

Nationalism, musealization and (de)coloniality in Barbados: some preliminary considerations on sexual and gender diversity amongst indigestible legacies and false paradoxes

DOI
<https://doi.org/10.11606/h1678-9857.ra.2022.213947ing>



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ABSTRACT

Since 2019, the National Museum of Barbados has been presenting some temporary exhibitions that address the importance of social movements in promoting respect for sexual and gender diversity. This article aims to outline a reflection on the relations between the formation of national states, the effects of colonialism, the institution of heteronormativity and, finally, the recent visibility of sexual and gender diversity, based on the case of Barbados and its National Museum.

KEYWORDS

Sexuality,
Museums,
Colonialism,
Nationalism,
Barbados

Nacionalismo, musealização e (de)colonialidade em Barbados: algumas considerações preliminares sobre a diversidade sexual e de gênero entre legados indigestos e falsos paradoxos

RESUMO Desde 2019, o Museu Nacional de Barbados vem apresentando algumas exposições temporárias que abordam a importância dos movimentos sociais para a promoção do respeito à diversidade sexual e de gênero. Trata-se de esboçar uma reflexão sobre as relações entre a formação dos Estados nacionais, os efeitos do colonialismo, a instituição da heteronormatividade e, enfim, a recente visibilização da diversidade sexual e de gênero, a partir de Barbados e seu Museu Nacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Sexualidade, Museus,
Colonialismo, Nacionalismo,
Barbados.

PRESENTATION¹

In 2022, three Caribbean countries – Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Barbados, all former British colonies – repealed colonial-era laws that had been used to discriminate and incite violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other expressions of sexual and gender diversity (LGBTQI+).

In Barbados, Sections 9 and 12 of the Sexual Offences Acts, dating back to the early 1990s in their current form and perpetuating a legacy of old British colonial legislation, were repealed.² These sections respectively condemned the practices of *buggery* and *serious indecency*,³ which solely valorized reproductive sexuality and therefore institutionalized compulsory heterosexuality and binary gender identities, to the detriment of diverse sexual desires and gender identity expressions. The decision was celebrated by non-governmental organizations involved in LGBTQI+ advocacy, organizations fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic and for family planning, as well as global governance institutions in general, supranational development agencies, parts of the Western press and some governments, all involved in promoting LGBTQI+ rights as human rights (and, it must be said, also involved in condemning the over 60 countries⁴ that maintain anti-LGBTQI+ laws and/or officially practice discrimination based on diverse sexual orientation and gender identity).⁵

These laws inherited from the colonial era were rarely effectively enforced in the former colonies (now independent countries) and in the current British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean but served to define and reinforce, alongside Christian religious moralities and modern medical-scientific discursivities, both hegemonic corporalities and the teleological nature of reproductive sexuality, as well as compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, as efficient regimes of power. Throughout the colonial era and after independence, despite the laws, dissident experiences of sexual diversity and multiple expressions of gender were present, whether represented in literature and the arts, or more recently documented in academic research on the subject, made visible through the spread of rights advocacy organizations and the proliferation of LGBTQI+ Pride festivals and parades, or showcased in museum exhibitions and countless educational initiatives.

Among the British colonies in the Caribbean, Barbados has always stood out for numerous reasons, which will be described below. The island, just over 430 km² in size, the easternmost of the Antilles arc, became independent from the United Kingdom in 1966 and remained associated with the former metropolis as a member of The Commonwealth, with Elizabeth II as its Head of State. In November 2021, the country opted for the proclamation of the Republic and the election of a woman as President and Head of State, once again distinguishing itself from other former col-

¹ | I acknowledge the Brazilian National Council for Technological and Scientific Development (CNPq) for the Research Grant.

² | Section 9 of the Sexual Offences Acts states that “[a]ny person who commits buggery is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life.” And Section 12: “An act of ‘serious indecency’ is an act, whether natural or unnatural by a person involving the use of the genital organs for the purpose of arousing or gratifying sexual desire.” See: <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/ngos/lgbt2.pdf>.

³ | In 1533, an Act by King Henry VIII of England condemned to death penalty the practice of abominable vice of anal sex with a woman, man, or animal (*buggery*), as had already been preached by some Christian laws (Weeks, 1989). In 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act instituted the crime of ‘gross indecency’ in response to a demand from British middle classes in defense of the family and against prostitution, but with direct effects on sexual practices between people of the same sex/gender and the definition of “perversion” (Waites, 2005). Both would be transmitted to all British colonies and, in most cases, would remain in force in local legal systems after their independence.

⁴ | See: <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>

⁵ | Footnote 5 on page 3.

onies.

As part of the activities carried out to celebrate the new political system, a temporary exhibition was held at The Barbados Museum & Historical Society (BMHS) between 2022 and 2023, entitled *Road to Republic: Exploring 400 Years of a Political Experiment*. By revisiting, from a decolonial perspective, the country's history since the British invasion, the exhibition drew attention by mentioning, in one of its panels, the social movements of resistance against colonization and its persistent effects in the post-independence era, including the LGBTQI+ movement. Another temporary exhibition held at the same museum in 2019, titled *Insurgents: Redefining Rebellion in Barbados*, had addressed the importance of these movements to the history of forms of insurgency on the island since colonial times, by countering the tenacity of colonialist representation that Barbados had always been a land of "peaceful" people, making it England's favorite colony in the Caribbean.

In a country where laws against LGBTQI+ individuals were still in force, how was it possible for academic texts on sexual and gender diversity resulting from research conducted in the country and elsewhere in the region to be published there, for Pride Parades to take place, for parties aimed at the diverse audiences to occur, and even for an LGBTQI+ film festival to be held? And for the National Museum of that country to manifest the importance of the existence of sexual and gender diversity? What is historically behind Sections 9 and 12 of the Sexual Offences Acts and the recent revocation of these Sections? A panel from the *Road to Republic* exhibition, held in a museum that aims to contribute to the manufacture and maintenance of the nation-building project itself, served as a pretext for seeking answers to these questions.

This paper aims to outline a reflection on the relationships between the formation of modern nation-states, the effects of colonialism and coloniality, the worldwide institutionalization and imposition of heteronormativity, and finally, the recent visibilization of sexual and gender diversity, based on the case of Barbados – through a panel from the *Road to Republic* exhibition. Firstly, some considerations will be presented on nationalism and the importance of museums for the consolidation of the "single matrix of meta-meanings" (Shulga, 2015) that shapes national ideologies.⁶ Then, the history of Barbados will be outlined to show the tension between the presence of sexual and gender diversity and its silencing and framing in the name of a heteronormative national project (initially British and then Barbadian). Finally, it will be possible to discuss the Barbados Museum and its recent temporary exhibitions as an indication that "spectral (homo)sexuality" (Murray, 2009) – one that is discursively treated as a threat to good manners and hegemonic morality, even though it is lived in secret by the people about whom so much is said – seems no longer to fully characterize the experiences of sexual and gender diversity

5 | *Compulsory heterosexuality* denounces the culturally arbitrary and therefore unnatural character of heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). *Experiences of sexual and gender diversity* refer to sexual and/or gender practices and identities and their multiple social and cultural dynamics (sometimes "expressions" will be used to emphasize the eloquent nature of practices and identities). *Non-normative sexuality* designates experiences of sexual and gender diversity considered as not conforming to established social, moral, and sometimes legal expectations, and are therefore subject to some forms of regulation. When the experiences are "other" in relation to the normative ones, but not necessarily subject to categorization, *alternative sexuality*. *Homosexuality* (as well as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexual, transgender, intersex, etc.) is the Western term most commonly used by international organizations, and is also widely used by Caribbean leaders and activists, among others. *Heteronormativity* designates the normative system (and its mechanisms, technologies, and dispositives) that sustain the institutions of modern states, naturalizing heterosexuality, gender binary and sexual dimorphism (Warner, 1993).

