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Carnivalizing the Nation:  
Reassessing the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival  
as an Inclusive Platform for Local and Diaspora Cultural Identity  
By  
Shari Bissoondatt

Claremont Graduate University

2022

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## **Approval of the Dissertation Committee**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Shari Bissoondatt as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

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## **Abstract**

Carnivalizing the Nation:

Reassessing the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival

as an Inclusive Platform for Local and Diaspora Cultural Identity

By

Shari Bissoondatt

Claremont Graduate University: 2022

Trinidad and Tobago's 2020 National Cultural policy ostensibly seeks to build the twin islands' cultural confidence through the development of a unifying and empowering national cultural identity. However, this research asserts that the current policy undermines these national goals by approaching its community through problematic colonial, nationalist frameworks and through centralizing the annual carnival festival. This positioning poses several key problems. First, it reinscribes the colonial cultural identity of the island. Second, this nationalist, Christian colonial approach reinforces a binary of belonging and non-belonging that excludes minoritized, diasporic, and non-conforming gender communities. Third, by centralizing carnival in cultural policy, the Trinbagonian national government promotes a one-dimensional story of the island, its culture, and its history.

This policy paper seeks to dismantle these limiting worldviews and their tangible manifestations by emphasizing Trinbagonian culture as one founded in fusion, movement, and inclusivity. Movement is inherent in Trinbagonian culture. I use carnival to study the framing of cultural identity because the carnivalesque or *transdimensional* qualities of carnival parallel the *trans-national* ones of cultural identity. Hence, to study this fluidity within the culture, I locate carnivalesque, the spirit of becoming, within carnival spaces. I then locate carnivalesque within quotidian culture through Trinidad and Tobago's liming

culture. Liming exhibits carnivalesque qualities of chaos, relation, imagination, and eroticism, making this system of informal and formal transformative socializing spaces.

I investigate cultural policy with a decolonial cultural studies framework as opposed to a neoliberal policy oriented one. Neoliberal methods, which policy makers use, are market oriented. Thus, they centralize economic reform policies. This approach preserves the focus of aesthetic culture over quotidian culture. As a result, I employ decolonial frameworks because they are critical examinations of cultural policy documents that lead to agency and equity through the support of self-determination and liberation. This approach prioritizes the lived experience of people and culture rather than a culture's economic potential. Interviews and textual analysis of soca songs as well as the Trinbago's 2020 national cultural policy were crucial to my analysis.

My research aims to fill the gap in cultural policy literature by highlighting intersectionality amongst the nation-state, identity, gender, diaspora, and imagination through the carnivalesque to transform the construction of the nation. From here, I explore how policy development can be more inclusive of multiple identities. Apart from my interdisciplinary approach, I focus on the intersectionality of cultural policy and gender, which distinguishes my work from other scholars.

In the NCPTT, there are many spaces where carnivalesque cultural identity should be applied. As a result, my main recommendation is that the Trinidad and Tobagonian government, policy makers, and experts review and reorient their understanding of the nature of Trinbagonian identity. It is not static or limited to the nation, rather it is a process of movement. It is a recognition of historical fragments and an acknowledgement of lived experiences; it is carnivalesque. Second, I recommend that once they re-evaluate their knowledge of Trinbagonian identity, they rewrite the cultural policy using the cultural decolonial framework to employ inclusive language that expresses the carnivalesque

approach to cultural identity. Third, I recommend that a carnivalesque cultural policy be written to reorient the current emphasis away from the development of the cultural arts for economic gain to the development of the cultural arts as a way of understanding Trinbago people's many fragments.

## **Acknowledgments**

First, I would like to thank my dissertation chair Dr. David Luis-Brown and my committee members, Dr. Darrell Moore and Dr. Linda Perkins, for all their support, guidance, and advice. Your feedback was invaluable. But more importantly, your emotional support throughout this process soothed my anxieties and helped me overcome any obstacles in bringing this project to fruition.

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I could finish this journey, and gave me the courage to go beyond what I thought were my limits. You both have made me who I am today. And you have always given me the tools and the support to grow. This body of work truly reflects your commitment, dedication, and love for me. So, this is for you!

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## **List of Abbreviations**

COP	Congress of the People
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
NAR	National Allegiance for Reconstruction
NCPTT	National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago
NEDCO	National Entrepreneurship Development
OJP	On-the-Job Training Programme
RCCP	Regional Caribbean Cultural Policy
UWI	University of the West Indies



Figure 1. Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost of the Caribbean islands and set just west of Venezuela’s coast. The twin islands present a multicultural microcosm that continues to evolve over centuries of indigenous, colonial, and modern sociopolitical evolutions.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction:**

#### **Applying Critical Theory to Ideal and Real Trinbagonian Carnival**

##### **Thronging Crowds Jook and Wine: Exploring Carnival’s Callaloo**

The blazing island sun shimmers off the bejeweled bodies of the sweating crowds as they revel in the Carnival chaos. Soca music blares from speakers on trucks while masqueraders and bystanders alike gyrate to Hindi melodies infused with steelpan calypso and soca rhythms. The revelers’ outfits accentuate this cacophony—the masqueraders jam in head-to-toe glittering beads as their bright feather headdresses flirtatiously wave in the bacchanal. Thrusting and swirling their hips, people jook and wine as they revel in the promiscuous dance moves enjoyed in the much-anticipated spring celebration of Carnival.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Mark Kirton et al, “The Political Culture of Democracy in Trinidad & Tobago: 2010 Democracy in Action,” The University of the West Indies Institute of International Relations, accessed July 26, 2022, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/trinidad-tobago/2010-political-culture.pdf>.

Caribbean legendary musician Roy Cape<sup>2</sup> conveys the importance of this annual event for Trinbagonian people, explaining:

We have carnival between January and February and maybe sometimes March depending on the calendar... the people who are masquerading and who make the masquerade, they live all year round for this. When you see November come, they have their camps, all the costumes, the materials.... They work when January comes. It's a serious time and also serious economic benefits.”<sup>3</sup>

In his interview, Roy describes how he competes with his good friends in music battles for coveted titles, such as Calypso Monarch or the Road March song of the carnival. Nothing can underestimate the importance of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad’s Carnival is known as the greatest show on earth, and people from all over the world come together to celebrate these moments of spontaneity, debauchery, and freedom. Interviewee Lyndon Gomez,<sup>4</sup> a cornerstone of the Trinbagonian music scene, explains that “[t]o me, carnival is all about freedom, you know. It's all about freedom. It's that one time of the year that we get to break free of all the everyday shackles and get to enjoy ourselves without any. It's also a great time for expression, even historically. It's a time where people could express things that they otherwise had to keep inside. They get to express it freely.”<sup>5</sup> Interviewee Lisa Lewis Arri<sup>6</sup> concurs with Lyndon and echoes his metaphor of the freedom from slavery, an integral historical experience that informs Trinbagonian identity. Lisa explains that Carnival is “about experiencing your freedom, going out there to say that this is a time where we can be yourself, we are one and we don't have a master over us, you know.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For Roy’s bionote, see Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cape, Roy, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, November 8, 2021 and November 14, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> For Lyndon’s bionote, see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> Gomez, Lyndon, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, November 19, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> For Lisa’s bionote, see Appendix 1.

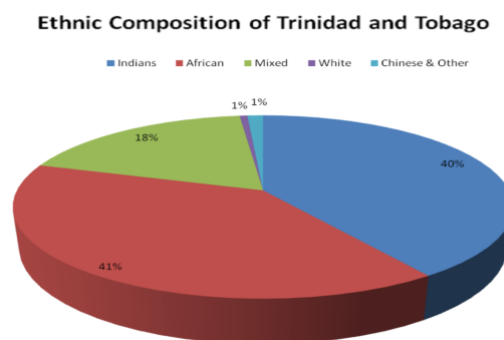
<sup>7</sup> Lewis Arri, Lisa L., interview by author, California, USA, February 15, 2021.

Lisa continues to describe how the entire nation becomes involved in Carnival—from the elderly to the children who are all swept up in the participatory call of this annual release from daily life. She reminisces from her childhood:

But from small, in my view, carnival has always been something that everybody wants to partake in. Even if you have different denominations who say they don't do carnival, they will be somewhere or the other on their verandah watching people revel in, people enjoying, even if they are not taking part on the street, they might do a little jig jig, they have a cousin coming over for some food... My granny had a shop. If you had a shop and the shop selling food and you know, every shop in the island has rum, cigarettes and so all the people from carnival coming there and you in the carnival. You even dressing up for it sometimes and you dancing up, you know. That's carnival, you don't have to be in the big crowd.<sup>8</sup>

Lisa's memories emphasize Carnival as a fluid space of freedom from difference where people unite in the collective experience of self, family, community, diaspora, and nation.

But, during this time where even watching the revelers equates to a form of participation, who are all these people creating, reveling, and uniting in this annual celebration? Is the Carnival actually such a utopic place of freedom from age, race, class, and gender concerns? As the people jook and wine, as they belt out the year's Road March winning song, as they laugh and eat street food that is a stunning array of world fusion cuisine, what are the ancestries and lives of these revelers who hail from a range of ethnoracial backgrounds?



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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, interview.

Figure 2. Trinbago's population<sup>9</sup> is divided into nearly equal parts African and Indian heritages juxtaposed with a set of persons of mixed, white, Chinese, Syrians, and Lebanese and Other heritages.

In fact, my own background offers insights into this complex question and provides an apt example of the cultural complexity that is Trinbago. I was born and raised on the Caribbean Island of Trinidad, where others described me as Indian (Indo)-Caribbean. At that time, I characterized myself as "Trinidadian." In 2008, my family and I moved to Boca Raton, Florida. In high-school there, my classmates viewed me as an "exotic island girl" and asked questions like "Do you wear grass skirts back home?" Their unwelcome comments and ignorant questions suggested that I came from a primitive, backward, and undeveloped nation. After high-school, I lived and studied in Georgia, New York, and California. During these points in my journey, I encountered invasive and impertinent questions such as "What are you?" and "You speak such good English. How long have you been here?" Sometimes I could barely restrain myself from rolling my eyes at statements like "I didn't know there were Indians living in the Caribbean." People assumed I was East-Indian, hailing from the subcontinent of India. Although my ancestors were from India, and there remains some cultural and religious connections, I personally have no connection to the country. In fact, I am fifth-generation Trinbagonian—I have never been to India. Yet, because of my appearance, I was told who I was by other people.

It baffled many people when I contradicted their assumptions and explained that my identity was fluid because of my cultural experiences. I came to recognize their awkward, confused smiles when my responses did not align with their presumptions. Some even insisted that I must have family living in India to soothe their confusion. In these moments, I

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<sup>9</sup> Raymond Mark Kirton et al, "The Political Culture of Democracy in Trinidad & Tobago: 2010 Democracy in Action," The University of the West Indies Institute of International Relations, accessed July 26, 2022, 7, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/trinidad-tobago/2010-political-culture.pdf>.



embodied the carnivalesque, here meaning a refusal of fixity of ethnic and national identities. In this state of carnival, my responses indicated how my ancestry, lifestyle, experiences, and worldview embraced fluidity of self, identity, and nation. My identity, as with Trinidad's carnival and carnivalesque, has unfolded in a way that depicts fluidity as well as the transcendent nature of hybrid identity and, more specifically, of Caribbean identity.

Each experience of cultural interaction has imbued my cultural identity with different meanings and symbols. People's categorical definition of my cultural identity is limited and static without the acceptance of my fluid and flexible cultural journey. Similarly, each invocation of carnival is a shadow of the true event until the implications of carnivalesque are fully spelled out. Consequently, I argue in this research that although categorical understandings of cultural identity are important, it is equally crucial to understand that identity is also fluid and protean. Identity is a multifaceted construct that encapsulates a person's lived experiences.

Like myself, many of the persons interviewed for this project contribute critical insights into the importance of Carnival and the carnivalesque to the nation and psyche of Trinidad local and diaspora persons. Interviewee Lauren's<sup>10</sup> comments on the meaning of Carnival echoes the complicated sentiments of this annual event's hybrid social function and atmosphere. She adds:

Carnival is for everybody, it's not religious or it's not subcultural and it has been successful and economically successful as well. And carnival also brings everybody together...your family you haven't seen in a whole year, you know. That's when I go down. Carnival is not just carnival; it means so much more. It means togetherness, happy time and I think that is another reason to focus on carnival because it always is a happy time and I think that's great. I know it kind of blends everybody together and there is no individuality but at the same time, carnival is about art and individuality so we express ourselves in a different way, not in the way we actually identify at the core.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For Lauren's bio-note, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> Plaza, Lauren, interview by author, Oregon, USA, December 5, 2021.

Lauren's comments allude to the Carnival's drawing of diaspora Trinbagonians to their geographic homeland. And, her insightful comment opens the conversation regarding the tensions in Carnival and in Trinbagonian culture regarding individuality and community, regarding ancestral heritages and national cultural identity. Is Trinbago culture a harmonious melting pot, or what is metaphorized locally as a callaloo? These themes represent the core investigation of this research project.

*What is Carnival and What Does it Mean to Trinbagonians?*

Kes and Iwer George's 2020 soca hit "Stage Gone Bad"<sup>12</sup> exemplifies Trinidad and Tobago's carnival atmosphere while illustrating this event's potential to deconstruct and transcend boundaries. Their lyrics lead revelers through the calendar of events, including the pivotal Panorama, which is an annual Steelband competition that began in 1963.<sup>13</sup> Kes and Iwer belt out rapid-fire lyrics that remind partygoers to attend Dimanche Gras, French for "Great Sunday." The Dimanche Gras shows feature the Calypso Monarch competition, the King and Queen of the bands coronations, and continuous calypso and soca music performances. The lyrics to Kes and Iwer's connect various Carnival events and emphasize how "de stage was good" at each event, equating the experience to "paradise."<sup>14</sup> Their rapid-tempo song creates a hyper and positive atmosphere, as they amp up the festive crowd to achieve a carnivalesque vibe.

Although these are much-anticipated events, the crowning glory of the month-long Carnival season come after Dimanche Gras on the Monday and Tuesday. Early on Monday morning, J'ouvert opens the two-day intensive festivities with people frolicking in the streets

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<sup>12</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Mason. *Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad*. (Latin American Bureau, 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hj54qm>.

<sup>14</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

painting their own and each other's bodies with vivid powders and mud. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the vibrant rituals of J'ouvert represent an evolution from the slavery era with interesting implications for free persons' self-expression and mockery towards their previous masters and bondage. As the Monday Carnival events progress, the festivities turn into a street party, with music trucks blasting soca music to carry the party late into the night. Tuesday culminates all the facets of Carnival where the people, costumes, and music converge in unbridled ecstasy. Kes and Iwer convey the physical energy of their band taking over the stage, as they intone:

But when ah come back on Carnival Day  
and ah hear dem big truck start to play  
Tell them when me and my section  
Touch down is trouble  
Because the stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again (x2)  
The stage nah good again  
After we trample Port of Spain  
Tell them the stage nah good again  
Ayyyyyyyy  
Cause

We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over (x2)  
Ayyyyyyyy<sup>15</sup>

These lyrics insinuate that people release their energy in indulgent behavior. They revel in their positive destruction as they goad those in power to call on social controls to futilely calm their exuberant energy. They belt out from the stage:

Look at how we behaving  
Bad  
The stage gone bad  
Call de contractor  
Call the mash up doctor  
Call the inspector  
Call the commissioner  
Call the minister  
and Call the fire brigade  
Because the stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again

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<sup>15</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

When we dismantle Port of Spain  
Tell them the stage nah good again<sup>16</sup>

Their lyrics imply that there is a metaphorical deconstruction of the twin island's capital of Port of Spain where the musicians' raw energy facilitates a carnivalesque break-down of institutions, norms, and hierarchies.

Carnival is a global, cosmopolitan event with a colorful history. In its fullest potential, it functions as a series of chaotic and transcendental moments that give rise to resistance. However, current nation-states seek to claim carnival as their cultural centerpiece, asserting that carnival is integral to their respective historical narrative and development in becoming their modern incarnations. While the manifestations of carnival in the various nation-states are unique, claiming carnival as their own confines and limits it to physical and cognitive borders, hindering the festival's potential to deconstruct and transcend boundaries. The situation regarding Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival serves as a clear example of the negative repercussions caused by competition over a declared ownership of carnival.

Multiple groups claim ownership of Trinidad's version of carnival, including nationalists on the island, Caribbean nation-states who have adopted a version into their own cultures, diasporic Trinbagonians, diasporic West Indians, and general revelers who participate in these carnivals. The complexity of carnival as a space for celebration and identity, among other things, alludes to the critical problem of cultural policy as it related to Trinbagonian cultural identity. The competition over the annual Carnival embodies the tensions between nationalist and transnationalist claims, roots and routes, and homeland and diaspora. For these reasons, the juggernaut that is Trinidad's Carnival presents a perfect platform to examine the complexities of Trinbagonian cultural identity and cultural policy

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<sup>16</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

due to various the desires of sociopolitical factions, ethnic groups, and competing nations for rights of origination, ownership, and authenticity related to this global event.

The very title of *The Economist* video “Carnival: Origins of the World’s Biggest Party”<sup>17</sup> exemplifies the global bacchanal reputation of this Caribbean-associated event. The fact that an international, erudite economic publication produced this documentary-like feature indicates the intersections of transnational commerce connected with carnivals. This de factor advertisement video also subtly links to the problematic issues of tourism among nations of disparate socioeconomic power levels. The informative clip offers a brief overview of the history of carnival. The content focuses on the ways carnival spread across time and space, emphasizing that it has become a global phenomenon celebrated in approximately fifty countries. According to *The Economist*, Ancient Egyptians celebrated carnival to usher out the winter and embrace the bounty of spring. The Greeks adopted the festival and eventually carnival spread to European countries like Italy, France, and Rome. While the French titled the festival as “The Feast of Fools,” the Romans dubbed theirs “Carnevale,” which means “farewell to meat.” The Romans popularized the festival through colonial expansion. Since its inception, carnival has traveled and continues to traverse many routes, with each interpretation encapsulating different meanings and symbols. It serves numerous social functions, contributing to historical pride, economic income, and national identity. For some, carnivals serve as sites of resistance.

The beating heart of carnivals resides in the unconfined spirit of the celebrations, in their ability to facilitate the state of the carnivalesque. In his critical theory work *Rabelais and His World*,<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin employs the term carnivalesque as a literary mode that subverts social norms through the grotesque, laughter, and chaos. Working in conjunction with

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<sup>17</sup> “Carnival: Origins of the World’s Biggest Party,” *The Economist*, last modified January 31, 2018. video, 3:26, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltXfR\\_TlIEE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltXfR_TlIEE).

<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1968), 177.

Bakhtin's theories, the political theorist and activist Andrew Robinson explains how the carnivalesque "creates a zone in which new birth or emergence becomes possible, against sterility of dominant norms [and] also encourages the return of repressed creative energies."<sup>19</sup> Due to its very nature of breaking down social division and structures, carnival is not the cultural property of any one nation.

The tensions that arise between the institutional, organized event juxtaposed to the abstract, imaginative arena parallel the pressures of defining cultural identity. Official, national cultural identity does not reflect the intermediate spaces that exist in quotidian culture. As such, carnival is a mechanism to examine the characteristics of cultural identity. This can strengthen the linkages between national and quotidian cultural identity, between local Trinbagonians and diaspora persons. National governments can employ these characteristics to design more inclusive and globally impactful policies that center around building relationships and sharing innovative ideas while acknowledging people's lived experiences and regional and international identities.

Consequently, this project asserts that Trinbagonian cultural identity should be consciously considered in creating cultural policy because it has the potential to bridge gaps between home countries and their diaspora. The transnational dimensions of carnival parallel the transnational aspects of cultural identity. Trinidad and Tobago's government needs to architect their own institutional frameworks rather than using colonially derived ones. In doing so, Trinbago's government officials can engender a cultural understanding based on movement, fluidity, and lived experiences of their people within and beyond the nation. Thus, in turn, granting them the opportunity to build cultural confidence and Trinbagonian identity through inclusive practices. Currently, these social identity gaps derive from the narrow

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Robinson, "In Theory. Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power," *Ceasefire Magazine*, September 9, 2011, <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/>.

conceptualizations of culture, identity, and gender by way of a nationalism that only considers a limited concept of Trinidad cultural identity.

Through exploring Carnival, this study casts light on tensions that reside at the intersections cultural identity, gap spaces, and cultural policy. In deconstructing the narratives of nation and Carnival, this research investigates Trinidad's cultural policy in relation to local and diaspora cultural and gender identity by analyzing Carnival history, cultural policy development, ethnographic interviews, and the carnivalesque in the quotidian as experienced in Caribbean music genres, social interactions, and food cultures. This study concludes by analyzing all of these factors in conjunction with interviewee suggestions for tangible policy initiatives to promote a realistic, inclusive Trinidad society and Carnival event that appreciates the carnivalesque in quotidian culture.

#### Postcolonial Theory to Assess Cultural Policy and its Impacts on Cultural Identity

In her text *Policing the Transnational*, Suzanne Burke, a Caribbean cultural sector researcher, defines cultural policy as the institutionalization of culture.<sup>20</sup> She asserts that its main problem results from the definition of culture itself. Her points regarding this pinpointing of the amorphous concept of a culture link into Toby Miller and George Yúdice's thoughts expressed on this topic in their text *Cultural Policy*. Miller and Yúdice are cultural scholars who focus on several topics including cultural politics, cultural policy, globalization and transnational processes and Latin American Studies. In their pivotal work, these scholars discuss how culture can be defined through either aesthetic or anthropological modes of culture. Culture as an aesthetic mode evolved in a way that separates social groups in terms

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<sup>20</sup> Suzanne Burke, "Policing the Transnational: Cultural Policy and the 'Traveling Cultures' of the Anglophone Caribbean," *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and its Diaspora* 11, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 77. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login>.

of taste and status, resulting in clear social hierarchy. Culture as anthropological mode is steeped in language, religion, values, and customs that are reflected in the quotidian.

In my experience, national governments favor the aesthetic mode over the anthropological mode because of its economic value. In the Caribbean context, “culture has been linked primarily to tourism development,”<sup>21</sup> thus the conflation of cultural policy and aesthetic culture. Like these scholars, I too argue that there needs to be a focus on anthropological culture when architecting cultural policy. Aesthetic cultural modes formulate, package, and commodify a national cultural identity, enabling it to operate as a financial resource. For instance, to partake in Carnival as the “greatest show on earth,” attendees must financially participate through purchasing costumes, tickets to various events and headlining fêtes, travel and accommodations, and the list continues.

In their preference for the aesthetic model, national governments can overlook and reduce the value of the anthropological cultural aspects when crafting cultural policy. It is important to understand that when I employ the word anthropological, I am using it to mean everyday culture; or rather to reference that culture is ordinary.<sup>22</sup> As anthropological elements relate more to the quotidian and mundane aspects of people’s lives, they often do not garner special attention, certainly not contrasted to the spectacle of Carnival. Anthropological attributes also relate to more defined aspects of daily life. These aspects can include religion, language and religion, which can be sensitive ethnoracial topics that lead to difficult discussions and highlight social differences. These differences might be catchy dialect phrases embedded in popular songs or they might be controversial customs practiced by a minority group. In the aesthetic model, Burke declares that fragile linkages exist between

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<sup>21</sup> Fred Constant. “Caribbean Culture in the 1990s: Toward a Carefully Conceived Policy.” *Caribbean Public Policy: Regional, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Issues for the 21st Century*, (1997): 92.

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams. “Culture is Ordinary,” in *The Raymond Williams Reader*, ed. Raymond Williams and John Higgins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).



cultural policy and other areas of public policy, such as political democracy, human rights, and social cohesion.<sup>23</sup> Despite there being links to quotidian culture, the fragmentation in the policy is clear. In truth, these links between official cultural policy and Burke's three pivotal aspects of harmonious culture need to be fortified. These connections can be strengthened by studying cultural policy at the national level because doing so exposes nationalism to critical scrutiny.

In their groundbreaking text *Who Sings the Nation-State*, the gender studies scholar Judith Butler and postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak converse regarding the state's capacity to "bind and unbind" its people and its nation.<sup>24</sup> In Butler's view, she asserts that the nation-state has the ability, to the extent of its political power, to assert its national identity and to define its history and borders. For the citizens, this can become the warm embrace of a homeland or it can mean becoming part of a diaspora through negative situations. The nation's capacity to "bind and unbind" its community grows as the state institutionalizes its concept of culture and of who fits within those definitions. This problematic process crafts cultural policy within a nationalistic framework through which the state determines the people's everyday cultural identity. From here, citizens adopt and adapt to these growing concepts of their national and cultural identity, which is promoted in feedback loops of cultural policy. This powerful homogenizing tool indoctrinates people to believe they have a continuous national identity and are members of a cohesive community. However, Benedict Anderson theorizes this national community is more accurately an imagined [political] community.<sup>25</sup> Anderson agrees that while the nation holds the power to manifest this

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<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Burke, *Policing the Transnational: Cultural Policy Development in the Anglophone Caribbean (1962-2008)* (Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 34.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6, <https://hdl-handle-net.ccl.idm.oclc.org/2027/heb01609>.

imagined community, this ideal collective is limited. In other words, the nation remains static because it relies on sameness.

These circumscribed cultural identities only allow for limited manifestations of the officially sanctioned cultural identity. These standardized concepts do not provide space for non-conforming communities. After reviewing Trinidad and Tobago's national cultural policy document, I postulate and have observed in daily life that the Trinbagonian nation fails to imagine diasporic and non-conforming gender communities in their national community. I also assert that this stems from and is reinforced the lack of recognition of these people in the nation's official cultural policy documents. Considering these issues, culture should be understood in both its aesthetic and anthropological everyday interpretations. By reassessing culture as a dynamic, reinforcing network of systems, Trinbago officials and persons can appreciate the intersections among different points that create positive tensions that result in symbiotic relationships. The mutually beneficial tensions produce movement that engenders synergetic flows that ultimately invent spaces for transformation to occur for all levels of society. Culture needs to be understood as a prism in which its many aspects are unified and applied before realizing its full potential.

Due to the archipelago's complex history, the Caribbean cultural identity articulates this dynamic network of culture composed of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The multicultural evolution of the Caribbean population has resulted in the conundrum of defining a Caribbean cultural identity. In "Negotiation Caribbean Identities," the cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall tackles this enigma, writing "[W]hat is more, in another sense, everybody there comes from somewhere else...This to say, their true cultures, the places they really come from, the traditions that really formed them, are somewhere else. The Caribbean is the first, the original, the purest diaspora."<sup>26</sup> In his holistic assessment of Caribbean identity, Hall notes

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<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," (New Caribbean Thought: A Reader, 2001): 6.

that the archipelago's history was built on a process of movement. And this migratory nature preceded the colonial era when the first inhabitants of the Caribbean immigrated from Central and South America.<sup>27</sup>

The flow of people to the archipelago continued into the colonial era with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. This period brought with it violence and trauma, as African slaves were torn from their homelands with no hope of return and brought to the islands. With the British nation's 1808 abolition of slavery in its colonies, the local colonizers sought out a different labor source to work their plantations. With promises of return and gifts of land, the colonizers lured people from the Indian subcontinent to labor as indentured servants in the West Indies. Throughout the varying epochs of Caribbean history, many more people moved to the islands contributing to its diversity, which is now permanently imprinted throughout the region. This brief history regarding the waves of willing, forced, and lured migration demonstrates the mercurial nature of Caribbean cultural identity. It is notoriously difficult to define because a single conceptualization excludes one group or the other.

As a dynamic network of systems, the Caribbean archipelago engenders an explanatory lens that promoting interdisciplinary conversations about the resignification of space and time.<sup>28</sup> This network of island communities calls for a meaning-making and rearticulation that responds to human experiences that traversing this fluid sense of space and time. In these rearticulations, diverse points of view on the Caribbean's collective cultural identity produce tensions that arise from the junctures of each nation's self-identification and its relation to the whole archipelago. In light of these diversities and tensions, Caribbean cultural identity cannot be categorized and firmly defined. Rather, it should be described as a process of *becoming* because these positive tensions create flows that allow for and promote

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<sup>27</sup> Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean, the Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 2.

<sup>28</sup> "Isolated Above, but Connected Below": Toward New, Global, Archipelagic Linkages," in *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Towards New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations*, 3.

change. The Caribbean ethnic landscape resides in a state of constant motion and transformation—it cannot be encapsulated in a single definition without passively neglecting or openly rejecting groups of Caribbean peoples. In his foundational text *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha asserts that this state of becoming manifests as a “space of ambivalence; an in-between space with no specific positionality.”<sup>29</sup> This approach conceives of spaces and freedoms for all Caribbean people to imagine themselves at their points of relation; this inclusive space embraces communities who otherwise dwell in liminal spaces.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago echoes the diasporic nature of the Caribbean in that Trinbagonian cultural identity is a process of becoming, which fits within Bakhtin’s concepts of the carnivalesque. This confluence of identities constitutes Trinbagonian cultural identity where their manifestation of the carnivalesque operates as “a system full of noise and opacity, a non-linear system, an unpredictable system, in short a chaotic system beyond total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world.”<sup>30</sup> While the carnivalesque conceptualizes points of origin as they might pertain to cultural identity, it disregards the need for spatio-temporal fixity. Thus, cultural identity is not rooted in one specific place and time and variations in cultural expressions depend on the spatio-temporal context of specific moments. As they defy definition and fixity, these variations can produce tensions. Some of the tensions in cultural identity come from the dissonance between official, national, and quotidian culture. Trinidad and Tobago’s official national cultural policy presents a perfect example of the eliding of tension-causing variations in identity and identifications. Unfortunately, this national policy document only references diasporic Trinbagonians subjects in a footnote, much to the chagrin of the hundreds of thousands who live in regional and international diasporic communities. Through the transitive concept, tis

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<sup>29</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004): 53.

<sup>30</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, “Caribbean Culture: A Carnavalesque Approach,” in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1997), 203.

nationalistic framework develops a narrow concept of cultural identity that cannot imagine people in liminal spaces. This way of thinking reinforces the idea that the nation is limited by its imagination.<sup>31</sup>

The Martinique theorist Édouard Glissant's theory of Relation<sup>32</sup> avoids this pitfall by taking no object. Through his lens, a particular moment of realization is independent of past and future moments, allowing it to aid in the expansion of the nation's imagination by raising the visibility of moments in quotidian culture. Ergo, the nation can recognize people who partake in moments of past, current, and future migrations. These nations can comprehend of these people and include them into their cultural identity. When Relation is practiced, movement becomes vital. Consequently, spaces are created to recognize migrants and diasporic communities as part of their cultural identity.

In expanding upon Glissant's concept, James Clifford demonstrates the need for relation when he declares that:

[D]iasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora is different from travel...in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this is different from exile), with its frequently individual focus.<sup>33</sup>

Clifford stresses that while diaspora people maintain relationships with their home countries, they also immerse themselves in their host countries. This organic integration of the diaspora into their new homelands creates multiple points of relation. The nation should acknowledge and engage these transnational junctures because diaspora contributes, to varying degrees, to the multiple attachments [spaces] that have influenced their development.

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<sup>31</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006): 6.

<sup>32</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, (University of Michigan Press, 1997): 27.

<sup>33</sup> James Clifford, "Diasporas." In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 307-308.

This project expands beyond frameworks centered on deconstructing birthright nationalism to explore gendered elements infused in national identities. An inclusive concept of gender freedom, fluidity, and expression are also not taken into consideration in the Trinbago nationalistic framework. Its absence creates inherent problems in cultural policy. In the NCPTT, gender is first mentioned in the definition of identity about halfway through. Here, identity “refers to the feeling of belonging to a group related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, or locality. Cultural identity is characteristic to individuals under cultural verifiers such as gender, location, race, history, aesthetics and even food.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout the entire document, the authors of the policy employ the dichotomous gender pronouns of “his/her.” Trinbagonian national cultural identity constructs a binary understanding of gender which conflates a person’s biological sex at birth with the corresponding gender attribute. This structure promotes the biological essentialist idea of gender as a binary construct, meaning gender takes on male or female identities with an assumed heterosexual orientation. These binary terms elide persons who identify beyond this gender dichotomy and heterosexual orientation. Under this concept of dichotomous genders, this elision promotes a dangerous division between the acknowledged and natural categories versus unacknowledged and unnatural ones. Therefore, the nation excludes genders that defy the binary, deeming non-conforming and queer genders unnatural and rendering them invisible to the imagination of the nation.

This project continues by applying gender studies lenses to understand the power dynamics at play in the current NCPTT cultural identity viewpoint. Due to the nations’ reinforcement of gender dichotomies of masculinity and femininity, power is concentrated in the male gender identity. As this gender dichotomy depends upon biological essentialism,

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<sup>34</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 55, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

women are often relegated to mothering and domestic duties—roles which become institutionalized as innate and natural skills and purviews for women. However, in her text *Gender and the Nation*, the scholar Nira Yuval-Davis contests the idea that women have natural roles.<sup>35</sup> The ideas women as *natural* or as having *natural roles* confines women to certain zones and implies that genders, other than male and female, are unnatural. Women's portrayal as natural categorizes them as non-sexual beings relegated to being mothers and nurturers. Simultaneously, these limiting, condescending notions imply that women need to be protected, respectable, and reliant on male power or maleness.<sup>36</sup> The nation does not provide spaces for nuances of female gender identities to exist and, more importantly, to be recognized.

Essentially, this viewpoint rejects non-conforming women and gender identities that are perceived as *unnatural* have no space in the nation. These non-conforming cisgender women and unconventional (trans or queer) genders must fight for recognition in official and in quotidian culture. And the double bind of these gender constraints play out in the carnival space.<sup>37</sup> However, the transformative world of the carnivalesque lends itself to the understanding that gender is fluid. As Butler postulates, gender is not biologically innate. It is a social construct, a performance, “an identity that is tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”<sup>38</sup> Gender, then, is a process of imaginative, repeated acts that constitute variance within its repetitive patterns. Like all aspects of identity, gender is in flux.

In accordance with this viewpoint, when I refer to people and communities who do not conform to gender binary roles or to heteronormative strictures, I employ the term “*trans-*

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<sup>35</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and the Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> De Freitas, “Disrupting the Nation,” *NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische* 73, no.1/2 (1999):16-17.

<sup>37</sup> Rosamond King, *Island Bodies*, (University Press of Florida, 2014): 22.

<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4, (1988): 519.

gender.”<sup>39</sup> *Trans*-gender, in the context of this research, includes people whose gender identification and orientations extend beyond the nationally constructed gender dichotomy. It refers to people who might identify within the cisgender boundaries but who do not conform to idealized gender and orientation norms. And as the term *trans*-gender implies movement, it perfectly links to this paper’s concepts of Caribbean carnivalesque, diaspora, and gender. The prefix “trans” is significant as it related to important key words such as, *trans*-national, *trans*-lation, *trans*-cendence, *trans*-gressive and *trans*-dimensional.

The American poet and literary theorist Rosamond King considers this prefix vital and effective. In her work, she explores how it can be applied:

as an umbrella term for unconventional genders...This abbreviation is appropriate because these five letters are the common prefix for various words referring to those who exhibit transgressive genders in English, Spanish (for example transsexual), French (for example, transsexuel(le)s and transgenres), and Dutch (for example, transgender and transseksueel) [...] *Trans* references the other words mentioned above while retaining difference, thus gesturing towards similarities and the distinctions of unconventional gender experiences...<sup>40</sup>

Beyond language concepts, “trans” retains differences and speaks towards both similarities and distinctions in gender experiences. More importantly though, the prefix links with other border eroding notions that reside at the crux of this research. This prefix and concept not only retains difference but ingrains movement into the very conceptualization of trans identities in terms of diaspora, gender, language, and so on.

Negative tensions surrounding gender during carnival occur because while the carnivalesque theoretically invites explorations of gender identity, certain actors can attempt to police gender norms. This policing of cisgender and heteronormative gender roles can occur in complicated ways. For example, women might be criticized for excessively imbibing alcohol, wearing extremely provocative clothes, and dancing suggestively. During carnival’s

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<sup>39</sup> As LGBTQIA+ classifications each have unique, heavily politicized histories, I cannot fully expound on their nuances and political value within the frame of this research.

