



FOLK ARTS, ADVOCACY AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE BAHAMAS

Katrina Cartwright

Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial

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## Abstract

**Title of Thesis:** FOLK ARTS, ADVOCACY AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE BAHAMAS

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This paper examines folk arts in The Bahamas, the cultural and economic impact they have had on rural communities on islands outside of New Providence, the most populated island and center of industry in the country, and the potential influence a cultural policy can have on the revival of those communities. It examines advocacy and the role that arts administrators play in influencing policy and agitating for change, while facilitating important interactions between key members of the creative community.

By comparing the challenges faced by cultural practitioners and arts administrators in The Bahamas to those of similar communities in other countries, it is obvious that the course can be changed and an economy built on cultural enterprise that promotes and supports folk arts and encourages development in rural communities. A

cultural policy that supports and encourages cultural enterprise must, however, be a part of a larger national development plan for it to be effective.

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## Introduction

### DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND

Folk arts in The Bahamas were once economic drivers in rural communities, but the advent of mass tourism changed the economic landscape of the country. This was detrimental to Family Island communities, which have experienced depopulation and minimum economic growth and as a result, are slowly fading out of existence. To change this trajectory, a concerted effort is needed by concerned, aware individuals who have the capacity to agitate for change. Successful advocacy by arts administrators for a comprehensive cultural policy that emphasizes traditional folk arts of The Bahamas and provides access to and assistance in reaching additional markets, will lead to economic growth in rural communities.

The Bahamas has a colorful and diverse history that spans over a millennium and combines the stories of the Lucayans and the peoples of West Africa, Europe and the US in an intricate web that has shaped the lives of modern-day Bahamians. It has influenced structures of governance, religion, education, the economy and ultimately, cultural practices and beliefs that are an evolving amalgamation of the cultures that permeate the collective psyche of the people who inhabit the space. Combined with its geography, the positioning of The Bahamas as a country that is reliant on external trade for its survival

by consecutive leaders has forged connections with other western countries. These connections, while beneficial are not without their challenges.

The following chapters will continue to explore these connections and their impacts on indigenous folk art in The Bahamas. They will navigate through the history of The Bahamas and folk arts in the archipelago; the efforts that have been made to keep it alive as an important cultural resource; past efforts to implement a cultural policy; and the advocacy needed to agitate for a new one that is both relevant and democratic. Utilizing material collected from sources in The Bahamas, the Caribbean and from international publications, the efficacy of folk art as an important economic resource will be analyzed, and a case to support folk arts in The Bahamas through the development of cultural policy will be presented. The connectedness of cultural identity to a sustainable, diversified economy that has long term impact will also be explored, along with factors that inhibit and promote the establishment of a cultural policy that elevates folk art.

For the purposes of this paper, folk art is defined in the broader sense, encompassing folk music, folk literature and folk art as visual art. Creative practitioner will be used to describe individuals who have an artistic practice, and it is within this structure that folk artists reside. Similarly, creative industries and creative enterprise refer to the economy in which creative practitioners participate, with folk arts falling under this umbrella.

According to the Museum of International Folk Arts, folk art is “the art of the everyday,” “rooted in traditions that come from community and culture” and “reflects traditional art forms of diverse community groups--ethnic, tribal, religious, occupational, geographical, age or gender-based--who identify with each other and society at large.” It

is these elements that make folk arts important to the social health of a community; they keep traditions alive, bring people together and establish a strong cultural identity while providing viable economic opportunity for residents.

## Chapter I HISTORY OF THE BAHAMAS

To understand the difficulties artists and arts organizations have with the lack of government support and the detrimental impact tourism has had on folk arts, it is important to know the history of The Bahamas. The Bahamas is an archipelago of over three thousand islands, rocks and cays covering about 225,000 miles (Bethel and Glaser 8). It is located just off the eastern coast of Florida and extends about five hundred and ninety miles to the last island in the chain, Great Inagua, which is near Cape Nicholas, Haiti (Craton 11). Of the 351,461 persons recorded living in The Bahamas, according to its 2010 census, over seventy percent reside in New Providence, and the remainder are scattered unevenly throughout the other twenty-nine inhabited islands and cays (2). Nassau, the country's capital, is located on the island of New Providence which is, paradoxically, one of the smaller islands in the country, having an area of just eighty square miles (Craton 11). The city of Nassau now encompasses a large portion of the island, leading to the practice of using the name of the city and the name of the island interchangeably. The other islands are called "Out Islands" or "Family Islands," and include the islands of Andros, Long Island and Cat Island, which have a rich history of indigenous crafts that will be discussed in the following chapters.



Fig 1: Map of The Bahamas. [www.worldatlas.com](http://www.worldatlas.com).

Gaining its independence from Britain in 1973, The Bahamas is a sovereign country that rests on the edge of the Caribbean Sea. It is a part of a group of twenty Caribbean countries that are a part of CARICOM. An acronym for The Caribbean Community, CARICOM came into effect on August 1, 1973 through the Treaty of Chaguaramas (“The Original Treaty”) and brings together countries that share a similar history of colonial rule, slavery and the resulting socio-political, social, economic and cultural challenges that continue to exist in these spaces (“CARICOM”). CARICOM

plays an important role in most of the ongoing research on economics and policy that will be explored in this paper.

The geographical location and topography of The Bahamas have been central to its long and complicated history. This started with the Lucayans, who settled in The Bahamas somewhere between 500 and 600 C.E and led a generally peaceful existence until the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 which heralded their demise (Craton 17). The islands are completely flat, made up entirely of limestone, with a thin layer of rich soil on the top and the only available fresh water found close to the surface, resting on the underlying salt water (Craton 11). This meant that, for the Spaniards, the only commodity that the islands provided that were of any interest were the Lucayans, whom they systematically captured, enslaved and sent to work on plantations and in goldmines in Hispaniola, where they eventually died. It is believed that the last surviving Lucayan was seen in The Bahamas in 1513 by Ponce de León while on his quest to find the Fountain of Youth (Craton 39-42). However, DNA extracted from the tooth of an eighth or tenth century Lucayan woman that was found at Preacher's Cave in Eleuthera in 2007, provides evidence that some present day Caribbean communities have indigenous ancestry, thereby debunking this belief ("DNA").

The British annexed The Bahamas from a disinterested Spanish government in 1629 while also laying claim to Carolina in North America. Prior to this the French twice tried to settle The Bahamas (Johnson 3). In 1647, the first English settlers who came from Bermuda seeking religious freedom shipwrecked on the island of Cigateo, which they renamed Eleuthera, calling themselves the Eleutherian Adventurers. (Craton 47-59). Thus

began the colonization of the Bahama islands, an endeavor that was riddled with hardship and conflict. Pirates started making appearances in The Bahamas in the late 1600s, using the numerous rocks and cays as hideouts (Craton 74-75).

The Lord Proprietors, who were also members of the British Privy Council, were given the task of establishing a colony in The Bahamas; it appears that they also saw the islands as unprofitable, shifting their eyes elsewhere for economic opportunities. By the early 1700s, the pirate problem had become so exacerbated Britain decided that the country needed a royal governor. Woodes Rogers, a former privateer, arrived in The Bahamas in 1718 and over twenty years--amidst much adversity and trials--effectively removed pirates from the country and began building structures for commerce (Craton 63-101). During this time, and well into the mid-1700s, attacks on the island of New Providence by the Spanish and pirates, and later Americans, led to the construction of forts, several of which still stand today (Craton 99-107).

Between 1783 and 1785, individuals who remained loyal to Britain during the American Revolutionary War fled to The Bahamas from Eastern Florida with their slaves. They called themselves loyalists and established cotton plantations throughout the country, bringing a brief era of economic prosperity to the islands. Previous attempts to start plantations had been unsuccessful, and the small number of people living on the Out Islands existed in abject poverty. The loyalists' arrival tripled the population and for the first time, slaves were the majority. Unfortunately, the success of the loyalists was short-lived. Just eight years after the first migrant's arrival, pests and a depleted soil saw the end of the cotton industry (Craton 149-159).

Britain began the process of criminalizing slavery in 1807, when its subjects' participation in the slave trade was made illegal. British vessels caught transporting captured Africans were intercepted by the royal navy, the captain and crew prosecuted and the human cargo liberated and settled in the nearest British colony (Johnson 62-63). As a result, there had already been a few free Africans living in The Bahamas pre-emancipation, several of whom were Black Seminoles who migrated to Andros in 1821, fleeing the influx of colonists to Florida (Howard 280). By 1838, slaves in all British territories had been emancipated, and while this had little impact on the failed plantation system in The Bahamas, it heralded another great change for the country. After the abolition of slavery, Britain accelerated its efforts to end the transatlantic slave trade and between 1838 and 1860 thousands of liberated Africans were brought to The Bahamas. They were primarily Congoes from Portuguese Cabinda, which is now a province of Angola, and Yorubans from what is now south-western Nigeria (Craton 176).

