady, the others would react with phrases like: “No man, she looks like she is just flown in from France” or “What, you’re serious, she is completely African man!” or “Are you crazy, she comes straight from Bollywood”. The young ladies that could count on the admiration of the whole group would clearly show traits of “all of the above and more”. It then became clear to me that this was an echo of a Caribbean tendency, often disparaged by ethnic purists to long for the in-between, not black, not brown, not white, but composite beauty like the composite people that they are (regardless of how they

physically look). Could this not be indicative of a longing for a composite social world? And how would this relate to concepts such as multiculturalism and diversity that I took for granted?

I became more alive to these questions on another occasion in Guadeloupe. The pursuit of the composite beauty, the weighing of what was right and what was not, took place a few days later safely from the inside of our touristy-bus driving through town. The safety of the bus was of course relative, since about half of the students on the bus were young ladies themselves. As I knew them, all this referring to these girls as sexual objects would not go down very well with our female Sint Maarten students. But matters turned out to be somewhat more complicated and defied this easy gender divide. In the bus I was actually surprised to hear the female students actually weighing in on the guys' arguments; pointing out to them what was supposed to be considered 'hot' and what as a definite 'not'. One of the girls, concurring with the consensus of the boys about one young lady looking particularly attractive, had to add: "Yes, she does look 'hot', but she definitely has to straighten her hair!" What I learned was that these girls who definitely considered themselves the equal of the boys and thus did not accept being objectified by them, had no problems doing so to others. Influenced by Hoetink's thesis (1968) on Dutch Caribbean blacks' alienation from their natural attributes (straightening their hair) I critically wondered about this desire for composite beauty (see also BURRELL, 2010). What I could not deny was a sense of cultural sameness, St. Maartenness, across gender and ethnic divides that bound them together. For the record let me just state that the girls also had moments they objectified Guadeloupian guys and the guys were equally enthusiastic on weighing in on the assessment. And again the composite was it! What to make of this? Was the love of the composite a love of a self that they had not yet learnt to express? Or was it simply alienation from the somatic norm image, especially for the African descended St. Martiners? These questions will be dealt with later.

For all their love of the composite, and performance of cultural sameness, a regard for ethnic specificity remained; inflected by gender and class. A matter I learnt to understand in

our discussions writing this paper as the constantly emerging and therefore the never quite the same, never ending, never fully synthesizing dialectic between what can be termed compositeness versus uniqueness. When uniqueness has the upper hand I would be amazed at how gender colored by ethnic and class particularity renders this regard for compositeness insignificant. Let me furnish an illustration I witnessed during the trip to Guadeloupe. Mike, a rather outspoken young man of Indian descent, full of self-esteem partially due to his class and perhaps caste privilege, had been ‘picking’ on Harini, a quiet friendly young lady of modest means equally of Indian descent. I considered it at the time, recalling my travels in India, as an example of the ‘standard’ way Indians did gender. “Harini, fix me a sandwich!” “Harini, get my shirt from the room downstairs!” Harini this, Harini that... an endless stream of commands. Harini carried out the ‘duties’ apparently just in order to make no fuzz. In my preconceived understanding forgetting St. Martin, forgetting the actual ground that allowed me to meet these two students, shame on me!, Mike simply being an “Indian man”, expecting Harini to carry out many small duties he didn’t feel like doing himself. I wanted to intervene, but the cultural relativist in me awakened in me due to my seeing this in ethnic terms prevented me from acting forcefully. This went on for about a day, until it had reached the ‘max’ according to two other female class-mates. Emily and Alysha, two truly emancipated, outspoken and smart young ladies of local St. Maarten descent, considered it enough, and put Mike in his place. They made it very clear to him that this was not the way to earn the respect of the female-gender in this day and age. Back then I interpreted this as a manifestation of Caribbean womanhood (Afro-St. Martin women being more assertive than their timid Indian sisters I thought; again the ethnic lens deluding me from recognizing the ground of St. Martin). I do not know if Mike saw it the way I did, in other words that he too forgot the ground, but it seemed that he couldn’t afford to lose face on the spot and didn’t give in, responding: “What do you know about it, just mind your own business.” The next day he took a different tack; he was brave enough to get back on the issue and admit to the two ladies that they were actually right, and that they had opened his eyes. “Wow”, I thought, “there is light at the end

of the tunnel”, he is accepting these Afro-Sint Maarten gender norms, which are of course again my preconceived notions of the Indian character of his actions! In the conversations that led to this paper, I now disregard the simplification of seeing this case in terms of competing gender scripts—Indian versus Afro-Sint Maartener. Instead, I regard it as compositeness asserting itself given his words. It was a question of questioning what are we.