<sup>40</sup>King, *Island Bodies*, 22.



time of excess, the barometers for acceptable transgressions becomes fluid. Yet, they might be enforced if someone or an agent feels a person, particularly a targeted individual, is transgressing beyond an acceptable level. At the same time, men's patriarchal dominance can also be reinforced during carnival's negative expression of excess in terms of unwelcome advances and gender violence. In this research, Chapter Two, Three, and Four explore these attitudes and their modern incarnations and evolutions as women increase their voices, especially through the #Metoo movement.

Not only can the policing of female cisgender and the expression of male dominance occur under the flashing lights of carnival, non-heteronormative gender expression can be policed as well. This policing can occur by informal non-state agents and by state agents. For example, in a carnival space, a transvestite or drag queen *might* be able to appear openly and remain unmolested and unafraid for a day or two.<sup>41</sup> The word *might* emphasizes that while a trans body is accepted in a transformative carnival space, a violent rejection is also possible. As interview responses will reveal, this safety of gender expression is not guaranteed during the Trinidad Carnival. Overall, the carnival site potentially reinforces or is potentially a transformative space to reorient the patriarchal views of the nation towards being more open minded and proactively imaginative. As a transformative site, carnival proposes to increase its capacity to conceptualize and fully recognize women and trans bodies within the nation.

In conjunction with its cultural studies aims, this study also hopes to serve as a practical outlet for abstract ideas of cultural identity by applying those abstractions to tangible cultural policy. Thus, this research explores the object of carnival institutionally as an event and abstractly in its carnivalesque attributes. Carnival, as an institution, represents aesthetic culture and illustrates how culture is governed and controlled. Carnival, as an abstract, represents the anthropological model where the carnivalesque and its history

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<sup>41</sup> King, *Island Bodies*, 52.

illuminates its *transnational* dimensions. Trinidad and Tobago provides a solid platform to explore these intersections of history, nation, cultural policy, and cultural identity. Located in the Anglophone Caribbean, the culture of the twin islands consists of mixed local and diaspora demographics formed over centuries of complex international influences. And, the nation's government, which positions the island as the birthplace of carnival, has a published and accessible cultural policy document supported by organizations such as the National Carnival Commission (NCC). Finally, Trinbago has a named quotidian culture known as Trinidadian *liming culture*,<sup>42</sup> which offers insights into how to understand the carnivalesque within the fantasy sphere of the annual Carnival juxtaposed to the daily carnivalesque outside of the carnival event. Chapter Five explores liming culture, which refers to a Trinbagonian style "hangout" that involves formally or informally discussing social life and socioeconomics. It often involves cooking, eating, drinking and/or dancing, which creates a warm atmosphere where people flirt, make jokes and poke fun at oneself, others, and life.

This research contributes to previous scholars' work by using their foundations to further this project's main argument that cultural identity plays an important role in cultural policy. This research asserts that creating an inclusive cultural identity has the potential to bridge gaps between home countries and their diaspora. The scholars discussed in the preceding paragraphs all provide foundational maps to investigate the complexities of cultural identity, gap spaces, and cultural policy both within and beyond a Caribbean context. Other scholars, including like Kevin Adonis Browne, Valeria Sterzi, and Rosamond King, present initial arguments for understanding carnival as an object and its intersectionality with diaspora and gender.

As noted in the previous discussion on Miller's and Yúdice's concept of anthropological culture, this perspective demands that national governments focus on various

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<sup>42</sup> Not to be confused with liminal which is a key feature of carnivalesque.

formations of quotidian culture—one of which is cultural identity. Obviously, I am not using the term “anthropological culture” in its disciplinary context that incorporates colonial methods of understanding culture. I agree with these scholars that current policy documents are too limited in their understanding of cultural identity because of the focus on aesthetic culture that promotes economic opportunities. However, in my research, I postulate that a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity forges spaces for categorical and fluid understandings of cultural identity to coexist. In other words, it acknowledges the influence of a spatio-temporal past while also highlighting lived experiences of quotidian culture.

A carnivalesque approach to cultural identity also defies singular definition. The Caribbean, as with Trinidad and Tobago, remains a region of dynamic histories, peoples, and cultures. It cannot be encapsulated into a singular definition. While I agree with many of Kevin Adonis Browne arguments, I disagree with his contention that the Caribbean is “an abstraction that waits to be resolved.”<sup>43</sup> Instead, I postulate that Caribbean cultural identity, more particularly Trinbago cultural identity, is not one to be resolved but rather contemplated. Movement and fluidity are inherent components in Trinbagonian culture. And this movement is illustrated from the time of the first peoples of our nation to our modern context through regional and international migrations and emigrations. Therefore, a cultural identity understood from a perspective of *becoming* serves as a fluid entity to be contemplated. This carnivalesque cultural identity implies a constant unfolding which allows for spaces of inclusion to unfold overtime.

A carnivalesque understanding of cultural identity balances both aesthetic and anthropological cultural views and goals. It also affords Trinidad and Tobago’s government the opportunity to embrace the lived experiences of its people. More importantly, it highlights

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<sup>43</sup>Kevin Adonis Browne, *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018): 11.

the cultural diversity of Trinbagonian peoples by reorienting its cultural policy to focus on a range of cultural sites. This reorientation would rupture the emphasis of cultural tourism that plagues the nation as well as the Caribbean region. In this way, the nation can accept and recognize that their national norms are informed by the past. However, this carnivalesque worldview acknowledges that national and cultural identity is fluid and can change over time. Thus, the nation forges spaces of inclusion for once ostracized peoples, such as diasporic and *trans*-gender communities. Consequently, a Trinbagonian cultural policy that emphasizes the carnivalesque would work to fund and strengthen culture across a range of everyday cultural sites in addition to the big-ticket events like Carnival and other festivals in specific ways that recognize the trans-national and *trans*-gender diversity that constitutes Trinbagonian culture in all of its everyday, diasporic richness.

Methodologies: Text Analysis, Ethnographic Interviews, Food Studies, and Ethnomusicology

In this research project, I investigate cultural policy with a decolonial cultural studies framework as opposed to a neoliberal policy one. Neoliberal methods, which policy-makers often use, are market oriented. Thus, they inevitably centralize and prioritize economic reform policies. For the purposes of this paper, the neoliberal approach inappropriately preserves the focus of aesthetic culture over the anthropological model's focus on quotidian culture. Therefore, decolonial frameworks support the critical examination of cultural policy documents in order to ascertain pathways to agency and equity through self-determination and liberation. This approach prioritizes the lived experience of people and their cultural outlooks and creativity rather than a culture's economic potential.

Because concepts of culture, identity, and carnivalesque are abstract, decolonial qualitative methods can guide analysis of these personal experiences. This research

investigates how people and communities view their cultures and identities and examines carnivalesque experiences in carnival events. Qualitative research provides a conducive space for this examination and allows for an understanding of people’s motivations, thus giving insights into the amendments that could craft inclusive cultural policy. In conjunction with analyzing sections of policy documents and identifying problematic elements, I attempt to redraft sections of policy documents in the paper’s overall conclusion. In addition to analyzing NCPTT documents, I also analyze other texts, such as the messages conveyed in Carnival advertisements and sociopolitical policy research from the University of the West Indies, the United Nations, and the 2020 Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI).<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the project, I take an ethnomusicology approach to understand the intersections of Trinidad cultural identity, Carnival, and Caribbean music. Music is vital in both carnival cultures and quotidian cultures—it shapes the carnival fantasy narrative and the carnivalesque quotidian narrative. I use various soca lyrics from different artists and time periods to illustrate how changes in the carnival scenes and political stages mutually motivate and affect each other. I also apply a food studies lens to understand the Trinidad cuisine so beloved by its people and internationally praised for its creative fusions of delectable ingredients and spices. In the analysis of music and food, both of these cultural attributes can be understood as vehicles to understand organic evolutions of syncretic cultural fusions. Trinidad music and food can also be understood as platforms to discuss deeper cultural divides—as in the debate over the callaloo or pelau cultural metaphor—and how to overcome these divisions to achieve genuine social harmony.

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<sup>44</sup> The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

Throughout the entire research project, I include responses from ethnographic interviews to understand the gap between aesthetic culture in contrast to anthropological culture. The interviews I conducted offer insights into peoples' perceptions of culture, identity, Caribbean identity, Trinbagonian identity, diasporic experience, notions of gender, and perceptions of carnival. I then use these interviews to construct recommendations for cultural policy that promote inclusivity for local and diaspora persons and freedom of expression for *trans*-gender persons. The interviewees, whose bios can be read in Appendix 1, include scholars, carnival planning committee employees, everyday individuals, activists, and people who work in various areas of the Caribbean music world.

Each sample size was dependent on the availability and willingness of people to be interviewed from both Trinidad and Tobago and its diaspora. The interview questions<sup>45</sup> target the gaps between the aesthetic and anthropological social models. The inquiries address cultural identity factors, including how diaspora view themselves, how they are perceived by their home and host countries, how origin country persons see their own cultural identity, etc. Gaps also refer to the possibility that regular people may or may not view their cultural identity in the same way authorities do. It also includes the dissonances and tensions between homelands and their diaspora. All responses are vital to shaping comprehensive, globally impactful cultural policies.

## Chapter Previews

The above introduction opens the discussions regarding the co-evolutionary development of Trinbago cultural identity in conjunction with its annual Carnival. After laying out the project's critical frameworks, which mainly center on theories from

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<sup>45</sup> For the full list of Interview questions, please see Appendix 2.

postcolonial and Caribbean scholars, I explained my project's methodologies, which include text analysis, ethnographic interviews, ethnomusicology, and food studies. In this text, each chapter is filled with interviewee responses and demonstrates the fluidity of Trinbago identity in terms of the constant reciprocal relationships among Carnival, quotidian culture, music, and food. Each chapter also includes central Caribbean, especially Trinbagonian, songs to explore the chapters themes as expressed through the pivotal platform of popular music.

Chapter One deconstructs Denyse Plummer's song "Nah Leaving" to understand Trinbago's syncretic cultural evolution. The chapter then investigates the history of Carnival's development throughout the centuries of cultural incursions and interactions in these tiny islands that brim with mutually influential cultural intersections. Then, the chapter details the 1977 Regional Caribbean Cultural Policy, along with the three phases of Caribbean cultural Policy, including the Creolization Policy phase, Plural Model Society, and Cultural Industry Policy. The chapter explains how the post-independence government's cultural policy focalized the national identity through neocolonial structures determined through the lens of Afro-creole and patriarchal structures. They reinforced colonial Protestant fetishized views of the twin islands as geographic imaginary. As a result, many diaspora persons, ethnoracial minorities, and *trans*-gender Trinbago groups experience alienation and a conflicted sense of belonging. This problem of belonging and non-belonging is reinforced through the NCPTT fostering binaries between "authentic" and "inauthentic" carnivals. By analyzing the Carnival advertisements that indoctrinate the concept of Trinidad as the "mecca" of all carnivals, Chapter One problematizes how the well-intended goals of the NCPTT failed to foster a cohesive, inclusive national identity.

Chapter Two explores the reality of how these modernizing policies impacted the average local and diaspora Trinbagonian person. Ethnographic evidence from the interviewees' responses supplements the discussions of these government policy issues, with

numerous points on the interviewees' agreement or disagreement with these policies. Several responses elucidate disagreements with and/or gaps between the ostensibly goals and the ultimate impacts of the government's cultural policies. Chapter Three turns towards deeper understandings of Bakhtin's carnivalesque to determine how the concepts of chaos, Glissantian Relation, imagination, and eroticism all converge in the annual Carnival explosion of freedom, release, agency, and participation. Because of this transformative power, carnivalesque fuels a differential consciousness, allowing it to be a process of "and," thus driving multiple potentials. This sections also includes wonderful insights from ethnographic interviewees' regarding their personal histories and experiences with Carnival.

In Chapter Four, I contend that the carnivalesque approaches to cultural identity recognize both past experiences and lived experiences and differences in lived experiences of everyday life. Therefore, the nation of Trinidad and Tobago is able to include fluidity in its understanding of its culture and its people. Moreover, I argue that carnivalesque is illustrated in carnival spaces, particularly through carnival music. Using an ethnomusicology approach, I demonstrate how carnival music became more inclusive and through this, it became a site for innovation. Chapter Four offers an ethnomusicology investigation of Caribbean music specifically associated with Trinidad's Carnivals and carnival culture in general. This section analyzes the diaspora, gendered, and sociopolitical messages in these powerful, popular songs. From here, I return to my project's central thesis regarding understanding how the carnivalesque can be understood and witnessed within the quotidian culture of every day Trinbago local and diaspora life. This acknowledgement of the positive power of the carnivalesque can embrace the nation's syncretic multiculturalism that accepts its diaspora relations, supports women's rights, and accepts *trans*-gender expressions.

In Chapter Five, I argue that carnivalesque moments could be identified beyond the fantasy of carnival by examining liming culture with its extensions into food studies and



linguistic studies, especially code switching. Through the process of liming and peoples' participation in "ole talk," Trinbagonian people engage in carnivalesque practices which deconstruct boundaries of belonging and non-belonging. In Chapter Six, I collate the interviewees' responses on crucial policy change topics to garner and present their personal experiences and thoughtful insights on the future of cultural identity and cultural policy in the twin islands. The project conclusion follows with a summative overview that extends these tangible solutions into practical realities for Trinbago minoritized locals, diaspora people, and trans-gender persons in an effective move towards fostering an inclusive Trinbago society.

## **Chapter One:**

### **History of Carnival Interwoven with Trinidad & Tobago Modern Development**

Denyse Plummer's calypso, "Nah Leaving," promotes a national narrative by boasting about the wonders of living in the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Simultaneously, the imagery she uses describes the unique potential of Trinidad and Tobago life to illuminate the *syncretism* of the culture. Syncretism is both a process and performance that arguably decolonizes Trinbago culture as it "utilizes performance forms of European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements without slavish adherence to one tradition or another."<sup>46</sup> In other words, syncretism affords the platform for Trinbago to decolonize its culture because this hybridity reorganizes myriads of cultural fragments through various systems of formal and informal performance. The end result produces—or hopefully produces—an equitable society where no social group dominates another.

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<sup>46</sup> Christopher B. Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999): 2.

This reassembly of cultural fragments manifests in a new culture. Plummer depicts the syncretic process when she describes the fusions of food and music that are unique to the country. While reflecting on “the ritual of Carnival, the Soca Chutney bacchanal,” she refers to eating:

You see ah just eat ah curry cue  
Peas, rice and cascado  
Two crab and callaloo  
Meh neighbour just gimme  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap<sup>47</sup>

These aspects of Trinbagonian culture signify the blending of African and Indian characteristics of food and music. And, callaloo refers to a local favorite soup often used as a metaphor to describe the “melting pot” society that is the diversity of Trinidad. This syncretism becomes an analogy for the inventiveness of Trinbagonian culture as well as a celebration of cultural differences within unification. Her lyrics reflect the many iterations of cultural identity within Trinbagonian culture.

But the national narrative dominates center stage and represents an unhealthy desire to define a singular national cultural identity. The power of this national identity is illustrated when Plummer sings that, despite the struggles of the country, she “nah leaving.” Plummer’s calypso depicts the realities of Trinbagonian life as she highlights the racial tensions and violence that grip the twin island Republic. She sings:

They say meh country so stressful, so tense  
With race hate, young jail bait, too much violence  
Girl pack up and go, this sweet Trinidad  
I tell dem no way (no way)  
How de people small-minded, macscious and loud  
Of bobol and scandal they boastful and proud  
Yet somehow I see, all this foolery  
As window dressing, dey still ah blessing.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>48</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

Despite these national struggles, the calypso evokes a sense of national pride and belonging.

Reflecting the resilience, warmth, and gregariousness of Trini culture she intones:

I see a people creative who must overcome  
Make magic from old steel, from rusty old drum  
So why should I fear, some tears here and there  
I tell dem no way (no way)  
Comradery so special like natural instinct  
Dey meet you by de river, is come take ah drink  
Unspoken but kind, no silent bad mind  
So forget New York and and de old talk<sup>49</sup>

In this intensely Trinbagonian song, Plummer references the Trini social style of liming, which means to get together and socialize and enjoy the ol' talk where people sing, dance, and picong, meaning tease each other. Liming and ol' talk represent such integral facets of Trinbago life that I dedicate an entire chapter to this cultural style.

In returning to Plummer's song, she emphasizes how Trinbagonians are perseverant. Through their collective history and identity, there is an instinctual bond among them. Regardless of the stress of Trinbago life, she sings of her neonatal, blood connection to her homeland, "Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap." For these reasons the good outweighs the bad and she reminds her listeners that "freedom doh come cheap." And this is the price we pay for our sweet Trinbago. What are the realistic social concerns Trinbagonians perceive as daily issues they would like their government to address more deeply?

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<sup>49</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

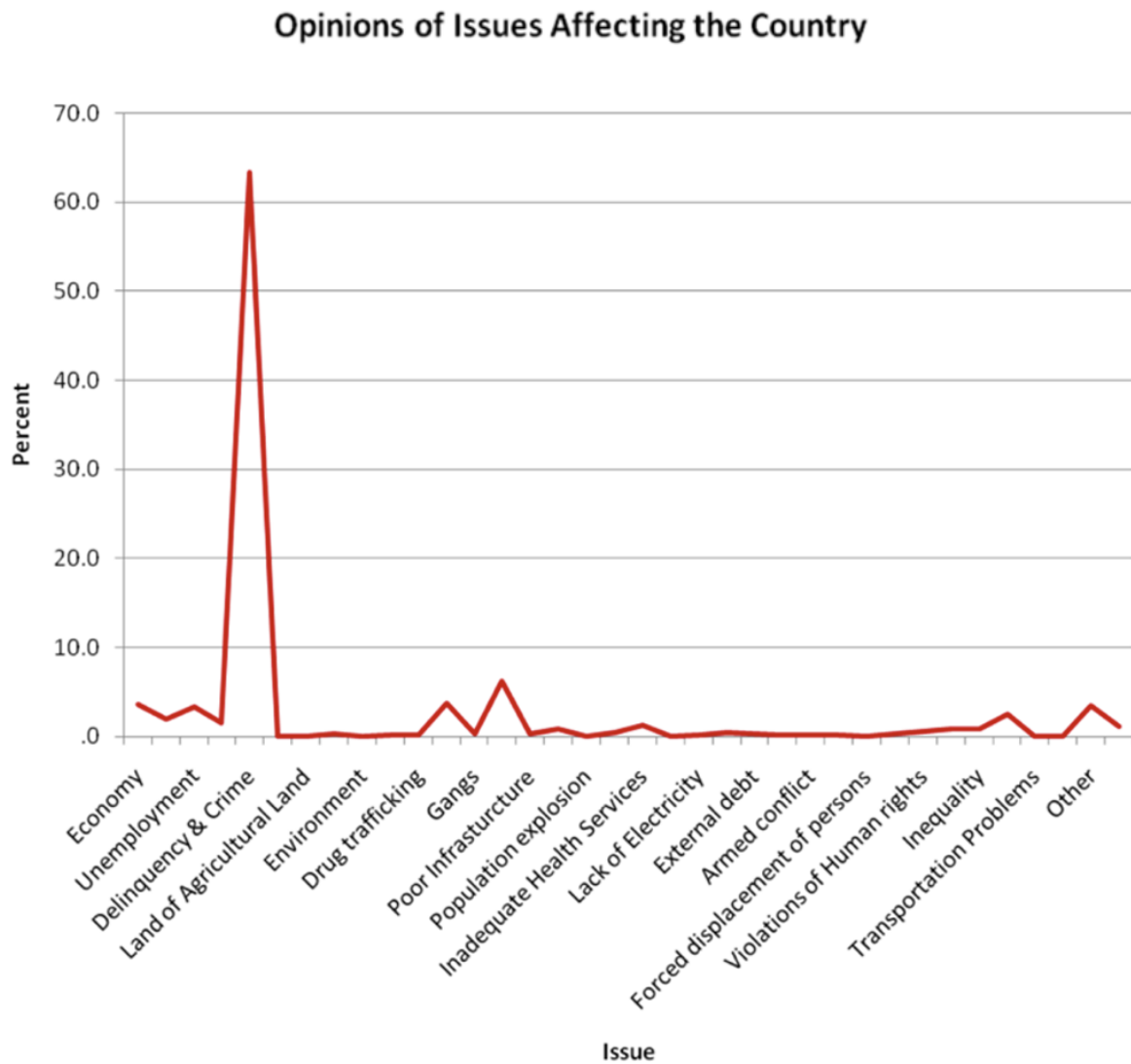


Figure 3. This chart shows Trinbagonian’s concerns mainly center on unemployment in conjunction with delinquency and crime.<sup>50</sup>

The national narrative in the above calypso exemplifies the Trinbago government’s attempt to craft a Trinbagonian national cultural identity. As with other Anglophone Caribbean countries, Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural identity has been prescribed by its colonial masters. According to renowned poet, Derek Walcott, “the Caribbean is still looked

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<sup>50</sup> BTI p. 67.

at as illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized [...] No people there [...] No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken.”<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the Caribbean is largely perceived by the outside world as the ultimate tourist destination. In every imagined reality, the Caribbean’s history, people, and culture wrestles with this image of being a prettily packaged, exotic paradise with no real essence. This description, along with its branding of being a destination of fun, sun, and relaxation implies that the Caribbean is not real—it is a fantasy.

Together with the colonial nationalistic framework of the NCPTT, the cultural policy positions Carnival as the biggest tourist attraction, reinscribing Trinbagonian people as overly sexualized and exotic. Angelique Nixon explains that:

Selling the tourist product [Carnival] relies on Caribbean [Trinbagonian] “paradise” not only being both fantasy and real, but it also relies upon normative notions of gender and heterosexuality to fuel the tourist economy [...] The institutions of slavery and colonialism shaped and depended upon constructions of gender and race to sustain inequity and domination; similarly, tourism relies upon certain notions of gender, race, and sexuality.<sup>52</sup>

One of my interviewees Naette,<sup>53</sup> who is a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Maryland,<sup>54</sup> echoes these sentiments when she states that “we are the dancing monkeys of the world. We are the ones who play the music, have the beach, we are very laid back, it’s slower than usual, but it’s always very fun, warm, and welcoming. I think that exists in tandem with a perception of the region globally that requires that we think that way about ourselves.” This cycle can be perceived in Carnival spaces which tend to be ambivalent in that they subvert and reinscribe cultural norms.

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<sup>51</sup> Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Angelique V. Nixon, *Resisting Paradise: Tourism, Diaspora, and Sexuality in Caribbean Culture*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015): 26.

<sup>53</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, Naette, interview by author, Maryland, December 20, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> For Naette’s bio-note, please see Appendix 1.

## Unity Amongst Citizenry

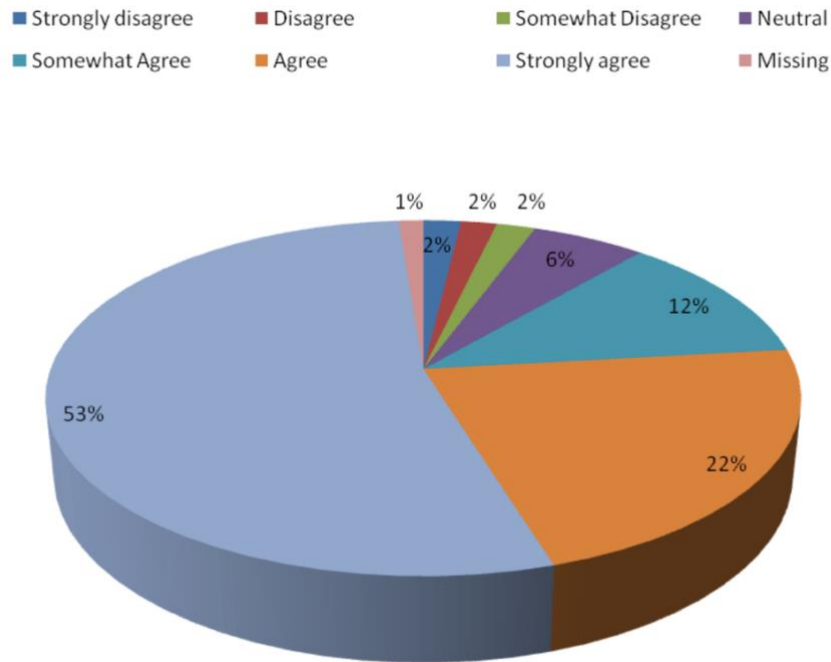


Figure 4. This chart<sup>55</sup> shows the Trinbagonian’s general perception of unity amongst its citizens. However, this project seeks to uncover elements of this national unity narrative that might be false, especially in relation to Carnival.

While this nationalistic, postcolonial approach seeks to unify fragmented peoples, it poses two key problems. First, it defines its nationals through geographical boundaries of the Trinbagonian nation. This is demonstrated in Plummer’s calypso when she sings “is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead,” meaning that Trinbagonian identity is rooted to the home nation. This framework overlooks the fact that many Trinbagonians reside beyond the country’s physical borders, thus eliding its diasporic subjects. The Migration Policy Institute reported that in 2017 that approximately 4.4 million Caribbean immigrants resided in the United States and more than 90% of Caribbean immigrants came from Cuba, the Dominican

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<sup>55</sup> 2010.

Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago. While this represents a sizable population, they are officially neglected or diminished within the national cultural identity, which represents a major point of investigation for this project. Second, the country's governmental efforts towards nationalism reproduce colonial frameworks that perpetuate fragmentation of its culture and people as it also reinscribes colonially derived cultural identity. The reproduction of colonial frameworks cultivates Trinbagonian culture and nationalism that is heteropatriarchal, reproducing colonial, Christian concepts of gender and sexuality.

Trinidad and Tobago's carnival and cultural policy document provides an opportunity to examine these interrelated issues of nationalism by providing insights into how cultural imaginings of identity affect Trinbagonian communities. Trinidad and Tobago's Cultural Policy (NCPTT) titled, "Celebrating Diversity: Maximising our Diversity," aims to craft national cultural identity and boost cultural confidence. But the policy employs a static notion of cultural identity which excludes diasporic and non-conforming gender communities. The Trinbagonian nation marginalizes these groups because their cultural identities produce ambivalence and otherness since they do not conform to the national norms. Their identities engender ambivalence because they project "otherness."

Difference and otherness are fantasies of a certain cultural space or form that contradicts the national norm.<sup>56</sup> To be different or to project otherness is to be deviant in the eyes of the nation. As a result of their difference and otherness, the Trinbagonian nation relegates them to in-between or liminal spaces. According to Homi Bhabha, liminal spaces are in-between designations of identity that become the process for symbolic interactions, it is the connective tissue that constructs the differences between identity classification.<sup>57</sup> Liminal

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<sup>56</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004): 45-46.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 5.

spaces are sites of transformations, but these potentials of varied cultural expressions are culled by static, national norms.

### Historical Overview of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago

Many narratives of Trinidad and Tobago, as with the rest of the Caribbean, begin with Christopher Columbus in 1492. But prior to his arrival, the Caribbean islands were occupied by Amerindian tribes known as Caribs and Arawaks. Amerindian tribes migrated to the island of Trinidad over 7,000 years ago from Venezuela.<sup>58</sup> Thus, from its very inception, the island of Trinidad was born out of a process of movement. The flow of people to the island continued with the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, who decided that they had rights to own the land, but the Amerindian populations did not.<sup>59</sup> With the clashing of cultures, along with contentions over land, the Spanish decimated the Amerindian populations.

Initially, the Spanish had no interest in Trinidad since there was no gold. However, things changed when European interests switched from gold to tobacco, cacao, spices and sugar. In 1783, Spain instituted the *Cédula de Población*, making it possible for foreign immigrants to settle in Trinidad if they were Catholic, of a friendly nation, or swore allegiance to Spain and accepted the laws of the country.<sup>60</sup> French planters and their slaves moved, voluntarily and involuntarily, to the island and a few years after the Spanish enacted the *Cédula de Población*, African and French groups dominated the island.<sup>61</sup> It is with this merging of the French and African cultural traditions that the basis of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival began to form all those centuries ago. Carnival was developed on the island of

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<sup>58</sup> Bridget Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago*, 11.



Trinidad and later when Trinidad and Tobago became a twin Republic, the festival became known as a Trinbagonian one.

Trinidad's carnival season starts around Christmas and leads up to Lent. In its formative years, carnival spaces exhibited ambivalence as they created spaces for transgressions to occur. During the festivities of this period, the French elite indulged in masquerades of inversion. White men disguised themselves as garden slaves while white women disguised themselves as mulattresses. These costumes permitted the colonizers to transgress normal social boundaries and act out their fears and fantasies of the imagined other.<sup>62</sup> While the French elite donned their masks, the free colored people were permitted to hold their own masquerades, while the slaves were not. However, in true subversive form, "slaves formed *convois* or black regiments, modeled on West African secret societies [...] and these underground organizations operated year-round but became more active during the carnival season and were the precursors to the jamette 3 bands that emerged post-emancipation carnival."<sup>63</sup> While the elite indulged in their fantasies, slaves rebelled against their masters by performing their cultural traditions in their secret society celebrations.

After Emancipation, newly freed slaves marked their freedom through their participation in public street carnivals. It was a way for the formerly-enslaved people to express their trauma as well as to rejoice in regaining their independence: "After 1838, they actually took over the street carnivals by masking, dancing, stickfighting, mocking the Whites, and reenacting scenes of their past enslavement."<sup>64</sup> Europeans were suspicious of these festivities because of their seemingly unruly, violent, boisterous manner. The whites stopped participating in carnival events. Free colored peoples disassociated themselves from

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<sup>62</sup> Christine G T. Ho, "Popular culture and the aestheticization of politics: Hegemonic struggle and postcolonial nationalism in Trinidad carnival, *Transforming Anthropology* 9, no.1, (2008): 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ho, "Popular Culture and the Aestheticization of Politics," 4.

<sup>64</sup> Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago*, (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001): 222.

public carnival activities, as they did not want to be associated with the low-class debauchery. But, while the free colored, middle-class “avoided association in the street masses,” they celebrated in private and were “deeply resentful of any interference with carnival by the Government.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, they were ready “to use it if necessary, as a means of indirect attack on the Governor and the upper (White) class whenever the tension rose.”<sup>66</sup> At this point, carnival became a significant event in history as it was wrapped up in rebellion and revolution, while it simultaneously became a cornerstone of Trinidadian culture.

Along with the abolition of slavery and its connection to carnival, the British colonial period brought about significant changes to the demographics of the island. Groups of “freed negro slaves from the United States, coloreds from Venezuela, Chines immigrants, Corsicans, Scots, Swiss, Germans and Italians,”<sup>67</sup> migrated to Trinidad during various periods. But perhaps the arrival of East Indians to the island served as one of the most significant movements. The British brought Indian populations to Trinidad under the system of indentureship. By 1871, Indians accounted for 25.1 percent of the total population, and “it was not only their late arrival and a number of legal restrictions which kept them to a large extent out of the existing social system; they isolated themselves from the rest of society by emphasizing their own cultural, religious, and ‘racial’ values.”<sup>68</sup> This influx of people to Trinidad led to socio-cultural tensions, particularly in constructs of national cultural identity and carnival.

Ethnic and religious minority groups distanced themselves from carnival festivities and associated themselves with a middle-class, Eurocentric, Christian view of morality as well as civility. However, this began to change over the years. Moreover, when Trinidad gained independence in 1962, and became the twin Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the

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<sup>65</sup> Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, 224.

<sup>66</sup> Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> Peter van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival, A Quest for National Identity*, (London: Caribbean, 1997): 13.

<sup>68</sup> van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival*, 93.

then Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams (September 25, 1911- March 29, 1981), was tasked with forging a Trinidad and Tobagonian national cultural identity. Often called “father of Trinidad and Tobago,” Williams sought to bring unity to the nation by employing carnival as a national symbol. “Williams was as a distinguished historian with a strong materialist standpoint had critical implications for the reification of the national culture in postcolonial Trinidad.”<sup>69</sup> He wrote what has become known as the nation’s manifesto and a second, unofficial constitution. To promote his unified vision of all the Trinbago ethniraces, he wrote:

There can be no Mother India [ . . . ] There can be no Mother Africa [ . . . ] and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or to allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society. There can be no Mother England [ . . . ] There can be no Mother China [ . . . ] and there can be no Mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children. All must be equal in her eyes.<sup>70</sup>

These words hold profound meaning, as they elide people’s ancestries and collapse ethnoracial identities into a single narrative of Trinbagonian cultural birth.

Williams’s reification of Trinbagonian cultural identity hoped to forge a postcolonial, multicultural realm of freedom and acceptance. However, Teruyuki Tsuji asserts that “While Williams and his government imagined conforming to the newly defined spatial bounds of the nation, in the place of dividing and ruling colonial culture and social discipline,”<sup>71</sup> they in fact promoted a neocolonial plantation-village socioeconomic system that entrenched ethnoracial divides by labor sectors. Opponents of Williams’ national vision claimed this program promoted an Afro-creole, masculine hierarchy of power. The social psychologist Ramesh Deosaran declared that carnival soca lyrics “openly expressed the opinion that only

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<sup>69</sup> Teruyuki Tsuji, “Villaging the Nation: The Politics of Making Ourselves in Postcolonial Trinidad.” *Callaloo* 31, no. 4 (2008): 1150.

<sup>70</sup> Eric Eustace Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. (London: A. Deutsch, 1964): 279.

<sup>71</sup> Tsuji, “Villaging the Nation: The Politics of Making Ourselves in Postcolonial Trinidad,” 1150.

people with an African background are entitled to share in Caribbean unity.”<sup>72</sup> Despite the racial tensions that emanated from the government’s nationalistic agenda of carnival, the festival grew to become more inclusive over the years. This ostensible inclusivity allowed more people of different socio-cultural, political, and economic backgrounds to participate in the madness of the season.

### Analyzing the Phases and Messages of Trinidad and Tobago’s Official Cultural Policy

In this chapter, I argue that the nationalist framework of Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural policy uses colonial frameworks and engenders a cultural identity that constructs a dichotomy of belonging and non-belonging. These dichotomies occur along the dividing lines of colonial, patriarchal, Christian ideologies of gender and sexuality. To argue this, I present an overview of the 1977 Regional Caribbean Cultural Policy (RCCP) and its three phases as it serves as the foundations for the 2020 NCPTT. I then move to examine the NCPTT and argue that in its attempts to characterize national cultural identity, it alienates its diasporic and non-conforming gender members. Lastly, I investigate the problems of non-belonging that are associated with the nation’s exclusion of diasporic and non-conforming gender and orientation communities.

Trinidad and Tobago’s Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts used the 1977 RCCP as a model to architect the 2020 NCPTT. However, these previous problematic cultural policies incorporated colonial frameworks that engender national cultural identities promoting paradigms of cultural belonging and non-belonging. Additionally, the NCPTT emphasizes carnival as a cultural commodity to be used for economic gain, which overshadows its cultural goals of boosting confidence and architecting

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<sup>72</sup> van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival, A Quest for National Identity*, 118.

a national identity. Subsequently, it privileges carnival as its primary cultural commodity, which further complicates the problem of cultural identity as it pertains to belonging and non-belonging.

As Caribbean islands began to gain their independence from European rule, they sought to combat colonial systems and reclaim their culture and identities through the creation of cultural policy. This form of policy was devised so that Caribbean people could shape their own culture, together with their own cultural identity from their perspective. This document afforded the region and its people the power to imagine and name themselves. Thus, the RCCP outlined nine elements for its individual nations to factor into their own policies. These goals served as frameworks for other similar policies, while explaining the significance of culture in development. It promoted some degree of unity at the regional and national levels through growth and shared collectives.<sup>73</sup> These proclamations endeavored to reorient power to the Caribbean people and provide them with the tools and capacity to develop themselves.<sup>74</sup> All of these elements contributed to the overall mission of building Caribbean confidence and creating Caribbean cultural identity.

Although Trinbago achieved de jure independence, like many postcolonial nations, the social systems, business networks, and leadership coteries prove difficult to alter overnight. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who in 1964 coined the term neocolonialism, uses this term to describe liberated nations that overtly or covertly adhere to colonial structures. He explains that:

When we talk of the 'colonial system,' we must be clear about what we mean. It is not an abstract mechanism. The system exists, it functions; the infernal cycle of

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<sup>73</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 1, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 6-9, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

colonialism is a reality. But this reality is embodied in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system.<sup>75</sup>

While Sartre focuses his neocolonial criticism towards African nations, he also includes examples of China's modern evolutions in government systems that externally appear to expand freedoms and deconstruct previous colonial or oppressive sociopolitical systems. However, he asserts, and what can be seen in Trinidad and Tobago, is a new manifestation of the colonial structures where the Western-educated elites of the formerly colonized nation organically move into positions of power and continue colonial structures and institutions. These latent structures manifest just as much in the interpersonal psychologies, social patterns, gender configurations, and economic relationships as they remain manifest in the architecture of the still-standing colonial-era buildings.