Ostensibly, The Bahamas has a long and protracted history with the United States that can be traced to the Gullah people of the Carolinas. Its connection with the Carolinas, which dates back to the 1700s, has resulted in a striking similarity between the language and stories of the Gullah and Bahamian people (Holm 305). Another link was forged through The Contract, a farm labor program established by the Bahamian and American governments in 1943 that saw the migration of thousands of Bahamian men and women to American states to work in the agricultural fields. This had a significant impact on black Bahamians, who were able to earn enough money to open businesses for the first time in the country's history. Some Bahamians returned, but many chose to stay,

settling primarily in Florida and New York (“The Contract”). The Bahamian population in Florida is so entrenched and plentiful that popular Bahamian festivals and cultural dishes are commonplace.

Prosperity in The Bahamas was sporadic and this was especially true in the mid-to-late 1800s where hope forever glimmered on the horizon, but never manifested into anything sustainable. Economies based on blockade running during the American Civil War and, later, industries that focused on the production of pineapples, sisal and sponge existed for mere flickers of time and were impacted by disease and an incredibly destructive hurricane in 1866 that left the populace floundering. Nassau was destitute and the Out Islands existed in a state of poverty that Michael Craton, author of *A History of The Bahamas* called “primeval.” It was during the twentieth century when much needed change came in the form of two World Wars, Prohibition and tourism, which built the foundation of the modern day Bahamas (Craton 207 -244).

## Chapter II

### FOLK ARTS IN THE BAHAMAS

Bahamian culture is fundamentally oral, making most of its traditions and practices intangible and highly vulnerable. According to the UNESCO International convention on Intangible Heritage passed in 2003, intangible cultural heritage is defined as:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills — as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith — that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (Bethel and Glaser 9-10)

Indeed, the unique elements of Bahamian culture provide insight into the attitudes, colorful expressions and idiosyncrasies of the Bahamian people. Unfortunately, the very intangibility that underlies this uniqueness has also contributed to the decline of important traditions that have been key economic drivers of rural communities in The

Bahamas. Folk art--crafts, music and storytelling--at one time provided significant revenue to families in these communities, and while appearing disparate in their physical manifestations, are all linked.

### History Of Folk Art

All Bahamian folk arts have a common element, storytelling. In Daniel Crowley's 1966 text on storytelling in *The Bahamas*, he likens Bahamian folktales to a "kaleidoscope with its finite number of bits of colored glass," that he believed could be classified as an art form (Crowley 5, 141). The music, crafts and even the language of The Bahamas is grounded in the tradition of storytelling, which has several major categories including: Ol' story, proverbs and riddles and songstory (Bethel and Glaser 15).

Of the three forms listed, Ol' story is considered to be endangered, as the entrenched community events that kept it alive are slowly becoming distant memories (Bethel and Glaser 7-8). Proverbs and riddles are heard in the everyday speech of Bahamians which lends itself to metaphor and much embellishment. The continued proliferation of songstory can be found in the ring plays, or children's games, that are a staple of the schoolyard, and in popular Bahamian music, which provides, for the most part, factual accounts of historical or notable events (Glinton 7). This differs greatly from Ol' story, which traditionally is based in the fantastical and gives the narrator the freedom to weave a tale that carries a flavor that is unique to the storyteller. While there is room for the storyteller to showcase his creativity, there is a structure that he must subscribe to; Crowley calls these structures motifs. These motifs are a traditional formula for the way a

story begins, the way the audience interacts with the story and the narrator, and the way the story ends. For example an Ol' story will typically open with the formula:

“Once upon a time  
Was a very good time  
Monkey chew tobakker  
And spit white lime  
Bullfrog jump from limb to limb  
And Mosquiter keep up the time.” (Glinton 10)

This immediately transports the listener to a place outside of reality, setting the stage for the storyteller's theatrics that paint a picture that includes spirits, talking animals and imaginary beings. It is Ol' story that is African in origin, while ring plays, schoolyard chants and other storytelling practices have a strong American and British influence (Glinton 5-6). It is important to note that Bahamian storytelling tradition invites the participation of people of any age—removing this barrier and involving all community members.

The tradition of storytelling has also been linked to plaiting straw. In the early to mid-1900s and, in some cases, the latter part of the 1900s, a lack of electricity in rural communities in The Bahamas prohibited access to more modern forms of entertainment. Storytelling was a way for families to extend the workday, providing entertainment while plaiting straw or making straw products by lamp, lantern or firelight. This practice augmented a sense of community and identity in individuals and ensured that beliefs, traditions and histories were passed down to the younger generation (Glinton 7-8).

The strawcraft industry began in the 1720s and was revived in the 1920s by local women (Turner 28-29). It has been an important source of income for Bahamians living in poverty-stricken communities in the Out Islands, has enabled families to educate their children and given individuals the opportunity to achieve financial stability. Ivy Simms was one of several women who cemented her place in this movement when she opened a strawcraft factory in Long Island and employed many young women from the community. She made work for export and was considered a pioneer during her time (*“Strawcraft”*).

Bahamian strawcraft is made from the dried, young leaves of a variety of palms that grow wild throughout the islands. Once they have been prepared, these leaves are woven into plait, which is then used to make items like placemats, floor mats, hats, handbags, baskets and a plethora of other products as seen in Figure 2. There are almost two hundred weave patterns used in traditional strawcraft, many of which have colorful names like Sour Sop, Jacob’s Ladder, Peas n’ Rice and Take Through. In Andros, the Red Bays settlement is known for its coiled basketry, which was brought over by the Black Seminoles who fled Florida in the early nineteenth century to escape re-enslavement (*“Strawcraft”*).

Historically the strawcraft industry has been dominated by women who established small and mid-sized businesses and provided employment in rural communities. The materials and methods used in this industry have minimal environmental impact; can employ individuals with diverse levels of skill; require little overhead in the form of utilities, specialized equipment or the importation of materials;

and allows a tradition that showcases the creativity of these communities to flourish (“*Strawcraft*”). With little initial capital investment, a small business that specializes in strawcraft can be formed, making independent financial stability a possibility for craftspeople in rural communities.



Fig 2: Bahamian strawcraft [*TheBahamasWeekly.com*; *Eric Rose*]

Storytelling is also a fundamental component of traditional Bahamian music.

There are three indigenous forms of music that while somewhat different have a common sound element—the goat skin drum. Junkanoo, Rake n’ Scrape and Goombay have changed over time but are essentially still the same.

Junkanoo, unlike its musical counterparts, is the single traditional Bahamian cultural practice that incorporates “all oral creative arts” (Bethel and Glaser 12). It is a vibrant amalgamation of music, dance, storytelling and visual art that is grassroots in

origin and involves thousands of Bahamians from across the socio-economic spectrum in months of preparation to produce an hours-long parade competition that can only be seen in the early mornings of Boxing and New Year's days (E. Bethel ix). The tradition of Junkanoo is so entrenched in the Bahamian psyche that Christmas in The Bahamas is synonymous with Junkanoo and thousands of residents across the archipelago eagerly anticipate the moment every year when they can dance through designated parade areas or view the spectacle from the sidelines (E. Bethel 1).

Junkanoo is an integral part of many Bahamian communities, with the "shack" being at the center. Shack is a colloquial term used to describe the building where all costumes, floats and other Junkanoo accoutrements are built. Community members work together throughout the year to create costumes and parade floats and choreograph dances and practice the music that is a signature of Junkanoo. These collaborations involve up to a thousand persons who arrange themselves into highly organized, well prepared groups (N. Bethel, "Economic"). While the newest iteration of the festival has become highly commercialized, the event still maintains its ephemeral quality, with costumes that have taken months to build being disposed of immediately after the parade. Most of the musical instruments have also stayed true to the "junk" found in Junkanoo; the goat skin drum along with other instruments, are still made using found materials (E. Bethel 10).



Fig 3: Junkanooers blowing their trombones on Boxing Day. [www.Complexmania.com](http://www.Complexmania.com).

The origin of Junkanoo has been subject to much speculation; recent research has tied the practice to a fusion of West African sacred rituals (Rommen, *Funky Nassau* 120), while others have theorized that it came from a powerful eighteenth century West African leader named John Conuu or Conny who traded slaves on the Gold Coast (E. Bethel 10). Timothy Rommen posits in his book *Funky Nassau: Roots, Routes, and Representation in Bahamian Popular Music* that Junkanoo combines both of these elements, including Christianity, to create a form of expression that references African and European traditions and engenders a strong sense of cultural identity among Bahamians (Rommen, *Funky Nassau* 118-129). Festivals connected to John Conuu are found only in former British territories in the New World and their original manifestations included terrifying

masks designed to frighten (E. Bethel 10). The Bahamas' Junkanoo, however, is unique in its expression.