6 | The "single matrix of meta-meanings" is proposed by Shulga (2015) as a symbolic arrangement elaborated to serve as a model (official, in general) for nation-building, almost always reformulating or going beyond actual meanings to produce meta-meanings.

in Barbados, especially with the advent of the Republic, since what a new matrix of meta-meanings is being built to characterize the national project in complement to the previous one.⁷

FROM NATIONS TO MUSEUMS

Abner Cohen proposed that attention should be paid to symbolic forms as elements that mark the identity and exclusivity of a particular political group: “[...] emblems, facial markings, myths of origin, customs of endogamy or of exogamy, beliefs and practices associated with the ancestors, genealogies, specific ceremonials, special styles of life, shrines, notions of purity and pollution, and so on.” (1969: 219). The main function of these forms would be to objectify social relations – and the underlying power relations. According to the author, a political regime may manage to impose and maintain itself in power through force, but it is only through symbolic arrangements that its stability is ensured. Nothing signifies these symbolic arrangements more than the collections exhibited in national museums, for example.

Contrary to what might be supposed, symbolic forms are not the prerogative of religious systems or codified traditions of a pre-modern past. Cohen argues that, in both capitalist and socialist societies at the time of his writing, “[...] emblems, slogans, banners, mass parades, titles, patriotic music and songs [...]”, as well as all sorts of other symbols, are deployed to maintain the political order, which demonstrates the power of symbolic forms in the secularized world. Precisely, these symbolic forms are interwoven and materialized in the collections of museums that are characterized as *national*, strengthening the creation of an imagined community capable of producing national unity (Anderson 2007, 2008).

In England or France, in Spain or Portugal, symbolic arrangements marking identity were also objectified in social relations and particularly materialized in museum collections. As Donald Preziosi suggests (2011: 58-9), “[e]very political regime [...] has always been fundamentally devoted to managing and controlling collective memory [that] entails a retrograde fabrication and projection of ‘cultural memories’ focused [...]” upon symbolic forms that originate from ancestors or imaginary entities common to a given group. Considering nationalism as “[...] the belief and the practice aimed at creating unified but unique communities (nations) within a sovereign space (states)” (Puri, 2006: 341), the relevance of symbolism for new national projects under construction is easily estimated: there must be a minimum sharing of the same *content* of imagined material for a communal *form* to be produced with national characteristics. Museums would be institutions of continuous reworking of the perfect fit of these contents into specific forms, through symbolic arrangements

7 | The reflections contained herein result from observations carried out throughout January 2023 at the Barbados Museum & Historical Society. Three visits to the museum were conducted, along with numerous conversations with users both inside and outside the museum. I would like to acknowledge the museum staff for their hospitality, particularly to the curator of social history responsible for the exhibitions that will be addressed, Natalie McGuire. This is a preliminary reflection on sexual and gender diversity in Barbados based on some panels from an exhibition presented by the museum, rather than an ethnographic study specifically on experiences of sexual and gender diversity in the country itself.

stemming from materialized cultural memory (Gonçalves, 2007; Vawda, 2019).

According to Flora Kaplan (2006), nations and museums, imbued with symbolic arrangements that mark identities, would have germinated in the mix of mercantile capitalism with European global expansion from the fifteenth century onwards. Western *national* museums would have their roots in the humanism of the Italian Renaissance and would have flourished from the scientism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Colonialism, which acquired universal characteristics with nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, according to the author, generated new wealth and expressions of pride in imperial powers, particularly in England and France, which materialized in Worlds' Fairs and *Expositions Universelles* and in the collections of large museums (such as the British Museum and the Louvre). That is, museums, as we know them today, would have emerged in the modern era in Europe, at the same time as (or as a corollary to) European colonialism and imperialism, the rise of the bourgeoisie to political power and bourgeois domination of the economy, naturalism and the great expeditions, modernity and liberalism, scientism (particularly, medical-scientific and juridical-moral discursivities and the aesthetic-scientific movement of naturalism) and their legitimizing theories of hierarchies of oppression (especially based on race and sexuality), the anthropological discipline and the evolutionist paradigm (and in the second half of the nineteenth century, social darwinism), the romantic idea of nationhood, nationalism and nation-states, etc (Haraway, 1984-85; Vawda, 2019).

National museums would be privileged educational institutions, not only for the reproduction of symbolic forms and knowledge about everything and everyone but also, consequently, for the dissemination of universal mental schemes about everything and everyone and how everything and everyone has evolved, legitimizing European expansion over the planet and the epistemological perspective linked to colonialism and imperialism driven by Europe. British museums – including those in the colonies – between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example, especially the ethnographic sections composed of material collected or looted in the colonies and organized based on the evolutionist paradigm that classified colonized peoples as uncivilized, served as useful tools for colonial administration and popular education – and later, to legitimize eugenic purposes (Coombes, 1988; Cummins, 2004; Kaplan, 1994; Macdonald, 2006; Knell, 2011; Vawda, 2019).

But what makes a museum a *national museum*? What is this entity called a *nation*, which can use museums, among other materialized symbolic arrangements, to establish itself? How is this entity able to produce a single matrix of meta-meanings recognized by the majority of the social collective and with which individuals can understand and interpret the world around them, giving them the necessary psychological comfort to promote the stability of the entire social whole?

Much has been written about the formation of nation-states, nation-building processes, the persistence of nationalism, and the global spread of European and American models across the planet (Elias, 1994; Wallerstein, 1974). On the one hand, some researchers associate the origin of nation-states with modernity, industrialism, individualism, globalization and the emergence of democratic citizenship in Europe (Anderson, 2008; Elias, 1994; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Tilly, 1975). On the other hand, some researchers distinguish nations based on *ethnic* principles, which may have pre-modern origins, from modern nations based on *civic* characteristics (Smith, 1991). Some relate nations to how people imagine themselves as a community, particularly after the advent of the modern press (Anderson, 2008), or how this imagined community projects itself *against* the power of the state (Trouillot, 2010).

Other researchers propose reflections on the characterization of nations in primordialist terms – based on the fluid definition of belonging by *blood* and *soil* and on ethnicity or processes of ethnicity (Barth, 2000) – and in instrumentalist terms – based on the political elaboration of the *state* (Armstrong, 1982). Moreover, some address nation-building in colonial and/or post-colonial situations, taking into account historical processes of creolization (Anderson, 2007), internal colonialisms (González-Casanova, 2006) or forms of spiritual nationalism (Chatterjee, 1993). Finally, some compare the marks of state political formation with nation-building, national *habitus* or national ideology (Elias, 1994). Anthropologists have explored the complexity of renewed attachment to new cultural forms that challenge or complement the idea of the nation (Sahlins, 1997) or of nations without ethnicity (Eriksen, 1991, 2004). Museums qualified as *national*, despite the criticism of or the buzz against nationalism, are modern universal institutions for maintaining and constantly reshaping *national* projects (also modern), whether primordialist or instrumentalist.