In my interviews, several persons noted the obvious neocolonial structures entrenched in Trinbagonian government and institutions. In connection to her views on national identity, Trishana<sup>76</sup> sees a national history haunted by colonialism:

In terms of identities, to me, I think it's still a lot in our history. In my opinion, we have a very deep-rooted historical identity that to me still plagues us and even the younger people. I think we haven't changed much, especially the way we think, act, the way we dress...well not really dress, we've definitely revolved that way. We have a lot of connections with that history to me and I think that's how I see Caribbean identity... a mix of people and all connected through history<sup>77</sup>

Another interviewee Lauren makes an even more cynical comment, asking: "You (meaning me, the interviewer) said something about focusing on Trinidadian culture without focusing on colonization, but how can we?"<sup>78</sup> A final interviewee sees exactly what Sartre noted in many liberated postcolonial societies. She says that:

Yes, I think that we replaced the government, we did not change it. So, we did not change that system that locks the public out. You have to remember that the spine of

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<sup>75</sup> Jean-Paul Satre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Translated by Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer and Terry McWilliams. (London: Routledge, 2001): 17.

<sup>76</sup> For Trishana's bio-note, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>77</sup> Singh, Trishana, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, December 16, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Plaza, interview.

colonialism, the hallmark of colonialism, is that it didn't distribute power to the places that the British, the others, the Europeans inhabited. They did not distribute power. Their job was to manage the populations, to limit the power for delegation but never to actually give creative power to the public. And you have a situation in which we replaced the white, European colonists with local people who still thought it worked the same way and so that's where you get this attitude in my mind.<sup>79</sup>

Overall, the issues of European colonial mindsets and sociopolitical structures continue to determine much of the nation's worldviews and government initiatives.

Despite attempts to craft a Caribbean cultural identity, the RCCP policies have “some resemblances to the traditional UK arts policy tradition “[and] the dominant role of international frameworks establishes policy credibility as well as technical and financial assistance from international donor agencies.<sup>80</sup> This implies that the Caribbean is not legitimized as a region that has the power to govern nor produce its own institutional frameworks. To establish their legitimacy, they are coerced into adopting systems that were designed to promote traditional cultures of their previous colonial masters.

One of the first phases of Caribbean cultural policy, which began in the 1950s, was the Creolization Policy phase.<sup>81</sup> This phase reflects the neocolonialism problem by adopting colonial frameworks. The main goal of this stage aimed to promote a national narrative by uniting Caribbean people through shared collectives of values, history, experiences, culture, and identity. Trinidad and Tobago, for example, endorses a national motto of “Together we aspire, together we achieve” on its coat of arms. This approach, however, “involved a promotion of a Protestant work ethic that promoted discipline, temperance, and collective work, and utilized the institutions inherited from British colonial rule to disseminate these values.”<sup>82</sup> British ideology remains central as Caribbean cultures and values remain in the

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<sup>79</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova interview.

<sup>80</sup> Suzanne Burke, “Re-imagining the local in national cultural policy formulation – the case of the Anglophone Caribbean,” *Cultural Trends* 28, no. 4 (2019): 272.

<sup>81</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 171.

<sup>82</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 171.

background. This consequently reproduced a Caribbean cultural identity that is embedded in colonial ideology.

Moreover, this framework failed to recognize the numerous ethnicities, religions, and cultural histories of its people. The title “creolization” emphasized the European-African experience, prompting a “binary reading of society.”<sup>83</sup> The Caribbean was founded on the constant movement of people, but the binary structure implied by “creolization” does not reflect this. This national narrative attempted to create a singular definition of cultural identity that erased the diverse group of people, which includes an amalgamation of indigenous, African, Indian, European, Lebanese, and Chinese populations, to name a few. Thus, “it created major institutions of support for the cultural domain which privileged select cultural traditions [...] and created a new class of cultural elites who were generally urban based, educated and middle-class.”<sup>84</sup> To achieve this elite class status, Caribbean people aspired to colonial ideologies that reflected colonial standards of civility, such as the Protestant work ethic, European clothing, and acts of respectability politics.

The second policy phase, the Plural Model Society, began by the mid-1970s. It embraced a people-centered approach to foster cultural acceptance of difference through the arts, including dance, theater, and visual and culinary arts. This phase focused on “creating an enabling environment for various cultural resources, and on empowering ‘every day’ people to take control of their cultural assets.”<sup>85</sup> All of these understandings derive from the notion of the Caribbean as a “plural society, whereby the various social groups, while existing in a common whole [...] mix but do not combine.”<sup>86</sup> But due to the lack of resources and training,

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<sup>83</sup> Suzanne Burke, *Policing the Transnational: Cultural Policy Development in the Anglophone Caribbean (1962-2008)*, (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010): 101.

<sup>84</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 171.

<sup>85</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 172.

<sup>86</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 172.



this model fell short of its goal of developing a Trinbagonian culture as well as cultural sector.

Though the Plural Model Society intended to address the issues of the first, it failed due to resource scarcity and the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies, which was a key feature of neoliberal economic policy. Neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, Structural Adjustment Policies in the Caribbean are corrective instruments of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) that are used to improve economic development and steer countries to full modernity through Westernization and capitalism penetration.<sup>88</sup>

Though Structural Adjustment Policies promised ample opportunities by ensuring “that indebted countries earn more foreign exchange and that the money they earn is used to repay their loans and to promote private investments,”<sup>89</sup> they instead further exacerbated socio-economic problems.<sup>90</sup> Governments were urged to focus on a market-oriented, aesthetic model approaches to development rather than anthropological ones one centered on the arts. Thus, structural adjustment deepened the dependency, poverty, and debt of Caribbean countries.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, instead of focusing on developing a Trinbagonian culture and identity, along with other specific sectors, they focused on bringing the nation’s economy into modernity. These economic reforms restricted Caribbean countries to this form of

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<sup>87</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 2.

<sup>88</sup> Eudine Barriteau, “Structural Adjustment Policies in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective,” *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 8, no. 1, (1996): 142-156.

<sup>89</sup> Kathy McAfee, *Storm signals: structural adjustment and development alternatives in the Caribbean*, Boston, (MA: South End Press in association with Oxfam America, 1991): 7.

<sup>90</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 173.

<sup>91</sup> Kathy McAfee, *Storm signals: structural adjustment and development alternatives in the Caribbean*, (Boston, MA: South End Press in association with Oxfam America, 1991): 7.

development so that they could secure international funding-loans through organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, from which they could achieve a form of legitimization in a global setting.

The third, and current phase, which began in the 1990s, ventures to centralize culture in national development. The Cultural Industry Policy phase nurtures the relationship between the cultural sector and the financial sector. Ostensibly, they seek to promote “the growing interests in the cultural industry sector[, meaning] that governments slowly began to shift their finite resources from the arts that cost, to the arts that pay.”<sup>92</sup> The emphasis on economic value of culture favors the aesthetic model over the anthropological one. In doing so, governments focused on the dollar value of culture rather than the development of culture for the purposes of crafting Caribbean cultural identity and boosting Caribbean cultural confidence.

As with the RCCP, the NCPTT utilizes systems that reproduce European ideologies. For instance, to measure Trinidadian cultural confidence, the NCPTT employs a set of indicators developed from research commissioned by the Bank of Sweden’s Tercentenary Foundation. The indicators aim “to build the knowledge and evidence base for cultural policy using a range of conceptual tools including social and cultural spatial capital, capability theory, cultural mapping and cultural planning.”<sup>93</sup> While these indicators provide a base through which Trinbagonian government can measure cultural confidence, the measures lack the nuanced understanding of Trinbagonian and Caribbean history, peoples, cultures, and life.

The NCPTT also endorses the notion of a singular Trinbagonian cultural identity while it focuses on the economic benefit of developing the cultural sector that architects frameworks of belonging and non-belonging. Firstly, the NCPTT is framed in two modes of

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<sup>92</sup> Burke, “The Evolution of the Cultural Policy Regime in the Anglophone Caribbean,” 174.

<sup>93</sup> Colin Mercer, “Towards cultural citizenship: Tools for Cultural Policy and Deployment,” SSRN Electronic Journal, (2002) 1.

understanding culture—the aesthetic and anthropological culture models. Culture, as an aesthetic, evolves in a way that separates social groups in terms of taste and status resulting in social hierarchies. Culture as anthropological is steeped in language, religion, values, and customs that are reflected in everyday experiences.<sup>94</sup> The document favors aesthetic culture, as it aims to use the country’s creativity for prosperity and profitability.<sup>95</sup> Aesthetic cultural development, in the form of national identity, is shaped by its ability to produce economic benefits.

Further, the desire for a singular Trinbagonian cultural identity essentializes its dynamic culture, creating dichotomies of belong and non-belonging through authenticity. But anthropological cultural focuses on engendering national identity that places equal importance on subjective, lived experiences of quotidian culture. As a result, the locus of cultural identity adheres to an acceptance of movement and fluidity, which form cornerstones of the transformative nature of the carnivalesque. Anthropological culture offers a non-hierarchical endorsement of everyday culture, lending itself to promoting the interests of minoritized, diasporic, and *trans*-gender constituencies, as the carnivalesque engenders *trans* potentials. As noted in the Introduction, this paper uses *trans*- to refer to the act and being of crossing borders or boundaries. This crossing can relate to international migration, non-conforming cisgender behavior, and non-heteronormative behavior. All of these transgressive states of being and behaving signals the need to transcend the named and bounded categories that have shaped people’s thinking and culture. These subversions consider movement across

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<sup>94</sup> Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 1.

<sup>95</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 8, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

nations, cultures, space, places, modes, semiotic resources, named languages, and genders as viable and important aspects of the individual psyche, subjectivity, and worldview.<sup>96</sup>

### Conclusion: Moving from Failed Policy to Carnival's True Positive Potential

Trinidad and Tobago's cultural policy reinscribes a colonial, Christian, nationalistic narrative which excludes diasporic and *trans*-gender communities. Though this approach endeavors to unify its fragmented peoples, I argue that it poses two key problems. First, it reproduces colonial frameworks, contradicting the goal of Trinbago's cultural policy which is to develop its own cultural identity and boost cultural confidence. The NCPTT itself acknowledges these are issues "not uncommon for heterogeneous post-colonial societies"<sup>97</sup> seeking to overcome the "multiple traumas of enslavement, indentureship and dependency in the economic world order."<sup>98</sup> Second, in reusing colonial, nationalistic frameworks, the Trinbagonian nation excludes minoritized, diasporic, and *trans*-gendered subjects. The lack of recognition in the NCPTT for diasporic communities insinuates that the government defines its nationals through geographic boundaries. Thus, to be written into the structure of the nation, people must reside within the nation's borders. Moreover, this colonial, nationalistic design fosters a binary understanding of gender and heterosexual orientation by reinscribing heteropatriarchal notions. Hence, the nation excludes *trans*-gender communities.

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<sup>96</sup> Margaret R. Hawkins and Junko Mori, "Considering 'Trans-' Perspectives in Language Theories and Practices," *Applied Linguistics* 39, no.1 (2018): 1.

<sup>97</sup> "National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago," Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, x, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> "National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago," Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 6, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

The NCPTT does not define gender or sexual orientation in the body of its pages nor does it use pronouns outside of his/her.

This chapter analyzed the 1977 Regional Caribbean Cultural Policy, which aimed to reorient power to Caribbean people to develop and name themselves. Correspondingly, Caribbean cultural policy underwent three phases: The Creolization Policy, The Plural Society, and The Cultural Industry. The Creolization Policy promoted a homogeneous narrative of Caribbean people which omitted the diverse groups of peoples and their cultures. The Plural Society phase, though a people-centered approach to fostering cultural acceptance of difference through the arts, failed because of the neoliberal implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies. These policies reoriented the Caribbean focus toward a market-oriented approach but without the proper tools and resources for success. The current phase is The Cultural Industry. This development attempts to centralize culture in national development. Therefore, culture is an object for nations, such as Trinidad and Tobago, to utilize for economic gain, which prioritizes culture as an aesthetic over culture as an anthropological model.

The preference of aesthetic culture over anthropological culture is limited because, as in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the development of culture for economic opportunities has not succeeded in building national identity or boosting cultural confidence. Trinbago's carnival event emulates these tensions between the two ideologies of culture. The NCPTT privileges carnival and perpetuating a singular history of the nation. It simultaneously claims that Trinbago is the mecca of all carnivals, disseminating claims between "authentic" and "inauthentic" carnival experiences. The conflict results in the ambiguous position of diasporic and *trans*-gendered subjects, as there are tugs and pulls between adhering to the acceptable norm or deviating from it, from being this nationalized ideas versus a complex, unique subjectivity. Through cultural studies research combined with ethnographic interviews, the

second chapter explores the ramifications of these policy initiatives for local, diaspora, and trans-gender persons.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Problems of NCPTT's Cultural Policy for Locals and Diaspora**

Just the title of David Rudder's iconic 2003 song "Trini 2 De Bone" emphasizes the sense of a cultural homeland that the world of the twin islands instills in and evokes for Trinbagonian locals and diaspora. Rudder, who is a highly respected Trinidad musician, begins his song with a slow tempo as he sings with thoughtful intonation. Then, the song builds to a medium tempo of warm, delightful rhythms.

Welcome, welcome one and all to de land of fete  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
When it come to bacchanal, well they can't beat we yet  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
Look, sweet women parade abundantly  
De brendren dey full ah energy  
Some people say God is a Trini  
Paradise and all convincing me  
God gave us a spirit-firey  
But nut'in in de world don't bother we  
But look a smart man gone wid we money  
We still come out and mash up de party<sup>99</sup>

The lighthearted charm of the melodies and rhythms and the affectionate tone belie the deeper importance of the lyrics. Rudder's song links to questions of internal verses external identity, as in the ideas of Trinbago being "de land of fete" imbued with "bacchanal," which serves as a tropic term repeatedly associated with Carnival. Rudder speaks with pride in the "sweet women" who "parade abundantly" and in "de brendren" (brethren), which links to ideas of community and congregations. Rudder's love for Trinbago shines when he sings that

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<sup>99</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

“Some people say God is a Trini” as he equates his land as a Biblical tropical “paradise” whose special people God gave a “spirit-fiery.” After intersecting homeland love, Carnival bacchanal, and spiritual intonations, Rudder’s verse concludes with an energetic flourish that expresses the Trinbago carefree style that takes Carnival partying very seriously. Despite any situation, Rudder emphasizes that Trini people “We still come out and mash up de party.” Rudder’s song lyrics encapsulate many ideas expressed in this chapter that explores the modern Trinbagonian experience of living with the impacts of the 1970s cultural identity policies.

Chapter One explored the evolution of post-independence Trinidad and Tobago in the making of its first postcolonial identity within the modern world and with non-foreign leadership. As discussed, while Eric Williams’ government sought to forge a new, authentic Trinbago identity that included all the citizens, it ultimately flattened individuality. In this research’s thesis, those policies minoritized many ethnoracial groups, minimized and elided the diaspora, and denied the *trans*-gender community of non-conforming and non-heteronormative persons. This chapter explores the tensions among the concept of Trinidad Carnival as the authentic and original “mecca” carnival intermixed with Trinbagonian perspectives on cultural identity, diaspora, racism, equality, religion, and gender.

As part of this investigation’s ethnographic research, this chapter includes voices from Trinbagonians interwoven throughout the following cultural studies analysis of the impacts of these 1970s cultural identity policies. The analysis explores the various concomitant initiatives to induct those policies and promote the cultural worldview that was directly and indirectly encoded in those national policies. The Trinbago voices included in this chapter are from people living in the islands and in the diaspora and from people who work in the Carnival and music industries and in other economic sectors. Their insightful commentaries

shed light on how these policies shape their worldviews and how the policies' play out in the day-to-day realities.

### How do the Interviewed Persons View Trinbagonian Cultural Identity?

Of her homeland's cultural identity, interviewee Trishana says:

“If I have to describe it, I will think it's just a mix of identities. You know, a lot of these countries, when you think about cultural identities, other than the Caribbean, it's one certain thing...one ethnicity, one race, one way they talk, one way they dress, and things like that. But when you think about the Caribbean it's actually a lot of different things all mixed in one.”<sup>100</sup>

For these small islands, she emphasizes the mixing of multiple identities to forge the collective one known as Trinbagonian. Another Interviewee Erphaan<sup>101</sup> concurs and discusses the idea of a Caribbean identity and then each nation's identity in the region. He adds:

Well to me, Caribbean history has a great impact on our culture as we know of it today and with time... Because you know the only constant is change, and a lot of things changed and become synonymous with different jurisdictions, different countries, so the idea of colonization would kind of shape the entire Caribbean region in terms of its history and our development but as time went on, each country was able to develop their own identity and their own culture. And there would definitely be similarities but generally, if you go to Antigua, something as simple as you hearing a version of soca music that would be synonymous to Antigua. And if you come over to Trinidad, you would hear a version of soca music that would be synonymous to hear. So, it's very diverse on the large scale and even more diverse when you hit it from country to country, So, yes there is Caribbean culture and yes, each country has a strong identity of their own when it comes to culture. That is my observation.<sup>102</sup>

He alludes to the influences of colonization shaping not just Trinbagonian history but influencing each Caribbean nation's evolution. As a musician, he notes the unique music styles that have evolved in each Caribbean culture.

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<sup>100</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>101</sup> For Erphaan's bionote, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>102</sup> Alves, Erphaan, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, June 30, 2021.



Another musician Isaac, who is the son of David Rudder who composed the above song “Trini 2 De Bone,” perfectly echoes the messages conveyed in his father’s popular song. Isaac discusses the friendliness and hospitality of the Caribbean ethos overall. Echoing the opening lines of his father’s song, the son states that “Well, I think Caribbean culture... It's a broad statement in my mind. But I would say one thing we are known for is being warm, welcoming uplifting people, especially sonically and how we greet people, and we are known for good food (both laugh).”<sup>103</sup> Isaac continues to discuss the self-assurance and hospitality of the twin islands as well as the psychological worldview alluded to in the final lines of the song’s stanzas. Of the island’s cultural essence, Isaac adds that Trinidad culture has:

And attitude...we are not really phased by much. We really think we are the hottest thing since sliced bread and that's almost inherent. It's almost like an amazing self-belief in everybody. But we are very welcoming people. Of course, internationally, we are known as people who love to party but beyond the partying, I feel like in homes, people are always trying to foster a togetherness and community. It has maybe fallen off a little but it’s still there especially around Christmas season<sup>104</sup>

Isaac offers an important aspect of the definition of cultural identity in general. He references the sociohistorical continuity of a culture’s way of thinking, customs. Thinking deeply, Isaac explains his opinion that:

people use the world culture loosely as it's only about certain traditions that have to do with fun stuff. But culture really has to do with a long time set of learned behaviors and that could advance over time, that could make new ones over time because new generations come out and may not like how things are and would want to make their own stamp on the world and it is fluid. One of the ways I always attack that culture question when I say Trinidad in culture is the things are so long standing and have not left us. Like the things I have seen...I could talk to my grandfather and if I talk to a five year old, I hear them say similar things so you know it's something long lasting and it is fluid. That's the truth. Even in my, like you said living in different places, you can see the changes over time of how many different things you've gotten. I feel like when you're in the throes of it all the time, you don't really realize the changes, you just consider that it's you, you know?<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Rudder, Isaac, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, November 12, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>105</sup> Rudder, interview.

In a nation of such constant influxes of people hailing from various ethnoracial backgrounds, Issac's perspectives hold specific importance. Trinidad has been culturally and politically dominated by various nation's sociopolitical, religious, and linguistic systems. These include the original Indigenous people before it began its revolving door of leader in the Spanish, British, French, Dutch, and Courlanders (modern-day Latvians) who used colonial systems of slavery and then indentured servitude. Finally, the twin islands came to be governed as an independent nation by local representatives.

Naturally, all of these cultures and people have left their impression within the cultural evolution of Trinbagonian ethos and worldviews. To the above cultural mixture, Erphaan adds modern American influences and concludes with important points regarding Trinbagonian influences on other nations themselves. Of the Trinbago's diversity, he discusses the World War II American soldiers' impacts on island life, stating:

Well, to me Trinidad and Tobago's culture is a mix of the interaction of foreign...how to put it...foreign interaction is tied within our own unique way of life that was born out of that mix. I watched some documentaries that showed that after WW2, they said that Trinidad wasn't the same because of the American culture because of the soldiers who would have spent a lot of time here, and a lot of access to American culture was there and the intermingling of two cultures coming together. That's why they say that Trinidad is so different from the other islands of the chain... You know we have a heavy influence on American culture. So, I believe that Trinidad and Tobago is the mecca of diversification in the entire world. The history of different nations having control of the landmass of different points in time, landing our independence, it would definitely give a mix of mix of representation and that mixed representation because so unique that we have our own identity unlike any other. I haven't gone to any place in the world where they have this strong mix of races, ethnicity, religion, all living in one place. Like anywhere in the world, politico could kind of negatively impact a nation but at the same time, so you're talking about Carnival here, we see a Monday and a Tuesday on the road here where everything concerning the vision is forgotten and you just see an explosion of culture diversity and all different types of diversity. So, I don't think you can describe it in one sentence. It is something very unique and to be experienced.<sup>106</sup>

Erphaan's insightful comment that Trinidad and Tobago is the mecca of diversification in the entire world is no understatement and opens the discussion regarding the important of the

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<sup>106</sup> Alves, interview.

word “mecca” in Trinbago culture, especially in association with Carnival. Let’s investigate these cultural identity ideas further in conjunction with the official national cultural policy.

### False Unity: Advertising Trinbagonian Carnival as the “Mecca”

Despite the emphasis on belonging, the NCPTT, in fact, alienates its diasporic communities. According to data provided by the World Bank in 2013, Trinidad & Tobago has a diaspora population of 374,492.<sup>107</sup> Given its history, as well as its present, Trinidad and Tobago, like the Caribbean, was and is a place of constant movement. Historically, swarms of people were forced to the islands through colonialism, slavery, and indentureship. And in present times, regional and international migration occurs frequently due to various push and pull factors like economic opportunity or safety of families due to the nation’s high crime rates. “Not only is the Caribbean a diverse region with people moving around and within it but, significantly, it is the region in which its peoples are linked to other recognized major diasporas [...] such as the African or Black, Chinese, Indian, and Jewish [...], Arab, English, German and the increasingly recognized Irish and Scottish diaspora.”<sup>108</sup> The nation is truly of small geographic region brimming with cultural diversity.

The national cultural policy also compounds the problem of static cultural identity as it conflates its carnival with its cultural identity. The NCPTT mentions “carnival” seven times in the body of the text, whereas other Trinbagonian festivals such as Hosay and Ramleela are only mentioned once despite referencing diverse and “other local festivals.”<sup>109</sup> This

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<sup>107</sup> “Migration in the Caribbean: Current Trends, Opportunities and Challenges,” International Organization for Migration, 97.

<sup>108</sup> Harry Goulbourne and John Solomos, “The Caribbean Diaspora: Some Introductory Remarks,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 4 (2004): 536-537.

<sup>109</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 45, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

conflation of identities operates in subconscious and conscious ways. When asked her opinion of Trinidadian cultural identity, interviewee Nneka <sup>110</sup>jokes that “The only thing I know related to cultural policy ...first of all, I think when Trinidad talks about culture, they are primarily talking about carnival so the ministry of culture could be really called the ministry of carnival, right.”<sup>111</sup> She expresses her and her community’s awareness of the dominance of Carnival culture in the government’s initiatives. Interviewee Trishana makes a statement that infers her belief in this intersection of Trinbago identity with the behemoth that is Carnival. She explains that:

To me, I personally see Trinidad as a big part of... you know... If You think of carnival, you think of Trinidad. That's very true, but as someone born and raised here, I also see a lot of different things too...smaller things, things that may not be as attractive ... things that someone would leave their foreign country to come and visit. But at the end of the day, it's things that hold as my home and things that I would see as “this is Trinidad” whereas other people would just see carnival.<sup>112</sup>

While outsiders might be overwhelmed by the spectacle of Carnival, Trishana sees the event as a “Trinidad” itself, as an integral aspect of what she considers her home.

What is this idea of Trinidad Carnival as the “mecca” of all carnivals” How has this idea been disseminated throughout Trinbago culture and psyche? As a national construct, this concept of “mecca” has been cultivated by the culture ministry and has evolved to hold a strong position in the Trinbago psyche.

Point blank, the NCPTT states that “Trinidad and Tobago is the mecca of Carnival.”<sup>113</sup> And in the same vein, it implies that through Carnival, Trinidad and Tobago can be a living example of how peaceful relations could be maintained in diverse societies. While this narrative seems wonderful, it disseminates unhealthy and divisive attitudes regarding the

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<sup>110</sup> For Nneka’s bionote, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>111</sup> Edwards, Nneka, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, December 5, 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>113</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, Section 1.0.2, 1, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.section 1.0.2, 1.

Trinidad Carnival as the originator and true event, making all other carnivals derivative imitations. The prioritization of Carnival in the NCPTT fosters binaries of “authentic” carnival experiences and “inauthentic” ones. Trinbago’s government and the National Carnival Commission (NCC) positions Trinidad and Tobago’s carnival as the authentic event rendering all other diasporic carnivals as less meaningful events. Because carnival and Trinbagonian identity are conflated, the tensions between Trinbago’s Carnival and diasporic carnivals mirrors the tensions of cultural identity with regard to belonging and non-belonging.

The tensions fostered from the dichotomy of static and fluid cultural identities parallel those embedded in Carnival. The Trinbagonian nation promotes carnival from a nationalistic perspective and as a result, carnival is synonymous with Trinbagonian identity. As Philip Scher has written that:

The main point of the plan was to position the National Carnival Commission (NCC), and consequently Trinidad, in such a way as to benefit from the explosion of overseas carnivals started, often, but not always, by émigré Trinidadians in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean and Europe. By reigning in what were sometimes seen to be competing carnivals, the NCC hope to promote year-round carnival industry... One pressing issue for the NCC was to establish rights over carnival and carnival related produces so that Trinidad might benefit financially and symbolically from “its” culture.<sup>114</sup>

Scher points out the irony that even though official cultural documents have neglected diasporic Trinidadians, Trinidadian cultural policy regarded diasporic carnivals as a model for and of their own. In a brilliant paradox, the government sought to claim diaspora carnivals as offsprings of their parent Carnival. This enabled them to diminish those events in a bid of cultural and financial competition while simultaneously benefiting from the global visibility of Caribbean carnival practices.

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<sup>114</sup> Philip W. Scher, “Heritage: Preservation, Carnival and the State on Trinidad,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75, no. 3 (2002), 453-484.

In this marketing and cultural ploy, they forever blurred the lines between authentic and inauthentic carnivals. And, as the diasporic Caribbean carnivals have increased in popularity, the NCC desired claims over them, asserting they germinated from Trinidad and Tobago's festival. As these Caribbean diasporic carnivals are modeled after Trinidad's Carnival, there should be more balance among all the parties regarding partnership and claiming. In this complex situation, the NCC seeks to garner economic profits from the association with these diasporic carnivals while simultaneously promoting Trinidad Carnival as the legitimate experience. In this binary, diasporic carnivals are positioned as illegitimate. This mental structure that questions inauthenticity and authenticity in carnival versus Carnival parallels those deep questions in Trinbagonian cultural identity.

The concept of Trinidad Carnival as the mecca is heavily indoctrinated in the language and advertising associated with this annual event. Just an Internet search reveals the near constant use of the term "mecca" in headlines and in close association with Trinidad Carnival. This connection is promoted by government, public, and private sectors alike, by large corporations and by individual bloggers. For example, on the website for the newsmagazine *Caribbean People* (CP), that describes itself as "The world's largest Caribbean owned & published newspaper," the website presents a culture and tourism article with a hummingbird icon for Caribbean Airlines centered above a stunning photograph of dark-haired, light-skinned women. The statuesque beauties shimmer in Carnival beaded bikinis and pose in towering feather aureoles. The headline of the CP News article reads "CARNIVAL: Trinidad and Tobago: The Mecca of all Carnivals."<sup>115</sup> This article offers a plethora of cultural studies points of interest in its three-line description of the host nation as "Trinidad and Tobago, land of mystery, land of spectacle, land of sorcery and witchcraft, land

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<sup>115</sup> Eve George, "Carnival: Trinidad and Tobago: The Mecca of All Carnivals," *Caribbean People*, March 1, 2018 <http://cpnews1.com/carnival-trinidad-and-tobago-the-mecca-of-all-carnivals/>.

of politics, land of kaiso, soca and calypso, a land where the good, the bad and the ugly is used to create art to form the greatest show on earth.”<sup>116</sup> The term “greatest show on earth” is another phrase specifically connected with Trinidad Carnival, which has an entire linguistic dictionary connected with its iconography.

Another website includes YouTube clips of parades, musicians, and revelers in costumes each more vibrant and scantier than the last. The article echoes the “mecca” association and boasts “Trinidad Carnival is the mecca for Caribbean Carnival. 2020 was an amazing event and now we are suffering some serious Tabanca. We know that 2021 will not happen but 2022 will be epic! Sit back and enjoy!!”<sup>117</sup> As another example of the cultural power of Carnival and its needs for its own dictionary of experiences, “tabanca” is used to describe the post-Carnival malaise that can be felt by revelers. Another website called “Carnival Glam” seems to target a socioeconomic crowd that might also enjoy “glamping,” referring to the idea of glamorous camping. Repeating the “mecca” correlation, this website tantalizes “Trinidad Carnival is the Mecca of all carnivals and isn't for the weak. It literally is 4 weeks of non-stop partying ending with 2 glorious days on the road.”<sup>118</sup> This tourism-focused blog offers sage advice on planning for and surviving for Carnival, including buying tickets for transportation, hotel, and events as well as an exercise plan, daypack necessities (like sunblock), alcohol intake pacing, and personal safety. The websites and blogs dedicated to both capturing and promoting Carnival are infinite, many of which incorporate the magical term “mecca” to lure people to the “greatest show on earth.”

The filtering through of this term “mecca” as intimately associated with Trinbago Carnival manifests in the people’s language and descriptions, including in the perspectives of this project’s interviewees. Trishana offers a heartfelt explanation for her connection with

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<sup>116</sup> George, “Carnival: Trinidad and Tobago: The Mecca of All Carnivals,” *Caribbean People*, March 1, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> *Caribbean Vibration*, 2020 <https://caribvibetv.com/trinidad-carnival-2020/>.

<sup>118</sup> Jade Amiel, “Carnival: Do’s and Don’ts,” *Carnival Glam*, May 26<sup>th</sup> <https://www.carnivalglamhub.com/post/carnival-dos-and-donts>.

Carnival, noting the emotional atmosphere of home and family that infuses the Carnival experience.

I see it as an experience but at the end of the day, if I have to choose between a carnival, it's going to be the Trinidad carnival. I am going to think back to my home birth, we have the great carnival. I think it's mostly because we have the music, the people... all that is part of it. It's not the actual event itself. It's all the other things around the event. I think that yes, Carnival in Trinidad, it must be the Trinidad carnival. Yes, there are other carnivals around the world but it may not have that true cultural... that true historical cultural meaning to it the way we have it in Trinidad<sup>119</sup>

Of course, she acknowledges other carnivals; however, she feels they lack that personal connection. Trishana echoes the national rhetoric that other carnivals lack the “true historical cultural meaning” and development that has imbued Trinidad Carnival with its authenticity. Roy also follows the national rhetoric, adding that “For carnival, I would say that Trinidad has been the big brother, but you will see nice carnivals in Grenada, St. Lucia or any of these places. We say in Trinidad that we are the mecca.”<sup>120</sup> His slightly condescending statement embodies the idea of Trinidad Carnival as the power source of carnival, with other manifestations as sibling events. Roy also extends this ownership of Carnival to how he perceives Trinidad Carnival economically impacts Caribbean musicians. He states that “It's also important for the economics of all the islands... all the artists, they record and the Carnival, it gets dropped in America, Canada, England, Europe...that's based on we carnival.”<sup>121</sup> Roy's Trinidad-centric viewpoint asserts that the Trinidad Carnival serves as the source center for the music developed and recorded in association with the carnivals. Then, this music is disseminated internationally.

Interviewee Lyndon Gomez, the manager for soca artist VoicetheArtist, echoes this privileging and competition between Trinbago carnival and diasporic carnivals. When asked about his thoughts on diasporic carnivals, he condescendingly states that they are “a serious

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<sup>119</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Cape, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Cape, interview.



form of flattery is imitation.”<sup>122</sup> He asserts that “yes, Trinidad will always be the mecca, but I like how a lot of our culture has been accepted and carried on over the years to other places. And you go there, and each carnival has a different spin to it.”<sup>123</sup> People’s privileging of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival over diasporic carnivals stems from governmental and carnival organizations positioning of Trinidad’s carnival being the “true carnival.” When I asked Erphaan about this issue of Trinidad Carnival as the mecca in relation to other nations’ and to Trinidad diaspora carnivals, he offered a powerfully insightful response. In my question, I asked him about the notion that all other West Indian carnival lack the evolved rituals of Trinidad Carnival and are not genuine because they include their own rituals, meanings, and symbols. He responded:

It's great that we influence other destinations to do something like it or try to duplicate it or... Well, I guess sometimes Trinis would have just exported themselves and literally started in their backyard and then it would develop into a community thing and then it would end up as something grand as well and the city. So, people would have carried our traditions and culture as much as they could and develop it on their own, which is great. That could only help in its growth. I don't think it could ever really be replicated. T&T is a very unique place and country and what we have here ... it is so special that it is kind of born out of the spirit of the nation. I don't know if you feel the same way, but Carnival is a time...the atmosphere is just different and I would go to another country during the same carnival time and like the days before ...Monday mas... I just don't get that energy. So, it is a positive that it is being done elsewhere, I don't see anywhere becoming as great as it is.<sup>124</sup>

Erphaan’s comments emphasize the sense of Trinidad Carnival as the original manifestation that can be copied, but not replicated. Other carnivals cannot claim authenticity nor, in his opinion, do they achieve the atmosphere and intensity of Trinidad’s Carnivals.

When interviewing Lyndon, I asked him about the parameters and protection of Trinidad’s Carnival in terms of other carnivals promoting and celebrating a likeness. Although I did not ask him this question directly, I have often wondered about how can Trinidad maintain the self-proclaimed status of “mecca.” When I did ask Lyndon a question

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<sup>122</sup> Gomez, Lyndon, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, November 19, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>124</sup> Alves, interview.

about the breakdown in communication between government and soca artistes, performers, and so forth, his response included the following statement: “and if we are to remain the mecca, we need to be ahead of everyone else [...] we see these mask makers going to all different countries now and they are a part of these bands. Our event promoters, which I don’t like in a sense how much of our carnival we export. I think it may have the effect of watering our product down a little bit but I guess that remains to be seen.” Although he expresses a fervent love for Carnival, he expresses an aesthetic model approach to Carnival. In his statement, Lyndon emphasizes the idea of Carnival as a national cultural product, one that he feels is being usurped by other nations.