Like Junkanoo, Rake n' Scrape continues to utilize the same readily available instruments and found objects that were originally used to create the sound that is synonymous with this traditional folk music. Prevalent on the Out Islands, it was played at social events to accompany "quadrilles, jumping dances and ring dances" (Rommen, *Liner Notes* 4-5). Musicians beat on the goat skin drum, played the concertina and scraped the carpenter's saw to create a sound reminiscent of West African instruments while singing traditional songs that told their stories (Justilien, "Rake n' Scrape"). These events marked occasions like weddings, holidays and other significant events and were for adults who looked forward to enjoying themselves after a long day of work (Rommen, *Liner Notes* 4-5).

The origin of Rake 'n' Scrape is difficult to pinpoint, but it appeared to have developed on several islands simultaneously and incorporated a diverse range of sounds that can be traced to the Turks and Caicos Islands and other Caribbean countries. The diversity of this music was celebrated at the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife in Washington DC, in 1994 (Justilien, "Rake n' Scrape"). The Smithsonian maintains an extensive collection of recordings of Rake 'n' Scrape music including the sounds of two groups from Cat Island, "Ophie and Da Websites" and "Bo Hog and Da Rooters" (Rommen, *Liner Notes* 1).

When The Bahamas began to market itself as a mass tourist destination in the early twentieth century, people on the islands migrated to New Providence for work and

the tradition of Rake ‘n’ Scrape was in danger of dying out. The survival of Rake ‘n’ Scrape is attributed to Charles Carter, who put this music form firmly in the realm of folklore by separating it from the slowly modernizing Goombay and aired it regularly on his radio show “Young Bahamians” (Rommen, *Liner Notes* 56).

Goombay music continues the storytelling tradition that is the lifeblood of Bahamian communities. The name *Goombay* is West African in origin and comes from the “goom-ba” drums (“Annual”), which are made from goatskin like those used in Junkanoo and Rake n’ Scrape, and strongly influenced by the calypso music of Trinidad and Tobago (Justilien, “Goombay”). Goombay music has been used as a tool to promote tourism in The Bahamas since the late 1930s when musicians were given the opportunity to perform this music around the world, building its popularity nationally and internationally (Justilien, “Goombay”). Today, Goombay Festivals are held in New Providence and Grand Bahama during the summer months under the auspices of The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism (“Goombay”) and in Miami as a way to celebrate the strong Bahamian connection that many Floridians have with The Bahamas through their shared history (“Annual”).

Pam Burnside, proprietor of Doongalik Studios and co-founder of Creative Nassau, laments the loss of indigenous traditions and practices, blaming the current state of Bahamian society on this phenomenon. She says:

It grounded you in what being Bahamian really meant, who you are as a people.

Unfortunately, we have lost that in this modern age. We no longer have that sense of community that was so important to us growing up. You claimed everyone as

your family because everyone was related. You respected each other and listened to the stories of the ancestors because that was how the traditions were passed on from generation to generation. You took those traditions with you because that is what made you unique. (Burnside)

Cultural activist and academic Dr. Ian Bethell-Bennett supports Daniel Crowley's belief that the lack of development and subsequent lack of communication and trade fueled the social structures that allowed oral traditions to thrive on the Out Islands. However, in direct contrast to ensuring deeply rooted cultural growth and the development of unique creative expressions, the economic growth of these islands was stymied, and according to Burnside, the effort to correct this neglect was so imbalanced that folk arts were relegated to the bottom of desirable occupations and abandoned in favor of white-collar jobs.

#### The Role Folk Arts Have Played In Local Economic Development

Strawcraft has been a staple in The Bahamas' cultural product for decades. Acting independently from government, straw vendors have been "organizing themselves into unions and cooperative associations since the 1930s" (Turner 30). Through their enterprising spirit, straw vendors and craftspersons were able to establish a profitable industry that created a network between the Out Islands and New Providence and ensured that tourists would be able to leave The Bahamas with an authentic Bahamian product. The Market Plaza, that accommodated about five hundred stalls, was destroyed in 1974 (Turner 30) and rebuilt six years later. Tragedy struck again in 2001 when an arsonist burned the thriving marketplace to the ground (Smith), leaving vendors without a venue

to sell their wares. The Straw Market that stands today was opened in 2011 by the then Prime Minister, the Honorable Hubert A. Ingraham, who at the opening ceremony said, “Your new Straw Market is...the flagship venue for the display of Bahamian crafts” (Ingraham).

For decades the Nassau Straw Market and Junkanoo, have epitomized “the national tourist product” (Bethel and Glaser 15-16). While this branding has been led by the government of The Bahamas, the link between the strawcraft industry and tourism was established in 1936 by women entrepreneurs from Fox Hill in Nassau. The entrepreneurial spirit generated by this industry could be seen in ventures throughout the archipelago, particularly in Long Island and Cat Island where straw factories and trade facilitated the export of straw goods to New Providence. Many others have followed in these footsteps, have elevated the craft to a fine art, have exported strawcraft products internationally and have garnered the support of advocates like Creative Nassau. Creative Nassau believes that this industry has provided and can continue to “provide opportunities for Bahamians to participate in the economy as entrepreneurs” (“*Strawcraft*”).

Unfortunately, vendors have been selling crafts from foreign producers at the Straw Market since 1980 (Smith), a situation that has gotten progressively worse. This has been attributed to the decline in strawcraft and plait produced on the Family Islands (Turner 30). Today, only a handful of vendors carry locally made products and many of the vendors are not Bahamian (Bahama Pundit). Dr. Nicolette Bethel, co-founder of the annual theater festival Shakespeare in Paradise, argues that for the Straw Market to be

restored to its former glory and truly be a venue that displays authentic Bahamian crafts, it should be closed, reconfigured or completely redone. The other option would be using “the market to fix it.” In this scenario a new marketplace, owned and maintained by the government but not controlled by it, would provide a place for brokers of local products to sell their wares to a domestic and tourist market. Bethel believes that these products would be of higher quality and more desirable, competing with the lower quality goods at the Straw Market.

Cultural activists have been lobbying for the recognition of the folk arts as foundational to cultural identity for decades. E. Clement Bethel, the first director of culture in an independent Bahamas and a staunch advocate for the arts, believed that calling attention to cultural identity through contemporary eyes could help cement this effort. In this spirit, he wrote the stage play *The Legend of Sammie Swain* over twenty years ago. Adapted from a folk tale originating in Cat Island, the play tells the story of a handicapped man named Sammie Swain who fell in love with the village beauty and sold his soul to the devil for revenge after she refused his marriage proposal. Performed as a ballet at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, then as a musical at the Goombay Summer Festival between 1960 and 1970, the full version *Sammie Swain* was performed in 1985 for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and in 2014 as a part of the Shakespeare in Paradise repertory (Gibson).

In addition to privately run cultural festivals like Shakespeare in Paradise that showcases contemporary Bahamian works like *Sammie Swain*, there are a large number of festivals that are the result of public and private partnerships and several others that are

planned and implemented solely by The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. These festivals include regattas, homecomings, fests like Pineapple Fest and Crab Fest, Junkanoo, Goombay Festival and the Tru-Tru Bahamian Festival. While each focuses on a different aspect of Bahamian culture, their markets are primarily domestic and each is designed to promote a sense of unity through culture, encourage Bahamians to visit their hometowns on the Out Islands and spend money to support those economies (“Festivals”). However, it is argued that these are missed opportunities to develop a cultural tourism product that can attract the international community, not by changing the core of these festivals, but by expanding them and marketing them to a broader audience. This is particularly the case with Junkanoo, which is widely supported by Bahamians but very few tourists turn out to see this spectacular event (N. Bethel, “Economic”).

### The Role Folk Arts Have Played In Tourism

Historically, folk art has been essential to the healthy economies of rural communities on the Out Islands. Burnside believes that the excessive promotion of white collar jobs and the subsequent belittling of makers--people who worked with their hands--led to a heavy dependence on resort tourism to keep Bahamians employed. There is some truth in this as the *2016 State of the Nation Report* states that tourism, largely supported by the resort, hotel and cruise ship industry, contributes 60% of the GDP; financial services is the second largest contributor at 11-15% of the total GDP. However, in the past forty years, The Bahamas has experienced only 2.8% average GDP growth, an issue that is reflected in the high rate of unemployment, particularly among youth, which in 2016 was 30% (Commonwealth of The Bahamas, *Vision 2040* 26). This report painted

a grim picture for The Bahamas and, among the many challenges outlined, was the increased depopulation of the Family Islands. This phenomenon is by no means new. It has been happening for decades as evidenced in Michael Gibney's thesis on Bahamian music in the 1960s to 2000s, where he notes the "mass emigration" to Nassau of Cat Islands residents seeking employment (Gibney 64). This occurrence was true for most of the Family Islands and the economic recession of 2008 further exacerbated the problem.

