## A NOTE ON NOTES AND NAMES

## Notes

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK I incorporate field notes that I kept from 1990 to 2008 on my research and experiences in the British Virgin Islands. Ethnographic knowledge is always mediated and it is in our field notes that ethnographers engage in one of the first mediations of what we observe, participate in, and experience. Of course, what we observe, participate in, and experience are themselves mediations, and in this respect field notes can also reveal a process of coming to understanding. By incorporating my field notes into the text of this book, I underscore the partiality of my knowledge, but I also bring the reader into the process through which I came to see something the way I came to see it. Because field notes frequently convey the "immediate history" of the "on-the-ground realities captured in a moment in time" that is so much a part of the ethnographic experience (Waterston and Rylko-Baurer 2007, 41) they can also give access to a situation, a sentiment, or a sensibility whose immediacy is as much a factor of our understanding as it is reflection upon or analysis of it. Thus, I often use field notes in this book to provide a sense of a moment or an event, or to amplify what I am writing about in the text.

In many instances, my field notes record conversations that I had with people in the British Virgin Islands, and so field notes are also a way of bringing their voices into the text. Because I am interested in conveying what I have come to know about the British Virgin Islands from as many different perspectives as possible, on occasion I use my field notes to destabilize the text, to call into question a single interpretive voice. Finally, I use field notes in order to put myself into the text, and thereby to subject myself and my practice to scrutiny and critique. At times, I engage in this critique myself, reflecting upon what is going on in a field note entry; at other times I leave it to the reader to engage in the critique. In all these instances, but in this latter instance especially, I follow a practice in feminist and recent ethnographic scholarship that underscores the contingent and constructed nature of knowledge by identifying the contexts and

conditions in which knowledge is produced, among them the subject position of the knowledge maker.

The field notes that I include here are unedited, except in the following circumstances. First and most obviously, after almost twenty years of formal research my field notes extend to hundreds of pages and simply by selecting some field notes and not others I engage in an act of editing. Second, my field notes on any given day run from a few paragraphs to fifteen pages or more and may detail a number of unrelated incidents or experiences, and so many of the notes that I include in this book are excerpts from longer notes. Within an excerpted note I sometimes omit material that might be used to identify an individual or a group or-in the interest of "discretion,' rather than 'confession'" (Lovell 2003, cited in Leibing and McLean 2007, 13)—material that is not relevant either to the ethnographic context or to an understanding of the process of knowledge production. In cases where I eliminate sections from longer notes, the redacted materials are marked by ellipses or by brackets with a brief summary of what was redacted. Finally, if I think that a word in a field note may be unfamiliar to the reader, I put the gloss of the word in brackets; I do the same when I substitute a description of a general description of a person for the person's name.

The field notes are set in sans serif font so they are clearly distinguished from other text.

## NAMES

In many instances in my field notes and in the text, I follow conventional ethnographic practice of maintaining the anonymity of people I describe, quote, or refer to. In field notes, in place of a person's name, I substitute an arbitrary capital initial—for example, "H. reported that...." If an individual is named in a field note, the name is an actual name, not a pseudonym, and I include it with the individual's permission. Likewise, in the text I refer to someone in general terms of status and occupation, for example, "a British Virgin Islander who manages a tourist hotel," or I use a pseudonym. When I use a pseudonym, I identify it as such. However, there are other instances in which I refer to individuals by name. When citing materials written by British Virgin Islanders, I use the author's actual name. Likewise, I use the actual names of individuals who are well known within and outside of the British Virgin Islands and about whom much has already been published; I also use the names of people whose job or position makes them publicly known. In chapter 8, I discuss four individuals who are central to the production of British Virgin Islands culture and whose lives and experiences illuminate the complicated positions of people who live in a country that is a major tourist destination. These individuals have made great efforts throughout their lives to have their voices and the voices of other British Virgin Islanders heard, and neither they nor I wanted what they said or experienced to be muted by pseudonyms or fictionalized life circumstances. Each individual who I discuss in chapter 8 read the chapter and, apart from a few corrections of specific dates or names, left it unedited.

The British Virgin Islands is a British Dependent Territory and is part of the larger Virgin Islands geographical group that includes the United States Virgin Islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. During my thirty-plus years visiting the British Virgin Islands, eighteen of them doing formal research, the terms that I heard used most frequently to refer to the islands constituting the territory were "British Virgin Islands" and "BVI." Likewise, natives of the British Virgin Islands were referred to and referred to themselves as "British Virgin Islanders" or "BVIslanders." These terms are relatively recent, coming into popular usage in the 1950s, after representative government was reestablished in the BVI after almost a century hiatus (Maurer 1997, 78). Thus, older British Virgin Islanders on occasion still refer to themselves as "Virgin Islanders." Beginning in the early 2000s, I started to hear the term "Virgin Islander" used more frequently among all segments of the population, and the BVI constitution of 2007 actually refers to the native population of this British Dependent Territory as "Virgin Islanders." A 2005 constitutional review report explained:

By the purchase from Denmark in 1917 of the Danish West Indies (principally: St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John), the United States of America established sovereignty over this group, which was renamed the Virgin Islands of the United States of America and soon became shortened to "The Virgin Islands." To avoid confusion in the day to day usage, the northerly group began to be called "British Virgin Islands." However, the official name of this Territory is the *Virgin Islands*. The Commission is of the view that every effort should be made, officially and otherwise, to reverse the trend towards the *de facto* surrender of the proper name of this Territory. (Report of Virgin Islands Constitutional Commissioners 2005: 1)

Throughout this book, I use the terms most commonly heard at the time of its writing: British Virgin Islander or BVIslander to refer to natives of the island group, and British Virgin Islands or BVI to refer to the island group itself. But given the symbolic import of a term that evokes a precolonial past and in consideration of an ongoing and strengthening interest in BVI independence, I suspect that were I to be writing this book ten years from now, Virgin Islands and Virgin Islander would be the preferred terms.

## Take Me to My Paradise