Erphaan echoes Lyndon’s points regarding protecting Carnival as cultural heritage and as a cultural product. He offers a detailed series of points regarding the specific rituals associated with Trinidad Carnival, rituals that have developed over centuries of cultural interactions with nation-specific meanings. He explains that:

But, what we need to be careful about is, as I said earlier when we were chatting about complacency, don't be surprised if with time, other nations study and develop their carnival in a way where it could be mapped out just like ours, and made more accessible to tourists for them to come and enjoy it. Before I go on to the no seasons thing, what we have here with the cultural aspect is the... items **like** stick fighting, Extempo competitions, the mass gras, the kind of the bands competition, the canboulay processions,<sup>125</sup> we have all these things that are naturally woven into the scheduling into the entire process of what carnival is leading up to carnival Tuesday, but some nations ...it’s tied into the whole Lent vibes too... But some nations just have no choice but to say “okay, we want to do a carnival, let's do it in July” but they won't have the privilege of the timing and that wide span and that schedule of having all these things that would lead up to what we know as the great parade of the bands. But as I was saying, for some reason, other countries in the Caribbean are so accustomed to investing into tourism, that when I go there, I feel as though they market their carnival in a way that would increase the impact globally, stemming from their nation to the world. For example, on a quick over soca cruise, I saw a lot of banners with countries, just hypothetically speaking, crop-over mass, get ready for crop over mass, get ready for spice band, but I didn't see anything concerning T&T carnival so I feel like we are here... You know when you reach the top of the mountain, you just watch everybody but they coming up. So, I feel we should know,

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<sup>125</sup> Canboulay processions are the precursor to modern-day carnival and serve as the roots and inspiration for calypso. The 1881 Canboulay riots were a series of riots that occurred when the British attempted to restrict certain aspects of carnival. These politically pivotal and culturally impactful riots are discussed throughout this research.

as the government and all the powers at be, to invest in marketing these elements that all these other destinations don't have.<sup>126</sup>

Erphaan details the “stick fighting, Extempo competitions, the mass gras, the kind of the bands competition, the canboulay processions,” which refer to the African stick fighting discussed in Chapter One, the Extempo Monarch soca winner competition, and other events enjoyed throughout the set schedule associated with Trinidad Carnival. He acknowledges the religious history attached to aspects of carnivals and understands other nations might celebrates their festivals in different seasons. However, he equates Trinidad Carnival as the best, noting the mimicry and competition. He states that “You know when you reach the top of the mountain, you just watch everybody but they coming up.” With this comment, he concludes with points regarding the government’s need to protect Carnival and financially to invest in promoting these cultural products so Trinbago retains its edge over other Caribbean and global carnivals.

Trinidad’s carnival is constantly presented and reinforced as the true and best carnival, despite diasporic carnivals being spaces of acceptance in regional and international spaces. Lyndon’s thinking aligns with others, such as the NCC and Trinbagonian government, who claim carnival as their cultural property and confine the festival to one manner of being. As the official narrative conflates carnivals in general with cultural identity, the Trinbagonian nation perceive diasporic subjects as too alien. Their identities are imbued with too many variations due to their foreign contexts and their carnivals reflect those rituals, symbols, and traditions. Therefore, there is an element of strangeness as the result of the absorption of new cultural meanings.

## Love, Loss, and Dis-ease: Interviewing the Trinbagonian Diaspora

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<sup>126</sup> Alves, interview.

When researching the advertising strategies that call upon the nearly trademarked association of Trinidad Carnival with being the “mecca,” I stumbled across an interesting blog website curated by a writer named Steve Bennet. In his website bio note, he qualifies himself as a “PR guy by trade, West Indian, Steve has been helping journalists tell stories about the Caribbean for the past 20+ years,”<sup>127</sup> which infers his in Trini-born and lives globally. His article offers a host of interesting points to analyze in relation to this project. He intersects attending Trinidad Carnival with the Muslim hajj, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. Bennet writes, “Just as every able-bodied Muslim with the means to do so is required to make the holy pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives, so too should every West Indian trek to Port-of-Spain for Trinidad Carnival, at least once, to cross the Savannah Stage.”<sup>128</sup> The writer describes attending and participating in Trinidad Carnival as a spiritually cathartic experience, noting “Once past security and full on the stage, I felt like I was floating; like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders, the whole scene taking on an epiphanous air like in a movie when all the action slows down all around the main character and some immutable truth is revealed.”<sup>129</sup> The writer intersects the bodily experience of being at the Trinidad Carnival with Trinbago identity, stating “For me, at that time, right there on the Savannah Stage, I felt I knew as much as I’d ever known about exactly what it means to be West Indian and to be damn proud of it”<sup>130</sup> Bennet profoundly conflates the concept of Trinidad identity as spiritually connected with the Carnival, where attending this event is likened to a religious requirement that purifies the partygoing pilgrim as he or she forges ties to the nation as homeland.

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<sup>127</sup>Steve Bennett, “On-Site Trinidad Carnival: Crossing the Savannah Stage for the First Time,” *Uncommon Caribbean*, <https://www.uncommoncaribbean.com/trinidad/on-site-trinidad-carnival-crossing-the-savannah-stage-for-the-first-time/>.

<sup>128</sup> Bennett, “On-Site Trinidad Carnival: Crossing the Savannah Stage for the First Time.”

<sup>129</sup> Bennett, “On-Site Trinidad Carnival: Crossing the Savannah Stage for the First Time.”

<sup>130</sup> Bennett, “On-Site Trinidad Carnival: Crossing the Savannah Stage for the First Time.”

Diaspora identities, just diaspora carnivals, are complicated affairs. To diasporic subjects who identify with Trinbagonian cultural identity, the continuation of carnival traditions by *trans*-migrants<sup>131</sup> is tempered by an understanding that the diasporic carnivals are not and never will be the same as their Trinbagonian counterpart. The overseas carnivals are invested with new meanings, symbols, and practices that mirror the lives of the migrants. And, while general attitudes might claim to welcome all Trinbago diaspora persons, there are cracks in these narratives. In the NCPTT, the word “diaspora” only appears in a citation on page fifty. And this community is not referenced as part of the Trinbagonian cultural identity. Diasporic subjects are coldly referred to as experts who can provide research, knowledge and advice to the development of Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural sector.<sup>132</sup> The lack of recognition of diasporic subjects is a gross oversight particularly because they are ostensibly acknowledged as a cultural resource. However, the actuality shows a different view of diaspora persons.

Although not in a rude manner, Trishana voices her opinion that she does not consider diaspora persons as truly Trinidadian. She expresses her ideas, saying that:

So, people who left Trinidad and are living abroad, I personally still do see them as Trinidadian. At the end of the day, this is their birthplace, this is there...rite of passage. This is their home; however, people are living abroad but have Trinidadian roots but not necessarily or in Trinidad or lived in Trinidad for very long, I personally don't see them as Trinidadian. I see them as whichever country they are from and they just have Caribbean roots or Trinidadian roots.<sup>133</sup>

For her, of course, she acknowledges their right to claim Trinidad as their birthplace and their Trini roots. However, she feels that they do not have the experience of growing up in the culture or the experience of the daily life of the island nation. Nneka complicates this

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<sup>131</sup> In the context of this section, the term *trans*-migrants refer to specifically to people who have transcended physical borders.

<sup>132</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 50, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> Singh, interview.

viewpoint by expressing her experiences as a Trini person living in Canada. She notes that “First of all, even just as a Trini, I see myself as a Trini more than a Canadian because this is where I grew up. It's Trinidad that shaped who I am but a lot of Trinis can't place me. To this day, a lot of people ask me where I am from...Am I from a small island, am I from Barbados, America? So, a lot of Trinis don't consider me Trini so that's one thing that I have to deal with.”<sup>134</sup> Although she lives in Canada, she identifies as Trinidadian, even if Trini people do not recognize her as their compatriot. She considers the world's confusion over her nationality and Trini people's lack of acceptance as something that she has “to deal with,” which intones a sense of dis-ease.

The interviewee Heather offers incredibly important statements regarding her identity as a diaspora person. She recounts how she is considered an outsider by Trinbago people and there can be a disconnect in their outlooks. She explains that, “Well, I see the foreign home mentality. I don't think I'm fully trusted because I abandoned Trinidad and I'm living foreign. I feel that sometimes when I read my poetry or short stories, they just don't get what I'm trying to say ... because I am from a whole different era that they just don't recognize anymore.”<sup>135</sup> Heather also details being “othered” by Trinidadians who seem to consider her a token foreigner whom they parade about at functions. She details these experiences:

I'm not sure, I'm really not sure. I just think they see me as some commodity that is different because I still have a Trini twang but my accent is more Canadian because I have to make myself community...especially when I was writing for the paper, I had to communicate with my client and that kind of thing. So, I don't really know how they see me. I think it might be in each person's mind a little of a split. Sometimes I think it's very “cool” to have someone from Canada come to the meeting...there is a lady in Texas who joins as well. So, I think they are very pleased to have some foreigners but I do kind of wonder if... sometimes if they talk about stuff that's too local...or stuff I don't know about, I feel the divide there.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>135</sup> Ferguson, Heather, interview by author, New Brunswick, Canada, December 15, 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Ferguson, interview.

Heather links into the idea of the importance of the Trinidad accent in being accepted as local and native. She also discusses the sense of people's minds being split and a sense of a divide among the mental outlooks, views on each other, and overall perspectives.

The government's desire for Trinbagonian national identity is predicated on national unification, but the very notion of a Caribbean diaspora raises questions about the formation, meaning, and boundaries of the Caribbean itself.<sup>137</sup> Questions about meaning and boundaries thrust the nation into flux, creating chaos as well as instability. Therefore, the NCPTT takes a rooted understanding of cultural identity along with a nationalistic approach to defining diaspora. Their limited conception devises feelings of non-belonging and authenticity focused on a spatio-temporal roots and a reproduction of the home nation's hetero-gender and orientation norms.

In these nationalistic approaches based on geography, diasporic subjects are rooted to their home nation, which maintains a constant turn towards the past. In this frame, diasporic subjects internalize cultural pressures from their home nation to reproduce their cultural expressions "authentically." They feel inhibited to embrace their new nation's cultural attributes and also can feel estranged from Trinidadian culture and daily life. This engenders a psychological rift and dis-ease within people's psyches. Isaac narrows in on this complex outlook Trinidad has on its diaspora community, which he is a part of as an internationally educated world traveler. He explains that:

I feel like no one has a fair answer to that because you find that people who say that "they leave" ...maybe those are the minorities, but then you have people who will say "yes you are Trinidadian" and then there are people who bend in between the two. One minute they say "oh you lived outside Trinidad" and they will also simultaneously say "Trinis in everything, they everywhere". So, I'll say this: this is a Trinidadian thing. Because we are in this Trinidad bubble, it's really easy to get caught in that. I feel like Trinidadians really just don't really care that much. They will have an opinion just to have an opinion but I don't really think they care about that. I feel that we are very much a picong people<sup>138</sup> as if there is something hot to speak

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<sup>137</sup> Goulbourne and Solomos, "The Caribbean Diaspora: Some Introductory Remarks," 534.

<sup>138</sup> Picong refers to a lively, joking cultural style.

about right now, they will give a comment but if I were to sit down with them and have a conversation and talk about what they think about people who live away, I feel like that person would say “I doh really care about that”. I feel like that's what they would say. And I say that from personal experience too. Because coming back from away was a different worldview, especially living in the Netherlands and France when I was still in my formative years, that gave me a different perspective and at that time, I had already traveled a lot ... My mom was a flight attendant and she worked for the UN and UNICEF for a short time. And my dad is David Rudder, so naturally I got to go to different places. So, at that point in time, living in a different place I knew that couldn't compare. And coming home I tried to tell people stuff. That became for five minutes “oh cool that you lived there” but when you tried to share your experiences, they were not saying the words “I don't really care” but the attitude was “who cares- we are in Trinidad, the greatest palace on the earth. So, I don't think people truly care that much. I think we are a culture of people of “what are you doing to benefit me right now” and if you are doing something to benefit Trinidad, great, they love you to death. If you fall in with the things that make us Trinidadian, great. If you post a picture of you drinking sorrel where you are, people would think that's so cool and that's how we are. But of course, if you're saying that you have to leave Trinidadian because it didn't have opportunities or me, they will say “well yea, go away girl, nobody asks you to stay here”. It's kind of funny to witness to be honest.<sup>139</sup>

Isaac<sup>140</sup> explains the nationalistic views centered on Trinidad pride that seeks to emphasize the island nation as a central place, which links back into the mecca concept. His points regarding Trini attitudes of emotional blackmail regarding loving and honoring the nation and its cultural elements.

According to Andreas Huyssen, people, especially diaspora persons, “focus too much on loss rather than renewal: loss of the real home, loss of a culture [...]. Such a reductive notion of culture functions like blindness for any analysis of the relationship between national and diasporic cultures. The more diaspora and nation share the perception of loss, the more they will both insist on safeguarding identity and fortifying their borders, thus ossifying the past and closing themselves off to alternative futures.”<sup>141</sup> Heather exemplifies these notions of nostalgia and grasping at an elusive past, acceptance, homeland, and identity. In regards to a sense of homeland, she explains that:

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<sup>139</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>140</sup> For Isaac's bionote, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>141</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts,” In *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics*, (Amsterdam: Brill, 2007), 153-155.



Yea, I know how you feel. I always feel that way. And I felt this was a deficit in my life. I feel like if I had to come back in another life, I would want to live in a country I was born in, lived, and died because I feel like I've been on a tightrope between Trinidad and Canada. I'm always walking a tightrope and never comfortable in either world now. I don't go back to Trinidad often. A lot of my family are in the diaspora but yea, there is no place to go back to when I travel to Trinidad. My ancestral home that daddy built was demolished which was sad so I can't even go back there and there is nothing there now. It's a parking lot now.<sup>142</sup>

Heather expresses the tensions of diasporic subjects trying to be authentic as like walking a tightrope. On the one hand, she feels that Trinbagonians view her living abroad as a betrayal; yet, she feels like she has to adopt Canadian cultural norms, such as a Canadian accent, so that she can pass as a local and build herself a community. Again, the idea of language and accents comes into play. Her revelations expose the difficulties diasporic subjects face when trying to walk the “tightrope” between two worlds, while it also reveals the longing and connection for a home.

Being rooted to a space and the past stifles the inventiveness and the futurity of a nation and its people. It creates instability because new meanings, along with expanding boundaries threaten the known through the creation of hybridity. Many definitions of diaspora are based on the concept of roots. When defining the Caribbean diaspora, Martin Franklin, Roger Hosein, and Samantha C. Joseph state that they are “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins, residing and acting in host countries by maintaining strong sentimental material links with their countries of origin or their homelands.”<sup>143</sup> The strong connectedness of diasporic subjects to their homelands stem from rooted, national constructions of cultural identity. There is always a desire for return or a memory of the fantasy of the homeland.

Heather expresses this continuous desire to turn towards the past and capture a point of origin. She contemplates:

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<sup>142</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Martin Franklin, Roger Hosein, Samantha C. Joseph, “The Caribbean Diaspora – An Untapped Resource for Impacting Economic Development through Investments in the Caribbean,” Presentation at the 11th Conference at the University of the West Indies, (March 24-26, 2010).

But I've written about the house and do a lot of arts and crafts so I did a scale model of the house and that's the only record now. It's funny that when you lived there, you didn't think of taking pictures. For me, it's not a lot of other Trinidadians around here now and it's been an increase in people from India... Of East Indian background from India, but unfortunately in our family, none of the marriages between those two groups never worked because there was a cultural divide. It's almost like when we meet in stores, we see each other, but can't get together.<sup>144</sup>

She discusses her family's now-demolished home in Trinidad and about her ancestral roots in East India. She expresses a nostalgic sense of memory, loss, and frustration at the inability of modern generations to forge new connections.

Some definitions of diaspora refer to a remaining connection or desire to return to the past and/or place of origin.<sup>145</sup> James Clifford outlines several components of diaspora which include the idea that these persons maintain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland” and that they see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return. And Sunaina Maira argues that “desire, in the cultural politics of the diaspora, is closely intertwined with the collective yearning for an authentic tradition or pure places of origin.”<sup>146</sup> She adds that “[t]o consume culture in all its varied forms, or to be nostalgic for cultural artifacts, is as much about imagining an inclusive future as it is about commemorating nostalgic memories of the past.”<sup>147</sup> In attempts to satisfy their yearning for authentic tradition and/or to appease their nostalgia, diasporic subjects often exist in a psychological state where they are neither here nor there. They often attempt to replicate norms from their home nation's cultural identity in their new host countries while hesitantly adopting local dialects and traditions. There is a push and pull—there is always something missing while at the same time, there is always something new being absorbed.

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<sup>144</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>145</sup> James Clifford, “Diaspora,” 304-305.

<sup>146</sup> Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*, (University Press, 2002): 194.

<sup>147</sup> Anita Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora,” In *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*, (Temple University Press, 2010): 22.

## Race Issues: From External and Internal Sources

David Rudder's song again offers insight into this subsection, as he sings:

As crazy as we might seem to be  
We still fight to be a family  
Indian, African or a Chinese  
Syrian, French-Creole and Portuguese<sup>148</sup>

Like a demographics list, Rudder's song calls upon the main ethnoracial groups currently inhabiting the twin islands. He acknowledges the intergroup tensions, but he quickly collapses these struggles into a sense of a family's natural infighting. Is this paradise a multicultural model for global harmony where Carnival represents a height of human positive interaction? According to the Williams government's national narrative, all Trinidad people suffered subjugation. This experience of oppression and emancipation within the sphere of his modern government supposedly automatically unites Trinidad people under the umbrella concept of the government's national cultural policy.

Yet, as the demographics and the interviewee quotes reveal, Trinidad's core identity is one of syncretism and hybridity. Trinidad identity is a fusion of numerous ethnoracial groups, with Afro-creole and Indo-Trinidad being the majority of those people. The other third of the nation's demographics include people of mixed heritage, Chinese, Syrian Lebanese, Caucasian persona, Carib (indigenous), and a handful of other minorities. The people of mixed heritage include a small but growing number of Afro-Indian persons, whom originally were nicknamed with the questionable term "douglas."<sup>149</sup> Originally used as a negative term, this racial designation derives from the Hindi Bhojpuri community that migrated to the islands as indentured servants. While the word originally means "bastard,"

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<sup>148</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>149</sup> Rodha Reddock, "Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Douglas Poetics in Trinidad and Tobago." *Identities* 5, no. 4 (1999).

which indicates its pejorative complicated racial associations, the word is slowly becoming destigmatized as Trinbago culture continues to evolve with altering demographics.

Heather offers a profoundly important statement regarding intersections of dialect, diaspora, and internal and external racial presumption, expectations, and reactions.

Yea, you know, we run into white people from Trinidad who can't even speak in standard English, they are strictly dialect. I ran into them at university here and people don't realize that they are Trinidadian as I am. In my family, I have a dougla cousin and she looks more afro-centric and the professor that met us both couldn't understand that we were cousins. So, I guess my identity in this country has been... has always been battling... Now if I were in a big city like Montreal, I wouldn't run into that problem because there are so many people from all over the world so you don't really have to explain yourself. But in a smaller province that is rural, I do have to explain myself all the time and it gets tiring.<sup>150</sup>

Heather also offers the only instance in all of the interviews where the term dougla is used, here in a neutral, descriptive manner to describe her female cousin. The scholar Reddock carefully describes how this sensitive term is usually only used to describe a single person, not an ethnoracial subgroup, and is still in the process of becoming an accepted term. At the same time, what are the genuine attitudes in Trinbago culture among the various religious and ethnoracial enclaves?

When interviewing many respondents, I came to understand the complexities of Trinbago race experiences in terms of external people's attitudes towards Trini people in conjunction with inculture attitudes towards persons of different heritages. When Heather immigrated to Canada, she noted people's ignorance of Trinidad. She explains that:

[of] New Brunswick, Canada. It's a small province and for the most part, people are in rural areas and small towns. So, I found that I really had to educate people here to what a Trinidadian was. They would look at my color and think we were all black and they didn't realize that we are all different ethnicities, that Trinidad is really a melting point, long before great cities like NY, LA, etc. We were a melting pot first. Our history really goes way back.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>151</sup> Ferguson, interview.

She adds with pride the multiculturalism of Trinidad, which rivals famous metropolitan centers like New York and Los Angeles.

But, in terms of this melting pot or callaloo idea, Naette reflects external nations' ideas of Trinidad, especially in terms of the nation being perceived of a composed of black persons whose culture evolved out of slavery. Regarding this sensitive topic, Naette makes an insightful statement:

But you understand colonialism so the question I think you should maybe reflect on is "What colonial purpose does it serve for the Caribbean to appear to be black?" What purpose does that serve? Because I think in terms of purpose. I think that in the hierarchy, in the global hierarchy, it is easier to oppress a community with a legacy of slavery. And so, if we treat Trinidad as emancipated slaves, then it's easier to manage than if you add the fact that we have Syrians and Lebanese and Chinese, and Indians.<sup>152</sup>

Naette notes the world's identification of Trinidad as a collapsed, simplified one that both focuses on the blackness and the history of slavers while eliding other elements of cultural and ethnoracial complexity.

Lauren strongly echoes Naette's observations and intersects these attitudes with the nation's music industry and questions of identity. She states that:

Well, I think it came about, because as you said, the whole slavery thing and the majority of people in the Caribbean are of African descent. Trinidad is very unique because we really do have a lot of mixture but again, I think it has a lot to do with awareness and tourism. When people go... in my day, Barbados, people went to Barbados or Antigua, those were typically black islands. So, the perception of Trinidad being black, I get it because people think that you know...and then most of our successful artists are also of African descent. We have no chutney singers anywhere (both laugh) or somebody of Indian descent. Well, I mean we have the ALIAS, we had a few Syrians who are soca artists, but nobody has made it big except for Machel and Kes. So that plays into it. I mean, don't get me wrong, I feel the same way when people say to me "oh, well you're not black" or "I thought you were Latina" and it takes away from who I am because it brings me back to ..." who am I?" I have been searching for this identify for a long time and I don't know if I will ever get it because my father was also Muslim, my mother is Catholic so I've got that going on and then all this other stuff. So, when people say... I remember going out with a friend in Toronto and she is dark Indian and we met some friends and one of them said...he turned to her and said "wait you're both..." because I used to just say I'm from Trinidad, right. He looked at me and said how come you are so dark. And I

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<sup>152</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

felt badly for her but I also felt like “wow, people can't perceive that Trinidad can be mixed” ... and I think a lot of it has to do with tourism. Trinidad does not promote itself.<sup>153</sup>

Naette's experiences demonstrate the casualness of pervasive ignorance and racial attitudes.

Heather adds a lighthearted but insightful statement regarding not living up to the stereotypes of herself as a Trini woman who can cook the island's famed cuisine. She notes, “I must say, as a Trini woman, I am ashamed that I don't cook. But the stereotypes are all out there because when people here are from an exotic, they think you can cook all this stuff.”<sup>154</sup> In another part of her interview, she comments upon the divides within Trinbago culture regarding persons of mixed heritage. Of the “dougla” community, she notes that: “The Indian-negro thing...I still really feel that in the poetry meetings...I can't put my finger on it but I still feel the divide. There is more intermarriage now. We got negro people with an Indian name so there is a lot more intermarriage but I still feel that there is a divide. It's just something I feel here more than anything somebody says.”<sup>155</sup> Heather's statement points to the constant evolution of demographics in the callaloo that is Trinbago. She also points to the pressures of external and internal racial attitudes and how those ideas color people's perceptions of others and themselves.

#### The Truth and Falseness that Carnival Breaks Down All Social Barriers

In the national cultural policy construct, the NCPTT claims a utopic notion that “Trinidad and Tobago is the mecca of Carnival” and then proceeds to imply that through Carnival the twin islands can be a global exemplar of how diverse cultures can live

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<sup>153</sup> Plaza, interview.

<sup>154</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>155</sup> Ferguson, interview.

harmoniously together.<sup>156</sup> What is the myth and truth of Carnival as a space where social boundaries, such as race, class, gender, religion, and nationality, become unseen factors in the thrill of the parading throngs of people? Roy seems to embrace this notion, saying that “It’s a celebration of the people of T&T. When I say the people, I mean all the people...the affluent people, the people who are not so affluent, we don’t think about race in carnival.”<sup>157</sup> Lyndon furthers this concept of Carnival as a non-discriminatory realm. Harkening back to the emancipation theme, adds, “Well yes. I think one aspect is that it may have started as a... I guess a symbol of the freedom for the enslaved, so that’s where it kind of comes from. But in my mind, I think of carnival as the mix where everybody comes in, everybody is significant, everybody’s contribution is appreciated. As you mentioned before, the chutney-soca are huge and you know, I think that’s so important.”<sup>158</sup> Lyndon also highlights the important concept of Carnival and public participation, which will be explored further in Chapter Three.

At the same time, these fantasies of equity seem to operate on a spectrum between truth and myth. In fact, Kearn,<sup>159</sup> who works with the NCC, disagrees with this thesis assertion of finding the carnivalesque in the quotidian and with the idea of Carnival as a realm of inclusivity. He asserts that Carnival is its own special realm that does not “translate” to everyday life. Kearn hesitantly agrees that Carnival can break down some social barriers, but it also reinscribes divisions, or breakdowns, in social unity. He states that:

I would say that that is definitely um... true...um that Carnival is that space of “I could kinda do whatever almost” um... but once the carnival is over then life goes back to normal...as she said, you know... So whatever boxes that you are really in...um...It’s kind of for a limited point in time... It doesn’t really translate or that carnivalesque translates to everyday life outside of the carnival season. So, I think there is validity in that but I would say that I guess the tricky thing about Carnival is the paradox of that carnival is in as much as it gives a space for certain things, it still

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<sup>156</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, Section 1.0.2.1, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

<sup>157</sup> Cape, interview.

<sup>158</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>159</sup> For Kearn’s bionote, please see Appendix 1.

tends to read for what is in everyday life. That is always intertwined into it. As much as we paint carnival as this unifying festival...I'm not saying that it isn't... but there are still other things within the structure of carnival which reinforces those breakdowns.<sup>160</sup>

Kearn continues his realistic point of view by commenting on the classism connected with Carnival. He notes how this festival is a middle-class that is a highly structured institution with various committees. He comments upon the entire matrix that is the Carnival, including promotional outlets, competition for tickets, and backroom deals for special privileges. He explains that:

You know they say carnival is still pretty much dominated by a middle class and an upper middle-class affair and historically it is, not things like that. So, for instance, when you have a committee system and I think for me, having for the research and academic side as well as the practical entrance?? Working in the industry, I understand why the structures are there but I also understand how they can eliminate or exclude people intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, again, with the committee system, I wanna go to X event which is in the bands, right. One reason why they would have a committee system where they promote, they have let's say 25 people on the committee... Um... is it to kind of control ticket access and also to reduce that whole black market and scalpos? That is a thing to consider, right. So, you basically put tickets in the hands of a select few and they now in one sense kind of become gatekeepers who working for this event. In some committees, I would say they are open enough to let's say where they are open enough when advertising and they list the committee members names, their Instagram handles and phone numbers so you may not know them but you have a way to access them. There are sometimes where people just literally put names and I think unless you are in certain social circles, how do I even get on to you?<sup>161</sup>

Heather furthers Kearn's realistic observations. She notes the ranging socioeconomic levels of the various Carnival events where just one venue will be a microcosm of social disparity. While everyone is ostensibly at the same event, the crowd is inevitably divided into the regular show attendees, the VIPs, and the VVIPs, etc.

So, I've been thinking about, while you're talking, about something very simple, a fête...a fête at the stadium where we are all going to see the same show but you've got your general, your VIP, your VVIP, and this and that. And we are all there for carnival, all experiencing the same artist and the show but our experiences are completely different. And I think I am still hung up on privilege and while privilege and all this kind of stuff where I see that you find in VVIP, I can safely go to the toilet

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<sup>160</sup> Williams, Kearn, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, July 19, 2021.

<sup>161</sup> Williams, interview.



whereas if I am in general, which you will never find me in, I might have to use one of those potter potties. The experience that I am having in the front, experiencing the artist, the music and the culture, is not the same experience that the person in general, behind that fence is experiencing. So, are we actually experiencing the same carnival? Are we actually coming together?<sup>162</sup>

Heather questions if these privileges and disparities inhibit the community from ascending to such a utopic state of equality and intercultural harmony. And Kern would not disagree with her regarding the preference in ticket allotment and sales. He echoes her points, stating that:

That type of thing...um what I always say happens and how us as human beings operate... Let's just say I am on a committee...um...there is a high chance that my family and friends would be first preference. There are a lot of those types of things vs someone from the outside. It does say that people are going to necessarily discriminate and say "Yo, you can't come in" but I also tell some of my friends that if I am on a committee and I am selling tickets, I could image that how some of my friends could be angry with me if all my tickets are sold out and I didn't even factor them. So, it's sometimes that kind of exclusion that happens where who gets access to particular fêtes and the price points of certain events kind of determine the crowds.<sup>163</sup>

Thus, while Roy and Lyndon see the unity in the Carnival experience, Heather and Kern address the financial sides where the socioeconomic disparities, which often intersect with other minoritized aspects of communities, come into play in the reality of the Carnival world.

### The Problem with Trinidad's Cultural Policy and Gender

The concept of the truth and myth of Carnival as a realm of unity and equity includes questions on gender expression and safety within these fantasy experiences of freedom, release, alcohol, and excess. As noted in the previous chapters, Trinidad's cultural policy enforces Christian heteronormative gender roles binary. This is complicated by the nation's postcolonial lens coupled with the tourist lens that desires, manufactures, and purchases this

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<sup>162</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>163</sup> Williams, interview.

fetishized fantasy. The colonial, nationalistic framework used to craft the NCPTT also fosters a binary understanding of gender and a heterosexual notion of sexual orientation. As a result, any person transgressing the boundaries of the national gender and sexual orientation norms is culturally ostracized from the nation. Additionally, the privileging of carnival in the NCPTT perpetuates colonial Christian views of Trinbagonian people through the narratives that define reputability and respectability.

In these narratives, reputability emphasizes being masculine, which equates to being a provider and protector. On the other side of this gender binary, respectability is linked to being feminine, which equates to being a mother and being chaste. Further, it paradoxically promotes the colonial idea of Trinbagonians as overly sexual and exotic because the emphasis is on this “wine and jam” model of Carnival. These two colonial ideologies contradict one another. But as the Trinbagonian nation adopted these conflicting frameworks, it sets national standards that juxtapose civility and “properness” with fantasy and exoticness. In both connotations colonial rulers both set a standard for the “uncivilized” island people to aspire to while prescribing them an overly sexualized cultural identity that still persists in a present-day context.

Lauren offers a perfect example of the paradoxical fetishization of neocolonial fantasy that she seen in Carnival promotions that demonstrate an intersection of race and gender issues. She explains that “But we don't promote our diversity. When we do see promotions, it's about carnival and what so they do? They put on all these white girls from town or some foreigners and they have them shaking themselves...because they want these white people here to imagine themselves doing that there and of course they have to have people looking like them. But they don't promote diversity. So, I think it has a lot to do with Trinidad.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Plaza, interview.

Regarding gender confines, Trishana confirms her perspective on Trinbago's strict heteropatriarchal gender roles. She explains that:

When I think of gender in our Caribbean cultural identity, I think of it very... not...the new idea of gender the younger people have. I think it's very patriarchal in the sense that our gender roles are very strict. You have certain roles for men, certain roles for women, and that's just how it has always been. People automatically assume that's how it should be and it's a very sensitive topic in the Caribbean, talking about gender and the roles that women and men have.<sup>165</sup>

Heather adds to this with a chilling reference to the nation's issues with domestic violence and femicide.

Heather explains what she sees in terms of gender issues, detailing that, "I see the man woman thing. I still see the men stick together and they pray to each other. The women are on the outs. I don't really like the way that women are being killed off. It's almost an epidemic thing going on in Trinidad but also regionally, and in Canada. So, I realize that it's not just there, it can be here as well."<sup>166</sup> The 2020 United Nation Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean records that Trinidad and Tobago have a femicide rate of 22/100,000 women, which puts the islands close to the lowest nation of St. Lucia at 4/100,000 and far from Brazil with 1738/100,000 women.<sup>167</sup> While Trinbago seems to have a low femicide rate, the 2017 UN Global Database on Violence against Women<sup>168</sup> shows a more disturbing record of 302 percent Lifetime Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence, 57 percent Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence in the last 12 Months. And, the record shows a disturbing 19 percent Lifetime Non-partner Sexual Violence and 112 percent Child Marriage, which refers to women aged 20-24 who were first married before the age of eighteen.

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<sup>165</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>166</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>167</sup> Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, Femicide or Feminicide, <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide>.

<sup>168</sup> UN Women, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/pt/countries/americas/trinidad-and-tobago>.

Trinidad and Tobago society privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates' feminine sexuality. They normalize relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desire and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant heteropatriarchal sexual and gender regimes. For example, in Trinbago, 49 percent of respondents voted that Trinbago is not a good place to live for homosexuals while only 27 percent voted yes. And *trans*-gender (Equaldex uses LGBT) communities have no legal protections against housing and employment discrimination; they cannot donate their blood; and they can apply for adoption only as a single parent and not as a couple.<sup>169</sup> This structuring principle privileges heterosexual men's experiences, definitions, and perceptions of sexuality. Not only are appropriations of female and (hetero)sexuality obscured, but homoeroticism and same gender sexual relations are denied legitimacy. In this structure that is coupled with a discourse of hyper sexuality, the nation oversexualizes and ostracizes lesbian, gay, and transgender people in addition to sex workers and other people deemed to be "sexual deviants."<sup>170</sup> These people are stigmatized and as unnatural, outlaws, and non-citizens.

Colonial models of gender and sexual orientation are built on ideas of Christian morals as these notions are signs of civility and modernity. Some of my interviewees expressed these sentiments of colonial, Christian ideals. Nneka, a diasporic subject who is a language consultant, artist, author and poet, stated that "one of the things that I associate with Caribbean culture is having a moral compass [...] I think that the Caribbean has been very morally moored."<sup>171</sup> And she thinks that the moral compass emerges from slavery. She continued to express "the fact that the slave masters controlled their workers through the Bible, and that possibly remained with us through slavery [...] but in Trinidad at least, people

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<sup>169</sup> Equaldex: Trinidad and Tobago <https://www.equaldex.com/region/trinidad-and-tobago>.

<sup>170</sup> Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*, (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004): 9.

<sup>171</sup> Edwards, interview.

are very...if not religious all the time, they are very God conscious. I don't think God generally is too far from the thought of a Trinidadian." Nneka's perspective links into questions of the Trinbago neoliberal structures being variations of the same systems of slavery and colonialism in modern manifestations.

Heather offers a personal example of the education and socioeconomic benefits afforded her family when her grandparents converted to Christianity. She relates how her family's connection influenced her family's trajectory, stating that:

You see, even I am torn because I grew up in the British system of education and back when my parents... My parents were up in the Canadian mission systems. They became Christians... Yea, that was the other thing we were divided by...the Hindu, the Muslim, the Christian religions. So, way back when my grandpa was baptized by a Canadian missionary (age five), he bought into this Christian religion and by doing so, he was able to move up the ranks socially and economically very quickly. So, he took advantage of that and was able to send his sons to college in Canada. My father came in 1938 and that's why when he immigrated, he came back to this part of the world. Now I still say it's behind God's back...very few Trinis are here. Anyway, I feel that educationally, we rose up through the ranks very quickly.<sup>172</sup>

Heather's narrative of religious conversion coincides with the prevalence of Christianity followed in many denominations in the island. In a 2010 University of the West Indies study, Trinbago respondents reported as: Catholic 23 percent, Hindu 16 percent, Muslims 4 percent, and Pentecostal 8 percent, with twenty other Christian denominations all having small percentages.<sup>173</sup> And very small percentages of respondents identified as Rastafarian, Jewish, Atheist, Agnostic, with a small percentage believing in a Supreme Entity but not belonging to a religion. The intersections of Christian ideals and racialized gender relations heavily intersects with Trinbago daily life and with the behaviors expressed and experienced during Carnival, both in subversions of norms and in reinforcements of those strictures.

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<sup>172</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>173</sup> Raymond Mark Kirton et al., "The Political Culture of Democracy in Trinidad & Tobago: 2010 Democracy in Action," The University of the West Indies Institute of International Relations, accessed July 26, (2022): 8.

Consequently, in Trinidad and Tobago, masculinity and femininity, along with heterosexual orientation, is rooted in the ideas of masculine respectability and feminine reputation. Reputation is connected to masculinity, as it emphasizes virility through sexual conquests, being a provider and protector, and establishing social power by boasting in the public domain.<sup>174</sup> Respectability is more commonly linked to femininity, as it centralizes ideologies of chastity along with legal institutional marriage and motherhood. In this framework, womanhood is also defined through the masculine lens as “motherhood is also a basis of reputation, with a positive evaluation of female fertility paralleling the valorization of male virility.”<sup>175</sup> These heteropatriarchal ideas harken back to strict binary rules that limit and determine people’s gender expression for men and women, for cisgender and non-heteronormative persons alike.