During the 1950s and 1960s Bahamian nightclubs, particularly those in urban areas, were popular entertainment spots for locals and tourists. Live entertainment was in demand and these clubs were "virtual incubators of Bahamian music" (Gibney 15). Cultural tourism existed in The Bahamas, long before a focus on mass tourism--hotel, resort and cruise ship tourism--overshadowed it.

It is evident that before The Bahamas gained independence from Britain in 1973, cultural tourism was one of the anchors of its economy. There were several decisions that were made at the governmental level that shaped the new tourism model for The Bahamas. Just after independence the Ministry of Tourism began to actively support local entertainment on cruise ships docking in Nassau (Rommen, *Funky Nassau* 175). The cruise ships paid more and the best entertainers were lured away from local clubs. This was just the beginning of a shift of focus to the "package tourist"--the cruise ship and all inclusive resort tourist--and eventually the local clubs were forced to close (Gibney 20). Today, resorts like Atlantis, Sandals, Superclub Breezes and, most recently Bahamar, dominate the tourism market, but while large numbers of tourists flock to these hotels, few of them spend money with local vendors. Recently, the current tourism minister

stated that “The Bahamas needs to get its six million annual visitors to spend more money” and that the country needs a “‘radically different’ approach...to tourism development in the country” (McKenzie, “We”). It appears that the ideology of policymakers may have gone full circle and they are now attempting to utilize the methods of the 1950s to attract cultural tourists to The Bahamas.

Cultural activists and policymakers see Junkanoo as a possible cornerstone of cultural tourism in The Bahamas, but there is still much work to do before it can realize its potential. In her 2014 economic impact assessment of Junkanoo, Dr. Nicolette Bethel’s findings show that the labor contribution to the creation of costumes, practicing music and dance of individual participants can be valued conservatively at \$300 week, assuming the person worked forty hours per week (20). Given that Junkanooers can spend six months or more working in the Junkanoo shack and that this number does not include the individual’s financial contributions to purchasing materials, it becomes difficult to quantify the value of the industry. However, one can infer that a restructuring of Junkanoo as an economically viable industry that creates both direct and indirect impact, can provide significant employment opportunities for Bahamians.

With this understanding of the importance of culture to local economic development it would be logical that strategies would be employed and policies developed and implemented to create an environment conducive to the growth of cultural industries. Dr. Ian Bethell-Bennett points out the challenge in this change in direction when he states, “You’ve already killed the industry; it can’t just be brought back. It’s

now a whole new industry, a different industry. But you can't rebuild what was there before, you have to start anew" (Bethell-Bennett).

However, it would be remiss to ignore the attempts that have been made to support and promote the creative industries in the last four decades. Between 2002 and 2007 a National Commission on Cultural Development was created to "craft the direction that the country should be moving in culturally" (N. Bethel, Personal Interview).

According to Dr. Nicolette Bethel, while the Commission was short lived, the activities that came out of this effort breathed new life into The Bahamas' cultural scene and inspired cultural practitioners to work to build the industry independently. The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas also opened its doors in 2003, and while its mandate is not directly related to folk art, it has influenced the growth and diversification of the visual art sector in The Bahamas significantly in the past fourteen years. The museum's galleries are reserved for the display of contemporary and traditional fine art, but it uses its gift store as a platform for craftspeople to showcase their wares.

Junkanoo Carnival was also supposed to spur the growth of cultural tourism in the country, but shrouded in controversy since its inception and continually functioning at a deficit, after just three years the current administration has decided to discontinue government funding to this event. Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Michael Pintard cites Junkanoo Carnival's lack of focus on indigenous culture as the reason for this termination and suggests that the event should be privatized ("Carnival").

Bethel argues that government's focus on "supporting the masses" is the key contributing factor to the failure of these major initiatives. Instead, investment in

“independent, sustainable, economically developing industries” would be more effective and have long term, broader impact. She also states that another contributing factor is the highly politicized nature of anything government supported. It impedes planning and implementation and unfortunately, every time the government changes so do the projects; indeed the government has changed in The Bahamas every five years since 2002. Further exacerbating the plight of independent creative practitioners are the lack of adequate intellectual property laws, which will be further discussed in chapter four, and exorbitant import taxes that make it difficult for local makers to compete with imported, cheaper goods.

## Chapter III

### THE REVIVAL OF RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOLK ARTS

Folk art as a component of economic development in rural communities is not a new idea. Research has shown that traditional arts “support economic development by strengthening communities, stimulating demand for local products, and supporting the economic activities of other local businesses” (EY 4). As evidenced by the success of the strawcraft industry in the early 1900s, creative practitioners need to exist in a space that supports small business enterprise by allowing access to trade and markets. This is where the support of government agencies is needed. Without the support of the public sector, the folk arts sector will not be able to be “connected to the commercial marketplace, which inhibits its ability to grow” (EY 7). Of course, one cannot promote the economic development of rural communities through the folk arts without considering social and cultural impact. Creating economic value for indigenous art and strengthening the culture of a community go hand-in-hand.

#### Current Efforts To Revive The Folk arts

While folk arts in rural communities in The Bahamas are in no way as widespread or robust as they have been in the past, there are public and private entities that have worked hard to ensure that they do not disappear from the Bahamian consciousness or physical landscape. The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC),

Bahamas Junkanoo Carnival, the Plait Lady, Doongalik Studios, Shakespeare in Paradise, the Tru-Tru Bahamian Festival, Jollification and a multitude of farmers markets and other venues have all worked independently or within government agencies to create moments where residents and visitors can experience authentic Bahamian culture through the folk arts.

BAIC is constantly working to create training and retail opportunities for local craftspeople. Its mission “to improve the quality of life for all the Bahamian people through the creation of a stable, fully employed society in which every Bahamian who is willing and able will become economically empowered” is reflected through its many initiatives and services which include business advice and counseling and “start-up capital through small business window loans from The Bahamas Development Bank (BDB), The Bahamas Entrepreneurial Venture Fund, and the grant of Crown Land” (“BAIC Vision”). Their last significant initiative was held in 2009 under the theme “Take back our souvenir industry.” This involved providing training opportunities for over a thousand artisans throughout the archipelago (“BAIC Chairman”). While the project was successful it appeared to be short lived. A recent probe into BAIC’s finances has revealed outstanding debts of three million dollars, making more projects of this kind unlikely for the foreseeable future (McKenzie, “BAIC”).

Bahamas Junkanoo Carnival provided a platform for Bahamian musicians to create new music, local craftspeople to sell their wares and costume designers to experiment with including indigenous material in their work, but after almost three years of existence it became a faded carbon copy of Trinidad’s Carnival. It was for this reason

that the current administration has decided to discontinue government support. The justification for this decision is that the government cannot use taxpayer dollars to fund an event that is an “appropriation of someone else’s culture.” Instead it is suggested that the event be “developed and promoted as a private enterprise” and Junkanoo separated from Carnival (“Carnival”).

In the modern day strawcraft industry, the “Plait Lady” is a name that all craftspeople know. Claire Sands, the “Plait Lady”, traveled throughout the country in the 1990s, purchasing plait from weavers and continuing the trade network that had been previously established by strawcraft entrepreneurs (“*Strawcraft*”). Her craft-store, also called The Plait Lady, is located in Marina Village next to the popular Atlantis resort. This strategic location ensures that visitors have access to authentic, well-made Bahamian crafts and broadens that market for craftspeople in rural communities.

Doongalik Studios fills a similar role but its focus is domestic, not international. It provides a venue for craftspeople to connect with the local market through its gift shop and weekly farmers market (“Farmers”). Creative Nassau is also providing a venue for craftspeople to sell their wares through its weekly crafts and folk arts market in Downtown Nassau’s Pompey Square. This is done in collaboration with the Downtown Nassau Partnership and has been garnering a following of supporters (“Nassau”).

Jollification and the Tru-Tru Bahamian Festival are each held once a year and provide a platform for all folk arts to be showcased. Jollification is a major fundraiser for the Bahamas National Trust (“Jollification”) while the Tru-Tru Bahamian Festival is the

brainchild of the Ministry of Tourism (Burnside). They both focus on a domestic market but have slowly begun to capture the attention of visitors.

Shakespeare in Paradise has showcased a series of Bahamian, Caribbean and adapted Shakespearean plays that have been a part of the Shakespeare in Paradise Festival for almost ten years. Festival co-founders Philip and Nicolette Bethel, inspired by the role that the Oregon Shakespeare Festival played in stimulating tourism in Ashland, Oregon, thought, “Why not do something like this in Nassau?” Their model includes Shakespeare modified to reflect Bahamian culture, and contemporary plays arising out of The Bahamas and the Caribbean (N. Bethel, Personal Interview). Shakespeare in Paradise is now a member of the Shakespeare Theater Association (STA), which connects it to theatre companies globally and gives festival members access to mentorship and training opportunities (“Shakespeare”).