In general, researchers agree that national ideology is related to a *cultural entity* (i.e., a group of people who share one or more languages, religious forms, historicity, and traditional practices), a *political entity* (a group of people who consider themselves a community with a desire to maintain an administrative organization), and a *psychological entity* (with people united by shared loyalties). The contested nature of the idea of the nation – culturally, politically, and psychologically – is central to the objectives of this paper and is materialized in the national museums of countries that became independent in the second half of the twentieth century, as demonstrated by these two temporary exhibitions held at the Barbados Museum & Historical Society since 2019.

Starting from the contested nature of the idea of the nation and the fact that national museums are both produced by and contribute to producing a national

narrative that is always contestable, it is necessary to consider, along with Preziosi (2011: 59), that “[...] collection or collecting always co-exists, and is co-defined and co-determined by, recollection and de-collection, and that it is with a clear appreciation of this matrix of attitudes toward the representational nature and significance of objects that may make it possible to critically investigate the phenomenon of the ‘national museum narrative.’”⁸ The national museums of the former colonies are privileged institutions for observing the processes of (re)formulation of national ideologies and their single matrix of meta-meanings, as they allow for a keen insight into how *re-collection* and *de-collection*, as described by Preziosi, take place.

The Barbados Museum, according to Alissandra Cummins (1994-1995) and reinforced by Kevin Farmer (2013), was established by the colonial elite out of a Victorian desire to explain the world through science, with a Christian moralistic bias, becoming a showcase for technological progress and the power of subjugation of the metropolis over anything deemed “primitive” in the colonies. Financed by private initiative through donations from wealthy local families, the museum was co-opted by the post-colonial government to become an important agent of identity creation, with the reinterpretation and reconstruction of the collection – that is, *re-collection* and *de-collection* – based on the symbolic arrangements activated for the elaboration of the new national identity and its single matrix of meta-meanings.

It is proposed here that museums qualified as *national* be considered as one of the various dispositives of biopolitical governmentality. Thus, they represent tensions related to the establishment and maintenance of *corpopolitics* (or bodypolitics, i.e. the discipline of bodies), *biopolitics* (i.e. the control of populations), and *geopolitics* (i.e. the regulation of the states in the world-system) at national and beyond levels (Castro-Gómez, 2019; Foucault, 2004).⁹ Sexual and gender diversity would not seem to fit into the biopolitically shaped narrative of the national museum for the production of a single matrix of meta-meanings, as it had been a total rejection of gender dissidence and non-normative sexualities, including in the legal system, in the context of the British imperial and its former colonies in the post-independence era since the nineteenth century.

The museums would even portray gender marks and some issues related to female participation in the elaboration of national symbols and/or in the production of “things” representative of the nation. In doing so, they share the idea that gender binary and sexual dimorphism would be *natural* and *essential* data in a world inhabited only by men and women, marked by masculine and feminine principles, as propagated by medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity, and religious moralities that sustain Western modernity and hegemonic biopolitical governmentality. This is how the single matrix of meta-meanings has always been constituted, on one hand, very diverse and particular, while, on the other hand, constantly

8 | The constitution of (national) museum collections is constantly being reformulated, according to Preziosi (2011), in accordance with the “issues of the moment” (political, social, cultural, economic, religious, etc.) or *l’air du temps*. Thus, additions of materials and/or removal of objects from the collections, as well as new associations of previously unassociated objects or dissociation of others previously associated, all guided by the issues of the moment, would lead to *re-collections* and *de-collections*, which would be directly related to the elaboration of national narratives.

9 | For the definition of *governmentality* and *dispositives* with biopolitical effects, refer to Michel Foucault (2004: 111-112; 1998: 244).

concealing and/or framing experiences of sexual and gender diversity in favor of heteronormativity, as a legacy of colonial power. In these national museums, there seemed to be no place for sexual and gender diversity, thus reinforcing the naturalness of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity as identity markers of modern nations – including former colonies after becoming independent.

By representing and instituting a particular reality, including the “normal” and “healthy” bodies of the nation, national museums would be privileging a certain identity over other possibilities, as “[t]he fabrication of any identity or social reality is a function of its imagined relationships to alternative identities, and so may rightly be understood as a function or artefact of its imagined othernesses.” (Preziosi, 2011: 59). In other words, the representation of a certain reality simultaneously masks, substitutes, or erases others, and consequently, causes the former to coexist as an effect of those that are thus made rendered “other”. The narrative of the national museum would therefore represent a modern imagined community elaborated by an intellectual elite to consolidate the nation as a hegemonic cultural, political, and psychological entity. However, this narrative is always partial and represents a community that is imagined only by a few people. National museums, when they exhibit historically delimited and socially defined realities, end up speaking much more between the lines of different realities and alternative possibilities or, as Preziosi (2011: 59) puts it, that *things could be otherwise*.

The need to think from between the lines seems to be suggested also by Kaplan (2006), when addressing the challenges posed to scholars of national museums today, such as the fracture of national identities in a world marked by problems of environmental degradation, exponential population growth, increasingly instantaneous communication, deepening social inequalities, increasing religious fundamentalisms and ethnic conflicts, among others. Between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there seems to have been a *renouveau* of interest in the study of national museums by professionals in the fields of social sciences and history, mainly in the English-speaking world. The analysis of curatorial processes and critical revisions of museum exhibitions – those between the lines – would be seen by these professionals as opportunities to address power relations in the identity politics of contemporary societies, against the backdrop of such challenges.¹⁰

Beyond the context addressed by Kaplan and turning to the Caribbean, it can be proposed that the national museums of *new* countries, which have explicitly undergone processes of *re-collection* and *de-collection*, are ahead (or at the forefront) of many decolonial questions that may be of interest to the social sciences practiced in these regions: the Barbados Museum’s *Insurgents* and *Road to Republic* exhibitions deal with what a national museum would not *normally* deal with, namely, the exhibitions present some “other” forms of existence and modes of resistance to British

10 | Kaplan references works of her own authorship, as well as texts published in the 1980s and early 1990s authored or edited by Arjun Appadurai, James Clifford and George Marcus, Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, Sharon Macdonald, Susan Pearce, George Stocking Jr., and Peter Vergo.

colonization and its persistent impositions in the post-independence era, making room for expressions of sexual and gender diversity (Cummins, 2004). To contextualize these exhibitions and the treatment they give to sexual and gender diversity, it is necessary to briefly address the country's history, especially since the British invasion and the institutionalization of slavery labor until the proclamation of the Republic, through the rebellions that contested colonization and paved the way for the construction of a national project and independence. The aim is to show how sexual and gender diversity was denied, framed, and silenced to then be criminalized and rendered "spectral" (Murray, 2009), while in fact, it has always been present between the lines, perhaps as a form of resistance – as these exhibitions at the Barbados Museum demonstrate.

INDIGESTIBLE LEGACIES

The national museums present narratives that are always contestable about the cultural, political, and psychological memory that characterizes the imagined *national* community – or at least that one imagined by the groups that hold the power to establish the legitimate narrative of the national museum. Generally, this narrative is primarily based on a history that, through the museum, will acquire characteristics of officialdom, with a certain anthropological grounding, ethnological materiality, and ethnographic sensitivity, as pointed out by research on this type of museum (Cummins, et al. 2013; Kaplan, 1994; Knell, 2011; Macdonald, 2006).