As these colonial notions are embedded into Trinbagonian institutions, the nation then perpetuates these ideologies as the collective norm. As noted in Chapter One, Eric Williams famously assigned a gender and nurturing role of “mother” to the nation with all of the inhabitants being collected under this parental umbrella. This male lens actually reiterates the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. This constrains people to national notions of gender and sexuality—if they stray too far from the collective norm, the nation may culturally perceive them to be deviant. This forces men and women to embody national ideals and perpetuates a culture of fear for anyone who deviates.

For example, if males act too feminine or females act too masculine, they might be pejoratively labeled as deviant and unnatural. As Kamala Kempadoo states, “male homosexuality is explicitly and violently renounced and defined as a corruption of

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<sup>174</sup> Jean Besson, *Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993): 13-14.

<sup>175</sup> J Besson, *Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women*, Jean Besson, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993)17 and Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*, (New York, N.Y.: Routledge (2004): 19.

masculinity, where anything considered feminine is seen to damage the ‘Real men’ identity of Caribbean men [and] female homosexuality is seen as a deviation from the natural superior heterosexual option where a lesbian tends to be corrected and punished by ‘Real women’ for being a ‘gender traitor.’”<sup>176</sup> The re-inscription and fear of “deviant” gender and sexual orientation norms are perpetuated the NCPTT’s cultural policy statement that only uses masculine and feminine pronouns.

This failure of the nation is also reflected in the fact that the NCPTT does not establish gender and sexual orientations as an integral component of national cultural identity. Gender and sexuality is first mentioned in the glossary as a component of cultural identity but not in any of the preceding pages. *Trans*-gender communities are not named, which is a gross oversight because “to name is to summarize [...] who is without summary and therefore, without reference, lost and confused. [...] Without official institutional documents naming these communities, they remain relegated to in between, marginalized spaces fighting for rights which should readily be available to them.”<sup>177</sup> Non-conforming persons are silenced, unheard, and written out of history. This system replicates the social death of slavery and colonialism, albeit in a modern gendered form of denial of human rights.

The scholars Dwaine Plaza and Frances Harry provide an illustration of the quest for authenticity in their interview with Trinidad migrants who returned home after living abroad. The migrants report that Trinbagonian women are stereotypically expected to take care of the men in their family. But one interviewee named Nicola Ragoonath balks at and burkes these heteropatriarchal assumptions and requirements. She states that she doesn’t “bother to pamper Trinidadian men. They know this I am the man attitude ... They don’t set out to

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<sup>176</sup> Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*, 46-47.

<sup>177</sup> Barry Chavannes, “Jamaican Diasporic Identity: The Metaphor of Yaad,” in *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity, and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 129-137.

impress and I am not competing with all other girls. That intimidates them.”<sup>178</sup> Her experiences abroad allowed her to be more independent and outspoken and not to cater these gender constructs of gender performativity. Her thinking and behavior contradict the Trinbagonian ideas of femininity as Trinbagonian women are typically taught to be more nurturing to men. Nicola’s subversive behavior links into another reason diaspora Trinbago people can be viewed with suspicion. Home nations consequently question the authenticity of their diasporic subjects especially when cultural variations are expressed.

Rosamond King provides an example of how trans bodies manifest themselves in Carnival spaces. She agrees that carnival spaces are subversive where “the unusual, perverse, reverse and inverse can exist.”<sup>179</sup> In the carnival space, transgressions in any manner are able to manifest themselves. However, she stipulates that “a transvestite or drag queen *might* be able to appear openly and remain unmolested and unafraid for a day or two.”<sup>180</sup> King underlines and italicizes the word “might” to demonstrate the precarious nature of the *trans*-gender body’s feeble acceptance in this space, even though these gender and sexual orientation transgression ought to be fully embraced. In the carnival space, the *trans*-body for sexually expressive ciswomen and for non-heteronormative persons is made both real and fantasy.

#### Conclusion: Moving from Failed Policy to Carnival’s True Positive Potential

This chapter has explored the incredibly complex public experiences derived from the Trinbago national policies and narratives regarding cultural identity. Rudder’s charming song

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<sup>178</sup> Dwaine Plaza and Frances Henry, *Returning to the Source: The Final Stage of the Caribbean Migration Circuit*, (University of the West Indies Press, 2006): 85.

<sup>179</sup> King, *Island Bodie*, 52.

<sup>180</sup> King, *Island Bodie*, 52.



emphasizes his love and pride for Tribago, a sentiment echoed by many of the interviewees recorded in this chapter. Rudder croons:

(Sweet sweet T and T) Oh how I love up dis country  
(Sweet sweet T and T) No place in dis world I'd rather be  
(Sweet sweet T and T) Oh how I love up meh country  
(Sweet sweet T and T) All dis sugar can't be good for me<sup>181</sup>

Respondents seem to feel pride in the multicultural, cosmopolitan world of Trinbago and, of course, in the amazing event that is Carnival. However, no nation is a utopia. This chapter explores the intersecting issues of the commodification of Carnival, diasporic disconnection, and gender exclusion. Overall, claiming carnival as a cultural product reinscribes ideas of a purity in gender and sexual orientation. In Trinidad and Tobago, “a heteropatriarchal cultural nationalism is perpetuated through the idea of pressuring the cultural ‘purity of its cultural arts and festivals. Consequently, with this logic, a paradoxical, nationalistic predicament is framed, one in which ‘pure’ cultural productions that are to unify and celebrate a cultural vibrant, national actually relegates non-hetero-normative subjects to a marginal citizenship.”<sup>182</sup> In other words, what is “natural” and what is perceived to be “unnatural” become cultural control points, as dictated by the cultural identity of the nation.

Trinidad and Tobago laws provide evidence that the nation reiterates nationalistic, heteropatriarchal cultural purity. The twin Republic decriminalized homosexuality in 2018, “after a high court judge ruled that the Caribbean nation’s colonial-era laws banning gay sex is unconstitutional.”<sup>183</sup> But despite the legal changes, “there are no laws explicitly protecting LGBTIQ people from discrimination or hate crimes [...]. Religious leaders and politicians publicly disparage LGBTIQ people and oppose progress towards LGBTIQ equality, even as the LGBTIQ community experiences greater visibility and improving societal

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<sup>181</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>182</sup> Antron D. Mahoney, “The Dying Swan: Cultural Nationalism and Queer Formations in Trinidad and Tobago,” *Interventions* 21, no. 2 (2019): 42.

<sup>183</sup> Brooke Sopelsa, NBC News, “Trinidad and Tobago Set to Decriminalize Homosexuality, April 12, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trinidad-tobago-set-decriminalize-homosexuality-n865511>.

acceptance.”<sup>184</sup> Though progress is being made, people in positions of authority are hindering the fight towards equality as they attempt to keep *trans*-gender groups in marginalized spaces.

One of the ostensible goals of the NCPTT is to build a culturally confident citizens who are able to share their voices, participate in politics and life, and live freely and safely in the nation. Every citizen—regardless of ethnicity, religion, and gender/sexual orientation—has the human right to name themselves, the right to be seen and heard, the right to equality and equity, the right to be protected, and, most importantly, the right to live freely. Despite these pronouncements, diasporic persons are directly and indirectly maligned and *trans*-gender communities are demonized, invisible, voiceless, and erased because the nation fails to write them into the national script.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **How Carnival Embodies Four Main Aspects of Carnavalesque**

##### Bakhtin’s Carnavalesque in Relation to Trinidad and Tobago

Destra Garcia’s 2003 soca hit “It’s Carnival” encapsulates the love Trinbagonians have for Carnival as well as its carnivalesque, meaning its spirit. The moment the people hear her song’s percussion beat, their hips start to move to the fast-paced tempo. Abandoning all care, they jook and wine; they back their bumpers up in frenetic energy. Destra’s first verse connects Carnival as a lifeforce for Trinbagonians. She winds up the crowd:

Carnival in T and T  
Is so special to all ah we  
Like we need blood in we vein

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<sup>184</sup> OutRight Action International, Trinidad and Tobago ‘At a Glance,’ <https://outrightinternational.org/region/trinidad-and-tobago>.

Dats how we feel about Port-of-Spain  
When de posse dem come in town  
Beating pan and ah bongo drum  
Is madness everywhere  
Carnival is ah true freedom  
Make ah noise or ah joyfull sound  
And jump up in de air  
So...<sup>185</sup>

For Destra and her partygoers, Carnival is “so special to all ah we/Like we need blood in we vein.” Using the local nickname, she alludes to Trinidad and Tobago as “T and T” and to the nation’s capital of Port-of-Spain. She forges a sense of energetic togetherness as the music rhythms pump through people’s veins like blood that energizes them to dance till dawn.

On the stage, her role crosses between singer, dancer, preacher, and instructor. With her simple, powerful lyrics, she repeatedly exhorts her congregation of masqueraders:

So put yuh rag dem in de air, in de air, in de air  
Stomp yuh foot dem on de ground, on de ground, on de ground  
And lemme see you jump around, jump around, jump around  
And let dem know we comin' down, comin' down, comin' down  
Yeah ya<sup>186</sup>

Her repeating of these instructions whips the crowd into a physical, sexual, and psychological frenzy of wonder and release. She calls on a fellow musician and collaborator the soca king, Machel Montano. Destra cajoles him, singing “Machel is ah mad man/You know you love bacchanal,” a term that serves as a Carnival trope, capturing the erotic essence of this climactic event. Returning to the spiritual, Destra implores the people that “All de pettiness have tuh down,” as “We is de soca vagabonds.” In the unifying state of the carnivalesque, she demolishes animosities and social boundaries—everyone is a low-class rabblrouser. Destra’s song captures the psychomagic aspect of the Carnival spirit that can be understood as the surrounding madness, the madness of the bodies that unite to create a carnivalesque moment of ecstasy, freedom, and rebellion.

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<sup>185</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>186</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

Destra's song lyrics also illustrate the deep embedding of Carnival with Trinbagonian identity. The intersection of the two stems from the Trinidad and Tobago's government's efforts both to reinforcing national cultural unity and to advance their financial benefits from the event. The first is illustrated in the twin island's 2020 cultural policy document; the latter is reflected in Carnival's financial contribution to Trinidad and Tobago's economy. In fact, since its inception, "in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago boasts the largest carnival, an exuberant two-day celebration that represents the largest cultural sector of the country [...] the carnival is a key component of the economy, backed by policies which since the early 1990's has developed targeted support of the creative and cultural industries."<sup>187</sup> As a result of and to further these positionings, Trinbago's government established organizations, such as the National Carnival Commission (NCC), and centralized carnival in their 2020 cultural policy document. Accordingly, Trinbago's cultural identity is constructed through the lens of Carnival. While this boisterous event might seem like an inclusive, authentic bacchanal, this research investigates how the nation's post-independence national narrative used and uses Carnival as an icon of national identity. Under their narrow directives, their concept of Carnival paints a one-dimensional perspective of the island, limiting Trinbago culture's potential to change overtime.

When the country's first Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams strove for national unity by centralizing carnival, his leadership engendered a nationalism that centered on the black male as the leaders of the nation, community, and family.<sup>188</sup> Cynthia Enloe explains how this intersection of nationalism and masculinity operates. She explains that "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Daniela Peña Lazaro, Inter-American Development Bank – Carnivals: A Celebration for Development.

<sup>188</sup> Pamela R. Franco, "The Invention of Traditional Mas and the Politics of Gender," in *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 37.

<sup>189</sup> Cynthia Enloe. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 2nd ed., 44, (CA: University of California Press, 2014). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6>.

This biased foundation to the Trinbago national identity prioritizes local black maleness, which then minoritizes non-black groups, overshadows femaleness, rejects other gender identity expression, and elides the diaspora. And, claiming Carnival asserts an ownership, which then formalizes the event.

This dominance stagnates and restricts its potential to change over time and space. As a result, the fluid nature of both carnival and cultural identity becomes static, as it is rooted to a spatio-temporal point of origin. Under this oppressive construct, nationally claimed carnival and cultural identity does not reflect the intermediate spaces that exist in quotidian culture. From this concept of Trinidad as the originator of Carnival emerges the myth that Trinidad and Tobago is a place of constant *fêting*. It covers internal social conflicts and promotes a utopic national narrative that Trinbago “is a free society without problems, without racial conflict, without religious intolerance, and without clashes between ethnic groups.”<sup>190</sup> In other words, it plays into colonial frameworks, especially tourism fantasies, that Trinidad and Tobago is an exotic place where nothing goes wrong.

However, does this usurpation of Carnival’s name and *fêting* dates mean that this centuries-old festival has become a dystopian, commercialized event? I firmly say no. In fact, I believe that the true psychomagic potential inherent in the carnivalesque of this beloved celebration of music, dance, and life holds vast potential to release Trinbago from its confining national narrative of enforced cultural identity. There is no denying Carnival’s importance in Trinbagonian life. As Trishana<sup>191</sup> states, “carnival is a big part of us, but I think that the reason carnival is a big part of us is because it’s our biggest marketing event.” At the same time, this festival functions as a space of revolution, freedom, expression, and ecstasy.

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<sup>190</sup> Petrus Hendrikus van Koningsbruggen. *Trinidad Carnival: A Quest for National Identity*. (London: Warwick University Caribbean Studies, 1997), 124.

<sup>191</sup> Singh, interview.

Carnival's power lies in the fact that it offers "a dynamic tool for self-expression and exploration, a tool to seek out our roots, a tool to develop new forms of looking at the world and its cultures, and finally a tool to unite the world, to discover what we all have in common, and to celebrate what makes us different. The power and creativity that underlies these art forms can transform lives."<sup>192</sup> Naette perfectly explains how the Carnival season mirrors daily life in a way that exposes truer visions of the mundane. She explains:

So, you will get a hybrid version of the culture in carnival in the same way you will get the Bapt mass, you will get a hybrid version of the Baptist culture. Like you would not look at the Bapt and be like "oh that is Baptist." But the Bapt comes from the Baptist community so whatever appears in carnival is a masked version of the group that came before. So, I feel like we should look for everybody in carnival with a carnival eye and that way it will look more democratic. But then we should also put carnival on the same level as all the other things because I honestly believe... and I'm working it out as I talk to you...that we are all ... it is not that there are diverse groups, it is that everybody participates in these different practices on the same level.<sup>193</sup>

Naette points the inverted nature of the Carnival world where the profane and the spiritual intermingle, just as the vagabond and the rich, bacchanal and prude, human and animal, local and foreign. How can the powerful attributes of Carnival serve as a conduit for Trinbago paradigm shifts and for social change? Just what are these powerful attributes of Carnival and what does carnivalesque specifically mean within a Trinbagonian context?

#### The Four Main Attributes of the Caribbean Carnavalesque's Transformative Power

The term carnivalesque was coined by Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin and refers to a literary mode that subverts the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos.<sup>194</sup>

Bakhtin explains that:

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<sup>192</sup> *Carnival Power: The History of Carnival.*

<sup>193</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

<sup>194</sup> Fatemeh Saber, "Bakhtin's Carnavalesque as Voiced through Gilman's Carnivalized Herlan-Ourland Saga," *World Applied Sciences Journal* (2012): 760.

Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants *live* in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a *carnivalistic life*. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent “life turned inside out,” “the reverse side of the world...” Carnival is the place for working out...a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life.<sup>195</sup>

In this, Bakhtin recognizes that carnivalistic life, or the carnivalesque, inverts hierarchies and social structures—carnival spaces are ones of creation that provoke the forming of new networks of interaction. In this paper, Bakhtinian carnivalesque offers an umbrella framework to analyze the world of the Trinidad Carnival. However, because of its Russian source and its focus on the medieval era, it cannot encapsulate the nuances of Caribbean and Trinbagonian history, culture, and people. According to the scholar Gerard Aching, “Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais’s literature is of limited application to Caribbean carnivals and manifestations of popular culture because it elucidates homogenous class formations that differ substantially from the mostly multiethnic, transnational, and class-straddling populations that participate in carnivals and popular culture in the Caribbean today.”<sup>196</sup> Therefore, this research uses Bakhtinian concepts as an umbrella theory while focusing on postcolonial and Caribbean scholars to target the nuances of the Caribbean carnivalesque. In this chapter, this project identifies four main categories of the carnivalesque at play in Trinidad’s Carnival. These include chaos, Glissant Relations, imagination, and eroticism. This paper shows how appreciating the genuine attributes of Carnival and identifying them in quotidian culture can help deconstruct the current colonial, homogenizing, nationalist system of Caribbean cultural identity.

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<sup>195</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122-123, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt22727z1>.

<sup>196</sup> Gerard Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 15.

## *Chaos*

First and foremost, the Caribbean carnivalesque is a state of being. A “state” can refer to legal and institutional structures as well as a cognitive mind-set. And, in the aforementioned ideas of Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, the state as a nation and as a national idea has the power to bind and unbind.<sup>197</sup> The concept of “state” reflects the tension of claiming Carnival, along with the tensions produced between static and fluid notions of cultural identity. But the Caribbean carnivalesque places emphasis on state as being a process and a temporary, immaterial condition. From this perspective, the Caribbean carnivalesque unfolds spaces for creation that occur out of the tensions between official national culture and cultural identity and the fluid constructions of enforced identities versus genuine ones.

These tensions give rise to chaos that “renounces linearity’s potential grip and, in this expanse/extension, conceives of indeterminacy as a fact that can be analyzed and accident as measurable.”<sup>198</sup> Chaos has no beginning nor an end. It does not follow sequential patterns. The lack of sequential form synthesizes carnivalesque to a state of uncertainty. As a result, the carnivalesque engenders spatio-temporal spaces to unfold itself in limitless forms. Each instance is independent from others and reveals itself in its fullest potential every time by being a space of negotiation. These spaces of negotiating reality, boundaries, and identities, opens doorways and platforms for freedoms of being and transformation. As experienced in Destra’s lyrics and her crowd’s reaction, Carnival can precipitate an eruption of emotion. Nneka offers her insights into Carnival’s potential to create vehicles for personal release. She wonderfully conveys the synesthesia effect of the sensory overload of Carnival, stating:

Carnival is like...when people jumping on the stage and they first come on, it's like an eruption of color. You know you just see all of this creativity and color and vibrancy

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<sup>197</sup> Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State: Language, Politics, Belonging*, (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 3.

<sup>198</sup> Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor Michigan: (University of Michigan Press, 1997): 137.



and energy just jumping up on the stage. And carnival is a time when people just let go and forget about all their fears.... I think that's the intoxication of carnival. I remember 2008 was the year when they had Fay Ann Lyons "Get On."<sup>199</sup> I don't know if you ever heard that song (Nneka sings a little of the song) and so she had a part where she says "hold it, hold it" (Nneka sings more) ... and when she gets to get on, everybody just get on. So, I think... even though I am a believer and I am not really into carnival, I can understand the intoxication because when I was in the middle of all of that, it really was intoxicating...the music, the color, the atmosphere, the vibes... there is no other word to describe it other than intoxicating. I can totally understand how... I mean I won't do it myself, but I can understand how people completely break away during carnival. That music is intoxicating, the beat, the rhythm, the rhythm moves your feet, you don't even think about it, you know?<sup>200</sup>

Even Nneka, who identifies as a practicing Christian, understands the powerful draw and emotional uplift that can occur in a Carnival experience.

Moreover, chaos theory postulates that tiny actions are related to larger phenomenon; and perceived randomness can function along different definitions of order that privileges continuous dynamics of repetition that lead to transformation.<sup>201</sup> Chaos conjures images of disorder, which signifies formlessness. Nneka's description that she "was in the middle of all of that, it really was intoxicating...the music, the color, the atmosphere, the vibes" perfectly encapsulates this psychospiritual state. Chaos brims with excess causing it to be a moment of rupture that shatters boundaries of form. It is like water spilling everywhere. It spills, rolls, and expands in no direction, shape, or purpose. However, chaos theory insinuates that within chaos's abyss, there are diminutive repetitions that order limitless repetitions. These internal, minute repetitions eventually leading to change. The stomping feet of thousands of dancing masqueraders can represent these minute repetitions that can culminate in large-scale change.

Moments of Caribbean carnivalesque chaos are apparent throughout Trinbago carnival. J'Ouvert, which was introduced in Chapter One's discussion of the historical evolution of Carnival, offers a stunning example of the positive world of carnivalesque's

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<sup>199</sup> "Get On," Fay-Ann Lyons, last modified November 8, 2014, video, 4:03, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKfccKt00dQ>

<sup>200</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>201</sup> Jeannine Murray-Román, "Rereading the Diminutive: Caribbean Chaos Theory," in Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Edouard Glissant, and Wilson Harris." *Small Axe* 19, no. 1 (2015): 20–36.

chaos. The daybreak revelry of J’Ouvert is one of the main festivals leading up to “pretty mas” on Carnival Tuesday. In this chapter, I focus on the revelry of this beloved aspect of the Carnival sequence of events. In this early morning event, revelers party in the street as they cover themselves with vibrant paints and powders as well as motor oil and mud. “J’Ouvert is about visibility. J’Ouvert is about protest, and celebration in the face of people who did not see you as human.”<sup>202</sup> Since J’Ouvert evolved as a form of rebellion that denied masters dominance and mocked and tricked these masters, it encapsulates the inverted world order of the chaos of the carnivalesque.

In its early inceptions, J’Ouvert offered formerly enslaved persons an opportunity to be seen and to be heard. In this dawn chaos, emancipated revelers were no longer held hostage—they were inducting a new set of cultural customs and asserting their rights over the plantations. This carnival space of J’Ouvert granted them a space and time for frenzied ecstasy. It afforded them moments of freedom, re-awakening, and gave them outlets to express their African tribal heritages. It was also a space to relieve themselves of their anger and to protest the skewed politics and human rights abuses of colonization.

J’Ouvert was ultimately a moment where these former slaves were able to rupture societal boundaries of colonial rule by forcing their former colonial masters to see and acknowledged their enslaved laborers. The chaotic moment created agency and power to which they previously had no access. J’Ouvert celebrations involve a high level of “play” combined with performance. In Trinbago Carnival, “play” serves as a key action from which all else derives. It is part of Trinbagonian identity, as can be heard in the vernacular phrases “to play yourself” or “to do your thing.”<sup>203</sup> Thus, these carnival spaces allow for a “coming

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<sup>202</sup> Rachael Espinet, “More Outrage over US Rum Brand Name. J’Ouvert is Ours,” *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, June 21, 2021. <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/06/21/more-outrage-over-us-rum-brand-name-jouvert-is-ours/>.

<sup>203</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio, “The Power of Play: Performance Time and Space in the Caribbean Carnival World,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2019): 292. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00086495.2019.1682345>.

into oneself” since they entail spaces for individual and societal imagining/reimagining and invention/reinvention, which can both lead to instances of subversion and revolt.

### *Glissantian Relation*

Consequently, these individual and societal imaginings/reimaginings demonstrate Glissant’s theory of Relation, which offers opportunities to claim agency and power to enact change. “Glissant sees imagination as the force that can change mentalities; relation as the process of this change.”<sup>204</sup> Thus, Relation serves as another crucial carnivalesque trait. “Relation functions like an intransitive verb in that it takes no object; it is not simply what is relayed but also the relative and the related; it always approximates truth in a given in a narrative.”<sup>205</sup> Relation is formless—it follows no sequential pattern and does not bind itself to a point of origin. It is indefinite. It only takes a specific form in a specific context. The interviewee Isaac explains how the carnivalesque atmosphere of positive chaos opens people’s minds to deny and reimagine boundaries. He offers a provocative but understandable example of the pure freedom of boundaries people can experience during Carnival. He states:

And in carnival time, you watch people jump up on the trees and wine in the trees. The tree becomes part of the carnival... anything that is around you, like people wining on cars...people jumping on the walls, J’Ouvert morning throwing paint here and there.... It’s the ultimate place of connectivity. Everything becomes part of it, not just the people. If you see a dog walking in the street by chance, people not going to shoo away the dog, they are probably gonna try and wine on the dog. That’s the ultimate place for that level of connectivity where it almost becomes like...we are truly one. And that makes me feel like it’s really possible for us to be joined all the time and not take any little thing for granted. It’s really a place for us to shed all the other things and just be together. So, in a way, it’s not really true freedom but it’s the closest thing I find.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, xii.

<sup>205</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 27.

<sup>206</sup> Rudder, interview.

Isaac explains how the whole world becomes permeable where people dance in fervent excess of release and people wine with strangers and even with trees. These might be a bacchanalian reimagining; however, this vision of a world of interactivity and fluid roles and positions can serve as a pivotal gateway into reimagining social structures and interpersonal relations. Everything is relational in that everything and everyone is relative in their states of being and power; and everything and everyone is somehow related to each other.

Every manifestation that stems from relational qualities is authentic, as it is independent of previous occurrences. Each movement of relative relation equalizes and redefines the relation. Caribbean cultural identity, along with Carnival, demonstrate Glissant's Relation because they both are rhizomatic, which "maintains the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root."<sup>207</sup> In other words, their spatio-temporal origins are important but do not define Caribbean cultural identity or carnival. Glissant's Relation, along with his understanding of the rhizome, parallels Caribbean theories of syncretism, which acts as a decolonial framework to interrogate Caribbean cultural identity and Caribbean carnivalesque.

Hence, my application of Glissant's Relation combats inequalities of colonialism in carnival spaces. It recombines various aspects of Trinbagonian culture—European, African, Indian, and others—to architect new structures of understanding. The 1996 calypso/soca song "Jahaja Bhai: Brotherhood of the Boat," written and sung by Brother Marvin, underscores the relational fluidity of Trinbagonian identity. Peter Masons explains how Brother Marvin's song "equated the transatlantic middle passage of African slavery with the long boat journeys of the indentured laborers and urged the two races to come together to celebrate their common bonds as well as their differences."<sup>208</sup> Mason notes that the theme of unity is not

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<sup>207</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

<sup>208</sup> Peter Mason. *Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad*. (Latin American Bureau, 1998): 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hj54qm>.

original in Caribbean music; however, Marvin's interweaving of "English, Creole, Hindi and Swahili over a soca beat proved a rallying point."<sup>209</sup>

This text's Chapter One discusses Eric Williams' national unity strategy that relied and relies on a universalizing narrative of a combined subjugation for all now-emancipated Trinbagonians. Marvin's song offers a complicated example of the nuanced messages of Trinbagonian essentialized identities versus genuine unity, especially when connected with Glissant's *Relations*. While Marvin's poignant song unifies Trinbagonians in an ocean-crossing journey to arrive at the twin islands, he acknowledges the various ethnoracial and linguistic heritages of the various minorities living in Trinidad. In this way, the lyrics avoid essentializing Trinbagonians into a single identity.

The song also stipulates that only when the fragments of people can accept and acknowledge their differences, then they can find unity through brotherhood. Brother Marvin sings "then and only then you'll understand what is a cosmopolitan nation [...] Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai." However, his lyrics also declare that "there was no Mother Africa, no more Mother India, just Mother Trini," making all Trinbagonians born from the twin islands. Thus, while the lyrics exemplify Glissant's *Relations* by acknowledging people's different starting points, Marvin ultimately imagines a Trinbagonian collective that is independent of their ancestral homelands. In essence, the Trinidad culture relinquishes its points of origin and that cultural identity becomes born through Mother Trini. In fact, Brother Marvin's song of inclusivity and ethnoracial and linguistic harmony sparked racialized political debates<sup>210</sup> with numerous cultural pundits calling out his song as biased against people of African heritage, despite Brother Marvin being of African heritage himself and including all major ethnoracial groups in his song of peace.

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<sup>209</sup> Mason, *Bacchanal*, 53.

<sup>210</sup> Reddock, "Jahaji Bhai," 582-353.

Brother Marvin's song demonstrates the complex relationships Trinbagonians have with each other, with the islands, and with their ancestry. However, the carnivalesque can still offer a place of acceptance and freedom. Mirroring Brother Marvin's ostensible denial of racism and culturalism, Isaac intones:

Carnival to me is the ultimate representation of acceptance. It's one place where you can go and shed any prejudice, any good or bad that you may have done, it's irrelevant. It's a space for us to connect and elevate. That's really what it is, an elevation of vibes. And that's why the music is so powerful and consistently has you moving. And I think that's the beauty of carnival. I've been to two others around the world that are not Trinidad inspired...completely different cultures...and it's nothing like here. It's really like a place where you go and be free. It is the true representation of freedom. And I want to say this just for the record because I don't know how other people feel about this but I don't believe freedom to be a real thing. I think it is the fallacy of the human mind because I think...okay, for example, I can't breathe without the trees. We are dependent on things all the time, so I think we have liberties but I don't think we have freedom. Carnival makes me consider that.<sup>211</sup>

Isaac's statement opens ideas regarding Carnival's ability to create awareness of people's relations with each other, increase self-acceptance and acceptance of others. His point regarding freedom being a state of mind provokes insightful thoughts regarding pathways to achieve self-determined freedom, if it is even possible.

Isaac's points lead into thoughts related to Carnival's inverted world where people can see and comprehend people and things in ways not normally available to their minds. In this altered state of awareness, Isaac becomes aware of both his lack of agency and his agency. Relation under the aegis of the carnivalesque propels agency, which compels active participation. "Passivity plays no part in Relation. Every time an individual or community attempts to define its place in it, even if this place is disputed, it helps blow the usual way of thinking of course, driving out the now weary rules of former classicisms[...]"<sup>212</sup> Relation, as with chaos, is a space of negotiation. More so, it empowers people or communities to disrupt social norms because of a reorientation of power. Thus, carnival events are laden with

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<sup>211</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>212</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 137.

subversive potentials. Relation in carnivalesque engenders participants their fullest expressions of self while giving them power to make themselves visible. It affords dispossessed groups agency to name themselves in public spaces, function as spatio-temporal zones that facilitates expressions of differences.

### *Imagination*

Correspondingly, imagination functions as a crucial element of the carnivalesque. Chaos and relation are primarily about a rejection of form. But, when a shape is defined, it is done so in a given narrative—imagination is necessary to conceive an architecture. The Oxford English Dictionary defines imagination as:

The power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects and situations, and those constructed by mentally combining or projecting images of previously experienced qualities, objects, and situations; also, the power or the capacity by which the mind integrates sensory data in the process of perception.

Imagination is linked to the senses, spatio-temporal instances, environments, and other objects. It therefore grounds abstractions, such as chaos and relation, to a material condition of reality by giving it a form. Imagination is a tool that transforms abstract states into material existence by reorienting modes of being to hold shape in a specific spatio-temporal narrative.

The evolution of carnival music serves as a testament to carnivalesque imagination. Imagination simultaneously necessitates performance and Carnival is a participatory event where people interact with one another and other carnival artists. People play the steelpan;<sup>213</sup> they play J'Ouvert; they perform in competitions. And, most importantly, they play mas, which itself means “to perform.” As mentioned above, the idea of “play” and “playfulness” form cornerstones in Trinbagonian worldviews. “To play” refers to embodying a character or

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<sup>213</sup> Only musical instrument created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

essence bigger or different than oneself. It is an immersive experience that paradoxically affirms one's self-identity through a serious (but playful) enactment of an imaginative other.<sup>214</sup> Additionally, it is an act. To perform, however, people must conceptualize themselves and be able to envision other manners of being. In doing so, the imagination urges people to take ownership of themselves along with their all their potential forms of being. Through this play, act, or performance, carnival revelers gain agency, transforming Carnival into a site of revolutionary, subversive potential filled with inventiveness.

Although Carnival developed from African cultures, carnival music entails a fusion of diverse cultural beats. Chutney soca and ragga soca are two subgenres of the fast-paced popular soca music. Chutney soca was born out of a fusion of Indo/Afro music while ragga soca integrated elements of Trinidad soca music and Jamaican reggae. Imagination is used to create new sounds through the synthesis of diverse cultures, dialects, and peoples. These infectious, melodious rhythms then become representative of unity of differences. In his interview, Lyndon,<sup>215</sup> the manager for the singer known as VoicetheArtist,<sup>216</sup> provides an example of cross-cultural influences and the unifying sociopolitical themes and importance of music. In our interview, Lyndon<sup>217</sup> recalls a Black Live Matter protest where “they played Voice’s ‘Year for Love,’”<sup>218</sup> with lyrics and a powerful music video that conveys messages of racial harmony and anti-gun violence. Lyndon states, “I don’t think we even realize the political impact that music could have [...] it was on such a big stage [...] I think that is kind of taught us even more about the type of impact our music can have.” VoicetheArtist’s creating this song where he fantasizes about a more peaceful world of inter-racial harmony demonstrates the imaginative potential embedded within the Caribbean carnivalesque. This

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<sup>214</sup> Riggio, “The Power of Play,” 500.

<sup>215</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>216</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Voicetheartiste>

<sup>217</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>218</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.



imaginative potential extends beyond the boundaries of the Trinbagonian borders and indicates the global impact that soca music and carnivalesque thinking can have on the world stage.

### *Eroticism as a Sexual and Non-sexual Power Charge for Transformation*

Before embarking on the discussion of eroticism within the carnivalesque, I must address a major element of Western colonial gender narratives regarding persons of color as hypersexualized. In these dangerous stereotypes that facilitate all manner of gendered violence, BIOPOC men can be viewed as aggressively sexual while BIOPOC women can be labeled as lascivious. These, entrenched narratives have long been applied to enslaved persons in the Caribbean and continue in their ongoing manifestations in fetishized tourism fantasies regarding various tropical island nations. However, eroticism plays a positive and pivotal role in the carnivalesque. Within Trinbagonian Carnival, eroticism as sexual and non-sexual serves as an energizing fuel for sensual expression and transformative empowerment.

Chanelle<sup>219</sup> describes her innocent childhood memories of the adult eroticism associated with Carnival. In terms of the sexual erotic atmosphere, she remembers:

Yea, that is actually...Yes that's very true and I remember...because I mean in the J'Ouvert packages...I think my brother carried me to Arima in Trinidad to just hang on the streets watching carnival and I think it was Monday night where people were still out on the streets and doing whatever they were doing and they had the condom packets on their ear. It was very much revealed. So, it was...I mean this is me assuming, but it could have probably been their way of communicating so everyone is seeing that you have your condoms exposed so maybe it means that you (were looking for a sexual tryst).<sup>220</sup>

Of course, eroticism plays a central role in Carnival, where people wear T-Shirts that identify them as “Bachannalist.” The beaded, sequined, and feathered costumes of carnivals are

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<sup>219</sup> For Chanelle's bionote, please see Appendix 1.

<sup>220</sup> Beatrice, Chanelle, interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, July 13, 2021.

legendary for their drama, beauty, and daring. And, the suggestive and interactive dance moves of jooking and wining add to the sexual energy of the Carnival. Singers and performers sing and shout to audiences to indulge in these dance moves and often include at least a reference to the catch term “bacchanal” in their lyrics.

Beyond the associations with sexual desire and pleasure, the erotic is notably understood as a power with self-actualizing and self-realizing qualities. According to Audre Lorde, the erotic is a source of knowledge as well as energy that can lead to change. It is “a creative power and information; power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling; a measure of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in doing something.”<sup>221</sup> Eroticism, in sum, is various forms of knowledge gathered from the self, from relationships between and among people, and from interactions with spatio-temporal environments. This holistic erotic knowledge is energy which fuels social and political changes.

The erotic combines elements of historic knowledge/experiences with that of lived experiences which is reoriented to develop ruptures of new ways of thinking. In his interview, Isaac offers insightful points regarding the sexual and sensual spirit of Carnival. He asserts:

I think that is in its own element because what you are being free of, is again...almost like... People don't think of their learning and life experiences as weights... If that's what it really is, you're consistently taking this information and storing it in your brain and then having to figure out how to navigate life. So, those are days where you are supposed to be free from it and then everybody is on that same wave. So, riding that wave together, that is togetherness so that's its own thing. That's the ultimate spirit of carnival. I feel like if you are missing that, then what's the point of carnival. You said ... it's interesting you said the erotic part. I would have to say that I feel like there is this overly large sense of erotica that's come into carnival recently. I have no problem with that but... (interrupted)<sup>222</sup>

In his statement, Isaac connects the spontaneous realizations that can occur when people experience the energy and freedom of Carnival revelry. He does note recent Carnivals have

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<sup>221</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007): 53-55.