These efforts, while small and disjointed, suggests that there is a genuine interest in the folk arts by both residents and visitors and a desire to support the tradition. In order for initiatives like these to grow and expand there must be economic stimulus from government agencies through the creation and implementation of a cultural policy. This policy will guide the creation and amendment of policies that support the creative industries, particularly folk arts. To do this successfully however, there must be “cultural understanding and cultural strategies,” both of which must be enshrined in a cultural policy (Borup ch. 1).

## Building Communities And Economies Through Folk Arts

Pam Burnside, co-founder and president of Creative Nassau, notes that small and medium sized businesses are the backbone of a country. Creative Nassau is working with government agencies to make it easier for these businesses to thrive. If successful in its efforts, one can infer that creative industries in the Family Islands will grow and proliferate, boosting those economies and potentially reversing the mass migration to New Providence.

To understand the potential long-term impact that efforts like these have had on communities that have a strong tradition of folk art, one must look at other communities that have experienced and dealt with similar challenges. The Isle of Skye and the Gullah-Geechee of the Carolinas have similar challenges to those faced by The Bahamas. They are both island cultures that have limited exportable natural resources and their economies are heavily dependent on tourism. The Bahamas and the Gullah/Geechee in particular are nearly identical, with the biggest difference being geography and citizenship.

The Isle of Skye is the largest island in the Inner Hebrides, which is an archipelago off the coast of mainland Scotland. It boasts a breathtaking landscape and although it is sparsely populated, it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Scotland. The island has a rich cultural scene, with dozens of art galleries, craft studios, museums and castles open to the curious tourist. These sites, in addition to Skye's flourishing whiskey, tweed and shellfish industries, have created a booming economy on an island that has minimal infrastructure and a small local clientele (Magan). Yet between

2013 and 2014 approximately 1.3 million people visited the island, putting significant strain on existing infrastructure, including bathroom facilities at national parks, accommodations and transportation. This led the Highland Council to publish a paper outlining short and long-term goals for the Isle of Skye. The goals include pursuing UNESCO World Heritage status to assist the island in attracting investment so that it could better accommodate the many visitors coming to its shores annually (“World”). Although the goals appear practical and attainable, had the council anticipated the rise in tourism numbers they could have pre-empted the crisis by ensuring that visitor facilities and infrastructure on the island were upgraded earlier.

As mentioned previously, Bahamian culture is closely related to that of the Gullah. While it is intangible and threatened by outside forces like The Bahamas, it received support to ensure that important traditions and practices did not disappear. The Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor was established to strengthen and safeguard the remaining traditional Gullah/Geechee culture in the region through education and experiences that allow visitors to participate in this unique culture. The corridor is supported through collaborations between The National Park Service, the State historic preservation offices of North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, community organizations and partners and the federal commission, comprised of local representatives, that manages it. The Gullah people lived in isolation on barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina in rural communities for many years before a bridge was built, connecting them to the mainland. This began to change the communities but the strong cultural connection and the retention of African traditions that were the result of

this isolation, have ensured that this connection was neither lost nor diluted. The Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor has also played a significant role in this, and by raising awareness and inviting others to participate, they have designed an authentic cultural experience that respects and preserves the culture of the Gullah/Geechee people and provides economic opportunity (“Gullah”).

There are also success stories in The Bahamas, small creative enterprises that continue to have an impact on the local economy, albeit on a small scale. Along with the Plait Lady, Androsia and Bahama Handprints share two common goals: provide employment for Bahamians through the creation of crafts and provide access to quality crafts for locals and visitors. Androsia and The Plait Lady have combined these goals with the desire to preserve and support folk arts and cultural heritage on the Out Islands. They both have a more rustic aesthetic than Bahama Handprints, and of all of the small businesses discussed, The Plait Lady has had the broadest reach in terms of spreading economic opportunity to the Family Islands (“*Strawcraft*”).

The story of Androsia, while inspiring, is overshadowed by the lack of policy that has contributed to the company’s deterioration. Founded in 1970 by entrepreneur Rosi Birch, Androsia sought to provide employment opportunities for women in Andros. Soon the batik fabric manufactured by the company became popular among Bahamians and even more local women and girls were employed as the business grew. Unfortunately, after decades of success, Androsia fell victim to The Bahamas’ inadequate intellectual property laws, which do little to protect creative practitioners. A larger company, that once had exclusive rights to sell Androsia fabric, copied the designs and look of the

fabric and had it mass produced overseas for a lower price. With no copyright protection under current Bahamian law, the founder of Androsia watched sales slowly decline and was forced to lay off staff. Her outlet was the publication of a scathing article printed in the local newspaper, expressing her outrage at the injustices perpetuated by a system that does not appear to value the creative industries (Birch).

The history of Bahama Hand Prints is less tumultuous than that of Androsia. They are both in the business of printing fabric, but Bahama Hand Prints uses silk screens to create its one-of-a-kind prints and produces a variety of goods, including clothing and bags, for a higher end clientele. It was established in 1966 and now operates under new owners who continue to work within the vision of the company's founders ('About us'). With the implementation of a strong cultural policy, these businesses would be more successful and existing or nascent folk arts businesses would flourish because greater demand would stimulate more growth. However, for this to happen, artisans must be confident that their products are protected under intellectual property laws, be able to penetrate a domestic and international tourist market, have access to more entrepreneurial opportunities and be able to price their work competitively through the reduction of import tax.

According to Burnside, Creative Nassau is in conversations with the Ministry of Finance to assist individuals seeking to apply for import concessions under the Industries Encouragement Act. This act allows manufacturers to import equipment and raw materials duty-free or at a reduced rate of duty. Unfortunately the procedure has been quite onerous for many in the past; Creative Nassau is hoping that their involvement will

ease the process. The July 2017 listing of The Bahamas rates of duty show some reduction in import tax on items like artist paint, now 25%, and original artwork, 10%; these are the exception as these low rates do not apply to the full range of materials that creative practitioners use when making products. Many materials are subject to duties of 45% in addition to 7.5% Valued Added Tax (Commonwealth of The Bahamas, Bahamas Customs and Excise Dept). Bethel suggests that the reason for these high import rates lies in The Bahamas' history as a mercenary and mercantile culture; indeed, finished items for retail sale generally have a lower import rate than the raw material used to make them.

### Stimulating Economic Growth Through Folk Arts

By their very nature, folk art stimulates economies through tourism because the cultural tourist is on a quest to experience local culture that is free of the trappings of curated touristic experiences. Borrup speaks about “big box” solutions, like large resorts that employ thousands, in *The Creative Community Builders Handbook* and supports the view communicated by Burnside, Bethel and Bethell-Bennett--that these supposed solutions are ultimately detrimental to communities (Borrup ch. 2). He attributes their failure to having “fewer equitable, balanced, and sustainable impacts” and argues that, “a diversified economy that is rooted in a community’s assets and in tune with its identity provides a more stable base and returns more to the local economy” (Borrup ch. 2). This was proven on the Isle of Skye, with the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor and to a smaller extent with Androsia, which did, for a time, provide gainful employment for women on the island of Andros.

Sixty percent of the country's GDP comes from tourism and the lack of growth in the past twenty years has led to ongoing discussions on the need to diversify the economy (Commonwealth of The Bahamas, *Vision 2040* 60). In the *2016 State of the Nation Report* it was determined that "the most significant diversification issues ...included:

1. Tourism in The Bahamas is predominantly reliant on one market, the United States;
2. Ownership of the tourism industry is concentrated among a few foreign investors;
3. The archipelagic make-up of The Bahamas is in itself a distinct and important competitive advantage. Yet tourism is concentrated primarily in New Providence and Paradise Island; and
4. The absence of quality value added services and well-formed clusters around the tourist product. (Commonwealth of The Bahamas, *Vision 2040* 67)

Even though the report acknowledges the need to diversify it did not identify indigenous culture, particularly folk arts as a potential contributor to economic growth within the tourism sector.

However, many discussions revolve around methods to get the six million visitors who come to Bahamian shores to spend more money. Tourism Minister Dionisio D'Aguilar traces this challenge to the government's focus on number of tourists instead of the economic value of each visitor (McKenzie, "We"). This value can be increased by diversifying economic sources, particularly through cultural initiatives, thereby catering to more visitor interests.

Cultural tourism should have been included in the 2016 report as studies by the US Travel Association reveal that about seventy percent of tourists travel to experience the culture of the places they visit. They stay longer and spend more money with locals, distributing the economic impact over a wider group of constituents (Goss). Heritage tourism or cultural tourism is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation “as traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present” (Gibson). Though cultural tourism has proven a viable economic resource for communities it also serves another purpose as it augments the identity of residents and ensures that important traditions and practices are shared and passed on (Goss). In 2012, the World Trade Organization (WTO) conducted a global survey, and through this, they identified six categories that are considered essential to the success of cultural tourism:

1. Handicrafts and visual arts
2. Gastronomy and culinary
3. Social practices, rituals, and festive events
4. Music and performing arts
5. Oral traditions and expressions
6. Knowledge and practices concerning nature. (Goss)

Folk arts pervade this list, but with many creative practitioners choosing to relocate to New Providence or discontinuing work, incentives, training and access to markets are needed to stimulate the revival of folk arts in Out Island communities.