What are We

We have just given you a rich potpourri of the fieldwork experiences of Mr. Wolthuis. The immediate question is what to make of this? The verb make is highly relevant for we do not believe that this is a question of “shedding light”, “uncovering truths”, “revealing patterns”, or any of the revelatory metaphors employed in modes of doing human sciences that are still too wedded to 19th century forms of positivism. We prefer to think in terms of making, unmaking, and remaking. To foreground the verb ‘make’, is to recognize the craftsmanship and aesthetics of humans as an integral part of their mode of being and dwelling in life; we are mostly what we make of the world and thus also ourselves. As emerging parts of the environment (life), to survive we have no other recourse than to remake the environment, first by making tools to then unmake other givens such as trees, rocks, minerals, and other animal life. A tool that is often not recognized as such is language and our other symbolic capacities. When we speak, write, and communicate with each other through painting, music making, or dancing, we are actually once again remaking what we made. There is no getting to an untouched, unmediated truth, prior to interpretation, for “the trail of the human serpent is truly over everything” (JAMES quoted in RORTY 1991, p. 58) —both that which we identify as the social world and that which we term nature. What this means is that the interpretation that follows is our remaking of what we made of Wolthuis experiences in the first section of this essay.

Our hinting that Mike’s turnabout repentance of his sexist attitudes towards Harini has to do with compositeness is related to our understanding of him not as an Indian but actually as a

creole: someone born or inhabiting a space outside of what is considered their traditional ethnic boundaries (BRATHWAITE, 1971). If we radicalize this insight we arrive at the deconstruction of the creole and the traditional.

Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is longer valid to glorify “unique” origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. In the Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity, just as Genesis legitimizes genealogy. To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of “creolized” that is considered halfway between two “pure” extremes....Creolization as an idea means the negation of creolization as a category, by giving priority to the notion of natural creolization, which the human imagination has always wished to deny or disguise (in Western tradition) (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 140-141).

There is a need to unpack this florid quote taken from Eduoard Glissant. For who exactly are these exponents of the western tradition? It is important to add the preliminary note that for the poet-philosopher Glissant the West is not a place but a project with exponents in the North Atlantic societies as well as what is termed the Global South. And thus the West looks like every face and gender imaginable in the world. It is the face that thinks in terms of neatly partitioned ethnic groups with their specific cultures and gender norms that might be crosscut by class realities; these class realities for those more left leaning expounders of the West can also be neatly partitioned in lumpenproletariats, proletariats, middle classes, and upper classes. And that in turn deconstructed by ethnicity, gender, and other intersections, ad infinitum. A matter of constant differing and deferring with no possibility of a bird's eye view that can oversee a supposed whole with its more sturdy and structured boundaries; recall here also the idea of contamination in section 1 of this paper. This is of course a legitimate way, a way to read Glissant's idea of creolization. It is on par with more radical

interpretations of multiculturalism (e.g. GODIN, 2008; GILROY, 2005; BAUMANN, 2002, 1996). This stance was worded as the distinction between multiculturalism understood as an ideal of separate ethnic and religious communities living justly and harmoniously, and multiculturality as a *conditione humain* in which there is always a plethora of ever emerging cultures and ideological collectivities *overspilling* group boundaries (GUADELOUPE; ROOIJ, 2007).

At the start of our analyses of the fieldwork experiences of Wolhuis, sitting behind our desks at the USM or having lunch in the home of Guadeloupe, we also began taking that route and felt that it was appropriate to keep traces of it in the paper. After much genuine dialogue, however, thinking alone and with each other, we recognized that it wasn't sufficient. We went back to a sentence that survived the many early rewrites, namely, "the constantly emerging and therefore the never quite the same, never ending, never fully synthesizing dialectic between what can be termed compositeness versus uniqueness". During one of our kitchen table chats, we discussed Glissant other key concept, Relation, the transactional dynamic called planet Earth enveloped in the beyond Earth, and saw its similarity to David Bohm notion of the implicate order that leads us to an acknowledgement of wholeness. Let us allow Glissant unpack the idea of Relation in his own words and then permit Bohm to do the same.

The difference between Relation and totality lies in the fact that Relation is active within itself, whereas totality, already in its very concept, is in danger of immobility. Relation is open totality: totality would be relation at rest. Totality is virtual. Actually on rest could, in itself, be legitimately or totally virtual. For movement is precisely that which realizes itself absolutely. Relation is movements... Relation neither relays nor links afferents that can be assimilated or allied only in their principle, for the simple reason that it always differentiates among them concretely and diverts them from the totalitarian—because its work always changes all the elements composing it and, consequently, the resulting relationship, which then changes them all over again... Relation... does not act upon prime [cultural stemming exclusive from particular cultures] that are separable or reducible. If this

were true, it would itself be reduced to some mechanics capable of being taken apart or reproduced... It is the boundless effort of the world: to become realized in its totality, that is, to evade rest (GLISSANT, 1997, p. 171-172).

Relation, the ever emerging whole, creates temporary elements, non-humans and humans, and their arrangements only to be able to remerge. More platonically inclined, the physicist philosopher, Bohm termed the dynamic the implicate order, a sea of potentials, that temporarily actualizes a few of these in the explicate order of matter that in turn forever returns. Nonetheless life goes awry when we solely think and act and live in terms of the explicate order—the erroneous idea of prime elements in Glissant speech—or what Bohm termed fragmentary thinking.