<sup>222</sup> Rudder, interview.

become more sexualized. At the same time, moves beyond that to focus on his definition of erotic. He continues:

Not sexual but definitely a need for a sensual level of touch. People almost seem to tangibly touch things, to touch other people. And nothing is necessarily wrong with that inherently, it's just it cannot only be that. That's not the only form of freedom there is and that's not the only form of connectivity. It's a beautiful part of carnival but if you look at the older people, the guys walking down the street in their sailor costumes...it is old school but that's another part of freedom...their level of creativity being shown in their space. That has nothing to do ...it's not necessarily a sensory thing<sup>223</sup>

In Isaac's perspective, the erotic opens a space for creative self-expression, which serves as a positive aspect that Trishana echoes in her interview. She explains that:

It's more relaxed. But it's true. But I think that's more for Carnival. Carnival in itself is a big thing. No one is thinking this is a woman and she needs to be dressed more, unless someone is sitting by the TV and judging. But in Carnival itself, people are actually experiencing it and playing it and seeing it as a freedom of expression rather than this culture of people half-naked in the streets. They definitely promote gender equality because you see women, you admire women. I think men...you know, they seeing women in these little outfits and I think men admire them than think of them as just sexual beings. That's my perception... like "waw,"<sup>224</sup> look at how great this women is...in a...not a sexual way but in an admiration way. But I think for me, it's all based on what I see and how it's broken down by the age demographic. You know some people differently when you're older and younger people think differently.<sup>225</sup>

In Trishana's view, she sees people being free to openly express their sexual energy and wear their self-determined outfits in public without judgement or fear. She feels that that carnivalesque space even allows women more freedom to wear revealing clothing in a safe Carnival environment where their physical attributes are appreciated within the context of the festival. Of course, she notes how these attitudes towards freedom of sexualized clothing and social judgements vary according to generations.

Nneka brings the idea of the erotic and Carnival back to a spiritual place, which still links to the erotic as a state of energized, transformative change. She comments that individual and cultures can spiritually release their tensions through these annual rituals and

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<sup>223</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>224</sup> "Waw" means "wow."

<sup>225</sup> Singh, interview.

celebrations. She says that “perhaps this connects with the Lent, etc. the religious meditative aspects, the cultural valve. But yeah, I think the joviality definitely has a part to play with forgiveness, self-forgiveness, forgiving others, yeah.”<sup>226</sup> Her comment on the Carnival as a space for forgiveness links to Destra’s Garcia’s song lyrics that “All de pettiness have tuh down.” Isaac also considers Carnival an atmosphere of positivity where people can release their negativity. He follows Nneka and Destra’s ideas:

That's exactly how I feel about it to be honest. I also find carnival is a way to ... maybe when people are not having the best of times, it's a nice reminder that there is the possibility of positivity in your life. Because even if you really shed all your negativity, you can really let go of your worries if you participate. If you are able to get past all your issues and become engulfed in the spirit of Carnival, you really can't just .... I used to do this too... I am guilty of this... call it you're acting as though you are problemless, but it's not acting. It's two very real days and everything around you is shut down so you can participate in this spirit. So, when you do get involved in this thing, it is a very beautiful thing. Hopefully, not too many people do that and get caught up in it long term, but it's a good reminder that you can go out tomorrow and while your day may not be the best, you can give thanks for life and give thanks for people around that are making things stick, give thanks for water. I feel like after carnival season, I usually get reflective in that way, almost like how people get on psychedelic trips, it's almost like having one without having one.<sup>227</sup>

Isaac continues beyond this release of negativity to view how Carnival—with its release, freedom, interconnections, imagination, and transformative power—can all elevate a person to a higher state of consciousness where they have a deeper understanding of their egos. Isaac adds that:

it's supposed to be a freeing time. Free means you don't have constraints and your ego is a big constraint in life especially when things you learn, they become not necessarily your natural self, they become your nurture. And nurture is an important part but the whole pint again is the spirit. And maybe people don't know the meaning of spirit, maybe that's what happened. I feel like spirit and soul are used as very woohaa words and something that is unseen but I am a very dictionary person... that same thing we were talking about having to learn words... exactly, I was forced...not forced ...and not only at school but it was always to read a book a week and always a) write words down in the book that I had to look up, but also just for no reason at all, learn ten words in the dictionary every week. So, I think people need to look up the meaning of the soul. I can't remember the definition perfectly. It's the seating of a living being's emotion and character. It's the unseen part of you but you know that

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<sup>226</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>227</sup> Rudder, interview.

you have emotions and you know you have character and it's the bed of that. So, when you talk about a spirit...referring to carnival as a spirit, it is that. It is something that will fit your character and your emotions. You have to let go to let that in you and there is no way you can say "want to be represented here or else". You can't come bold otherwise you are going to dominate the spirit. And then you will make it become you rather you become part of it. I don't think that's how it works when you have a spirit. It doesn't work that way. Carnival is a spiritual experience.<sup>228</sup>

Isaac's point leads into ideas of how the changes made in one's awareness during the inverted world of the Carnival can organically impact one's awareness in daily life. In this way, the Carnival influences the quotidian.

At the same time, I assert the carnivalesque always exists in the quotidian and constantly offers ways for proactive transformation. The self-realizing power of the erotic is crucial to understanding Caribbean carnivalesque as it can address Shalini Puri's claim that carnival subversion does not translate into quotidian culture. While the carnivalesque has the capability to spur changes of the self within a carnival fantasy, I contend this transformative erotic energy can be accessed and employed in everyday life outside of festival events. Because of Carnival's importance, Caribbean scholars have privileged the study of carnival and Caribbean carnivalesque. Shalini Puri critiques this privileging as she contends that there is a critical divorce of carnival from other aspects of everyday life.<sup>229</sup>

For her, carnival analyses offer instances of subversion in the fantasy of carnival but these transformations do not necessarily translate into quotidian culture. Though I agree with Puri on the limitations of carnival studies in Caribbean research, I postulate that Caribbean carnivalesque offers opportunities for subversions and transformations to be translated in Caribbean and Trinbagonian lifestyle. Building on the works of Caribbean scholars such as Gerard Aching and Kevin Adonis Browne, I argue that Caribbean carnivalesque is a state of becoming that defies static forms of being because of its main elements, chaos, relation,

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<sup>228</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>229</sup> Shalini Puri, "Beyond Resistance: Notes Towards a New Caribbean Cultural Studies," *Small Axe* 14 (2003).

imagination, and eroticism, which defy form. Additionally, I postulate that through understanding Caribbean carnivalesque, fluid notions of Caribbean identities, and, more importantly, Trinbagonian cultural identities can be adapted to include diasporic subjects as well as *trans*-gender communities.

Because of these elements, the Caribbean carnivalesque gives all Caribbean peoples “a means of knowing the world through process and repetition, the construction of new knowledge, controversial meanings, and the insistence on alternative perspectives.”<sup>230</sup> In other words, the Caribbean carnivalesque allows Caribbean people to acknowledge their past, create new ways of understanding, and forge alternative paths for themselves. The Caribbean carnivalesque, most importantly then, ensures the futurity of the Caribbean, and its islands like Trinidad and Tobago. As a result of being in flux, differences are generated, allowing for bodies to position themselves as beings or entities of becoming. This entails a process of “and...” rather than a dichotomy of “either/or.” The futurity is the promise, the hope. As Sara Ahmed intones, “[t]he hope of changing directions is that we don’t always know where some paths may take us: risking departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible.”<sup>231</sup> Her optimistic viewpoints delights in the power of transformative change.

Carnival performance lends itself to being a space of limbo. According to Kamau Braithwaite:

limbo is a dance in which the participants have to move, with their bodies thrown backwards and without any aid whatsoever, under a stick [...] it is said to have originated – a necessary therapy after the experience of the cramped conditions between the slave decks of the middle passage [...] Limbo then reflects a certain kind of gateway or threshold to a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles.<sup>232</sup>

Thus, carnival music and its associated performances reflects its African slave origins while creating a carnival atmosphere where bodies of participants indulge in moments of excess,

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<sup>230</sup> Kevin Adonis Browne, *Tropic Tendencies: Rhetoric, Popular Culture, and the Anglophone Caribbean*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018): 23.

<sup>231</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.)21.

<sup>232</sup> Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” *Daedalus* 103, no. 2 (1974): 89.

pleasure, liberation, subversion, and resistance. The carnivalesque movements of carnival's music is akin to carnivalesque qualities in cultural identity as it pertains to diasporic subjects and *trans*-gender communities.

Chela Sandoval phrases this process of “and...” as “differential consciousness” where that “differential consciousness is the expression of the new subject position.”<sup>233</sup> Thus, from these four powerful attributes of the carnivalesque, people can achieve a new subjectivity and worldview. This ideology recognizes and creates space for differences which provides material and immaterial bodies with the power to authentically unfold in any context beyond implied boundaries. Hence, in the carnival space, revelers are able to act or perform transgressive behaviors without repercussions. Additionally, the body of the carnival space becomes a site of transformation because it is a site where the process of “and...” is accepted or belongs. The carnival space becomes a space of resistance because it recognizes difference and allows subversion, which prompts change. It becomes a space that is experienced individually and collectively.

#### Recognizing Carnavalesque Qualities in Cultural Identity, Diaspora, and Gender

When I apply a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity it is to deconstruct the dichotomies of belonging and non-belonging as it creates room to unfold new forms of being. As explained, Caribbean carnivalesque ensures futurity because its combined traits of chaos, relation, imagination, and eroticism to encompass a differential consciousness, which is the process of “and” rather than “either/or.” Therefore, differences which lead to spaces of ambivalence are no longer a threat because of otherness. Differences are translated into

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<sup>233</sup> Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 44.

spaces of newness and creation. These ambivalent spaces, or in-between spaces are dubbed the “third space” by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha posits that the “third space” is the:

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.<sup>234</sup>

Bhabha implies that there is a polarity in the way in which belonging is perceived by people. As such, people are thrust into homogenized categories, like being unified under a national identity. While this national identity may anchor a person's sense of belonging, it also erases the nuances of people, culture, and other forms of existence. Bhabha suggests, then, that there are spaces in between these homogenized categories. He dubs these in-between spaces as the *third space*. In this mystical third space, there is no delimited location and no center contrasted to negativized peripheries. There are no insiders contrasted to outsiders, no locals elevated above diaspora. These are spaces of plural subjectivities and inclusion, imagination and political revolution.

Kevin Adonis Browne posits that Caribbean carnivalesque “has the potential for activating consciousness among historically disposed peoples, thus enabling the desires of individuals to take form through collective practice.”<sup>235</sup> Caribbean carnivalesque is a tool or method to understand what Derek Walcott calls the “fragmentation”<sup>236</sup> of Caribbean people as it affords Caribbean peoples the power to name themselves. It is also a conscious practice and performance of lived experiences of Caribbean everyday life. The Caribbean carnivalesque then, facilitates Caribbean ownership of its past, rights over its present, and the potential to construct its own future.

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<sup>234</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 56.

<sup>235</sup> Browne, *Tropic Tendencies*, 11.

<sup>236</sup> Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*.



A Caribbean carnivalesque approach to cultural identity is not focused on a spatio-temporal beginning. It includes both the past as well as lived experiences in present moments and includes diasporic subjects. In fact, according to Harry Goulbourne and John Solomos:

The Caribbean is not only a *geographical* region, but also a region of the imagination and lived cultural experiences: if its inner core sits within and surrounds the Caribbean Sea, its *cultural* contours spread outwards into parts of the South and North American continents, Europe, the Middle East, West Africa, and Asia (particularly the Indian subcontinent and China) [...] Rather, the region has become a ‘home’ of the imagination, helping to develop and further define the region itself.<sup>237</sup>

Caribbean and Trinbagonian cultural identity cannot then be synthesized into one definition because it is a place of movement. The fragments of people who made their way to the twin island of Trinidad and Tobago are a dynamic mosaic that is constantly rearranging itself. Further, the frequent movement of people to other islands and international nations incorporate new cultural meanings and symbols into their cultural identities. Trinbagonian cultural identities are always shifting and are always in flux. Thus, they defy singularity in definition.

Similarly, Carnival reflects the diasporic traits of cultural identity as Trinbagonian carnival has spawned Caribbean carnivals worldwide. “It is estimated that there are over sixty diasporic Caribbean carnivals in North America and Europe.”<sup>238</sup> But each utterance of these new diasporic carnivals is imbued with new cultural meanings and symbols that reflects the struggles and rebellion unique to its new spatio-temporal context. “The carnivals have over time incorporated carnivalesque traditions from other immigrant countries: South Americans (e.g. Brazilians and Colombians), Africans and Asiana {and other Caribbean countries like Jamaica and the Bahamas} [...] and the diasporic Caribbean carnivals have developed into a means to affirm cultural identity and promote sociopolitical integration within the Caribbean

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<sup>237</sup> Goulbourne and Solomos, *The Caribbean Diaspora: Introductory remarks*,” 534.

<sup>238</sup> Ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 246.

diasporic community as well as with the host society.”<sup>239</sup> These diaspora carnivals are carving out third spaces for themselves within the global sphere.

Toronto’s Caribana festival provides an example of the changes within diasporic communities. The Caribana scene has morphed to overcome new challenges that occur in this host society. Carnival music scenes also create dialogue and acceptance within host nations because they function as sites of communications, activism, and resistance. The Toronto soca scene:

represents resistance against mainstream Canadian culture and in particular, racist attitudes and structures in Canadian society by celebrating an alternative identity; one that is Caribbean but not exclusively black; the soca posse (group) is Caribbean black or Indian| mixed, but not violent or linked to criminality, thereby challenging racial profiling or stereotypic of Caribbean and/or black people in Canada; lastly, it is a site that is Caribbean Canadian but not Jamaican.<sup>240</sup>

These forms of resistance create awareness about the diversity of the region, making Trinbagonian people heard and visible in ways that undermine ideas that immigrants from the Caribbean are only of African heritage or only from Jamaican. It challenges stereotypes while exhibiting different, accepted forms of identity. This first creates recognition within diaspora communities, which then extends to acceptance and belonging in the wider Canadian community.

Give the context of the third space, Caribbean carnivalesque affords Trinbagonian cultural identity the space to include diasporic subject as well as *trans*-gender communities. Women are able to subvert stereotypical norms that relate to motherhood, naiveté, and virginity. In the freedom of the carnivalesque, those who do not conform to gender and sexual orientation norms become visible and accepted to varying degrees in these spaces. One such rebellious character in Trinidad’s carnival space is “Baby Doll.” The Baby Doll character roams the streets during carnival accusing male spectators of being their child’s

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<sup>239</sup> Riggio, *Carnival: Culture in Action*, 248.

<sup>240</sup> Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, “Feteing as Cultural Resistance? The Soca Posse in the Caribbean Diaspora,” *Topia* 20 (2008): 85.

father and demanding child support. While this brash character might seem like a modern feminist invention, she evolved as a reaction against the rampant sexual violence perpetrated by slave masters against bonded women. In fact, “Baby Doll” represents a powerful voice for enslaved and minoritized women to call for justice and assert their human rights. Thus, these characters confront historical oppression and disenfranchisement of women as well as confront the upper-class society that marginalized them.<sup>241</sup>

In more recent Carnival spaces, women have broken economic barriers to actively participate in the festivities given their growing economic independence. In this space, women take ownership of their bodies and their movements to express themselves in ways that transgress the norms. “The carnivalized woman embodies the most despised aspects of strong femininity, and her subordinate position in society is in part underlined in this enactment of power reversal.”<sup>242</sup> In other words, women subvert the norms by indulging in the Carnival’s debauchery, such as wining, wearing skimpy carnival costumes, and drinking in public streets. Through this erotic moment, they are able to explore their sexual freedom, to self-actualize, and to transcend beyond the boundaries of society.

#### Conclusion: Moving from the Annual Carnavalesque to the Quotidian Carnavalesque

In the words of Destra Garcia, in her song, “It’s Carnival,” “seasons come, and seasons go, but carnival will last.” Carnival, or rather its carnavalesque or spirit, spans beyond the limits of a carnival season in both the nation of Trinidad and Tobago and its diasporic communities. According to the Trinbagonian legend Roy Cape, carnival is “a celebration of

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<sup>241</sup> “The Art of Rebellion: The Baby Doll Masquerade in Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival,” Avah Atherton, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/art-of-rebellion-baby-doll-masquerade-trinidad-and-tobago-carnival>.

<sup>242</sup> Valeria Sterzi, *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual*, (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2015): 180.

the people [...it's a way of life that we have in the Caribbean.]”<sup>243</sup> Carnival is infused into their cultural and everyday lives. Carnival music, behaviors, and attributes can be found during a gathering of any kind. And soca or calypso music is not limited to festivals—it can and is played continuously throughout Trinbagonian life. The carnivalesque can be located in a singular moment when someone is driving home in her car with soca music blaring as she cruises through the streets of Port-of-Spain, Nottinghill, or Boca Raton. The carnivalesque mood and attitude can strike at any moment to inspire and motivate on any random day. For these reasons, carnival is a source of pride for Trinbagonians abroad and at home. But to lay claim to carnival is to impede its carnivalesque and its ability to be found in every aspect of Caribbean life.

Caribbean carnivalesque is the spirit of carnival. It is a state of being that opens spaces of inclusion both within the carnival fantasy and beyond it. Caribbean carnivalesque bears “overtones of pragmatic self-definition and adaptability that make it particularly suited to engage and interpret a series of issues that emerge in shifting contexts.”<sup>244</sup> Because of its chaos, relation, imagination, and eroticism, Caribbean carnivalesque is able to afford opportunities of self-realization as well as moments of transcendence that lead to change. Its attributes position Caribbean carnivalesque to be a force that unfolds over time because it is a process of differential consciousness. The Caribbean carnivalesque allows Caribbean people to acknowledge their past, understand their present, and open their possibilities of their futures. Under this idea of the differential consciousness, this process of “and...” allows new pathways, or forms of existence, to be created and accepts engendering multiple futurities.

Moreover, the Caribbean carnivalesque approach to Trinbagonian cultural identity can decolonize its limited national notions of cultural identity. The Trinbagonian government’s

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<sup>243</sup> Cape, interview.

<sup>244</sup> Browne, *Tropic Tendencies*, 14.

push for national unity comes from their desire to create a name for themselves. But pushing for national unity by laying claim to carnival as a cultural object, limits the concept of cultural identity. This way of thinking creates distinct divisions between belonging and non-belonging. As a result, the Trinbagonian nation excludes diasporic groups and *trans*-gender communities.

However, a Caribbean carnivalesque approach has the potential to expand the understanding of cultural identity because it is performative or an instance of “play” that allows for the creation of zones “in which new birth or emergence becomes possible, against sterility of dominant norms (which in their tautology, cannot create the new). It also encourages the return of repressed creative energies.”<sup>245</sup> Trinbagonian cultural identity could then be characterized in many different ways rather than being confined to one definition. This is because the Caribbean carnivalesque approach is a process of *becoming* because its tensions create flows that allow for change. This concept means that the cultural landscape is always in motion and cannot be encapsulated into a single definition without rejecting groups of Trinbagonian peoples.

This approach conceives spaces and freedoms for all Trinbagonian people to imagine themselves at various moments in their lived experiences. It gives empowers people to determine their cultural identities and the ability to express their cultural variations in particular spaces and times. Thus, Audre Lorde would advocate that “recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.”<sup>246</sup> Understanding the carnivalesque’s attributes of chaos, relation, imagination, and eroticism

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<sup>245</sup>Andrew Robinson, “In Theory Bakhtin,” 2.

<sup>246</sup>Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 59.

within the quotidian allows people to be aware of their constant access to transformative change.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Liming, Food, and Language as the Carnavalesque in the Quotidian**

As previously noted in this project, the NCPTT officially defines identity as “the feeling of belonging to a group related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, or locality. Cultural identity is characteristic to individuals under cultural verifiers such as gender, location, race, history, aesthetics and even food.”<sup>247</sup> This wonderfully broad, objectively inclusive statement traverses nearly all the main attributes that compose an individual’s and a nation’s holistic identity. As this research investigates the tensions between the essentializing of identities under an enforced unity versus a carnivalesque acceptance of genuine diversity, this rosy definition bears further scrutiny. And although many people may only consider the spectacle and extreme sensory experience of the annual Carnival to be a realm of the carnivalesque, this research explores how the carnivalesque can and does occur in the quotidian every day. From there, this paper hopes to demonstrate the ways the carnivalesque occurs in the Trinbago quotidian and how these positive attributes can be harnessed and enhanced for social betterment. In light of these aims, this chapter explores the formative, pivotal, and central role of “liming”<sup>248</sup> as a cultural pastime in conjunction with the language styles and food culture that organically infuse these liming meetings with the dynamism that fosters the carnivalesque in the quotidian.

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<sup>247</sup> “National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, accessed July 17, 2022, 55, <http://parlcloud.ttparliament.org:8081/PapersLaidViewer/TempFiles/White%20Paper%20-%20National%20Culture%20Policy.pdf>.

<sup>248</sup> Although liming is a term used throughout the Caribbean, I use it in reference to Trinidadian culture.

## Ole Talk and Liming Culture: Relaxing, Flirting, and Political Planning

Carnival sites are fueled by the carnivalesque that creates junctures of transformations and transgressions. However, it is arguably difficult to locate the carnivalesque in daily life because quotidian culture demands that social rules and hierarchies be obeyed. Shalini Puri illustrates this rift between the fantasy of carnival and everyday life. She argues that while carnival is important to the Caribbean aesthetic, culture, and economy, her concerns lay with the fact that there is a critical divorce of carnival from other aspects of everyday life.<sup>249</sup> Puri's claim is valid; however, I propose that to bridge the gap between carnival and quotidian spaces it is crucial to identify carnivalesque moments in that sphere. To do this, one must understand the major elements of carnivalesque that pervade the fantasy of carnival spaces, which were detailed in Chapter Three, and locate them in quotidian culture. Understanding the elements of carnivalesque to be chaos, imagination, relation, and eroticism, I contend that the "liming" culture in Trinidad and Tobago is a carnivalesque site in quotidian spaces. Liming functions as a practice and performance in the Caribbean and its diaspora. It is also an art of oral-kinetic performance,<sup>250</sup> which incorporates lived experiences. This means it not only includes unofficial, national forms of knowledge, but also movement. Finally, liming embody humor and vulgarity that directly oppose national ideals of "proper" behaviors that are derivative of colonial rule and respectability politics.

What exactly is liming? Trishana offers a general definition of liming and its cultural infusion across time, space, and age. She explains that:

Liming culture to me is... everything you need to take a drink. It's Friday, let's go take a drink. Oh, it's Tuesday, let's go take a drink. You know liming culture is all about...

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<sup>249</sup> Shalini Puri, "Beyond Resistance," 24.

<sup>250</sup> Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

for me, personally, it's all about creating memories, just simply enjoying yourself but I think it's something that is very big in Trinidad. Everybody is like “let's take a drink” and it doesn't have to be alcohol. Just go out, be free and be around people.”<sup>251</sup>

In the un/official dictionary, a lime (gathering) “must have some kind of basic purpose, but the purpose must not be all-consuming, otherwise it becomes a distraction from the main business of talking, eating, drinking, arguing, dancing and minding other people’s business.”<sup>252</sup> This definition confirms that the deeper intention of liming relations to socializing. The point is to relax and interact with others in casual ways that should become meaningful.

Liming, or the act of participating in a lime, is also “an ambit where meaning is negotiated, social and political discourses are elucidated and debated, and cultural products and spaces are collectively used [...]it is also a critical space for community building and networking.”<sup>253</sup> Liming might start off as casual fun, but important conversations organically evolve or erupt during these meetings. Liming is a gathering where people discuss any range of topics—from sharing jokes to politics, as they eat, drink, dance, sing, and make music with commonplace objects like spoons, bottles, and coolers.<sup>254</sup> The verbal communication generated in this space is coined “Ole Talk,” which includes the sharing and passing along of stories from daily life and from ancestors. Ole Talk can range from discussing politics and social life to reminiscing about the “old days.”

Personally, limes have always been a crucial part of my life. When my family and I lived in Trinidad, every Saturday, the entire family would help with cleaning our home. My sister and I tidied up our bedrooms and bathrooms while our mom and dad would handle

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<sup>251</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>252</sup> Mason. *Bacchanal!*, 67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hj54qm>.

<sup>253</sup> Santana Anabel Fernández, Camille Nakhid, Margaret Y Nakhid-Chatoor, and Shakeisha Wilson-Scott. “Liming and Ole Talk: Foundations for and Characteristics of a Culturally Relevant Caribbean Methodology.” *Caribbean Studies* 47, no. 1 (2019): 99–123.

<sup>254</sup> From my own personal experience, liming – during Christmas or a random day or a river lime – these objects along with others are used to create a rhythm section, as demonstrated in the 2020 chutney soca song “Nack Ah Ting.”



everything else. My young brother would play by himself amongst the morning hubbub. In between the cleaning, my mom or dad would also be cooking. My mom would cook her chicken soup or my dad would make his salty fish broth soup as energetic soca music soared throughout the house. Throughout the day, friends and family would stop by and everyone would indulge in a drink or food. My parents seemed always to have a steady supply of ingredients to put on a new pot of soup for the next round of welcome guests. These limes offered me opportunities to socialize with my parents' circle as well as kept me connected to my family. For my parents, it was a time for them to ole talk about a range of topics, including politics and society. They foster an environment of intergenerational warmth and passing of knowledge.

After we moved to the US, my family and I yearned for those Saturday morning interactions. When I was in relationships, I would try to recreate them. And when I'm with my family, we have our own little limes that are full of laughter, ole talk, and even dancing as we drink and enjoy each other's company. But as my siblings and I got older, these limes became more about connecting with our family in a deeper way. Our conversations would range from the political state of the US and Trinidad and Tobago to learning more about our parents' past through listening to their memories. These limes helped me to think about our past while also contemplating my own and our family's future. Liming has remained a central part of my life, especially because it provides that connectivity amongst people in a more relaxed manner that fosters genuine interactions and sharing.

I also use limes as a form of networking. I try to connect with people at work and different organizations through sharing my culture. We have "backyard limes," and I tell my colleagues that they will get a chance to see how "Trinis" lime. I usually cook curried chicken, order Trinidadian buss up shot (a type of roti), and organize other Trinidadian snacks. I set out a full bar and usually have soca and chutney music blasting. In these

moments, people can learn about me and my culture. But more so, I can casually discuss with them my intentions and visions for projects ahead. The scene becomes relaxed as we all share in these cultural moments of explanation and enjoyment.

The importance of liming to the Trinidadian psyche cannot be underestimated and offers an energetic example of the carnivalesque in the quotidian. Liming cultures are chaotic, imaginative, relational, and erotic, making them quotidian carnivalesque sites of transformation. Approaching them as such can reveal moments of inclusivity and innovation. Liming and slackness generate belonging through recognition and praxis; they are sites of cultural productions of knowledge. They deconstruct dichotomies of public versus private spheres and recode constructs of acceptable social behaviors. In liming, I focus on its key oral and music aspects, as they are linked to other oral-kinetic acts of dancing, drinking, and eating. During a lime, limers (those who participate in a lime) practice and participate in the art of ole talk. The space of a lime establishes trust and the freedom for limers “to speak freely as they recount their experiences of an event, debate political matters, or simply renew old acquaintances [...] These spaces can be equated to that of the Caribbean “yard” – the crucible of Caribbean culture – and considered to be the “melting pot” where viewpoints are constructed and reconstructed within a familiar setting and among familiar faces.”<sup>255</sup>

Nneka captures the warmth and interpersonal Trinbagonian emotions inherent in the liming experience. She explains how liming has survived the COVID-19 pandemic:

Absolutely, we’ve definitely seen that in the pandemic. Lots of people have been locked up just because they wanted to be liming outside curfew...um within the curfew hours, you know. I have to admit, I’m not typical in that regard. I am a homebody; I love to be home working on my book or my art or whatever. But Trinis do love to lime, that’s a huge part of our culture and I think it just goes along with our playfulness, our friendliness. We love to connect with people and I guess...for the same reason you could go in a maxi and connect with somebody, right. And in terms of the diaspora, I have met Trinis, particularly when I was in Japan, when I was in Korea especially, and you know there is something different about a Trini. When

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<sup>255</sup>Santana, Camille, Margaret, and Shakeisha. “Liming and Ole Talk: Foundations for and Characteristics of a Culturally Relevant Caribbean Methodology.” 2.

you're liming with a Trini, you know. There is more warmth, there is more playfulness, the picong, the rapport is different.<sup>256</sup>

Nneka hits on the playfulness and picong, or gentle joking, that often occurs in the liming atmosphere. Liming is a cultural practice that breaks the boundaries of social norms. It is filled with carnivalesque moments where everyone—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and/or social status—organically engages in cooking, dancing, piconging, consuming alcohol, and ole talking. In these ole talk moments, people enjoy this Caribbean conversational practice that is unstructured, relies on close connections, shared competencies, and the use of humor.<sup>257</sup> “To picong” is to tease and joke in a mocking manner. In these inverted spaces, men cook and women drink. And all limers partake in the relaxed, indulgent atmosphere that resonates with the carnival spirit. Liming spaces grant opportunities for all Trinbagonian people to reimagine themselves from different perspectives. To rephrase, liming culture fosters belonging for all participants because it empowers them to recount, reshape, narrativize, and create their own cultural experiences as they have lived and viewed it. Liming culture also has the potential to allow for diaspora and *trans*-gender communities to become visible although, for the time, this may be more accepted in diasporic communities.

Because they bring the private into the public, liming culture also deconstructs dichotomies of public versus private spheres, encourages civic engagements, and confronts gender stereotypes. Limes are both formal and informal; they can occur in any number of spaces. And anybody is welcome in a lime, regardless of the manner in which they were invited—for example, it is not uncommon for people to show up based on hearing about a lime from friends of friends or from family of friends. Limes occur in public settings, such as restaurants, bars, beaches, rivers, streets, just as much as they occur in private locations, such

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<sup>256</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>257</sup> Anabel Fernandez Santana, “Sharing Our Way: A study of Caribbean identity using Liming as culturally affirming research methodology,” 13.

as private homes, beach houses, vacation homes, and hotel rooms (especially during travel!). Because these sites merge both public and private spheres “an individual who contributes positively to a good lime is likely to be perceived as someone who can also be a positive contributor in general both in the workplace and political realm.”<sup>258</sup> In any liming space, people of different cultural, social, racial, political, and ethnic, gender, and generational backgrounds can partake in eating, drinking (alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages), dancing, and ole talk.

Because liming fluidly shifts between formal and informal, it functions as a prime ground for networking and communication. Although this is not the primary purpose of a lime, but with the help of food, drinks, and music, limers sometimes organically discuss topics such as business or politics, which invites relationships in these more formal settings. Dr. Eric Williams used liming to ensure his popularity with the electorate, resulting in his leadership from 1955-1981.<sup>259</sup> In a social experiment by scholar Ruth Clarke, one of her participants stated that “in Caribbean business operations, people take a lot less pleasure in work if there is no liming among co-workers. So, a business that does not encourage or at least condone some liming will not have happy employees. Liming probably influences the vote and encourages people to vote in island politics.”<sup>260</sup> Another respondent agrees that liming plays a pivotal role in Trinidadian business, saying that “many a deal is brokered or at least given a voice in the most casual of situations. The inclusion of alcohol [...] gives rise to a relaxed state, where parties can feel more inclined to put forth ideas and forge relationships. Any a business card is exchanged when liming.”<sup>261</sup> Like many cultures, the fluid crossing of

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<sup>258</sup> Ruth Clarke, and Charles N Reccia, “Caribbean Liming: A Metaphor for Building Social Capital.” *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* 12, no. 3 (2012): 305.

<sup>259</sup> Clarke and Reccia, “Caribbean Liming,” 306.

<sup>260</sup> Clarke and Reccia, “Caribbean Liming.”

<sup>261</sup> Clarke and Reccia, “Caribbean Liming,” 308.

formal and informal interactions facilitates difficult conversations and fosters organic communications and relationships, both in the personal and in the business world.

Liming does not only blur the lines between the public and private, it also encourages civic engagement. These intimate spaces affect not just cultural aspects of society but also influence political and economic sectors too. The lime is essentially “a living, breathing organism with a life of its own and has to end in its own time.”<sup>262</sup> Because of its emphasis on flow rather than strict timing, the lime is resistant to the colonial Protestant work ethic. As a result, Trinbagonians employ this space to conduct business where people can gain insights into political, economic, and social relations. The former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago used this strategy to curry favor with his people. Limes, for politicians such as him, range from informal spaces like “rum shops” (roadside bars) to more formal activities, like a politically sponsored event such as a cricket match.<sup>263</sup> In these informal interactions, everyday people feel as though their voices are being heard by politicians and businesspeople alike. And in these moments, they engage in their civic duty to ole talk.

### Liming and its Intersections with Gender Roles

Liming practices also has the potential to confront the male-female gender dichotomies in the Caribbean and its diasporic communities. This may be easier to do in diasporic spaces because of the hugely publicized gender movements happening in international communities. International societies also afford opportunities for Caribbean diasporic subjects to be freer in their articulations of non-conforming gender identities, to interact with non-conforming gender peoples, or to learn more about the *trans*-gender movements. Many organizations promoting gender equality have sprouted in the Caribbean,

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<sup>262</sup> Clarke and Reccia, “Caribbean Liming,” 303.

<sup>263</sup> Clarke and Reccia, “Caribbean Liming,” 306.

including organizations like the Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO) in Trinidad, J-FLAG in Jamaica, OutRight Action International and the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC).

Trishana discusses the tightrope women can walk between freedom of expressing their independence and sexuality in public liming situations. She notes that:

“I think people ...it definitely helps break away from the gender stereotypes but at the same time it kind of worsens the situation. Let's say for example, you go to a bar and you drink on a Friday evening. A lot of these older men, when they see the female waitresses and they are very rude and disrespectful and with alcohol they think that they could do what they want and say what they want. I think a limin culture kind of worsens the gender disparity in Trinidad but at the same time it allows people to be a little more free and open, but I think that's with a close friend, not strangers. So, if you're with your close friends, it helps with the gender bias, but if it's with strangers and older people drinking alcohol, I don't think it's something that helps with gender identity.”<sup>264</sup>

Trishana conveys an understandable and believable perspective on these male-female interactions, especially under a generally heteropatriarchal social system and especially when alcohol is involved.

At the same time, times are changing and liming does unravel public versus private binaries by deconstructing national constructs of gender. Women are active participants in limes. Women and men lime together in the same spaces where they are able to break the rules of propriety. Destra Garcia's soca “Rum and Soca”<sup>265</sup> exhibits women's empowerment and agency in an all-female lime, which moves from public spaces into a private one. In limes, such as the one illustrated in this song's music video, women are empowered as they decided where and when to go out. They dress as they deem appropriate. In the video, Destra and her posse are seen getting dressed in sexy, tight-fitting/short clothes. They hop into a chauffeured limo dancing and wining and enjoying each other's company. In the car, they consume champagne, which is indicative of economic independence. And while men may be

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<sup>264</sup> Singh, interview.

<sup>265</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

a topic of conversation, the lime is about them and their experiences as they navigate the world. They continue the lime at bars and clubs, where they continue to express their sexual and economic freedoms. They drink together and wine on each other as a group, suggesting they are not there for the purpose of men—they are liming to satisfy their own pleasures. The space is free of inhibitions and brimming with female agency, as they own their bodies and movements in public spaces.

### Trini Dialects: In-culture Warmth and Diaspora Code-switching

As noted above, liming includes the conversational act of ole talk, which links into points regarding the importance of understanding the importance of the Trinbago dialect as a point of cultural pride and identity. In Lisa Winer’s comprehensive dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago dialect, she notes that “Trinidad has had the most varied ethno-cultural and linguistic history of any island in the Caribbean”<sup>266</sup> due to its incredible ethnic diversity. She details the plethora of Amerindian words still used for locations, flora, and fauna; she notes the deep remnants of Spanish and French language echoes that have evolved into a Creole English. The dictionary is a treasure trove that records the history and cultural syncretism that is the energetic and dynamic Trinbago dialect. Of course, as in all cultures, language for Trinbagonians also serves as an incredibly important identity marker, which is used to assess a person’s insider, outsider, or diasporic relation to the island world. In the world of Trinbago, where oral culture and storytelling are valued skills that demonstrate creativity and performativity, language skills figure heavily in cultural identity and in liming settings.

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<sup>266</sup> Winer, Lise. *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago: On Historical Principles* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009): xiii.