While the various festivals and public and private entities provide platforms for the folk arts, there must still be visitor demand for them, so a smart marketing strategy must also be developed. Reviews written on social media, in blogs or on websites like *Trip Advisor* are a modern form of word-of-mouth that have proven effective and economical. To utilize these marketing outlets, the creative practitioner would need a dynamic, viable product and a social media account of their own that is regularly updated to share ideas, experiences and new products.

Creative Nassau has been working closely with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Central Bank of The Bahamas to raise awareness of the creative economy, also known as the orange economy, in The Bahamas and use their capital to facilitate opportunities for creative practitioners. In his article addressing this subject, Keith Nurse argues that “small developing states of the Caribbean can maximize the potential of the creative or orange economy by fostering policy innovation, generating new business models and promoting creative entrepreneurship” (Nurse, “Orange”). This stance is further supported by the research documented in the book *The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity* that was published by the IDB and succinctly outlines the significant economic impact that the creative industries have on their countries. Nurse also highlights the many virtues of the digital economy, which provides greater opportunities for makers to market their products to a wider audience for less money (Nurse, “Orange”).

Many folk artists do not have the requisite knowledge to navigate social media platforms or even begin to think about having a website. This is where organizations like

BAIC can expand professional training for creative practitioners by engaging island locals in the designing and implementation of technology workshops, focused on familiarizing participants with digital marketing tools. However, this would be an expensive undertaking as there are many people living on the Family Islands who do not own a computer and in some cases, inadequate infrastructure in communities make it difficult to use any technology.

The Ministry of Tourism could also assist in this effort by creating a portal on their website that lists vendors, their products and where they can be found. It can also continue its Two Fly Free campaign to promote domestic tourism on the Family Islands. This campaign was re-introduced in 2012 to encourage travel to the Out Islands. Residents and international visitors booking hotels through this program receive free airfare to the island they are traveling to, sometimes halving travel expenses (Adderley). The Ministry of Tourism is the most well-funded government ministry in The Bahamas. It has extensive resources to collect and compile up-to-date data on international visitors, tourism offices around the world and a strong social media and internet presence. Effectively using these existing resources to market the folk arts to a wider audience would be practical and cost effective and give folk artists access to a previously unreachable platform.

## Chapter IV CULTURAL POLICY IN THE BAHAMAS AND THE CARIBBEAN REGION

In the revised 1999 document “The Arts and Canada’s Cultural Policy,” cultural policy is defined as:

...the expression of a government’s willingness to adopt and implement a set of coherent principles, objectives and means to protect and foster its country’s cultural expression. The arts are the very foundation of this expression. In an age when countries are becoming increasingly interdependent economically and politically, promoting cultural expression by means of a coherent cultural policy for the arts is a valuable way to emphasize and define what distinguishes one country from another. (Jackson)

The responsibility for promoting awareness and supporting the continuity of a country’s culture is placed squarely on the shoulders of the State. It is explained that “the role of artists is not only to mirror the values of the society in which they live, but also to reflect on the issues that society must address if it is to know itself better” (Jackson). Therefore, the State must ensure that these persons work in an environment that is conducive to the proliferation of their artistic practice and provide venues where the public can access their work (Jackson). While the most recent cultural policy for The Bahamas was drafted in 2006, it was not comprehensive in this sense, and was never finished.

## History Of Cultural Policy In The Bahamas

The Bahamas Cultural Policy draft of 2006 was by no means the first of its kind. It was preceded by various official statements on the importance of culture which included the Schafer Report of 1986; the UNESCO sponsored Senate Hearings on Culture, 1992 to 1993; and the Adderley/Lockhart policy of 1995. All of these documents were shelved and were never implemented (Bethel and Glaser 4). Such was the fate of the 2006 Cultural Policy, which lost support as a direct result of a change in government after the 2007 general election (N. Bethel, Personal Interview).

Daniel Glaser and Dr. Nicolette Bethel, then the Director of Culture in what is now known as the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, took on the task of crafting a cultural policy that touches on all aspects of Bahamian life and is rooted in the needs of all cultural practitioners as well as the economic needs of their communities. In the preamble, the authors “believe that culture is too important to be left to political and practical expediency.” Bethel reiterates this belief in a 2017 interview where she outlines a solution that can assist in alleviating the challenges that currently impact the cultural sector.

The first thing we need to do is create a dedicated cultural foundation, a corporation, and endow an arts council, something that is not located within a ministry and that is not answerable to a minister. The minister can be responsible for it, but it has the ability to raise its own funds, has some autonomy, like The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, like a US local art agency. Everything here

is entirely dependent on the government. It's even worse than it used to be. (N. Bethel, Personal Interview)

The Cultural Policy draft of 2006 incorporated economic strategies and was primarily written “as an expression as well as a determiner of the national identity” (Bethel and Glaser 3). Drawing upon successful policy elements from St. Lucia, Jamaica and Barbados, the Bahamas’ Cultural Policy draft was created:

1. to safeguard Bahamian cultural heritage;
2. to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
3. to give a coherent strategic national context for planning and decision-making about culture;
4. to ensure respect for the cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
5. to utilize international cooperation and assistance in the development and promotion of Bahamian culture. (Bethel and Glaser 2)

However, Dr. Ian Bethell-Bennett points out that the creation of cultural policy is not enough:

Any cultural policy has to consider the trade of culture, the artistic, the expression of culture. And we haven't done that. It's much broader than the cultural policy, the cultural policy has to fit within the development policy. We don't have a development plan or policy. You can have cultural policy without a development

plan but then it works in isolation and is not effective. That's why you need the economics, the financial, the legal and the hands on. (Bethell-Bennett)

There is a national development plan that is currently in the planning stages but it is still far from completion. Creative Nassau recently joined the ranks of stakeholder consultants, and according to Burnside, their concerns and suggestions have been noted and added to the discussion. Burnside recalls her initial surprise when she realized those leading the national development plan had been myopic in their approach to culture. She advised them to invite all stakeholders to have a seat at the table by “connecting with the Family islands, the people and broadening the scope of the plan so that the scope is not only economic” (Burnside). The current government administration, which was newly elected in May 2017, is continuing the work that the previous administration began with the development plan although progress has been slow.

These developments are positive but there is still concern that all of this work could become obsolete when the governing party changes again in future general elections. A cultural policy needs to evolve alongside and fit within a development plan for it to have any agency; continuous regime changes threaten their success. Additional challenges include the lack of implementation of an intellectual property regime and the inadequate protection of Bahamian creative expression (Bethell-Bennett). Adequate intellectual property laws are a global concern as the internet has promoted a culture of free access. The repercussions of failing to address this issue would be catastrophic to the development of folk arts as an important part of economic growth in rural communities.

But for authors and creators to continue creating culture and promoting cultural

diversity, they must be compensated fairly for the use of their works. Otherwise, creating will again become a leisure activity restricted to those who already have the means to house and feed their families. (EY 88)

Economist Keith Nurse has done extensive research on cultural industries in ACP (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) countries and argues that:

Supporting the growth and industrial development of the cultural industries is considered to be of increasing importance as the ACP economies work towards diversifying away from the traditional export activities such as commodity exports and exploiting the opportunities in new trade agreements like the EU Economic Partnership Agreements. Investment in the cultural industries also presents other benefits such as the cross-fertilization and promotion with other sectors like tourism, manufacturing and information and communication technologies in ICTs (Information and Communication Technology). There is also scope for exploiting destination branding and intellectual property thereby generating value-added flows and sustainable jobs and enterprises that are associated with the rise of the creative class. (Nurse, *Study 2*)

We are again brought back to the importance of intellectual property laws and the need to use cultural industries to diversify economies in Caribbean countries. Nurse also notes that effective incentive mechanisms are needed, ones that will have a greater impact than those currently in use. He believes that to increase economic activity in the cultural industries “incentives should be part of an integrated industrial and innovation policy rather than a stand-alone measure” (Nurse, *Study 9*). This must be a consideration when

formulating a cultural policy that will develop and support folk arts in The Bahamas. Increasing the ease of doing business through lower import tax rates, easier access to obtaining a business license, removing barriers to ecommerce and access to venues for retail sale should all be incorporated into a cultural policy that will truly affect economic change in rural communities.

Understanding that the most recent cultural policy in The Bahamas was drafted in 2006, it is this document that would be considered for amendment and completion if the idea of crafting a policy were revisited. A policy will ensure that cultural programs are not subject to the vagaries of a fickle political environment, specifically a change in government, which Dr. Nicolette Bethel cited as one of the primary reasons the Cultural Policy draft of 2006 was shelved. When asked what her suggested amendments would be, Bethel concentrated on the many flaws found in a system that inhibits the implementation of any cultural policy, regardless of how good it might be.