In essence, the process of division is a way of thinking about things that is convenient and useful mainly in the domain of practical, technical and functional activities... However, when this mode of thought is applied more broadly to man's notion of himself and whole world in which he lives (i.e. to his self-world view), then man ceases to regard the resulting divisions as merely useful or convenient and begins to see and experience himself and his world as actually constituted of separately existent fragments. Being guided by a fragmentary self-world view, man then acts in such a way as to try to break himself and the world up, so that all seems to correspond to his way of thinking. Man thus obtains an apparent proof of correctness of his fragmentary self-world view though, of course, he overlooks the fact that it is he himself, acting according to his mode of thought, who has brought about the fragmentation that seems to have autonomous existence, independent of his will and of his desire (BOHM, 2002, p. 3).

What both Bohm and Glissant were intimating is a horizon beyond and within the fragmentary multiplicity. We pondered this insight in Guadeloupe kitchen, imaging and imagining its link to the empirical case and our drafts, until the vision of the callaloo soup emerged. We ran with the image. Collecting various recipes of callaloo soup, and eating it in various venues, we realized that it is always differently prepared. The vegetables

and other ingredients are clearly discernible, but you cannot taste them without tasting the rest. They are themselves and every other. And even they, the ingredients, are variable, as main the leaf after which it is named can also be replaced.⁴

We agreed that in our parlance Glissant and Bohm were talking about callaloo soup, and that dish also symbolized our struggle for a New Humanism, which was a quest for the non-violent acknowledgement of the pluriversal Oneness of Life in its continuous in/and unfolding. The guiding fictions of racism, sexism, and class discrimination, and their contestation employing the same vocabulary differently referred, emerged out of fragmentary thinking. This intuition changed everything.

Instead of looking at persons (Mike, Harini, Emily, Alysha, Aahil, Pranav, Peter, Andrian, ourselves) and cultures as the prime elements, we had to understand all these as the stuff in the callaloo soup that was St. Martin! Why exclusively interpret Mike and Harini's interaction as representative of Indian gender norms? Or, Aahil as a Muslim who transgressed in drinking alcohol in Guadeloupe? Or, Emily as the Afro-Caribbean feminist? Why not see each and every one of them as themselves and multiple? As a particular ingredient and the callaloo soup St. Martin that is all ingredients together. Solitary and solidary as Glissant (2000, p. 131) would put it. Wasn't this after all the way we self-identified! After all we adhered to a considerable body of scholarship that thoroughly demolished modes of thinking that obscured the work of culture and interpretation in acting as though blackness and Asianness had some direct correlate

⁴ Here is this common Wikipedia entry "Callaloo (sometimes calaloo or kallaloo) is a popular Caribbean dish originating in West Africa served in different variants across the Caribbean. The main ingredient is a leaf vegetable, traditionally either amaranth (known by many local names, including callaloo or bhaaji), taro or Xanthosoma. Both are known by many names, including callaloo, coco, tannia, bhaaji, or dasheen bush. Because the leaf vegetable used in some regions may be locally called "callaloo" or "callaloo bush", some confusion can arise among the vegetables and with the dish itself. Outside of the Caribbean, water spinach is occasionally used. Trinidadians and Dominicans primarily use taro/dasheen bush for callaloo, although Dominicans also use water spinach. Jamaicans, Belizeans and Guyanese on the other hand use the name callaloo to refer to amaranth, and use it in a plethora of dishes." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Callaloo>) Reviewed on 28th of October 2015.

in a pristine non-symbolic world “race”, ethnicity, and gender are cultural constructs (MCKITTRICK, 2015; GUADELOUPE, 2010; GILROY, 2005, 1992; HALL, 2001).

As we began reexamining the case, many instances emerged that allowed us to corroborate our insight. There were many Afro-St. Martin girls who from time to time displayed a similar submissiveness. And Mike like all the dude boys on St. Martin was into masculinist Black Atlantic pop culture (creole and transcultural to its core). Peter behaved similarly but his behavior was never connected to Indian patriarchal culture, when he too could have been influenced by it as it was also part of the callaloo soup that was St. Martin. Their embrace of compositeness without denying uniqueness, as Daniel and Aahil foregrounded their Christianity and Islam when they saw it fit, should have given us pause. So too Alysha’s use of hair relaxer and extensions, but yet always claiming that having tightly coiled curls is the best as she could do anything with it. They were composite beings, callaloo soups too!

Allowing these youngsters to speak to us, instead of reducing them or depicting them as less knowledgeable, brought us to the radical conclusion that our St. Martin exemplifies the dialectic between compositeness and uniqueness, but that this took place within a wider Compositeness. Compositeness became our rather mundane term for Relation and the implicate order. Compositeness was the world understood as a bowl of callaloo soup, in the combo of universe, with St. Martin being one of the ingredients and also a continuously emerging unique broth influencing all others. Tasting and embracing St. Martin was embracing the world and the larger process known as Life.

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