Language and personal expression become other elements of the carnivalesque in the quotidian—they transform into vehicles of personal agency. This agency constitutes knowledge through lived experiences. Therefore, liming spaces constitute belonging while serving as sites of cultural productions of knowledge. It can also serve as a source of inculture fun, piconging, and mocking of others. For example, the ole talk in liming might constitute verbal and gestural language that might appear vulgar since it is not part of the national, official standard of “proper” forms of communication. Trinidadian performer Miguel Browne discusses the linguistic innovations of Trinbagonian dialect, a strategy applicable to the wider Caribbean community as well. He muses that “people have been knocking our creole tongue or dialect. But our language is something rich and it’s something we should be proud of. You see, our colonial masters taught us that this language ya’ll speak, that this Trini talk backward; it is inferior; it has no syntax; it has no structure; bad English; bad grammar. They lie! They fool us...doh let nobody fool yuh! Our language has syntax and grammar too [...]It’s not bad English, it’s culture.”<sup>267</sup> Demonstrating the carnivalesque, Browne’s clever insights demonstrate the subversive application of language to subvert oppressive, discriminatory systems.

Through comedy, Browne raises several important points. First, he highlights the shame associated with “unofficial” Trinbagonian/Caribbean and/or diasporic “low” culture language. He simultaneously explains that this shame is derived from colonial definitions of “civilized” language. He continues to explain that instead of being ashamed, Trinidadians should feel pride in its cultural inventiveness. Second, language is how people understand their worlds as they remember and experience it.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, language generates knowledge that is relevant to Trinbagonians, Caribbean people, and/or West Indian diasporic subjects.

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<sup>267</sup> Miguel Browne, [Our Language](#).

<sup>268</sup> Miguel Browne, [Our Language](#).



Third, the inventive nature of Trini language compels the formation of new forms of speaking and knowing. The Trini dialect is not “bad” English—it is its own dynamic cultural expression filled with its own musicality, meaning, heritage, and future.

Consequently, liming produces informal knowledge through lived experiences because these sites are carnivalesque in nature. Since liming and Carnival are both comprised of music, liming spaces contradict official, national histories. Because they incorporate Caribbean music and ole talk, they allow Trinbagonian people to produce their own narratives and convey their own lived experiences. Carolyn Cooper postulates that music is a literary expression of subversive noises in the blood that articulate preoccupations of a people. Music defines the particular cultural contexts of their verbal creativity, contradicting “the official, written histories of enslavement, voicelessness and erasure that seem to have absolute authority in neo-societies.”<sup>269</sup>

In Trinbagonian communities at home and abroad, the overlap of the same music in large-scale Carnival spaces and in the smallest liming spaces encourages cultural fusions in quotidian spaces. The chutney ragga soca song by Surface entitled “Chutney Ragga Soca Party” blends cultural elements from several genres of music and various cultural backgrounds. Combining African, Indian, dancehall,<sup>270</sup> soca and chutney beats, the infectious rhythm demonstrates harmony within differences. The lyrics also intone descriptions of positive interpersonal cultural moments. The lyrics recite the story of a man attending a chutney party where he met a woman from India. When played in everyday Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic spaces, these displays of intercultural harmonizing inspire bodies to “jam” (dance) and unite. Moreover, the song encourages diasporic subjects to acknowledge

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<sup>269</sup> Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*.

<sup>270</sup> Jamaican dance music genre.

and articulate the synthesis of their local and global cultural identities and cultural knowledge generated from their interactions.

Beyond the realm of welcoming liming and the ole talk that organically arises from these setting, the issue of Trini dialect was referenced in Chapter Two when several interviewees discussed challenging cross-cultural interactions and tensions over their authentic Trini identities. Much like all the cultural identity issues explored in this research, the Trinbago dialect functions as both a site of inclusion exclusion, an issue that creates stress for diaspora person when dealing with non-Trini cultures and with Trini persons who distrust their accents. The below explores several diverse perspectives on the joys and struggles over language, dialects, cultural embrace, in/outsider status, and the intersections of dialect, music, and food as the callaloo that is Trinbago identity.

First, let's explore the ideas of the carnivalesque in the linguistic realm of the quotidian through Nneka's points regarding the idea of language and play in Trini English. She states that:

first of all, it's a mix of so many different cultures within creole English and in our dialect. So, you've got the French [...] it's got some Spanish, it's even a little bit of Chinese. You've got the Hindi, West-African languages [...] and then in terms of playfulness, just the way we phrase things [for example] if you say somebody could coo, they have sweet hand [...Creole English, as I heard other people say, is a language of intimacy for us. Because it's playful and play connects people.<sup>271</sup>

Within the everyday language, there is creativity, innovation, and intimacy that connects people of different social hierarchical norms. It also reflects the carnivalesque by being a syncretism of different languages. The many varied points of connection represent the diverse roots of Trinbagonians that resist totalitarianism.

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<sup>271</sup> Edwards, interview.

At the same time, Heather discusses her stress as a diaspora Trinbago person adjusting to life in Canada. She explains her jumpstart code-switching she needed to adopt in order to survive in her career:

It's almost like getting thrown into a swimming pool and saying swim. I had to sound more Canadian, and I had to be Canadian in order to out there and I was in the editorial department in a newspaper, so I had to go out and interview business people, and write about their companies and so I really had to have an understanding of what they were trying to accomplish This was my career so in my heart I was always a Trinidadian, but I felt like my upbringing and education...this is where in my mind there is a divide.... The good thing about the British system of education is that we have a sound education (both mentioned schools they went to) and I went to St. Joseph to write my exams. And then, mommy taught at Holy Name and daddy was at QRC.<sup>272</sup> But I found that that kind of education where you learned a little bit about many subjects, it gave you a wider scope of education. When I came here to university, I walked right through because we learned how to study in Trinidad. When I studied A levels, it was two years. When I came here to study Shakespeare, it was ... you know... three days.<sup>273</sup>

In this statement, Heather details the daily stress of linguistic adaptation and mentions how she was able to depend upon the strength of her Trinidadian top-tier education.

The global citizen, multi-lingual Nneka details her experiences of being linguistically ostracized by Trinbago people. She recounts how “They just think that I... which I find strange because there are so many accents in Trinidad that I don't think my accent doesn't sound Trini but a lot of people tell me ‘You do not sound Trini’.”<sup>274</sup> When I stated that I would not assume she is from any other culture than Trinbago by her accent, she gracefully acknowledges my compliment and continues to explain her complex perspective on the intersection of her life as a global citizen of diverse ethnoracial heritage:

Yea, thank you. So, there is that. Then there is also... Even though I am Trini, I think there is a side of me that is Asian. So even before I went into Asian studies, I loved sleeping on the floor, I loved walking around bare-foot, I loved eating out of bowls. There just seems to be a part of me that is Asian, not completely Trini. So, for example, with my artwork, quite a few people have told me that my artwork looks like Asian and I think it's a cross between Caribbean and Asian because it has a lot of Caribbean color but then I've got this Japanese minimalistic kind of aesthetic in my

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<sup>272</sup> Queen's Royal College

<sup>273</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>274</sup> Edwards, interview.

work. So, my art kind of crosses two cultural worlds and then because I speak different languages, I think my perspective of the world is one which is colored by these different windows that I see the world through, you know. I speak French, Spanish, Mandarin...and Mandarin in itself is a whole other world because you've got the spoken language but then the spoken language is so rich, so philosophically rich. I think as a philosophy teacher, you would find Mandarin very interesting.<sup>275</sup>

From Nneka's views that cross continents, Lisa details an unexpected experience of language-based racism against her and her daughter. This occurred from the Southern California black community while they were living in that region. Lisa recounts how:

my daughter, when she started going to her...well, she was doing dance and everything. So, when we came here, we found a place for her to do dance and gymnastics. Before the gymnastics place, we went to a place for dance... and you know, we have people would could look like you, but the first thing they said to me was "You need to sound like us, you're not a true black person." And I had to ask (interrupted)<sup>276</sup>

I was so surprised that I interrupted her to ask, "Wait, you experienced this from the African-American community?" She confirmed that racism she repeatedly experienced from the SoCal black community and from other non-Caribbean communities in the area. She eventually found a niche within the Russian/Armenian community where the families welcome and respect her as a private tutor.

#### Culinary Syncretism and Cultural Diversity: Is it Callaloo or Pelau?

From all of these experiences, the importance and power of language shines through both as a way to be welcomed as a familiar or noted as an outsider. Just as in the color of people's skin, the linguistic cues of the Trini accent forge a critical aspect of the Trinbago cultural identity in official, national platforms and in informal, liming ones. Just as important as liming, music, and language, food forms another cultural foundation for Trinbago cultural

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<sup>275</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>276</sup> Lewis interview.

identity, especially within a quotidian realm. Lauren offers a perfect statement to understand the Trinidad interweaving of music, code-switching, and food. She explains that:

The code switching is not evident or easy for me because I never had a real Trinidadian accent. So, it's really much harder for me to blend in. And then, of course that brings things in like "Oh, you know" ...the genuine parts don't feel ...like in my heart, I am a Trini. Sunday lunch is stew chicken, callaloo, the whole works. Even in my Zumba classes here, I am playing Machel. I am holding on but when I get there, I know that people.... if I keep my mouth shut, I can probably pass and sometimes I really do want to pass because I'm so wanting to feel that sense of belonging but I have to open my mouth every now and then and that's it.<sup>277</sup>

Like even when I go shopping with my mom, I ask her to ask people for how much is xyz. Because I know once I open my mouth, the prices double. So, I don't feel that sense of belonging that I really wish I could have because I am kind of in limbo. I understand trinidadian culture, i've been educated in trinidad, i still maintain my friendships from way back when, i am still very connected to trinidad, but i don't feel that trinidadians think of me as a genuine trinidadian unless they really know me, unless we are really close and know that i hold those values. Other than that, it's just somebody coming down for carnival.<sup>278</sup>

She brings up the classic Trini Sunday lunch, which is a mammoth affair likened to having Americana Thanksgiving every Sunday. She also brings up the famed soup/sauce "callaloo" and her struggles to "pass" for local before she is caught as a non-local when shopping at the market. Her experience of paying higher prices indicates her treatment as an outsider, which she bristles at in her list of authentic Trini activities she includes in her daily life.

Naette provides a stunning example of the daily life carnivalesque inherent in the cooking culture of Trinbago. She details the wonderful syncretism of the cultural complexity of curry beef, explaining:

Okay, great. So, we know that curry... this is my favorite example. Curry came from the Indian subcontinent with indentured immigrants. We know this. Curry beef, beef roti, is the most popular roti in Trinidad. Beef is essential for roti. How is it that a Hindu...you are following my point, right? A thing that could be perceived as dominantly Hindu, because really and truly when you think about it, you don't really associate curry with Islam. Hindu thing...is now being made with cows. That is what...that is Trinidad culture there. That is how we should be looking at cultural identity. We don't need a policy to tell us that what we do as a society is to assimilate and it's because we do not, and this is what I am most afraid of and I am going to put

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<sup>277</sup> Plaza, interview.

<sup>278</sup> Plaza, interview.

my fear on record here... if we ...we are taking bits and pieces from the US. Day by day, it's changing our society, but you see this culture of offence that the US has where if you do something that I don't like, I am offended? You see that rubbish. It hasn't taken root in Trinidad yet but not being offended...Trinidadians will fight... Blacks and Indians will fight each other to the ground but they never go "oh, you offended me, you hurt my culture". It's never that. It's always about power. It's always about resources. It's never this... I mean how many Muslim people you know have a Christmas tree in their house? [...]And in Trinidad, we have beef roti and Muslim Christmas. I mean, can you imagine anywhere in the US, Hindus making beef?<sup>279</sup>

Naette's charming narrative explores the ideas of culinary diplomacy where people authentically interact through enjoying and fusing one another's food cultures.

Let's explore the idea of callaloo, which has already been introduced as a local metaphor for the American "melting pot" of harmonious, respectful intercultural diversity.

Winer's dictionary includes a detailed description of this national treasure:

callaloo, calaloo, callaloo, calalue, calilue, calilou, colaloo, kalalu 1 n A thick soup, made with green leaves, usu. DASHEEN leaves, and OCHRO, seasoned with salted meat or crab. Occasionally may refer to stewed dasheen leaves. /kalalu/ (<LAS calalú <Ptg carurú 'a rich soup or stew in which one or more kinds of calalu leaves are the chief ingredients' <Tupi-Guarani caàrurú 'a fat or thick leaf'; African words such as Ge kalalu 'broth; soup' are prob. a loan from Amer via Ptg)<sup>280</sup>

Just the variety of spellings of this scrumptious meal indicates the oral, storyteller values of this staple meal. And the plethora of international influences, which can also be seen in the primary ingredient of the thick green leaf being associated with indigenous Tupi-Guarani, African, and American language histories.

And, people in Trinbago are often described as callaloo. Winer's dictionary includes sample sentences:

4 n Something mixed, with great variety together, often said of a person's heritage. ◇ "My father is a mix of Chinese and Negro... my mother's mother was Venezuelan and her father was English. So, I am a real callaloo." ... St. James offers a rich variety of eating places... a unique cuisine drawn from the callaloo of cultures of cosmopolitan Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>281</sup>By embracing a 'callaloo' identity, Trinidadians modify and broaden any implicit suggestion of 'illegitimacy' within the category 'mixed'.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

<sup>280</sup> Winer, *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*, 155.

<sup>281</sup> Winer, *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*, 155.

<sup>282</sup> Winer, *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*, 155.

From these examples, it might appear that the overlapping of Trinbagonian identity with callaloo, which some call the national dish, is a forgone conclusion. However, in recent years some people, including the politician Siparia Kamla Persad-Bissessar asserts that Trini people are not the melting pot of callaloo. Instead of this congealed metaphor where identities might be essentialized, she favors the food metaphor of Trini people equated to the rice dish of pelau. In her opinion and in the opinion of her followers, this better exemplifies a Trinidad that embraces a genuine ethnoracial harmony because the individual ingredients in the pelau retain their integrity within this mixed dish.

Regardless of whether someone identifies Trinidad society as a callaloo or a pelau, the importance of liming, music, language, and food can never be denied—nor can the complexity of Trini identity. Lauren offers a final comment on the topic of these intersections. She asserts that:

Exactly. And then a lot of us aren't a callaloo. I am going to deviate because I think this is really important to disclose. So, I am mixed, right. My grandfather wawa half African or of African descent and my great grandmother was from the British isle, and she married a Spaniard. And of course, my father is of Indian background so I am really mixed. And I grew up not Indian or not black or... I was kind of like all over the place. And depending on which people I was with, I switched. So, identity to me has always been a stretch and that's one of the things I worked on in my thesis because my thesis, it was looking at people, students who identify as bi-racial, multi-racial, and mixed because ...that's why I find this so hard to answer because I don't even know what my identity is<sup>283</sup>

### Conclusion: Translating Everything into Tangible Initiatives

Shalini Puri's claims that carnival research is restricted to the fantasy of carnival spaces. However, I argue that liming culture demonstrates carnivalesque spaces within quotidian culture. Limes are a Trinbagonian and Caribbean gathering where people not only

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<sup>283</sup> Plaza, interview.

perform, but they also participate in the negotiation of social and political discourses through ole talk and piconing. It is a space where limers can transcend sociopolitical boundaries and a site that unites people across classes, races, ethnicities, and genders. Liming culture fosters people of every race, ethnicity, gender—at home and abroad—the power and self-realization to recount, reshape, narrativize, and create their own cultural experiences as they have lived them. Consequently, I postulate that a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity within Trinbago’s cultural policy would be beneficial to all its peoples because it would foster spaces of inclusion. It would acknowledge the cultural spatio-temporal origin of its diverse and diasporic people and recognize the lived experiences of all its fragments.

Liming culture in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago is mimicked in its diasporic communities. But in the diaspora, the liming space arguably fosters more inclusivity for *trans*-gender peoples because it is more widely accepted in these spaces than in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. These spaces can work to normalize these indemnities through discussions, and through familial and friendly trust and support, particularly because they erode the lines between public and private spheres. Jen, an openly gay woman in Trinidad, says that friends help to create a safe space for her. “When she was around people she knew, or places that were familiar to them, it fostered safety”<sup>284</sup> in the public spaces she frequents because she knows people in those areas who provide safe places for her and her friends to lime. She also recounts bars that are friendly and open to lesbian couples. Correspondingly, Emma, who also faced issues of being an outsider because of her gender identity as well as her Scottish-Caucasian descent, expresses that in public spaces, like the University of the West Indies (UWI) campus or liming spots in Port-of-Spain like “Studio,” she feels less

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<sup>284</sup> Krystal Ghisyawan, “Geographies of Sexuality: Constructions of Space and Belonging.” *Journal of Department of Behavioral Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2014): 38.



anxious about her gender expression and sexuality and does not feel pressured to conform to Trinidad gender norms.<sup>285</sup>

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Music as the Vehicle and Being of Carnavalesque**

#### Trinbagonian Cultural Identity: A Constant Carnavalesque of Becoming

The carnivalesque possesses the ability to expand quotidian spaces to include diasporic and *trans*-gender communities because it is a state of being that is comprised of chaos, relation, imagination, and eroticism. It generates futurity because its combined elements invoke continuous instances of differential consciousness. The carnivalesque, then, is a process of becoming. But more importantly, it is recognizable within and beyond the fantasy of carnival spaces. With this in mind, it is a core trait of cultural identity since it incorporates both sameness as “one people” and difference. In a positive way, conceptualizing cultural identity in this manner pressurizes the nation’s spatial and temporal borders. The constant pressure forces the nation to expand its delineations resulting in an outward explosion of potentials. In effect, there is a transformation from linear forms of existence to non-linear ones. In other words, the nation moves from focusing on spatio-temporal origins to present moments of existence or lived experiences. In relinquishing its attachment to origins, the nation acknowledges inevitable occurrences of movement. These movements are carnivalesque and foster differences which in turn allows for the creation of new spaces. These spaces are chaotic, present moments, and they imagine various forms of

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<sup>285</sup> Krystal Ghisyawan, “Geographies of Sexuality,” 40.

being into existence. Thus, carnivalesque cultural identity affords visibility to both diasporic subjects and *trans*-gender communities.

Further, carnivalesque cultural identity incorporates Paul Gilroy's notions of roots and routes. As a negative, roots can refer to a constant turn to a spatial and temporal past; it involves attachment to a point of origin and nationally constructed cultural identity follows these linear trajectories forcing people to choose one classification over another. Routes, on the other hand, focus more on a spatio-temporal point throughout a person's journey. Thus, as Gilroy states, it is "the relationships between rootedness and displacement, locality and dissemination that lend them vitality in this countercultural setting."<sup>286</sup> In other words, it is both the acknowledgement of roots as well as routes that subvert a static notion of cultural identity as it articulates ambiguities and differences through cultural expressions. This notion also resonates with Glissant's concept of the "rhizome." According to Glissant, "the notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root."<sup>287</sup> As with Gilroy, Glissant argues that each point in a person's journey characterizes their cultural identity differently because new spatio-temporal environments imbue identities with various cultural expressions. Just as Trinidad and Tobago's identities are in revolutionary states of becoming, so is each individual's identity.

A carnivalesque approach recognizes differences in cultural identity generated from lived experiences in quotidian culture. Simultaneously, it does not neglect the safety of roots. Instead, it creates spaces for both ideologies to exist. Consequently, carnivalizing the nation refers to embodying carnivalesque approaches to cultural identity, thus dissolving dichotomies of belonging and non-belonging. This mode necessitates that the nation

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<sup>286</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993): 105.

<sup>287</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

recognizes all its people because it pushes the boundaries of its imagination to conceive spaces of inclusion. National identity becomes:

A matter of moral and emotional identification with a particular community based on shared loyalty to its constitutive principles and participation in its collective self-understanding. It creates a sense of common belonging, provides a base for collective identification, fosters common loyalties, and gives the members of the community the confidence to live with and even delight in their disagreements and cultural differences.<sup>288</sup>

In the above quote, the powerful final coordinating clause emphasizes that national identity is a site of both collective ideals and differences. Tensions produced from these junctures give rise to newness, creation, and innovation. All these components are fundamental for ensuring the multiple potentials that secure the nation's futurity.

Consequently, carnivalizing the nation entails understanding carnivalesque qualities embedded within cultural identity. Moreover, it prompts the nation to reconstruct cultural identity to include both roots and fluidity rather than favoring one ideology over another. Incorporating both frameworks recognize movement in lived experiences that generate differences. Therefore, national cultural identity can conceive itself to be a process of becoming that unfolds over space and time. It becomes future oriented as it expands to include multiple potentials. With this in mind, the nation can conceive and enact cultural and institutional changes that promote acceptance, belonging, and inclusion within its community.

A carnivalesque approach to cultural identity denounces the use of any singular definition of Caribbeanness or Caribbean cultural identity. Instead, it aligns itself with the notion that Caribbeanness is an idea. It is a mood, a state of mind, a state of being emerging from the region's fragmented peoples and cultures. Carnivalesque Caribbeanness persists and is inventive. Derek Walcott echoes these sentiments when he declares that the Antillean

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<sup>288</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, "'Defining National Identity In A Multicultural Society.'" In *People, Nation and State: The Meaning of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011): 69.

experience comprises “this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong.”<sup>289</sup> Walcott’s summation emphasizes the persistence of fragmented, historical traditions as well as experiences. But the Caribbean’s creativity reveals itself through its varied dialogic.

Using the motif of the ocean, scholars like Paul Gilroy and Derek Walcott make linkages to fluid concepts of cultural identity to Caribbeanness through the imagery of the ocean. For Walcott, “the sea” is both a place of history and the medium of arrivals to the Caribbean. It conjures the traumas and horrors of the past; it tells the stories of people’s journeys to the Caribbean islands.<sup>290</sup> The literal and metaphorical sea also represents renewable power through its healing properties and is used as an image that can heal the wounded Caribbean psyche. He states, “I mean the Caribbean seas, whose smell is the smell of refreshing possibility as well as survival.”<sup>291</sup> Finally, the sea is also linked to lived experiences, linking diaspora communities as the seas connect peoples of various cultures and remains a passage for movements. At its core, Caribbean cultural identity involves the ebbs and flows of Caribbean movement—historical and lived experiences. It is a transformative state of being that incorporates the complexities of Caribbean life. Its fluidity enables it to transcend spatio-temporal boundaries of nations. Carnavalesque cultural identity, as applied to the archipelago, is a reminder that the Caribbean is an echo of its past *and* the author of its future.

Caribbeanness is the embodiment of carnivalesque cultural identity. It affords each Caribbean Island to generate its own nuanced version of its cultural identity. Thus, Caribbeanness may unite the Caribbean islands under a shared characterization, but each

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<sup>289</sup> Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*.

<sup>290</sup> Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History,” 1930.

<sup>291</sup> Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*.

island nation offers its own separate identities. In Trinidad and Tobago, carnival music illustrates the transcendental qualities of Caribbean cultural identity. In Trinbago, the three main musical art forms are calypso, soca, and chutney soca. Their evolutions parallel the potentials embedded within Trinbagonian carnivalesque cultural identity as the music has evolved and unfolded to incorporate new spaces.

### Ethnomusicology: Calypso, Soca, Soca Chutney, and Ragga Soca

Part of this becoming does entail the process of liberation from Western colonial rule, including overt slavery, indentured servitude, and other unfair labor practices. And music plays an integral role in this process, just as much as it does in the daily lives of Trinbagonians. The realm of music perfectly encapsulates the attributes of Carnival that translate into positive social change on large-scale political levels as well as on small-scale, interpersonal ones. Music has a special role in Trinbago culture in terms of sociopolitical rebellion. “The steel pan's story, exhorting Trinidadians to remember the hardships endured during the instrument's transformation from junk metal into steel orchestra, from vulgar underclass pastime into national instrument.”<sup>292</sup> Dudley describes how steelband originated from the 1881 Canboulay riots. “At the Port of Spain carnival of 1881, neighborhood stickfight- ing bands, animated by drumming and singing, joined together to defend themselves against a police attack, and the incident was used by the authorities to push for greater restrictions on carnival performances.”<sup>293</sup> These events precipitated the colonial government to attempt further controls over the unwilling labor force who continuously

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<sup>292</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Aesthetics and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 3.

<sup>293</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*.

pushed back, eventuating in freedom that also resulted in a national music genre that continuously expanded into other syncretic music forms.

### *Calypso: Afro-Caribbean Syncretism*

Calypso, a musical artform, originated in Trinidad around the mid-nineteenth century during the colonial era. The music, a derivative of African music traditions, was used as a way for slaves to express their “hopes, fears and experiences of enslavement.”<sup>294</sup> Calypso is a musical style encompassing African cultural traits: percussive rhythmic beats, call-and-response pattern, extemporaneous singing, and satires.<sup>295</sup> Lyndon expresses his respect for calypso’s psychological and emotional impacts and social importance. He states, “I think part of it is the music. I think the music...historically with calypso, expressing whatever social ails that we've been through throughout the year, we express it and accept it and it's heard. And even with soca music now, it may not be so much social commentary any more, but it's still an expression of freedom and an expression of, you know, wanting to, I guess just be yourself.”<sup>296</sup> The sociopolitical connections Trinbago culture associates with music and with calypso in particular cannot be underestimated.

Calypso, even after the colonial era, remained a form of socio-political and economic commentary laden with humor and satire. It was originally a male-dominated space, as calypsonians were typically black, male and lower class.<sup>297</sup> But during its evolution, female calypsonians—including Lady Trinidad, Sugar Alice, Calypso Rose, Singing Sandra and Denyse Plummer—played pivotal roles in reimagining calypso together with carnival spaces to

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<sup>294</sup> Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, 185.

<sup>295</sup> Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, 185.

<sup>296</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>297</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musica*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 3.

include female bodies in the carnival scene. It even crossed boundaries and “reached a wider audience with more recordings in New York from 1937 onwards, and it was during and immediately after the Second World War that calypso reached what may have been the height of its international popularity, as American servicemen stationed in Trinidad at the invitation of the British took back many of the songs they had heard there.”<sup>298</sup> Women were not to be kept from the calypso music scene.

### *Freedom in Soca: A Space of Wining and Jamming*

Although calypso persists in carnival festivities, such as yearly competitions, carnival tents, and performing venues with a seated audience,<sup>299</sup> soca music dominates the contemporary carnival scene. Soca comprises upbeat tempos and is considered the fêting music of carnival to which revelers can ‘wuk up, wine and jam,’<sup>300</sup> meaning that participants can gyrate their bodies alone or with others in provocative manners. The Soca Dictionary defines “wine” as a form of dance that involves gyration of the hips and waist and is done in a slow to medium pace. “Wuk up” is a form of dance which involves a clockwise rotation of the hips and waist, done in time to music and is a faster pace of a wine. Lastly, “jam” means to dance with someone.<sup>301</sup>

Soca is a combination of calypso, Indo-Caribbean influences, and American soul and disco.<sup>302</sup> It broke away from standard formats and song structures and depended more on soul and feeling of music rather than words.<sup>303</sup> Interestingly, “the word soca does not belong to

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<sup>298</sup> Mason, *Bacchanal!*, 25.

<sup>299</sup> Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 3.

<sup>300</sup> Release Riddim: Soca Dictionary <http://www.releasedriddim.com/soca-dictionary-glossary/>.

<sup>301</sup> Release Riddim: Soca Dictionary <http://www.releasedriddim.com/soca-dictionary-glossary/>.

<sup>302</sup> Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, “Feteing as Cultural Resistance? The Soca Posse in the Caribbean Diaspora,” *Topia* 20 (2008): 66.

<sup>303</sup> Mason, *Bacchanal!*, 29.

anyone, and perceptions of it change with time, just as perceptions of calypso have changed likewise.”<sup>304</sup> Both forms of music are free to evolve over time and the sounds, and even lyrics, are able to change given the space and time of the environmental context. In general, soca focuses on happy, carefree vibes; however, it is also a site of resistance. For example, it is a musical platform for female artists coupled with female audiences to transgress the social constraints or “properness” associated with femininity. Soca music is a site where they can explore their sexual freedom and independence, relishing in their unconstrained power. Soca artistes and female revelers alike are able to wine, drink, and curse with freedom and without derision in carnival spaces.

#### *Chutney Soca: Indo-African Syncretism*

Soca is also a site of transformation, fostering its own creative offspring in chutney-soca and ragga soca. Chutney soca was interestingly coined by a Trini woman of Hindi heritage named Drupatee Ramgoonai. In its inception, chutney soca establishes female power and agency in carnival spaces. Chutney soca is also a synthesis of Indo and Afro rhythms, thus illustrating the uniqueness of each culture and their harmonious blend into a single genre of music. Chutney music is fast paced with percussive beats. It originated from the folk songs from the Indian region of Bhojpuri, Hindu weddings, and other Indian events where men and women usually dance in same-sex groups.<sup>305</sup> In contrast, chutney soca provides opportunities for social, racial, and gender transgressions that permeate national boundary divisions. An example of racial, gender, and musical crossing songs include the 2006 remix of “Lota La” by Sonny Mann, Denise Belfon, and General Grant; the 2013

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<sup>304</sup> Mason, Bacchanal!, 30.

<sup>305</sup> Robin Balliger, “Chutney Soca Music in Trinidad: Indian Ethno-Nationalist Expression in Transnational Perspective,” in *Globalisation, Diaspora Caribbean Popular Culture*, (2005) 191.



“Indian Gyal” by Machel Montano and Drupatee; the 2019 “Second Nature” by Drupatee and Shurwayne Winchester; and the 2020 “Ameilia,” by Hunter (Lalchan ‘Hunter’ Babwah) and Soca Elvis.

### *Ragga Soca: A Subversive Original Style*

Ragga soca represents another subgenre of soca music. It is a music indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago that incorporates freestyle aesthetics of hip hop lyricists, political, and social commentary of calypso. It adopts the demeanor and stagecraft of reggae and dancehall performers combined with the spontaneous delivery of biting lyrics popular of Trinidadian Extempo (calypso) artists.<sup>306</sup> Similar to other forms of carnival music, Ragga soca aims to subvert societal norms through its rhythmic beats and its lyrical content: “Cultural resistance is evident in the lyrical content of ragga soca music in two primary ways. First, the performers defy the laws of soca by selecting lyrics that speak to social and political commentary as in calypso. Second, the performers use elements of the Jamaican phonological characteristics of patois within the indigenous musical structure of soca music.”<sup>307</sup> Some famed ragga soca artists include General Grant, Bunji Garlin, Maximus Dan, and KMC.

Caribbeanness is prevalent in the carnival music scene as it is reflective of Caribbean syncretism. In all its forms, it remembers its past and expands to include other traits resulting in its synthesis of new forms of sound. Carnival music fluidity, generated from the carnivalesque, provides it with the capabilities to transcend divisions, including but not limited to race, culture, and gender. Calypso, soca, chutney soca, and ragga soca’s transformative potentials are a result of incorporating the lived experiences of Caribbean

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<sup>306</sup> Meagan Sylvester, “Ragga Soca Burning the Moral Compass: An Analysis of ‘Hellfire’ Lyrics in the Music of Bunji Garlin.” *Black Music Research Journal* 36, no. 1 (2016): 86.

<sup>307</sup> Sylvester, “Ragga Soca Burning the Moral Compass,” 97.

peoples. In other words, these forms of music tell the complexities and stories of all peoples and cultures that reside within and beyond the Caribbean's borders. As such, carnival music is an apt mode of investigating carnivalesque cultural identity as it relates to diaspora and gender.

## The Cultural Role and Impacts of Trinbagonian Musicians

### *Diaspora Expression and Global Collaborations*

Diasporic Caribbean carnivals have increased in popularity in their diasporic communities. These carnivals offer socio-political opportunities for carnivalesque Trinbagonian cultural identities to re-imagine itself to include new forms of expressions, while celebrating their homelands. Similarly, carnival artistes who reside in diasporic communities are able to incorporate various sounds and rhythms into their music. It is first important to note that while many artists originate from Trinidad, carnival performers emerge from other Caribbean islands as well as international and diasporic communities. Additionally, there are a number of them who have even moved from the archipelago to diasporic communities. Prominent artists like Alison Hinds, Rupee, Byron Lee, Peter Ram, Wetty Beatz, Jadine 'Soca Diva' Greenaway, and Claudette 'CP' Peters are a few artists hailing from other Caribbean islands and who use their respective islands' cultural influences in their music. Meanwhile Lyrikal, Brent Toussaint (New York based producer), Julius the Artist, Ness Preppy (born in Germany and moved to Trinidad), Biggie Irie, David Rudder, Calypso Rose (Linda McCartha Monica Sandy-Lewis), and DJ Private Ryan (Ryan Alexander) represent some artists who are either from the international community or who now live in diasporic ones.

These artists embody various cultural values as per their respective cultural journeys. One way they express their cultural identities is through their craft. In Chapter Two, I explored the unifying messages in David Rudder's 2003 song "Trini to De Bone." However, here, I would like to how his lyrics also convey his diasporic experience as a Trini living in Ontario, Canada. He sings:

all these years I spent abroad in de cold  
longing to be home  
Trini to de bone  
Trini to de bone  
God I pray that some sweet day  
I will no longer have to roam Trini to de bone  
Trini to de bone<sup>308</sup>

While Rudder's song reinforces a nationalist Trinbagonian cultural identity, it also speaks of the struggles and in-betweenness of diasporic journey. He project's the individual's loneliness and longing that Gilroy references in his critical theory regarding the weights of roots and the guiding pathways of routes. The lyrics suggest that Rudder, other Trinbagonians, and the larger West Indian diaspora yearn for their homelands and contend with the feelings of dispossession that go with a loss of home and lack of connectedness outside of the Caribbean. He also illustrates the diasporic nature of Trinbagonian culture in an interview titled "Caribbean-Canadian or 'Trini to De Bone.'" He states that he is both/and, meaning he is Trini to the bone while living in Canada where there exists a strong Caribbean presence. So, he feels a hybrid "Caribbean-Canadian spirit," too.<sup>309</sup>

But in these nationalistic lyrics, a diasporic reading of the lyric "roam" recognizes the movement of bodies and the precarious ambivalent states of being they encounter. Although the lyrics lament a return to a fixed position, the inherent movement acknowledges carnivalesque in the experience. Trinbagonians, like many other Caribbean peoples, move

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<sup>308</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>309</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

from place to place. They reside in various regional and international diasporic communities. And while they maintain their roots, their routes also metamorphosize their cultural expressions to include their diasporic environments. Therefore, the lyrics can be reoriented to be read as an acknowledgement, and to an extent, an acceptance of difference.