The kind of legislation that needs to be written is one that removes control from the central government. It removes control from the hands of civil servants in ministries and it removes control from the financial sector. What we need to do is set up a completely different way of administering funds that has more to do with auditing and reporting and less to do with control (N. Bethel, Personal Interview). Bethel argues that there are fundamental structural challenges within the country's system, ones that must be dealt with before a cultural policy can be considered. Bethell-Bennett echoes this sentiment, making it appear that Creative Nassau's decision to influence culture's role in the national development plan by actively participating in the

process is practical and effective and paves the way for the consideration of a cultural policy.

### Why A Cultural Policy Is Needed

There have been various studies done erratically and in isolation on distinct aspects of Bahamian folk art, but it was not until The Bahamas was invited to participate in the 1994 Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife held in Washington DC, that extensive research was done on Bahamian tradition and culture (Outten 48). A research team, made up of Bahamians and representatives from the Smithsonian, traveled throughout the archipelago, uncovering a veritable treasure trove of "knowledge, creativity, talent and skills...in the Family Islands" (Outten 48). While this was exciting and the information gathered can be found at both the Smithsonian and the Department of Archives in Nassau, there has been no significant effort by The Bahamas government to facilitate proper documentation of indigenous Bahamian heritage, guaranteeing its protection under the UNESCO 2003 Convention that The Bahamas signed onto in 2006 (*Convention*). Instead, this effort has been led by Creative Nassau, a nonprofit organization founded by Jackson and Pam Burnside, which worked for years to have Nassau declared a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts. Nassau was added to UNESCO's Creative City network in 2014, with Junkanoo and strawcraft "declared outstanding cultural representations" (Gibbs).

The UNESCO 2003 Convention exists:

- (a) to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;

- (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance. (“Intangible”)

Countries signing onto this convention are doing so to safeguard their indigenous culture from the harmful effects of free market trade agreements. The caveat is that for indigenous culture to be protected under this convention it has to be researched, documented and recorded with UNESCO. As outlined in the convention, this is the responsibility of each of the participating countries. Currently, only Junkanoo and strawcraft are protected under the convention, leaving remaining folk arts vulnerable to outside pressures.

While other Caribbean countries experienced significant economic growth through tourism in the past twenty years, The Bahamas has been notably stagnant by comparison. Since independence, it appears that American hip-hop, Trinidadian soca and Jamaican reggae have infiltrated the ranks of Bahamian popular music, pushing local music to the lower rungs (Gibney 6). Michael Gibney, author of *The Evolution of Popular Music in The Bahamas: 1960-2000*, believes that the constant tension between tourism and culture in The Bahamas has contributed significantly to this situation, fostering an environment where Bahamian musicians create music for tourists, ostracizing their domestic audience, who do not feel connected to local music (Gibney 6).

The same can be said for the strawcraft industry where Bethel observes that straw vendors selling local goods often decorate bags and other items with Hello Kitty or Mickey Mouse. The Bahamas has also not updated or adopted any policies that fit within a development plan that clearly map the direction of culture in the country, whether it is through the lens of the industrial or that of cultural identity, unlike their Caribbean counterparts, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

This lack of direction is most evident in Junkanoo, which, in contrast to Trinidad's Carnival, has stayed true to the core of its origins but has yet to be developed and expanded to have an economic impact that can be similar to that of Carnival. Instead there is a continued reliance on the domestic market for support even when there are up to 35% of tourists who hear about Junkanoo but only 9% attend the festival (N. Bethel, "Economic" 22). Clearly this is a missed opportunity to increase Junkanoo's revenue and market the festival as an important winter activity for tourists. Even though this appears obvious, the "political and symbolic nature" of the festival is kept at the forefront and little emphasis is put on the festival as an engine for economic growth. Government investment does not "build economic capacity for its practitioners," instead that strategy was used to create Junkanoo Carnival, in which the Bahamian government at the time invested \$1 million at its inception (N. Bethel, "Economic" 15). As discussed previously, the current administration has chosen to discontinue funding for this event, yet another moment where the control that government exerts over cultural activities is evident.

## Looking Outward

Dr. Nicolette Bethel compares the success of the cultural foundation in Barbados to the much weaker attempts of committees within government ministries in The Bahamas to implement cultural initiatives. The ineffectiveness of these initiatives is attributed to the “overly politicized, overly bureaucratic walls around the development of culture within the government” and a much larger national challenge, a centralized government system where all of the decisions for the country are made in New Providence, with little or no input from residents living on the Out Islands. By having autonomous national and local agencies that are not controlled by the government, Bethel believes that many of the challenges inherent in government initiatives will be eliminated.

When looking at the many hindrances to the creation and successful implementation of a cultural policy in The Bahamas, one cannot help but contrast this stagnation and general disorganization to the apparent success of policies in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The Bahamas’ relationship with these countries, a history that spans decades, and the integration of Jamaican and Trinidadian music, dance and food into Bahamian culture, speaks to the proliferation and development of creative industries that could only have breached the borders of other countries through the strategic support of their respective government agencies.

Trinidad and Tobago is best known for its Carnival or Mas which marks a week of pre-Lenten revelry that invites visitors from all over the world to celebrate. This is the biggest Carnival in the region and is considered one of the country’s “most important

cultural exports” (Carnival). The mas industry in Trinidad pervades all levels of the economy, providing economic opportunities for singers, songwriters, choreographers and other creative practitioners. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) have grown and thrived because of the economic stimulus that Carnival provides; government reports indicate that the event generates in excess of US \$100 million per year (Carnival). While this sounds like a wonderful success story that other Caribbean countries should seek to emulate, Dr. Ian Bethell-Bennett argues that Trinidad has industrialized its culture to the detriment of its indigenous cultural traditions (Bethell-Bennett). This view is supported by the Artist Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago which makes the allegation that the Carnival artists “have no sense of local style,” “are creating masturbatory foreign-imitative music and art” and are “aliens to their nation.” These strong words indicate a feeling of exclusion that is not synonymous with policies or practices that are developed with the intention of nurturing a strong cultural identity. It can be argued that the financial efficacy of Carnival supersedes concerns about cultural identity and indigenous culture. However, research has shown that large scale ventures that are not aligned with cultural assets and the identity of the community are unsustainable and short-lived (Borrop ch. 2).

In direct opposition to Trinidad’s approach is Jamaica, which has recently finalized another revision of its cultural policy (Reckord). While Bob Marley is credited with putting reggae in the international sphere, the Jamaican government has continued to support the development and expansion of its cultural products through policies that protect, conserve and develop “its natural, cultural and built heritage through a series of

laws and the creation of a network of government agencies” (“Heritage”). The importance of culture is imbedded in the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development and the process that led to the revision of the current cultural policy involved the participation of cultural agencies and community members across the island of Jamaica, a practice that is steeped in cultural democracy and assisted in the development of a policy that was inclusive, had stakeholder buy-in and kept the safeguarding of indigenous heritage at its core (Reckord).

Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas have their unique challenges when confronting the development, preservation and promotion of cultural industries in their respective countries. However, The Bahamas appears to have been drifting with the currents that move through its beautiful waters, instead of crafting strategies based on a fixed ideology that would determine the direction the country would take. This is why a cultural policy is so important and this is where arts administrators come into play.

## Chapter V ADVOCACY AND ARTS ADMINSTRATORS

Arts administrators have an important role to play in advocacy for a cultural policy. Advocacy is defined as “the act of speaking, writing, or acting in support of something or someone” (Korza et al. 262). It is from advocacy that policies are created and implemented and creative practitioners are given a voice. Research has shown that cultural institutions have been foundational to building communities for centuries, and their activities play a vital role in the social and economic health of these places (Borrupt ch. 1). Arts administrators must ensure that community members, organizations, civic groups and government agencies are aware of the importance of culture and must insist that it be prioritized when budgets are being formulated (Korza et al 35). Thus, arts administrators must add political effectiveness to their set of skills.

### Challenges And Positive Steps

Arts advocacy is fairly new in The Bahamas, as is the field of arts administration. However, as arts administration grows in the country, more and more arts professionals are recognizing the importance of moving outside of their small communities and establishing connections with government agencies, committees and the wider community. There is an understanding that the explicit interconnectedness of creative practitioners and their allies underpins effective advocacy strategy. Creative Nassau

exemplifies the activities of successful cultural organizations by building “social relationships,” enabling “problem solving” and providing “access to resources” (Borruptch, 1). The organization considers itself an umbrella under which creative practitioners can unify and work together to promote the development of arts and culture in The Bahamas. They are working with local corporations to create an orange economy database that was launched in February 2018. The orange or creative economy is defined as “all the sectors whose goods and services are based on intellectual property” (Buitrago 15). It is hoped that this database will bridge gaps not only nationally but eventually, regionally (Burnside).