In advocating for the importance of museums in the construction of national projects in the Caribbean, with an emphasis on Barbados, Farmer (2013) showed that the interest in this type of museum is curiously quite recent, although the museums already existed as colonial legacies. Throughout the struggle for liberation and in the first decades following independence, politicians were concerned with the elaboration of national symbolic forms that would help to distance themselves from the metropolis – electing black leaders and creating anthems, flags and coats of arms, for example, with typically local signs – without care for the assertion of a national culture or the valorization of a national cultural heritage. According to Jeanne Canizozo (1994), the concern with cultural particularities only began to emerge in the wake of the development of tourism as the main source of economic resources for the new countries, replacing the "agrarian vocation" imposed by colonization. In this context, local leaders and intellectuals, mainly newly formed historians returning from abroad to take up positions at the University of the West Indies,¹¹ gradually turn to museums and begin to carefully create the narrative for *re-collection* and *de-collection*, from a decolonial perspective.¹²

11 | The University of the West Indies has interconnected campuses spread across the former British colonies in the Caribbean (Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago).

12 | Here, a broad definition of decolonial is used, which overlaps with the post-colonial perspective, as employed in the works of Anglophone Caribbean scholars, rather than precisely aligning with the one proposed by Latin American intellectuals from the Modernity/Coloniality Group. For the latter, coloniality intertwines the process of colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean with the formation of the capitalist world-system based on hierarchical structures of racial, sexual, gender, and class inequality. Decoloniality would entail overcoming coloniality (Lander, 2005). Trinidad and Tobago).

The historiography of Barbados, which underpins the narrative of local national museums, mainly emphasizes the functioning of the slave regime during the colonial era, the social movements and labor revolts leading to independence and the post-independence political-economic arrangements. However, there is also a body of archaeological research on the Amerindian peoples who inhabited the Caribbean and the territorial disputes that were ongoing upon the arrival of English colonizers.¹³ Some evidences suggest diverse sexual experiences and gender expressions among these pre-Columbian peoples, although this theme has not yet received much attention (Beckles & Shepherd, 2004; Reid, 2018; Sued-Badillo, 2013; Wilson, 1997).

Barbados is said to have been named by the Portuguese or Spaniards in the early sixteenth century, who, although not settling there,¹⁴ allegedly sighted trees (*ficus citrifolia*) with roots and vines that reminded them of bearded men. Another version suggests that they saw bearded men on the coast, not trees – given the rarity of bearded Amerindians in that Caribbean region, the name would express a certain surprise of the Iberian navigators (Beckles, 2007; Drewett, 1991). A more controversial version recently circulated speculates that these bearded men were of mixed indigenous and African descent; the latter allegedly arrived in the early fourteenth century from an unsuccessful expedition of the Mali Empire.¹⁵ In any case, Barbados was believed to be uninhabited when the English seized it in the 1620s. Perhaps the people who lived there had migrated to other islands due to difficulties in food provision caused by environmental reasons such as soil erosion and deforestation. However, the main cause of depopulation was, indeed, the atrocities of the colonization process in the sixteenth century: the decimation of the indigenous population after their enslavement and the flight of the survivors to other islands (Beckles, 2007; Beckles & Shepherd, 2004; Drewett, 1991).

In the second half of the 1620s, the English seized Barbados and established plantations for indigo, cotton, and tobacco. Barbados, along with St. Kitts to the northwest, served as the first English colonization experiments in the Tropics, acting as laboratories. However, the introduction of sugarcane, likely brought by Jewish merchants from Pernambuco (in Brazil), changed Barbados' fate and reconfigured the economic model of British colonialism in the Tropics. Barbados had an “advantage” over other Caribbean islands due to its relatively flat terrain, lack of large forested areas and fertile coral-based soil – and it was uninhabited. Enslaved Africans quickly replaced the labor force, initially composed of indentured labor recruited from the UK – mainly Irish and Scots. Due to Barbados' unique geographical position – being the first island reached when sailing from Africa to the Caribbean following the ocean currents – it became the main distribution center for enslaved Africans to the entire Caribbean and even to parts of the mainland Americas (Shepherd &

13 | I'll focus specifically on the history of Barbados and British colonization, without mentioning the former colonies of other European colonial powers.

14 | Spain took possession of the island in the late fifteenth century, but Portugal claimed it for itself in the 1530s. However, Portugal did not occupy it and eventually abandoned it completely by 1620, leaving behind a large population of wild boars and no human inhabitants (Beckles, 2007).

15 | Check out the work, activism and bibliographic and visual production of indigenous leader Lokono-Arawak Damon G. Corrie, from the Eagle Clan Arawaks, who is active in the Indigenous Democracy Defence Organization and the Caribbean Amerindian Development Association. On his YouTube channel, you can find information about a film being produced about the incursion of African navigators to Barbados: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHsrdc5CRZ4>

Beckles, 2000).

The production of sugar using enslaved African labor deeply marked Barbados' history and left indelible social and cultural imprints. The generated wealth – not only from the sugar trade but also from the slave trade – was so significant that a Parliament, akin to that of the metropolis, was established in the seventeenth century to legislate on the colony's interests and shape agrarian capitalism in this Caribbean laboratory. The Parliament had the autonomy to enact laws specific to the colony, provided they did not conflict with the commands of the metropolitan monarchy (Beckles, 1984; Beckles & Shepherd, 2004). At that time, England dominated the transatlantic slave trade, and following the economic success of the colonization of Barbados, it began to rationalize the trade involving Africa, the Americas and Europe like never before, including Asia in the circuit – a century later, Indian workers would be brought to the Caribbean and the northern part of South America through indentured labor (Gounder et al., 2022).

It is important to emphasize, following Ann Laura Stoler (2010) and Dawn Harris (2017), that the enslavement of African people and their trafficking consolidated a regime of truth at the core of biopolitical governmentality, ideologically supported by racial hierarchization (racism), male domination (misogyny), and the essentialization of heteronormativity (heterosexism), evident to this day. With Portuguese and Spanish colonization, Christian morality had been imposed on the planet between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, but it was chiefly under British and French imperialism and the ensuing expansion of capitalism between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries that this morality acquired another guise, now interwoven with medical-scientific discursivity, defining “good bodies”, and legal-moral normativity, defining “good minds” (Han & O'Mahoney, 2014; Lennox & Waites, 2013; Wilets, 2010). Thus, bodies were disciplined, populations controlled and relations between nation-states and their racialized colonial peripheries regulated.

Slavery became not only a mechanism for securing labor – what many scholars claim was the central characteristic of enslaving African people before the modern trafficking controlled mainly by the British – but also a powerful dispositive for redefining humanity through the (unethical and immoral) lens of racism, misogyny, and heteronormativity – this being the “novelty” of this form of modern slavery (Walz & Cuno, 2010).¹⁶ Consequently, the framing and/or concealment of sexual and gender diversity existing on the African continent were reinforced, if such diversity did not serve the labor and reproduction of enslaved labor, the same happening with the sexuality of enslaved people trafficked to the Caribbean and their descendants.¹⁷

Paul E. Lovejoy (2000 [1983]: 1) aptly defined slavery as a form of exploitation characterized, among other things, by the fact that enslaved individuals were prop-

16 | Racism, misogyny, and heteronormativity are at the core of the apparatus defining a new perception of humanity because they are also at the foundation of the essentialized ontological conceptions by European medical-scientific and legal-moral epistemological perspectives, which generate a new global order – what has been called the coloniality of power, being and knowledge (Lander, 2005), to which I would add the coloniality of sexuality.

