



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

## Impact in history research

### Tara Inniss



**Dr Tara Inniss** was awarded a Commonwealth Split-site Scholarship in 2002 and spent one year at the University of Manchester as part of her PhD research on the history of medicine. After the completion of her PhD at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados, Tara went on to study for a Master's qualification in Social Development at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Her decision to study this course was a result of noting parallels between historic health issues and contemporary health development in the Caribbean and other developing world contexts during her PhD research. Upon returning to Barbados, she was employed as a part-time Lecturer and now a full-time Temporary Lecturer in the History Department at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill.

#### PhD research

At the time of her application for the Commonwealth Split-Site Scholarship, Tara was a PhD student at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus in Barbados. Her research focused on the history of children's health and medicine in the Caribbean in the 18th and 19th centuries and as part of her study she was in contact with academics at the University of Manchester. As the majority of historical records needed to study Caribbean history are located in the National Archives and at universities in the UK she was driven to apply for the scholarship during the second year of her studies in order to access these primary resources.

Tara noted that after arrival at the University of Manchester it became apparent to her that the scope of the topic was wider than she had anticipated and she therefore extended the area of research for her PhD to encompass the history of medicine and science more generally. She remarked "I expanded my area of investigation during the scholarship and also realised that there was a lot of teaching potential. Through the time that I spent in Manchester, I expanded on the teaching disciplines in the history of the Caribbean [at my home institution]. We were the first institution that expanded into teaching the history of medicine and science. It hadn't been done in a systematic way in the region before".

Commenting on her time at the University of Manchester, Tara noted that her colleagues were very supportive of the

research project that she had outlined and she was given the opportunity to present some seminars at the department. She noted that from a research and teaching perspective this was a very useful experience. She enjoyed the academically challenging environment and the opportunity to explore different aspects of history. She also observed that in contrast to the PhD studies in Barbados her experience in the UK was more formalised as she had the opportunity to audit courses not available at Cave Hill.

On returning to Barbados Tara spent the next two years writing the research that she had conducted in the UK. She published several articles and also presented her research findings at conferences.

#### Knowledge and skills

Tara stated that her time at the University of Manchester allowed her to develop important research, analytical and writing skills. In addition she was able to take a number of computer and statistical courses and she learnt useful software applications such as the use of Geographic Information Systems which she applies to her work in history research. She also noted that her current research is informed by the questions that she was challenged with during her scholarship and she therefore frequently utilises the knowledge that she gained at the University of Manchester.

Through the taught modules that she attended while at the University of Manchester Tara was able to develop a better

understanding of the topics that could be included as part of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This knowledge was applied when she returned home and she contributed to the development of courses in the History of Medicine and on Race, Gender and Medicine at Cave Hill, which offered an interdisciplinary approach to students in science and health disciplines. Tara noted “we have been experiencing a decline in people who are studying history but because of the interdisciplinary nature of the courses we are offering it invites other people into the department and faculty who wouldn’t normally have considered pursuing a course like this before”.

Additionally Tara worked with colleagues in the Philosophy department to develop a Minor in Biomedicine, Ethics and Society. She has also developed an ethics and humanities course for the Faculty of Medical science. Some students at the Department of History have pursued postgraduate qualifications in Public Health Administration and Tara believes that the courses she introduced have opened new career paths for her students. Commenting on the importance of an interdisciplinary approach she noted: “Living in a small island developing state (SIDS) like Barbados where we have a very small human resource base, we need people who are able to diversify themselves. That is one of my professional aims”.

## Development impact

For Tara an important aspect of her work is highlighting the importance of the teaching of history in schools and at universities, as well as the preservation of heritage sites in Barbados. Through her role at the Department of History she has been involved in discussions with the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of teaching of history at primary and secondary level. She has also worked with her department and the Caribbean Examinations Council to ensure the development of the curriculum for teaching history in schools. Tara’s work also involves working closely with teachers of history and she arranges conferences and workshops for them. This has resulted in consultations with school teachers and principals with the aim of providing better history and heritage education, and includes visiting historic sites and having a better understanding of how history informs contemporary politics and economics. She noted that positive feedback had been received from schools and the Department of History had received a number of invitations to conduct workshops for pupils or lead tours of historic properties.

In addition to her work at the University of the West Indies, Tara has been involved in the protection of heritage sites in the region and was on the committee that secured the first UNESCO World Heritage nomination for the Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison site in Barbados. She also served as part of the international delegation that approved World Heritage sites globally between 2009 and 2014. Tara is also council member of the Barbados Museum and the Historical Society, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Association of Caribbean Historians.

Tara had also provided consultancy services for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Barbados. In 2006 she was the lead author on a report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and provided a mid-term review on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for Barbados. She has also reported on Barbados’ progress in implementing the Convention for Social, Economic and Cultural Rights.

## Commonwealth award

Tara noted that the Commonwealth award was a very important factor in the development of her career and that she would not have been able to conduct the research, or travel to the locations that she visited in the UK without the scholarship. The research that she conducted while in the UK took her outside of Manchester to London, Edinburgh, Leeds and Bristol to meet academics and access resources. Therefore the financial assistance was key in ensuring that she had the flexibility to pursue this in the UK. Additionally Tara attended a number of workshops organised by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission on professional development which she found useful in understanding the challenges of reintegration in developing country economies after returning home from the scholarship.

Tara also described the importance of the Commonwealth award in enabling scholars to study and gain exposure to parts of the world that have undergone similar experiences being part of the British Empire. She noted that “whether it is the UK, Canada, South Africa or wherever the former British Empire has touched, if you’re studying the history of empire or history of colonial development, you should spend time in another Commonwealth country”.

## More about Tara’s work

With Prof. Pedro Welch, et al, ‘UNESCO World Heritage Nomination Dossier for Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison’ (Bridgetown: Ministry of Community Development and Culture, Government of Barbados, 2010)

*Treaty-Specific Report on the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)* (Bridgetown: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Barbados, 2011)

‘Heritage and Communities in a Small Island Developing State: World Heritage in Barbados’ in *World Heritage and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Communities* ed. Amareswar Galla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

‘Locating Gender in the History of Science, Technology and Medicine in the Caribbean’ in *Love and Power: Caribbean Discourses in Love and Gender*, ed. Eudine Barribeau (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012)

“‘This Complicated Incest’ Children, Sexuality and Sexual Abuse during Slavery and the Apprenticeship Period in the British Caribbean’ in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, eds Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014)

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