While building a unified sector and digital linkages are central to an effective advocacy campaign, artists and creative practitioners also need the opportunity to exchange and hone ideas in real time. Dr. Nicolette Bethel believes that an impediment to stronger partnerships among art industries is the absence of shared physical space. She explains, “We’re still silo-ized. The live musicians no longer have a space. And theatre practitioners have a time but we don’t really have a space. Just having that space is critical. If the government just provided that it would help--but that’s too hard for them” (N. Bethel, Personal Interview).

She goes on to outline other potential spaces that have and can continue to be used as gathering spaces to share ideas, engage in critical discourse and collectively strategize to make government agencies and the public see art as imperative to economic growth and the cultural identity of The Bahamas. The National Art Gallery and Shakespeare in Paradise are identified as existing spaces. Bethel points out that “maybe

the government doesn't have to do anything else but connect creative people to people who have real estate. Just incentivize those landlords in a way that will encourage them to open up those spaces. That is the simplest thing you can do" (N. Bethel, *Personal Interview*). Like Burnside, Bethel also believes that there is enough rapport between disciplines that individuals can easily work together, but they are not taking advantage of the opportunity.

As Creative Nassau advances its orange economy database, an initiative that is broad and deep in its scope, arts administrators in The Bahamas must position themselves strategically to advocate for the support and development of a cultural policy. In addition to digital connection and a physical space for the building of relationships and sharing of ideas, a third vital component of an advocacy strategy leading to cultural policy is the breadth of the meaning of "arts." Advocates must embrace the entire spectrum--from the most esoteric of contemporary visual, performing, and literary arts, to the most accessible and deeply rooted folk arts--and practitioners of all forms must be included in supporting a policy reflecting their interdependence.

Dr. Ian Bethell-Bennett argues that to have advocacy, "you have to have a whole industry that backs up that advocacy. You must have a mechanism to make that advocacy happen. Offices that give you access to copyright, trademark etcetera."(Bethell-Bennett). Cultural communities, characterized by strong connections, can effectively insist that policy be written that incorporates elements of copyright law, tax law, import duties,

economic prosperity and a visitor development strategy that benefits all creative practitioners, and ultimately their communities and the economy of the country as a whole.

According to Burnside, government agencies have finally begun to communicate with each other and are pooling resources to work more efficiently. The Ministry of Finance is in discussion with Creative Nassau, and the Department of Forestry has partnered with them. These are all new and unusual developments that speak to moving in the right direction, even if the movement is sometimes slow.

### Measuring Success

To effectively advocate for the creative industries in The Bahamas, stakeholders will need examples where a strategic, democratic approach to cultural development has created a successful, sustainable economy. In addition to the Isle of Skye and the Gullah of South Carolina, Santa Fe, New Mexico has elements that The Bahamas can emulate when crafting a cultural policy that elevates folk arts and uses existing cultural resources to stimulate cultural tourism.

A visit to Santa Fe by the founding members of Creative Nassau spurred the establishment of the nonprofit whose primary goal was to have Nassau added to UNESCO's Creative Cities Network. Santa Fe has a long history of folk art that began with the Santa Fe Indian Market in 1922, which has grown into the International Folk Art Market. Started in 2004, this new market showcases the work of more than 160 artists from 47 countries and has become "the largest international folk art market in the world" (Santa Fe). Records show that revenue generated from market sales alone has totaled

more than two million dollars. Santa Fe continues to enjoy the success of its folk art market and joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2008. The city has an extensive network of folk art museums and performing arts organizations. This robust creative industry is made possible through the support of state and local government agencies that recognize the importance of folk arts to the continued economic health and growth of Santa Fe (Santa Fe).

All of the communities discussed were able to develop a strong economy based on cultural heritage because they had a unique culture to share and had the support of community members and the government--recognizing that "government" may include departments of planning and zoning, tax assessment and allocation, transportation, natural resource conservation, economic development and tourism, and others--incorporated into a master plan overseen by elected officials and a designated manager. The same is needed in The Bahamas for economic growth through cultural industries to be realized.

#### Advocating For A Cultural Policy

While this paper focuses on folk arts, advocating for the support of cultural policy that promotes cultural heritage in isolation would not be practical or smart. Advocates must approach government officials through their area of interest, which is currently tourism. The national development plan demonstrates this attitude, as it continues to put tourism at the fore, while discussing cultural enterprise in the most rudimentary terms. Elevating folk art along with other art forms through the lens of cultural tourism has the potential to capture the attention of an official or opinion leader, who can become a

champion for the creative community's cause, increasing the possibility of the development of a cultural policy that has agency.

The World Trade Organization offers eight guidelines to plan for cultural tourism.

They include:

1. Defining tourism products
2. Identifying stakeholders and establishing participation mechanisms
3. Maintaining authenticity
4. Creating partnerships
5. Setting limits of acceptable change
6. Balancing education and entertainment
7. Seeking long-term rather than short-term gain
8. And monitoring and measuring. (Goss)

Each of these guidelines is further broken down and inclusivity and the protection of culture are at the core of this approach. Arts administrators in The Bahamas who choose to advocate should use these guidelines as a model when developing a cultural policy that includes cultural tourism as an avenue for economic growth, so that the social and financial needs of rural communities are met.

## Conclusion IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The obstacles that cultural advocates face when lobbying for a cultural policy that is inclusive and puts the needs of cultural practitioners and the community at its center are significant. Arts administrators across disciplines need to work together to effectively strategize and implement a plan of action that will garner the attention of policy makers and opinion leaders in the community. They are in a unique position to facilitate interactions between different factions within the local creative community and work with them to advocate for policy creation and implementation.

Creative Nassau, Shakespeare in Paradise and the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas have established themselves as the forerunners of arts administration and advocacy in The Bahamas and are positioned to lead the charge for the development of a comprehensive cultural policy. However, for a successful cultural policy that elevates folk arts and provides economic opportunity for rural communities to be realized, each of these entities must officially recognize the importance of folk arts to cultural heritage and economic growth. Creative Nassau's mission revolves around folk arts but The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and Shakespeare in Paradise are more fine art focused and support folk arts through indirect avenues. Revisiting their mission statements to include

folk arts will ensure that it is considered part of the “art” spectrum and by extension build its visibility, changing perceptions and nurturing this art form so that it does not cease to exist.

Were they to situate themselves at the helm of advocating for a cultural policy, these three entities could become a powerhouse under which smaller creative enterprises could thrive. Issues surrounding intellectual property, taxation, financial support for creative ventures, physical space and access to marketing platforms would be magnified by the collective voices of those who are most affected. Folk artists would be given equal status in this effort and the plight of indigenous folk art in rural communities given consideration when planning for a cultural policy that is rooted in the assets and identity of communities.

Lobbying for a policy requires strategizing to gain the attention of policy makers so that a cultural policy can become a reality. Using the lens of cultural tourism to increase awareness of the importance of cultural policy could be effective, but cultural tourism in and of itself, is not a panacea for The Bahamas’ ailing tourism industry. It would be easy to take the approach of Trinidad and Tobago, who created a policy that industrialized culture, and is currently making millions of dollars a year as a result, but it is disconnected from the cultural identity and assets of its communities, which speaks to an unsustainable structure that will eventually collapse. The collective efforts of arts administrators, led by Creative Nassau, The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and Shakespeare in Paradise would promote sustainable practices by convincing decision-

makers of the far more profitable long-term impact of economic development that focuses on cultural heritage and is rooted in the histories and traditions of local communities.

However, working together to advocate for greater support for the arts is only one facet of a larger effort, as a successful cultural policy is dependent on the structures within which it exists. Successful advocacy can influence the creation and implementation of a cultural policy, but it can only be effective if it is designed within an existing development plan. Creative Nassau has already inserted itself into the development of the national development plan and this presents an opportunity for the other entities discussed to lend their influence. By participating in the formulation of the cultural section of this plan, they can pave the way for a cultural policy that fits within the structures that will determine its effectiveness.

Although the focus of this paper is on The Bahamas in particular and more broadly on the Caribbean, the core of this research can be used by arts administrators living anywhere in the world. Rural communities everywhere share similar challenges: lack of access, lack of infrastructure, little governmental support and depopulation. However, when dedicated community members and arts administrators work together to combat these challenges, a once declining community can become a bustling cultural center. Arts administrators in The Bahamas can begin to take steps to make this happen in rural communities by driving a collective effort to revisit, update and complete the 2006 Cultural Policy Draft, actively cultivate the support of policy makers who have expressed

an interest in the arts and appeal to the commercial interests of government agencies without compromising the policy's core values. It is through these efforts that a comprehensive cultural policy that emphasizes the traditional folk arts of The Bahamas and provides access to and assistance in reaching additional markets, will lead to economic growth in rural communities.

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