17 | The ideological consequences of the persistent effects of Euro-American medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity and Christian moralities on Sub-Saharan societies are evident in current controversies regarding the treatment of sexual and gender diversity there. To explore this subject further, besides a review article authored by me (Gontijo, 2021a), one can refer to the works of Adrian Jjuuko (2022), Kapyra Kaoma (2012), and Adriaan Van Klinken and Ezra Chitando (2021), as well as the doctoral thesis of Francisco Miguel (2019).

erties “[...] that [...] did not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities [...]” The identity of the enslaved person was subordinate to that of the master, the former dependent on the latter. The control of sexuality, in this situation, applied, on the one hand, to the enslaved person, by the master; but also, on the other hand, to the master, by the colonial society of which they were a part, thus falling on the enslaved individuals the effects of the moralities imposed on the master – shaped either by Christian religion or by institutions supporting the national state marked by biopolitical governmentality. Despite this dependence, forms of camaraderie among enslaved individuals developed, characterized by updates of knowledge, practices and values often directed by the moralities prevailing in the original African societies or syncretized with the moralities imposed by the masters’ society – but always partly discordant with the latter.

Thus, one understands the persistence of affections among enslaved people that diverged from those that colonial society had been imposing based on Christian moralities and, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, grounded by medical-scientific discursivity and legal-moral normativity, as some recent research points out regarding experiences of sexual and gender diversity in colonial America and the Caribbean.¹⁸ As Cummins (1994-1995: 1) aptly recalled, colonialism was “[...] in itself a project of cultural control. Cultural forms in these new colonial societies were transformed and reconstructed, creating new categories and oppositions between colonizer and colonized, conqueror and conquered, European and African, and even male and female.”

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was, on one hand, the expansion of the British Empire fueled by the economic prosperity generated by colonial exploitation based on slavery, and on the other hand, an increase in movements of resistance and combat against racism (and also sexism), in favor of freedom and equality, as a reaction to the excesses of colonialism. Forms of insurgency, including female participation (Beckles, 1999), have been the subject of recent studies in Barbados, contributing to revising the widely held conception that British colonization was mild and, for that reason, the Barbadian people were “peaceful” and heirs to British moral values (Beckles, 1984; Beckles & Shepherd, 1996; Howe & Marshall, 2011).

The insurgent movements, often mirroring international experiences such as the success of the Haitian Revolution, led, according to Hilary Beckles (1984, 2004), to the abolition of slavery in the 1830s, albeit with some perverse conditions: the Emancipation Act stipulated, among other prerogatives, that formerly enslaved persons over six years of age should remain working for their masters for twelve years as a form of “apprenticeship” to life in freedom and, for this work, they would not receive wages unless they performed some additional function beyond their orig-

¹⁸ | To further explore this topic, consult the works of Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman (2006), Lindon Barrett (1995), Kamala Kempadoo (2004, 2009), Kate Houlden (2017), Linda Lewis (2003), and Ann Laura Stoler (2010).

inal role! The legislation further strengthened the powers of landowning masters by granting them exorbitant compensations, maintaining the relationship between labor and plantations, restricting migration and regulating wages at low levels for a century (Beckles, 2004; Beckles & Shepherd, 1996, 2000).¹⁹

The post-emancipation era was marked by questioning the privileges maintained by white people in a predominantly black society, especially regarding access to the labor market, secular formal education and the right to public health, in addition to the demand for political representation by the majority (Beckles, 2004). All of this, against the backdrop of the decline of the Caribbean sugar industry, the migration of workers to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago (and even to the Brazilian Amazon – cf. Lima, 2013), and, of course, the effects, on bodies and minds, of the medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity and Christian morality that marked the reign of Queen Victoria (Hyam 1990).

During the Victorian era (1837-1901), more precisely between the 1860s and 1880s, laws on sexual offenses were “modernized”, now acquiring characteristics in line with the new medical-scientific conceptions of “normal” corporalities, strongly rooted in scientific racism and bourgeois sexism of the time. This legal apparatus, naturalized as part of British imperial morality, was expanded to the colonies and would serve to shape the entire state structure, enduring after independence, with the backing of Christianity and its dominance over the Barbadian educational system (Han & O’Mahoney, 2014; Lennox & Waites, 2013; Hyam, 1990).

The crisis of the Barbadian sugar industry resulted in widespread impoverishment of the majority of the population, at the same time as the Victorian era consolidated hierarchies of racial and gender oppression, which reinforced the dissatisfaction of the masses. Between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, culminating in 1937, labor uprisings contributed to drawing the metropolitan power’s attention to the need for economic diversification, quality education and healthcare institutions, respect for local realities and more political autonomy (Beckles, 2003, 2004; Beckles & Shepherd, 1996). The British central power responded with investments and political actions of a decentralizing nature, such as the creation of a federation of British Caribbean colonies... to no avail. Over the next two decades, England and local political leaders, usually left-leaning, created conditions for complete independence, which would occur from the 1960s onwards in virtually all former colonies in the region, with some exceptions (Beckles, 2003, 2007; Chamberlain, 2010; Howe & Marshall, 2011). But all the new countries remained connected to the former metropolis through The Commonwealth,²⁰ many of them recognizing Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State.

Since independence, Barbados has stood out for its political stability characterized by the alternation of two parties (Democratic Labour Party/DLP, and Barba-

19 | The *chattel houses*, typical of the Barbadian landscape today, originated from the fact that almost all cultivable land belonged to the masters. Therefore, for the vast majority of former enslaved people, their work and residence were confined to the plantations where they had previously worked as slaves. These chattel houses were wooden structures that could be easily dismantled and reassembled, allowing former enslaved people to move if necessary (Beckles, 2004).

20 | The Commonwealth, comprised of 56 member states – mostly former British colonies –, does not see itself as a political organization but as an intergovernmental body of countries that cooperate with each other based on common values and objectives. The “community” of these values and objectives is generally defined by the most powerful member states in the global world-system (democracy, free trade, good governance, human rights, individual freedoms, etc). See: <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/>

dos Labour Party/BLP, both center-left or social democratic) and the absence of major social conflicts, as well as universal formal education and an efficient healthcare system, relatively competent policies for distributing wealth and minimizing inequalities, and the gradual replacement of sugar production by tourism,²¹ small-scale industrialization, and international financial transactions (sometimes considered fraudulent) as the main sources of income – all of which makes Barbados a relatively prominent country in the region (Farmer, 2013).

In the second half of the 2010s, due to the rapid population growth in the previous decades and a restructuring of the island's land use to meet the needs of mass tourism, there was a failure in the sewage system network that led to the flooding of a tourist area of the island. Coupled with the DLP government's inability to solve the problem, economic stagnation and rumors of corruption, this led to the election of the first female Head of Government, Mia Mottley, of the BLP. In 2018, in an unprecedented election, the parliament became solely composed of members of the Prime Minister's party. The infrastructure problem was solved and tourism returned to grow as the country's main source of income, but the economic crisis led to the adoption of unpopular measures. Mottley led the country to a definitive political break with the former metropolis by replacing in 2021 the old form of government linked to Queen Elizabeth II by the Republic and the election of the first local Head of State, also a woman, Sandra Mason.²²

Mottley was the first Head of Government to openly speak about the need to promote LGBTQI+ rights in Barbados, denouncing the inherited legislation, as an indigestible legacy from the colonial era, and by extension, the prejudice of fundamentalist Christian perspectives as another indigestible legacy of colonialism (Lennox & Waites, 2013).²³ Not surprisingly, the first LGBTQI+ Pride Parade took place precisely in 2018, as well as a series of parallel activities aimed at raising awareness of sexual and gender diversity and criticizing discriminatory practices.

