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Geschiere, P.; Allen, R.M.

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AN INTRODUCTION: MULTIPLE CULTURES AND MULTIPLEX CITIZENSHIPS IN THE ABC-ISLANDS AND BEYOND

ROSE MARY ALLEN, UNIVERSITY OF CURAÇAO
PETER GESCHIERE, UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

The texts in this section were originally presented at a seminar which was held at the University of Curaçao, General Faculty, on the 2nd and 3rd of May 2012. The seminar theme was *What do we mean by culture? Different perspectives*. It was organized in collaboration with a research program of the University of Amsterdam called 'Culturalization of Citizenship - The Netherlands in International Perspective.'[1]
We chose this theme because we felt that further attention to the notion of culture was urgent in the present-day context, both globally, and in Curaçao and the Netherlands in particular. Cultures are increasingly exposed to globalizing forces (including transnational mobility) that interweave the local and the international, and affect societies in an ever more accelerated and intensified manner. These developments contribute to various levels of complexity of cultures in the Caribbean and elsewhere, and affect the way in which societies are developing. Culture is now recognized as the so-called 'fourth pillar' of sustainable development and was acknowledged and explored as such during the recent Small Island Development States (SIDS) Conference hosted in March of 2012 by the University of Curaçao.

With this resurfacing concern for culture, discussions have inevitably refocused on what precisely constitutes culture. The conversations and debates thus far on this theme seem to validate literary critic Raymond Williams' (1983: 87-92) emphasis on the 'complicatedness' of the concept of culture, considering its multiple definitions and interpretations. Culture has proved quite difficult to capture within the narrow confines of scholarly definitions. Its multidimensional complexity is reflected in the multiplex ways in which the concept is used. Williams (p. 90) extrapolates four common definitions of culture:

[1] This programme is jointly sponsored by NWO (the Dutch organization for scientific research), by FORUM (the Institute for Intercultural Affairs in the Netherlands) and by Oxfam-Novib. As organizers, we were particularly happy that a representative of FORUM, Dr. Chris Huinder could attend the conference and contribute very significantly to the deliberations as a discussant.

1. a developed state of mind, in the sense of a 'cultured' person;
2. a worldview and a set of lifeways, in the sense of the 'culture' of a people;
3. the means by which such a worldview and such lifeways are creatively expressed, with particular reference to the arts and human intellectual work; and/or
4. a signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.

A fifth, more recent dimension may be added, based on the concept of 'culturalization' which is being used to capture and describe a process which is unfolding universally in reaction to what is sometimes experienced as the cultural 'suffocation' of globalization (Geschiere, 2009).

As elsewhere, in Curaçao there is a re-emerging interest in culture as it relates to matters of social and economic development and discussions about values and norms. It is therefore most welcome that the University of Curaçao has decided to develop an academic program in Cultural Studies in order to address these issues. This seminar on *What do we mean by culture? Different perspectives* constitu-ted the launching of this innovative academic program as well as of a series of lectures exploring the cultural issues that are relevant to the concerns of the people of Curaçao. The seminar was therefore designed to provide an opportunity for reflection among colleagues who are involved on a daily basis with issues related to culture: not only social scientists but also social workers, activists and artists. Through this seminar, scholars from Curaçao were able to enter into ongoing dialogue with researchers from the Amsterdam-based program on 'Culturalization of Citizenship' that incorporates researchers from the Netherlands, West Africa and the Middle East. By interactively engaging the analysis and ideas of local and foreign scholars, the organizers sought to transcend the locality of the discourse on culture and to encourage fertilization across the boundaries of geographic space, language, cultures and paradigms. We also succeeded in involving both senior and junior scholars in order to ensure continuity in the thinking processes regarding culture in Curaçao. We opted for a multidisciplinary approach by inviting anthropologists, sociologists, gender specialists and philosophers to join the panels which brought together enthusiastic and passionate presenters and discussants. The seminar not only succeeded in encouraging interaction between presenters and discussants, but also between panelists and the audience, which participated very actively in the proceedings. We hope that the seminar and the following collection of the presentations made there in this section of the present volume will help to constitute a productive platform for new voices and initiatives in the study of culture.

The organization of both the seminar and of this collection of articles reflects ongoing initiatives for the further development of the new academic program on Cultural

Studies at the University of Curaçao. Besides training people – young people in particular – to examine society in a more critical way, the program will encourage research on culture and its relationship to society. Much has already been done in these areas and we would like to specifically recognize the valuable contributions of Elis Juliana, Pader Brenneker, Alejandro Paula, René Römer and Valdemar Marcha. However, there remains much more to be done in areas such as youth culture, religion and the arts.

We hope that the seminar and the articles that follow in this section will contribute to a better understanding of the vast range of issues around culture and will help to create not only a *center* for advanced Cultural Studies, but also a *culture* of advanced and critical thinking in Curaçao. We want to thank the editors of this volume for offering us this opportunity to publish the presentations made at the seminar and for their diligent and creative editing work.

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