It is worth highlighting the importance of a body of publications over the past two decades, generally addressing issues related to sexual and gender diversity from the perspectives of feminist critique and decoloniality. These publications contribute to substantiating actions in support of respect for diversity in Barbados. They cover various topics, including the relationships among homophobia, (hetero)sexism and nationalism (Atluri, 2001; Houlden, 2017; Kempadoo, 2004; 2009; Kempadoo & DeShong, 2020; Lewis, 2003; Murray, 2021); the connections between religious moralities, legal norms and sexualities (Aymer, 2016; Charles, 2022; Jackman, 2020; McDonald, 2019; McNamara, 2018); and the particularities of local gender binary and its critiques (Barriteau, 2001, 2003, 2019; Barrow, 2019; Brereton, 2013; Harris, 2017).

The symbolic arrangements used in the past two decades to shape the nation-

21 | While the sugar industry has historically generated wealth concentrated in the hands of a capitalist elite, tourism, although also operating within capitalist logic, has allowed for greater participation by a larger number of people and a more widespread distribution of wealth (Farmer, 2013).

22 | Several videos are available on the internet showing the inauguration ceremony of the Republic, with the two highlights being the moment when the Republic is declared in front of the then Prince Charles, representative of Queen Elizabeth II, and the moment when Rihanna, the Barbadian pop singer, is announced as a "national hero". See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EysvNwlvNY

23 | See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8Ss9K_tx04

al project and establish a single matrix of meta-meanings, now more focused on the demands of a national culture and the valorization of Caribbean cultural heritage in contrast to the British legacy, as noted by Farmer (2013), seem to finally embrace the contestation of anti-LGBTQI+ colonial laws and the denunciation of the excesses of Christian moralities. This was evidenced by the repeal of Sections 9 and 12 of the Sexual Offenses Act and the subsequent facilitation of the normalization of LGBTQI+ rights. This seems to create a positive image of Barbados as a nation that is in tune with its time – although this may be considered a form of homonationalism or homonormativity.²⁴ It also, to some extent, acknowledges the indigenous, African, and/or colonial sexual and gender diversity that has been denied, silenced, and framed by the regime of truth sustained by modern medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity, and Euro-American Christian moralities imposed by colonialism and imperialism. This regime persisted in the form of the coloniality of power-being-knowing. It is in this context that the presence and relevance of the panel on LGBTQI+ movements in the temporary exhibition *Road to Republic*, on display at the Barbados Museum between 2022 and 2023, is understood.

24 | Regarding the nuances of homonationalism or homonormativity, see Puar (2007, 2013), Irineu (2016), and Gontijo (2019; 2021b).

INSURGENTS ON THE ROAD TO REPUBLIC

The Barbados Museum & Historical Society (BMHS) is a non-profit non-governmental organization that serves as the national museum in Barbados. It is located in an area declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – comprising the historic center of the capital, Bridgetown, and some military facilities further south. In addition to various galleries, the complex includes a bookstore and souvenir shop, library, workshops and activity rooms for adults and children and the headquarters of the Barbados Historical Society, a research center on the history and anthropology of the Eastern Caribbean.

The history of the BMHS and its integration into the broader context of the formation of Caribbean museums, from a decolonial perspective, has been well documented in texts published over the past three decades, with notable contributions from the current director, Alissandra Cummins (1994-1995, 2004, 2013), and the deputy director, Kevin Farmer (2013). The Historical Society emerged in 1933 from the display of private collections of natural history, some of which subsequently became part of the museum's collection. This exhibition served as the starting point for campaigns among the island's wealthy families and Parliament to establish permanent collections and financial support for a museum, which was to be housed in the military buildings provided by the government at that time.

Initially, the BMHS was restricted to members and benefactors, usually of British origin, and, as Cummins (1994-1995) suggests, both the collections and the buildings housing them were Eurocentric in their focus, aiming to attract the attention of “worthy citizens”, namely those interested in “giving practical expression to the best of their own past”. However, as the BMHS was established at a time when Barbados was experiencing heightened nationalism, which would culminate in independence in 1966, tensions also arose among members, politicians, and intellectuals regarding the museum’s characteristics and even its relevance to Barbados.

The 1980s were marked by a series of national celebrations, such as the sesquicentennial of the emancipation of enslaved people, the fiftieth anniversary of the 1937 riots, the twentieth anniversary of independence, and the 350th anniversary of the installation of Parliament. These celebrations sparked a national debate about Barbadian “culture” and “identity”, reinforcing a sense of social responsibility that underpinned the need to consider the BMHS as part of broader Barbadian society (Cummins, 1994-1995). The BMHS began to take a closer look at the daily lives of ordinary people: “By examining the lives of the non-great, non-white and non-male past of Barbados, which had largely been ignored by academics and local historians alike, the challenges posed by conflicts over race, gender, and economics were taken up.” (Cummins, 1994-1995: 5) From there, new collection and exhibition formats (re-collection and de-collection) were produced, “[...] admitting that children, women, workers and other minorities had and have equally relevant histories.” (Cummins, op. cit.: 31)

It is in this context that the efforts over the past thirty years to navigate the paths to the *Insurgents* and *Road to Republic* exhibitions are understood, especially when considering that national museums contain narratives related to a negotiated reality based on stories that are told to themselves about themselves (Canizzo, 1994) and that decisions about how nations are represented deeply reflect prevailing power relations (Karp & Lavine, 1991).

In January 2023, a visit to the museum began with the bookstore and souvenir shop before reaching the exhibition rooms. Harewood Gallery and Jubilee Gallery display some deteriorating objects and somewhat aged explanatory cards, although there is an effort to update them, with new cards revising older texts in some cases and introducing interactive elements – panels with questions that lead visitors to critically reflect on the importance of the historical content on display for social life today. Harewood Gallery deals with Barbados’ natural history, focusing on the island’s geological formation and terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, including information about species introduced by colonizers and their impacts on the environment and contemporary social reality.

Jubilee Gallery covers social history up to independence, with themes such

as: pre-colonial indigenous ways of life and their material culture from various Caribbean areas; a panel referencing the first book on Barbados history by Richard Ligon, published in 1657, only 30 years after British occupation, with the emblematic title *The True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, demonstrating how history is a contested terrain; the early decades of colonization, marked by indentured labor; the introduction of sugarcane and African slave labor, detailing the cruelty of the slave trade with photos of former enslaved people from the nineteenth century; daily life in the plantation house and slave quarters, the luxury of white elites and the poverty of the black majority; the plantation system; some peculiarities of life in West Africa brought to the Caribbean; the Emancipation precursors and the lives of former enslaved people thereafter; the functioning of the colonial government and the legislative and judicial powers; migrations; the development of trade unions and the 1930s revolts; the Church-controlled education system; the decline of sugar production; religions; shipbuilding; manufacturing and craftsmanship; musicality; early seaside resorts and tourism; sports, especially cricket; the railway; electricity; and architecture and the prominence of *chattel houses*.

The Warmington Gallery and the Military Gallery contain objects depicting decorative arts and military memorabilia representative of the colonizers. The Cunard Gallery, dedicated to “fine arts”, mainly features paintings from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries depicting “human types” and Caribbean daily life, as well as portraits of various individuals. Next to this last room, there is a cell from the old prison as an example of the original function of the buildings now occupied by the museum. One of the largest rooms, the African Gallery, presents objects and panels on the history of the African continent and the current reality of various countries, highlighting spirituality and the relationship between the African continent and the Caribbean. Next to it is a room for children and, further on, a temporary exhibition room.

In this last room, there was a colorful exhibition on Barbados’ intangible cultural heritage, highlighting: language;²⁵ craft know-how (basketry, weaving and pottery); Creole cuisine; musicality, including contemporary elements like local soca music peculiarities; performing arts and literature; sports; festivities and ceremonies, such as the Crop Over Festival, as well as traditional dances; religious diversity; herbal practices and local medicinal knowledge; etc. This exhibition was a celebration of the Barbadian national project and its single matrix of meta-meanings, in the form of intangible cultural heritage, in the wake of the Republic’s establishment.

The temporary exhibition *Road to Republic* is directly linked to the establishment of the Republic in 2021, as it was jointly promoted by the Division of Culture of the Office of the Prime Minister, the National Cultural Foundation of Barbados and the BMHS itself, under the curatorship of Kevin Farmer and Miguel Pena. Accord-

25 | The local dialect of English is known as *Bajan*, a corruption of “Barbadian”. *Bajan* also serves as an adjective for anything related to the country and to characterize the people.

ing to information from Natalie McGuire, from the BMHS, after being exhibited in the Aall Gallery of the BMHS, the exhibition would travel to the country's libraries throughout the year 2023. The introductory panel sets the tone of the exhibition, stating that it is a journey through 400 years of Barbados history, emphasizing the "[...] major political and social developments that have taken the nation from a place governed by a few, through to self-government and finally Republican Status."

It is important to briefly discuss the previous temporary exhibition, titled *In-surgents*, held in 2019 under the curatorship of Muslim activist and student Saamiya Cumberbatch, anti-sexual violence activist Ronelle King, and BMHS historian and museologist Natalie McGuire.²⁶ Reflecting on the social responsibility of national museums and based on the principle that "[...] museums are not neutral spaces, and accordingly aims to foster more comprehensive relationships with its communities in a postcolonial context" (Cumberbatch, King & McGuire, 2020: 30) and that Barbados history had been told through androcentric and heteronormative lenses,²⁷ various workshops were held with women and LGBTQI+ individuals to construct an exhibition about forms of activism that were not adequately documented in history books. Videos, photographs, and various objects representing what the curators called "stories of activism" were collected. Throughout the exhibition, visitors were invited to create posters on various topics with their own demands. This led to criticism of the forms taken by feminist and LGBTQI+ movements in Barbados, which were often mirrored in Euro-American models. From there, it was possible to reflect on Barbadian diversity and new forms of activism more in line with local realities. Some of these objects, such as posters, photographs, and personal documents, were displayed in the Aall Gallery in January 2023, complementing the *Road to Republic* exhibition.²⁸

Throughout 16 colorful panels with dark backgrounds akin to banners (measuring approximately one meter tall by sixty centimeters wide), the *Road to Republic* exhibition, in turn, addresses, as an "experiment," the political evolution of the country, with its symbolic arrangements generating a single matrix of meta-meanings, now through the political power. It begins with Barbados being governed as a private fiefdom of the Earl of Carlisle, the establishment of Parliament in 1639, and a first attempt at independence under the command of farmers loyal to King Charles I, in the wake of the English Civil War (1642-1649). Next, the revolts for equality and social justice by enslaved individuals and indentured workers for the creation of their own government are highlighted. It is interesting to note that these revolts, some of them led by women, are presented as African strategies for political action (*African polity*). The Emancipation and the struggle for civil rights in the nineteenth century, the mobilization and formation of unions and labor movements in the first half of the twentieth century, and the role of political parties in the second half of the same

26 | I thank Natalie McGuire for showing me the importance of the *In-surgents* exhibition in understanding the scope of the *Road to Republic* exhibition and the decolonial logic that underlies the actions of the BMHS. The curators published an article about the *In-surgents* exhibition in 2020 (Cumberbatch, King & McGuire, 2020).

27 | As said by the curators: "Despite the tremendous contributions of women and the LGBTQI+ community to Barbadian history, they have largely been ignored by historians as trailblazers for reasons that go beyond homophobia and sexism." (Cumberbatch, King & McGuire, 2020, p. 31).

28 | See attached photograph of the Aall Gallery and the exhibition (Image 1).

Image 1 | Aall Gallery,
Road to Republic, 2023
 (photograph by the author).



century, triggering the process toward independence, are themes addressed in other panels, always showcasing the black individuals who were protagonists in the main achievements. The logical conclusion of the “experiment” would be the establishment of the Republic, and thus, the exhibition explores the differences between how governance was conducted before and what is expected from the republican government that begins.

The penultimate panel, entitled *Ideologies of Nationhood / Issues of Citizenship*, addresses the construction of the national project and full citizenship as a process of seeking answers to ongoing challenges, which can only be achieved, according to the exhibition’s curators, through anti-colonial criticism and social movements.²⁹ At the top of the panel, the tone is set with a poem from 1967 by Kamau Brathwaite, one of the main references in Barbadian literature, entitled “Negus”, which states that it is not enough just to be free from the British Empire. In other words, the ideology of the nation would still be in the process of formation in the post-independence era, always under construction, and should take into consideration the “issues of citizenship”. The panel details what is meant by “issues of citizenship” as follows:

Issues of citizenship articulate a number of ways, including the continued fight for rights of the LGBTQI community, navigation of dress code restrictions and hair prejudice in government buildings and schools, vulnerabilities in legislation against domestic violence and child

²⁹ | See attached photograph of the panel (Image 2).

Nationalism, musealization and (de)coloniality in Barbados: some preliminary considerations on sexual and gender diversity amongst indigestible legacies and false paradoxes

abuse, disparities between paths of Barbadian naturalization for CARICOM citizens versus European / US citizens, growing gaps in class and poverty lines associated with race, and the marginalization of indigenous voices in debates of cultural identity. It also manifests in subtle ways through the persistent use of standard English as an institutional written language in Barbados, when Bajan is the most widespread language of communication. In the digital and post-pandemic age, this also extends to (a lack of) connection to stable internet and devices that are increasingly needed for access to education platforms.

The anti-colonial emphasis is noticeable. Among the citizenship issues that need to be addressed in the ongoing process of nation-building, the fight for LGBTQI+ rights stands out alongside the fight against racial and social inequalities in general. The demand for respect for sexual and gender diversity also takes on anti-colonial characteristics here, thereby indicting colonization (and its medical-scientific, legal-moral, and religious foundations) as the true culprit for the rejection and/or framing of experiences of sexual diversity and multiple gender expressions, which could be considered quite innovative and daring in a country that still had anti-LGBTQI+ laws at the time of this temporary exhibition and the previous one (*In-surgents*).

Image 2 | Panel from the exhibition *Road to Republic*, 2023 (photograph by the author).



In addition to the texts, the panel features three photographs. Although not captioned, it can be observed that the image in the upper right corner portrays a political act by young people in the center of Bridgetown, but it is not possible to identify the exact reason for the act. A small image in the lower center draws attention by showing the spray-painted statue of Sir Horatio Nelson, which had stood in front of Parliament since 1813. The British military man died in 1805 in the Battle of Trafalgar against France and Spain. The presence of the statue had been questioned since the 1990s, as the military man was one of the greatest defenders of the slave trade and the colonial system. In 1999, the square where the statue stood was renamed, changing from Trafalgar to National Heroes Square, although Nelson is not recognized as a national hero. As a result of the wave of global anti-racism protests following the murder of George Floyd in the United States, the statue was vandalized and the prime minister decided to remove it from the square.³⁰

The third image on the panel depicts a Pride Parade. In the image, flags and umbrellas with rainbow colors, symbolizing LGBTQI+ demonstrations around the world, can be seen. Started in 2018, Pride Parades in Barbados are just one of the many activities organized annually, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, by groups such as Pride Barbados, Equals, SHE Barbados, Barbados Gays and Lesbians Against Discrimination (B-GLAD), and Butterfly Barbados, among others, including parties, film screenings, academic symposiums, entrepreneurship events, guided tours, environmental actions, etc.³¹ These citizenship groups' mobilization during the 2021 constitutional reform to collect LGBTQI+ people's agendas for discussion in Parliament was of great importance.

Despite the importance of this image depicting the Pride Parade for the visibility of LGBTQI+ causes and the promotion of respect for sexual and gender diversity, it is noticeable that the people were photographed from behind, as were the people represented in the image of the young people's act in the streets of Bridgetown, perhaps to avoid their identification and thus their public exposure. Even though these people are in a public space and, therefore, aware that their participation in the Parade can serve to raise awareness and promote respect for sexual and gender diversity, one might preliminarily consider how the effects of anti-LGBTQI+ laws, medical-scientific discursivity, and conservative Christian moralities shape and naturalize hegemonic corporalities, reproductive sexuality, compulsory heterosexuality, and heteronormativity.

Let us return to the initial question of the paper: how was it possible, in a country where laws against LGBTQI+ people were still in force, to have academic texts on sexual and gender diversity published there, to have some Pride Parades, diverse public parties, even an LGBTQI+ film festival, and for the National Museum of that country to express the importance of the existence of sexual and gender diversity

30 | See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-barbados-statue-idUKKBN27X1UZ>

31 | See: <https://www.instagram.com/pridebarbados/>; <https://shebarbados.org/>; https://www.instagram.com/?utm_medium=copy_link

in at least two exhibitions? A panel like the one above, present in an exhibition that revises the history of a country in a museum that is *national*, is one more element to, on the one hand, critically reject the persistence of this colonial-inspired regime of power and, on the other hand, question local social movements about the need to address local problems in particular local terms, without neglecting the country's insertion into the global world-system. Perhaps here lies an element of response to the apparent paradox presented in the form of the question above.

PERSPECTIVES

Recently, a direct correlation has been shown between, on one side, institutionalized forms of repression of sexual and gender diversity and in defense of gender binary, compulsory heterosexuality, and heteronormativity, and on the other, the particularities of British colonialism and imperialism and the persistence of their ideological basis to this day, through medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity, and Christian moralities (Han & O'Mahoney, 2014; Kempadoo & DeShong, 2020; Lennox & Waites, 2013; McNamarah, 2018).

Leah Buckle, in a text published in 2020 by the British virtual collective Stonewall,³² reports that half of the independent countries with anti-sodomy laws in the world are part of the Commonwealth. The French equivalent would be the International Organization of La Francophonie.³³ France rejected anti-sodomy laws during the French Revolution, while England did so only in 1967. Although comparisons between the two entities require caution, Buckle notes that 66% of Commonwealth countries have anti-sodomy laws, whereas only 33% of La Francophonie-affiliated countries do, which, for her, demonstrates that a significant portion of the latter bloc followed France in shaping its legal system. Analyzing the specific situation of Sub-Saharan Africa, Buckle shows that colonialism associated sex with gender through biology where it did not occur before and added a legal and religious dimension to this association. While in 1910 the region's Christian population accounted for 9% of the total, this proportion jumped to 63% in 2010, largely now consisting of American evangelical churches. Thus, fighting homophobia in former British colonies would be a way to combat colonialism and imperialism and their persistent ideological forms.³⁴

Javier Corrales (2015), denouncing the timidity of research in the field of political science on LGBTQI+ rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, at the same time paradoxically noting the proliferation of these rights in the region, realizes that there is a difference in the treatment given to the issue in Latin America – former Spanish and Portuguese colonies – compared to that in the Caribbean – mainly for-

32 | See: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/african-sexuality-and-legacy-imported-homophobia>

33 | See: <https://www.francophonie.org/>

34 | Other intellectuals and activists confirm this perspective on digital platforms for the production and dissemination of information promoting sexual and gender diversity and combating homophobia as legacies of British colonization and American neo-colonialism - <http://gal-dem.com/the-commonwealth-colonialism-and-the-legacy-of-homophobia/>

mer British colonies. Jim Willets (2010: 349) had already listed some elements that could help understand the slow process of LGBTQI+ rights recognition and the “anti-LGBTI social animosity” in the Caribbean, relative to Latin America, mindful of the danger of generalizations in such a diverse region: the role of the Churches, since in Latin America the Catholic Church would not have achieved the same success as Evangelical Protestant Churches in the Caribbean in shaping individual consciences; the effects of colonialism, which are felt through the persistence of British-origin legislation in the Caribbean, even after independence, which did not occur in Latin America; the impacts of slavery, which, according to the author, would have made Caribbean men subservient and, after Emancipation, they would have sought to strengthen masculinity and virility and reject homosexuality to distance themselves from the image of the colonizer man, more than in Latin America; local ways of incorporating Human Rights, which lead to more resistance to associating LGBTQI+ rights with Human Rights in the Caribbean; etc.

“LGBT policies” are not only about civil rights issues, according to Corrales (2015), but above all about the relationship between the state and the Church that is particular to our time. In the former British colonies of the Caribbean, Christian conservatism forms transnational bonds with homophobic groups abroad, such as Evangelicals in the United States, paradoxically asserting that the “gay agenda” is a Western imposition. These countries became independent recently, and as seen with Barbados, had to build national projects to unify the racially, culturally, and politically divided nation. This happened at a time when the former metropolis was reviewing its medical-scientific discursivity, legal-moral normativity, and even Christian morality, by repealing, for example, old anti-sodomy laws, as England did in 1967. It may be that gender binary, compulsory heterosexuality, and heteronormativity have served and still serve in former British colonies, to demarcate their particularities from the former metropolis. Therefore, faced with this complexity, there seems to be no paradox when one perceives the resistance of LGBTQI+ people to persistent colonial impositions and their post-independence updates, as demonstrated in the exhibitions held by the Barbados Museum.

That is why decolonial initiatives, such as those of the Barbados Museum, a *national* museum, have been interesting for the production of knowledge that allows us to understand that, just like other aspects of contemporary Barbadian reality, sexual and gender diversity was framed by the colonial enterprise. And that, currently, it is a matter of reviewing history with an ethnographic sensitivity, now *in local terms* and attentive to indigestible legacies, to formulate critically and reflectively a more culturally diverse, socially inclusive, and politically aligned future with global challenges – also using national museums for this task.

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CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORSHIP: Not applicable.

FINANCING: Fellowship of Research Productivity, National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), process no. 306128/2021-7.

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Received on July 2nd, 2023. Accepted on March 13th, 2024.



This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001