The diaspora community also creates natural opportunities for collaborative works among global and local artists working within Caribbean music genres. Erphaan emphasizes these relationships, stating:

For the music itself, it definitely shines through the music because you have collaborations with artists who sing chutney and chutney derived from the Indian classical music mixed in with the soca... You have a lot of chutney soca collaborations and you have a lot of soca badlands performing in chutney events and vice versa and now trickling down to the people.... It's a really nice mix and understanding that this is our culture. So even in the general idea of our carnival, I observe these things, different ethnicities mixing and mingling with each other, dancing with each other, and it's not no trouble. The spirit of carnival allows unity on a kind of next level where certain things that wouldn't usually happen outside the realm, will happen there. I get to experience plenty of things through the music because when I go vibes with Ravi B<sup>310</sup> and them, I get to experience that side of the culture, learn from it and vice versa. Trinidad is so unique that people don't really... The only time I feel like people study race and things is the election. But natural, especially within music... My producer (Alex) is of East Indian descent. I am of African descent and it has no way or no time that our physical imagination, when it comes to race and ethnicity, affects what we do. And I grew up with all different races, went to primary school with all different races, and when it comes to the creativity of things, everybody is one. We love the music so much that we don't have time to see or evaluate that side of it. It's like pure vibes and pure love. David Rudder sings a song... Marshall sings a song with Desperate. So, I feel as though we enjoy the cultural mix and cultural diversity and it has a list of tunes from calypso to now where artists actually explore the idea. We are so fortunate that we can enjoy and embrace the culture like no other place. Even with religion, I noticed a church on one side and right opposite a mosque... for certain places in the world, that's war. So, I really feel as though T&T is a very special palace and the artists use it as an inspiration to even sing on topics like that and that in itself creates positive energy for the people and adds to the idea of unity and consistency... So, every time a man sings about it, it reminds us of who we are and where we come from. We represent through music, through religion and even thorough sports. That idea is real positive and the artists continue to paint that. You never hear ... in different parts of the world, you will hear artists singing about racial divide etc., but within soca music, as far as I know, they have a little subset of things, but it's mostly politically driven, But when aa soca artists sing about a cultural mix in Trinidad, nine out of ten times it has to do with us doing it together... jumping up together...partying together. That plays a huge

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<sup>310</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

role to me in the psychology of the nation and coming together. For me, music is REALLY important and influential in so many ways that kind of directs people's thinking.<sup>311</sup>

Erphaan notes how he, as an Afro-Trinidadian, works with his producer Alex, who is of Indo-Trinidadian. Kern continues this emphasis on music's ability to bring people together from the various backgrounds in the local community and to bring diaspora people together. He explains that:

So interestingly enough, the same thing happened in the UK and I think there definitely has been some commentary on this. In Nottinghill Carnival in particular, they have a huge sound system culture that is part of their carnival now. So, we, in the Trinidadian mindset, the pillars of Carnival are still mass, steelpan, calypso, and calypso soca. In the UK, they have technically sound systems [44.50] and the sound system culture would have come about from basically that Jamaica setting up on the corner playing a system in that sound system and playing dancehall. Now Jamaicans dominated the amount of West Indians who went over there so they have always influenced Caribbean culture the most which is why everyone thinks the Caribbean culture is Jamaican. It was a Trinidadian guy who was involved in the Notting Hill Carnival because obviously there were a lot of Trinis involved, who I think some of them in the 70s decided you know what, let's bring in the sound systems because he saw, maybe some of the vision was happening or maybe some other west Indians, particularly Jamaicans, this wasn't translating to them entirely to bring in a major aspect of their culture, so you can't talk about Notting Hill carnival and not include this other aspect of it. I personally still feel, and this is my nationalism side of it, how the Notting Hill Carnival is structured, I don't think you have a lot of people who actually come out for the mass and soca music because their numbers are insane., like over a million people come out. When I was in it, I felt it around me. I was like this is a Trinidad congregation all in one space... So, a lot of people don't come for that and what happens is that there are a whole lot of side street parties that happen with a little of the sound systems so all the different sub cultures particularly in blackness. So, you may find a street that is like a Nigerian block party. They have their own DJ, food, you know... And it changes the dynamics of this Carnavalesque or this strictly Trinidadian experience. And for me, just because of where I want soca music to go, I would love for people to come and experience and pay attention and hear the trucks passing and playing music. But it is also I cannot fault them for this particularly for a celebration of blackness, getting a space to come out, especially in London to represent their culture, so now carnival has become beyond Trinidad and Tobago and should embrace that and not reject it.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>312</sup> Williams, interview.

Kearn brings in important ideas of how diaspora carnivals offer places for community connection to each and to people heritage while also creating opportunities for visibility and public acknowledgement of these immigrant communities.

Basically, diasporic, “no season” carnivals (that are held irrespective of the religious calendar or other historical markers) fuel collaborations among artists. These *trans*-national platforms construct both local and global stages where artists can advocate for reconceptualizations of the nation. This is done through establishing networks of alliances.<sup>313</sup> With the ever-increasing expansion of year-round carnivals, artists are developing new international events that revolve around themes of unity. Machel Montano, the Soca King, exemplified this through his eighteenth annual concert, titled “Real Unity,” which was the name of his 2016 soca hit featuring Drupatee. He tapped into his vast network of alliances and expressed that this diverse show “was designed to feature symbolically a nation not confined to the physical territory of an island but emerging out of the Caribbean and its multiple diasporas as a whole.”<sup>314</sup>

The Soca King acknowledges carnivalesque cultural identity by recognizing multiple forms of belonging. He does this through his music as he acknowledges various forms of soca music which reflect the blending of different cultural identities. In an interview for *OkayAfrica*, he states that “Collaborations for me have happened organically over the years [...] in recent times, it's more like following something that is a calling. We have these various forms of soca; dennery segment in St. Lucia, bashment soca in Barbados, Grenadian jab jab, the Vincentian jab jab beat, and now the jab jab could even be coming out of Trinidad and Tobago. So, when you see the sort of patterns, you really have to pay attention and know how to tune in.”<sup>315</sup> Here, he indicates that soca, like Caribbean cultural identity is a calling.

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<sup>313</sup> Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 197.

<sup>314</sup> Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 223.

<sup>315</sup> Kaeche Liburd, An In-Depth Conversation with Soca King Machel Montano On His New Documentary,” *OkayAfrica*.

His music serves as a cultural fusion of differences that meld people together in harmonious melodies. And these callings emerge from diasporic peoples of other nations, thus highlighting that the cultural Caribbean's borders extend beyond physical boundaries. Machel calls for unity and acceptance of all Caribbean peoples. Through these affirmations, Machel, along with his music, call for unity through the acceptance of difference. This includes diaspora, which engenders acceptance abroad and in homelands. He reiterates the deeper idea that cultural identity, particularly Caribbeanness, cannot be captured in a singular definition. Rather, it is the embodiment of carnivalesque, making it a transformative state of being—one to be contemplated in its independent spatio-temporal moments, instead of being resolved.

*Political Message, #NoSeasons, and the Post-pandemic Digital Age*

In his interview, Erphaan expresses powerful statements on soca music's ability to effect sociopolitical awareness and to serve as a history archive of important events. He muses that:

Definitely, because in the first place, when you think of Bob Marley back then for example, bringing two political leaders together on a stage, like that's the power of music because both sides would have listened to Bob Marley and danced to Bob Marley music. And the calypsonians mirrored Trinidad and Tobago society. That was the poor man's newspaper. When a calypsonian brought out a new song, it spoke of the reality in the current time. And I believe we lost our way a little creativity, in terms of strongly presenting soca music and calypso music for the sake of partying alone when really and truly it was greater than that in the calypso space. The tempo of the music became a little faster, and the message in the music dwindled a little bit because it was kind of strongly driven towards people enjoying and having a good time. So, the lyrical content was kind of dedicated to that nah. So, for me now, as a young soca artist, when you listen to a song like No Habla, that I wrote and released in May 2018, that was a time where there was an influx of Venezuelan nationals in Trinidad and Tobago. It was at a very high level and it became taboo at a certain point but now it's kind of normal. And I just sang that song (in 2018) reflecting what I was seeing in society and it would be a timestamp so 10 years from now, when you hear

that song, you would literally be taken back to that time and Trinis would say “aye, that's when all them Venez were here boy.”<sup>316</sup>

In fact, Venezuelan immigrants, both legal and illegal, represent another minoritized group of people moving within and through the twin islands.

Carnival music also increases the Caribbean’s visibility because year-round carnivals present opportunities for the production of more music, collaborations, and events for Soca artist. Erphaan Alves<sup>317</sup> strongly promotes a mind-set of #NoSeasons because he believes “this mind-set, if adopted by every artist, can truly increase the reach of soca music further placing the genre on track for optimal international recognition.”<sup>318</sup> International acknowledgement positions the Caribbean region as a site of new cultural formations. This is because Caribbeanness is not a static, rooted identity but rather a carnivalesque one. It is therefore a source of different forms of being as well as a site where new modes of cultural identity expressions can manifest. This creates spaces of inclusion within Caribbean communities within and beyond its borders and these carnivalesque modes of existence can translate to other communities.

As carnival music unfolds in all carnival spaces, it requires continuous reinvention. Carnivals in 2020 were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cancellations also extended into 2021 for some communities. Despite these obstacles, carnival organizers and performers found different ways to host their events and promote their songs. At the juncture of the global, public health crisis and carnival’s in-person cancellation, tensions arose that fueled the reinvention of carnival. Naturally, Carnival music scenes thrive on audience participation. Nonetheless, artists leaned into digital platforms by producing:

virtual concerts from acts like Kes, whose “We Home” and “Under One Roof” shows garnered over half a million views...with the same high production value as their real-

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<sup>316</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>317</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>318</sup> Quevaughn “Q” Caruth, “‘Soca to The Universe’ – Soca Music Continues To Expand Its Reach Internationally,” Soca To The World Blog, via Medium, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



life shows, complete with full bands and often masked dances on both indoor and outdoor sound stages. As artists like Baston, Skinny Fabulous, and Nessa Preppy continued to release music in 2020, they leaned into TikTok with skits, dance challenges, and candid footage, bringing fans even closer to artists.<sup>319</sup>

This renewal of carnival successfully translated the music scene from physical to digital ones. Its reimagining involved strategic uses of technology that reaffirmed the futurity of carnival.

Another opportunity generated from diasporic carnivals and their music scene is the increased visibility of the region, which can lend itself to breaking down colonial perceptions of the Caribbean archipelago. Derek Walcott states that, the Antilles is most commonly perceived as “a mindlessness, brilliant vacuity, as a place to flee not only winter but that seriousness that comes only out of culture with four seasons.”<sup>320</sup> But the cross-cultural musical expressions of artists from different *trans*-backgrounds allow for cultural flows of exchange to occur. Music, in general, is an oral tradition that circulates knowledge. Calypso, soca, chutney soca, and ragga soca are no different. They spread information of sociopolitical landscapes of the Caribbean as well as its diaspora. In doing so, *trans*-national performances deny simplistic, fetishized perceptions of a picturesque, tourist Caribbean by sharing the complexities of the region’s every-day experiences. Key to this is the fact that diasporic carnivals attract people of backgrounds other than Caribbean. For example, the Notting Hill Carnival embraces all types of participants, even the international superstar Adele, and the Toronto Carnival opens itself to Canadian-born, non-Caribbean participants.

### *Carnival Spaces and Heteronormative Women’s Freedom of Expression*

Additionally, the rise of digital platforms has not only morphed carnival spaces but have provided opportunities for diasporic subject and *trans*-gender communities to partake in

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<sup>319</sup> Sajaе Elder, “In a Year Without Carnival, Soca Artists Still Made 2020 Theirs, The Fader, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

<sup>320</sup> Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, 14.

the festivities, become visible on digital platforms, and have a sociopolitical voice. For example, in 2017 Caribbean activists initiated a campaign using Calypso Rose's soca song "Leave Me Alone" with the hashtag "#LeaveMeAlone," in response to violence against women. The hashtag refers to the song "Leave Me Alone," marking the comeback of the iconic calypsonian Calypso Rose, who has continuously denounced women's oppression throughout her career. Feminists have used the hashtag to campaign against gender-based violence and raise awareness on issues of consent,<sup>321</sup> which can be seen in the T-shirt with the caption "Permission to wine?" Calypso Rose has long been a symbol of female power. And since her coming out in 2012 at the Chutney Pride in New York,<sup>322</sup> the hashtag, I argue, could extend to include people of the *trans*-gender community who experience various forms of violence.

Overall, carnival music scenes create content that provide agency, erode the divisions between public and private spheres, combat nationally constructed gender stereotypes, and delink women's role as solely "mother" and as sexually pure and naïve. Destra Garcia's 2011 soca "Independent Ladies" illustrates these breakages from the nationalistic norm as she sings:

All meh independent ladies, taking care of your babies,  
working hard for your money,  
see I don't need no man to do that for me [...]  
Lemme tell yuh this shorty,  
big ting never impress meh you gotta gimme more than that baby,  
hard work not easy so for that boy yuh have to respect meh,  
everything I am its all on me.<sup>323</sup>

In these lyrics, she demands respect from her male counterparts and from society on a whole as she emphasizes that it is through her hard work and dedication that she can support herself and her family. She also pokes fun at the male ego, as she employs "big" to mean both the

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<sup>321</sup> Hanna Klien-Thomas "#LeaveSheAlone: Feminist hashtag activism and Carnival popular culture in the Caribbean," *Participants Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 17, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>322</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>323</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

male sexual organ as well as their ability to provide economically for women. In this, she levels the importance between maleness and femaleness by declaring that it would take more than a large penis, and high income to win her affections.

In the past, Carnival was a historically male-dominated space. It was deemed improper and vulgar for women to participate in any form of the festival's events. The obstacles and challenges women faced in the carnival spaces reflected national constructions of gender in cultural identity. Women who publicly defied social norms in carnival spaces by indulging in public displays where they spoke their mind through their music and indulged in public displays of vulgarity, like wining on stage, were often heavily criticized. Two notable women who revolutionized these spaces are Calypso Rose, the Mother of Calypso, and Drupatee Ramgoonai, known as and Chutney Soca Queen. Both of these women faced harsh judgements for daring to enter these male public spaces. Calypso Rose stated that her father thought calypso was devil's music and that her female church groups questioned her calypso performances because "women should not do that."<sup>324</sup>

In a Coachella-curated YouTube video, she reminisces about the time she was not awarded the Road March title, which is awarded to the person whose musical composition is most played during Carnival Tuesday. In the interview, Rose says that the judges of the competition claimed that her 1968 hit "Fire in Me Wire" was too short and that they could not give her the Road March title because she was a woman. Similarly, Drupatee faced backlash because she was a woman of East-Indian heritage. Drupatee transgressed the gender-ethnic divide through originating the syncretic genre of chutney soca, a term she coined. Even though she aimed to bridge these gaps, Drupatee "was condemned by many Indian cultural nationalists [in Trinidad] for her participation in carnival, for her sexually

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<sup>324</sup> Patricia Meschina, "78-Year-Old Caribbean Trailblazer Calypso Rose on Her History-Making Coachella Gig," *Billboard* articles, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

suggestive lyrics, and for throwing her ‘high’ upbringing and culture to the mix with vulgar music, sex and alcohol in carnival.”<sup>325</sup> However, Drupatee, along with her family’s support, persevered.

Calypso Rose and Drupatee stood firm in their public careers which paved the way for other female artists and for the social acceptance for female empowered lyrics. They broke down divisions of public-private spheres by bringing women into the public carnival spaces and demonstrated female empowerment and agency by dominating carnival stages and demanding respect from their communities and male colleagues. This paved the way for more contemporary Caribbean and Trinbagonian artists to advocate for female agency and to defy national gender identities. Some recent feminist songs include: “Roll it Gal” (2005), “Independent Ladies” (2006), “Who Rule” (2014), “Leave Me Alone” (2016), “Big Girl Now” (2017), and “Real Woman” (2019), demonstrating just a small sample of contemporary songs from diverse carnival artists that interrogate gender identities.

In her wildly popular song “Roll it Gal,” Bajan-Born soca artist Alison Hinds encourages female agency through owning sexual freedom and recognizing women in all roles and backgrounds. The refrain “roll it gal, roll, control it gal” is a call to all women to take ownership of their bodies, sexuality, and freedom. It also encourages sisterhood among women of different backgrounds. She sings “free yourself gal, you got class and you got pride, come together cause we stronger unified...if you feel me ladies roll it’s time to rise.” To “free yourself” is a common theme in carnival sites. Hinds uses the phrase to embolden women to release themselves from the constraints of society which include piety, sexual purity, ideals of domesticity, and the expectation that women be submissive to their male partners.<sup>326</sup> She also reinforces the idea of independence and strength by reminding them of

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<sup>325</sup> Shalini Puri, “Canonized Hybridities, Resistant Hybridities: Chutney Soca, Carnival and the Politics of Nationalism,” in *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1999): 25.

<sup>326</sup> King, *Island Bodies*, 125.

their inherent (not socially constructed status) status that are embedded in femaleness. She uplifts her sisters through her call to action “roll, it’s time to rise” by enabling them to recognize that this moment is theirs. This song was an anthem for Caribbean women at home and abroad,<sup>327</sup> making the reconceptualization of female gender norms occur in homelands and their diasporic communities.

As such, these gender interrogations also work to deconstruct notions of authenticity within diaspora as these communities tend to reproduce nationalistic structures of being. Sunaina Maira illustrates this in her ethnographic study on the Indian diasporic community living in New York City. According to Sunaina Maira, reproducing heterosexual relationships and values of “chaste womanhood” are markers of superiority within this authenticating framework.<sup>328</sup> Although her work is on the Indian diaspora, her argument reflects the struggles against the re-inscription of trans/diasporic bodies when people move to new, more openminded cultures. Like Alison Hinds “Roll it Gal,” Patrice Robert’s “Big Girl Now” tackles the issue of reproducing an “authentic” Caribbean female self in diaspora and the Caribbean through the promotion of female liberation. In this song though, there are more explicit lyrics that delegitimizes the idea that women should be sexually pure and naïve.

The first verse and chorus explicitly transgress the stereotype of women’s naivety and sexual purity. The lyrics are as follows:

Verse 1:  
I give me all no turning back  
I wanna wine up, wine up  
I not gonna cut no style, if any man wanna wine up on meh  
I behaving rude meh bumper slack  
I wanna grine up, grine up  
Can’t you see how I grow up?  
Chorus:  
Das why when I dip low and bruck it up doh watch me no face  
Mind yuh business hush yuh mouth when I pelting meh waist yeah

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<sup>327</sup> Jennifer Thorington Springer, ““Roll It Gal”: Alison Hinds, Female Empowerment, and Calypso,” *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 119.

<sup>328</sup> Sunaina Maira, “Ideologies of Authenticity: Youth, Politics, and Diaspora,” *Amerasia Journal* 25, no. 3 (1999) 141.

Imma big woman not ah little girl, I not sixteen again  
So doh expect me to be the same cuz  
I's a big girl now  
Watch how me fat bumper woking it, wokin it from night till morning  
And I doh give a damn cuz  
I's a big girl now  
Expensive liquor I drinking, have meh license, now I driving  
So don't judge me now<sup>329</sup>

The lyrics articulate behaviors typically associated with being improper for women. The first verse focuses on sexually explicit movements of a woman's body. The lyrics "wine up" imply that she is doing so on her own, which correlates to her independence and sexual emancipation. This term contrasts "grine up," which is done with a man, making the movements imitate the act of heterosexual sex. Thus, to grine up indulges in a level of impropriety in a public space that in non-carnival spaces is deemed vulgar and indecent. The lyrics are brazen, signifying her defiance of "proper" behavior in the public carnival space and a celebration of her free state of being. She is able to transgress the boundaries of nationally constructed stereotypes. Moreover, in the chorus, she expresses her pride in her womanhood and recognizes that sexuality and the freedoms that come along with ownership of herself is part of being "a big girl now." Finally, she basks in the sexual independence and freedom of her body. She sings that she can move freely, intoning "now I driving." She brags about her financial independence, singing "expensive liquor I drinking." And she sings about her independence to make her own decisions, "wokin it from night till morning." All of these actions and lifestyles defy national constructs of gender and mark transitions from childhood to womanhood.

Carnival music also engenders agency for participants through recognition. In these songs, women's roles, beyond their reproductive abilities, are acknowledged and praised. They are powerful through the delinking of their role as solely mothers. It is important to note

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<sup>329</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

that the role of woman as mother is powerful in its own right, but it is not the only role for women, nor is it the only one they may have within societies. Keeping this in mind, Patrice Roberts's song "Real Woman" emphasizes women's position outside that of mothers. Patrice's music video portrays women, of all backgrounds, in various positions. At the 2:37 mark, there is a recitation of Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman."<sup>330</sup> In Angelou's iconic poem, she celebrates her genuine womanly form. She writes, "Pretty women wonder where my secret lies./I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size. Angelou's poetry links with Roberts's open sexuality, as the poet writes:

The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.

However, Angelou, like Roberts, respects and protects her sexuality. The poet writes "But they can't touch/My inner mystery." Following this poetry reading, eight women introduce themselves as well as their occupations. The women includes a young, self-empowered entrepreneur who sells produce in the Arima market (a farmer's market in a particular borough in Trinidad); a Honda sales executive; ambassadors; business owners; and even ministers, which is typically a male-dominated profession. As expressed in the song, women across the board are recognized in their agentic power through taking charge of their lives and inspiring others to find their agency.

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<sup>330</sup>For a full text of Angelou's poem, please see <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48985/phenomenal-woman>.

*Although Challenges Still Ahead, Signs of Opening to Non-Heteronormative Persons*

Carnival artists also employ their music and platforms to articulate their cultural journeys within the context of gender both in the Caribbean and in the diaspora. Though these spaces can reinscribe national gender and sexual orientation ideologies, their carnivalesque nature has the potential to foster inclusive spaces. This can be seen in people's responses when Outlish writer Karel McIntosh asks the question, in 2012, "how would you respond if your favorite soca artiste, or another popular Soca artiste came out, saying he or she was gay? Do you think people would accept it? Do you think it would kill their career?"<sup>331</sup> While some responded that it would be a career killer or that the artist would get disowned, others responded more favorably. One person says "depends—on the artiste—If their sexuality seemed iffy then people would accept it." Another states that "I don't think it would kill their career—they will probably get plenty 'pong' (insults)...But you know Trinis...let the artist only come out with the hottest Soca hit and Trinis jumping back on that bandwagon very normal." Another said "I'd be proud of them for coming out...because in this country, gay people does still get bottle."<sup>332</sup> "Gay people does still get bottle" means that gay people get violently beaten.

Despite the social complexities, at the same time, carnival spaces offer non-conforming gender groups the space to become visible, though there is a double bind. "Those who inhabit unconventional genders—whether deliberately or unconsciously and whether through behavior, dress, speech, or some combination of these—are often considered ineligible to be full, legitimate members of Caribbean societies."<sup>333</sup> But in Caribbean

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<sup>331</sup> Karel Mc Intosh, "Soca and Sexuality: What if your Favourite Artiste was Gay?" Outlish, July 16, 2012. <http://www.outlish.com/soca-and-sexuality-what-if-your-favourite-artiste-was-gay/>.

<sup>332</sup> Mc Intosh, "Soca and Sexuality."

<sup>333</sup> Rosamond King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*, 20.



carnivals spaces *trans*-gender expressions become permissible but insinuate falsehood.

Dame Lorraine is one such character in Trinbago's carnival. "The Dame Lorraine can be seen as a covert figure of legitimization, one that functions as a marker of Carnival masquerading and, hence, of national tradition of cross-dressing and female impersonation. It also mediates the distinctions between drag shows and "faggot" shows, despite that such a characterization would be "lying."<sup>334</sup>

Although progress is being made on the female front, it is slower in the *trans*-gender arena. Nevertheless, carnival spaces are slowly unfolding to include these peoples. For example, when Bajan Calypsonian, Paul "Billboard" Murrell, released his 2018 song "Sex Change," he received a slew of backlash from the Bajan LGBTQI community for his offensive lyrics, which state "there is no such thing as being transgender as you cannot change your sex."<sup>335</sup> The flood of outrage from the *trans*-gender community (LGBTQI community and their allies) demonstrates that there is an increase in this group's visibility in the Caribbean region. While this does not decrease hostilities towards the community, increased visibility, through resistance, creates more instances of awareness about their struggles.

In contrast to Murrell, Calypso Rose openly came out at a diasporic Chutney Pride event in 2012. While she received some backlash, she received an outpouring of support signifying the growing acceptance for this community. It is important to note that the support and acceptance emerged from diasporic spaces. In these diasporic spaces, communities are generally more accepting of the *trans*-gender communities because these conversations are more widely accepted into the norm. Further, when performers ally themselves with *trans*-gender communities, it is done so in diasporic spaces. For example, Destra Garcia and

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<sup>334</sup> Jasbir Kaur Puar, "Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad," *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1050.

<sup>335</sup> Barbados Today, "Barbados LGBTQI Community Upset Over Calypso," *Times Caribbean*, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018. <http://www.timescaribbeanonline.com/barbados-lgbtqi-community-upset-over-calypso/>.

Machel Montano have openly allied themselves with *trans*-gender peoples. Destra declares that “she sees heat and she doesn’t care what people say or do” and she has performed in the 2015 Toronto Pride Parade in celebration of this community.<sup>336</sup> Additionally, Machel voiced his support for *trans*-persons during a radio show interview. LGBTQI groups, like the Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation, Trinidad and Tobago (CAISO), thanked him for his support on inclusivity and tolerance as well as for his advice to his fans to respect the sexual orientation of others. And CAISO invited other public figures to join in on Machel’s stance.<sup>337</sup>

Along with these changes, Lyndon contends there is an increasing acceptance of LGBTQI persons. He states that:

I think it may be taboo still because we are here... I mean I have friends who are in that community and they still tell stories and sometimes you're shocked... Do people still think like that? People still act like that? But I don't see why not. Soca music as we always say is happy music. Soca music is about enjoyment, inclusion, acceptance, being welcomed and so, so I don't see why not [...] well for the most part, we've moved away from songs that are against that community and I think everyone, again with education and exposure, everyone is trying to break those old habits. I think that is some progress but I can't think of any songs that are specifically for that community.<sup>338</sup>

In spite of lingering resistance towards *trans*-gender peoples, the carnival music scene unfolds to interpret “transness” in certain songs. As CJG Ghanny writes in his blog, “On Being Gay and Caribbean,” he was able to read acceptance in Destra Garcia’s song “Family” because it is a message of strength, self-acceptance, and perseverance. This falls in line with messages that hold true for LGBTQ persons of Caribbean origin.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Moriba Cummings, “Soca Queen Destra Talks Keeping the Genre Alive, Embracing Younger Talent and Uplifting her LGBTQIA+ Fans,” *In The Know*, June 24, 2020. <https://www.intheknow.com/post/soca-queen-destra-garcia/>.

<sup>337</sup> “LGBTQI Groups Thank Machel for Support After Radio Show,” *Loop T&T News*, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://tt.loopnews.com/content/lgbtqi-groups-thank-machel-support-after-radio-show>.

<sup>338</sup> Gomez, interview.

<sup>339</sup> CJG.Ghanny, “On Being Gay and Caribbean,” *INTO*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

However, open resistance is more visibly apparent in the 2009 chutney soca song “Tek Sunita (Nadia’s Reply)” by Princess Anisa. In the clapback style, “Tek Sunita” responds to the 2009 chutney soca “Catch Meh Lover” by K.I. and JMC Triveni in which the male protagonist catches his wife, Sunita, in a car with Nadia, her friend from school. “Tek Sunita” narrates Nadia’s first-hand affair with his wife Sunita, laying out the reasons and motivations, including the husband’s alcoholism.”<sup>340</sup> The first lines of the song are “if you know what went on in yuh bruk up [old and worn down] Corolla...Mek Sunita leave you and go because I do it bettah.” In this introduction, Nadia boldly admits to the affair with Sunita and boastfully declares that she knows how best to satisfy her. The last verse is even more explicit, singing:

only woman knows what it takes,  
to make another woman’s legs start to shake,  
so in your car boy,  
it was real earthquake.<sup>341</sup>

The song defies gender roles by openly exploring a same-sex relationship. In doing so, it legitimizes orientations other than heteropatriarchal ones, which enforces sexual agency and raises a different level of visibility for *trans*-gender communities. Thus, it challenges the nationally constructed gender dichotomies by normalizing the same-sex affair through its fearless lyrics.

People within the fantasy of Carnival bear witness to the carnivalesque nature embedded within carnival music. Soca, calypso, chutney soca, ragga soca, and other genres of music provide spaces of limbo that offer people in liminal spaces a chance to have a voice and to be heard. As a result, the carnivalesque Trinbagonian cultural identity also bridges the gaps among Trinbagonians, their diasporic communities, and their *trans*-gender members.

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<sup>340</sup> Krystal Nandini Ghiyawan and Preity Rajanie Kumar, “Queer Tactility: Same-Sex Intimacies between Women in Chutney and Soca Music,” *Middle Atlantic Review of Latin American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 96.

<sup>341</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

But the carnivalesque does not solely exist within the fantasy of carnivals spaces. Expressions of carnivalesque manifests within quotidian cultures. The liming culture of Trinidad and Tobago exhibits carnivalesque qualities of chaos, imagination, relation, and eroticism through the intimacy of “play” and performances in everyday life.

### Conclusions: Finding Even More Carnavalesque Quotidian Spaces

The carnivalesque creates spaces of inclusion for minoritized, diasporic, and *trans*-gender communities in quotidian culture. Conceptualizing the nation from this carnivalesque approach pushes the limits of its spatio-temporal borders to include lived experiences. As a result, Caribbeanness cannot be encapsulated in a singular definition. Instead, it can be characterized to highlight its many elements, which allows each Caribbean Island, including Trinidad and Tobago, to cultivate its own nuanced version of cultural identity without restricting it to a one manner of being.

Carnival music illustrates the carnivalesque Caribbeanness. The various genres of carnival music are sites of transformation that fosters creative, imaginative, and collaborative spaces that result in innovation and spaces of inclusion. In carnival spaces, calypso and soca music for instance afford women of various classes and ethnicities the ability to transcend the limits of society in their performances as well as in their participation. Women, such as Calypso Rose, Denyse Plummer, and Drupatee Ramgooni, paved the way for women to be able to express their sexual freedom by indulging in the vulgarity of carnival while also raising their visibility to be seen and heard in these spaces. Further, carnival music links diasporic and *trans*-gender subjects and gives them a sociopolitical voice. Recognizing carnivalesque in quotidian spaces, including liming culture, acts as a lens by which Trinbago’s government and its people can empower themselves to name themselves. In other

words, it provides a decolonizing framework that reorients the power to the Trinbagonian people.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Achieving an Inclusive Carnavalesque Through Targeted Program Initiatives**

How can the NCPTT practically integrate the findings of this research regarding genuine carnivalesque values of syncretism, movement, and fluidity into daily Trinbagonian life? The NCPTT has many spaces where the carnivalesque cultural identity should and can be applied. In light of this policy research, the Trinidad and Tobagonian government, policy makers, and experts should review and reorient their understanding of Trinbagonian identity. It is not static, nor is it limited to the nation's geographic boundaries. Trinbagonian identity exists as a dynamic cultural fusion, a process of movement, a recognition of historical fragments, and an acknowledgment of lived experiences—it is, by its nature, carnivalesque. After this reevaluation, the Trinidad and Tobagonian state actors can rewrite the cultural policy statement using decolonial frameworks and anthropological models to employ inclusive language that expresses the carnivalesque approach to cultural identity.

As part of this process, government agents, policymakers, and experts should adopt worldviews and policies that reorient carnivalesque cultural policy away from the aesthetic development of the cultural arts for a neoliberal-based economic gain towards the development of the cultural arts as a way of understanding the twin islands' many fragments. As an official document in the Trinbago government, the current NCPTT centers on two main goals. The first goal works to develop national identity and cultural confidence; the

second one seeks to create a harmonized and strengthened cultural environment.<sup>342</sup> On paper, these goals appear to benefit the twin islands and foster a peaceful nation and culture. However, this research argues that the current NCPTT mission statements, public projects, and funding directives promote a conflation of Trinbagonian identity with the annual Carnival. Although the NCPTT ostensibly serves as a modern, citizen-focused ministry, this research explores how its initiatives continue a colonially derived, static notion of cultural identity. This neocolonial perspective on identity inevitably manifests in spaces of exclusion. This conflated, neocolonial identity determines and dominates the twin islands' cultural identity, eliding minoritized ethnoracial groups, diaspora collectives, and *trans*-gender persons.

Opposing this confining worldview, a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity deconstructs the binaries of belonging and non-belonging, of male and female. Instead, this hybrid, fluid identity approach aims to prioritize the lived experiences of Trinbagonians in quotidian culture. The carnivalesque eschews privileging of a singular definition of Trinbagonian identity anchored to the past. In embracing the true notion of carnival, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture, and the Arts realistically can decolonize frameworks of cultural policy that perpetuate external stereotypes of Trinbagonian cultural identity. In the current NCPTT mission statement, the document mentions “national identity” twenty-eight times. The 121-page document mentions it once in the title, once in the forward, three times in the summary, fifteen times in the body, and nine in the glossary.

Meanwhile, “Trinbagonian” and/or “Trinidad and Tobago” national identity is mentioned eleven times throughout the document. These repeated references indicate that the NCPTT places a significant emphasis on these phrases. Echoing this government body's

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<sup>342</sup> National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago, “Celebrating National Identity: Maximising our Diversity, 2020-2025,” Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, page x.

emphasis on profits, the NCPTT only mentions commodified cultural products associated with national identity. However, the NCPTT never actually characterizes national identity. This research encourages the policy makers to explore this possible carnivalesque approach and explicitly to state that fusion, movement, and fluidity are integral elements of a Trinbagonian identity that denies a singular definition. Like other Caribbean peoples, Trinbagonians are not static nor fixed—they persist and thrive. They are innovative and dynamic because of their fragments.

Kevin Adonis Browne explores this vibrant dynamism through carnival's mas to explain how this festival dramatizes the Caribbean experience and being. He states that “This *Mas* of ours. You should see it. When you do, you will see what I mean when I say that a photograph is a fragment of Caribbeanness, a parable of the Caribbean individual who persists (fragments and all).”<sup>343</sup> He echoes this research paper's emphasis on the Trinbagonian sense of both being from elsewhere, being in a state of movement, and being intrinsically connected with the twin island land and community. Browne adds, “So much of what we do, as a Caribbean people, is about finding a place for ourselves – one we have made, rather than have made for us...it's that the “Caribbean,” as we understand and experience it, is not really a place at all but an idea of a place.”<sup>344</sup> Like the Caribbean geography, the Trinbagonian community is an amalgamation of the fragments of people's journey, experiences, origins, and cultural expressions.

If the NCPTT revises the cultural identity statement, they should characterize movement as an inherent aspect of Trinbagonian national identity. Openly integrating the concept of movement as an identity factor allows people to embrace their past experiences while they simultaneously explore their lived experiences. In this way, the ministry can

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<sup>343</sup> Kevin Adonis Browne, *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Photography*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018): 11.

<sup>344</sup> Browne, *High Mas*, 11.

acknowledge movement as a part of Trinbagonian identity while also giving the people the opportunity to describe themselves. The freedom manifest in acknowledging origins and self-determining identities promotes the disassembling of colonial frameworks. Browne finishes his cultural assessment to explain that the Caribbean is “not the last undiscovered country in the region, but rather a long-discovered abstraction that waits to be resolved. It’s a place populated by an ironic people who insist substance into their elusive hopes for a better like in this (non)place we call *home*.”<sup>345</sup> While I agree with many of Browne’s insights, I argue that Trinbagonian and Caribbean cultural identity cannot be resolved into a singular, homogenizing definition that does not include lived experiences. A resolved definition of Trinbagonian cultural identity limits its potential to become. Trinbagonian culture embodies and emulates the carnivalesque—it is forever in an evolving state of chaos, relation, imagination, participation, and transformation.

In continuing to evolve the Trinbagonian national policy on cultural identity, the below sections present five major areas for policy reform gathered from interviewee responses. Their viewpoints express their experiences and opinions regarding ways to tangibly work towards increasing awareness and improving this issue within the Trinbago local and diaspora life. Their responses are divided into the categories of:

- Protect and Develop Trinbagonian Cultural History
  - Increase Trinbagonian Awareness of the Carnival’s Evolutions and Deeper Potentials
  - Collate and Preserve Historical and Music Archives
- Protect Trinbagonian Creativity and Other Resources
- Invest in Education, Especially Music Education
- Increase Political Participation and Gender Equity

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<sup>345</sup> Browne, *High Mas*, 11.



- Increase Political Participation
- Increase Gender Equity and Freedom of Expression for *Trans*-Gender Persons
- Diversify the Range of Trinbago Festival Celebrations

### Protect Trinbagonian Cultural History and Assets

#### *Increase Trinbagonian Awareness of the Carnival's Evolutions and Deeper Potentials*

To begin combatting the colonially derived framework, an educational initiative that integrates the genuine historical investigations of carnival and how carnival events developed would be beneficial. This project's interviews offer many insights on what gleaned from carnival about the carnivalesque and its subversive and transformative qualities. These lessons would also offer opportunities for Trinbagonians to learn about themselves, their unique culture, other variations of carnivals, and the expansion of the Trinbagonian culture beyond the borders of the nation. The current focus on the commercialized carnival events erodes its meaningfulness and treats it as a cultural object. But with this educational initiative, Trinbagonians can have the power to understand and identify themselves, which facilitates a process of self-awareness that can deconstructs colonial frameworks. Lyndon echoes these sentiments when he states the following:

The traditional aspects of carnival need to be taught, and need to be kept. That's something... Everyone is kind of moving onto the more economically viable aspects of it. Everybody wants the pretty mas and the big fêtes and so on. But the traditional aspects of carnival are so rich, and we need to keep that vibrant and keep it going, teach young people about it because a lot of that is part of our identity as well, as a Trinidadian, you know... to understand the great people, the great battles that have been fought and won, that goes a long way in helping someone appreciate their own identity.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Gomez, interview.

For Lyndon, the younger generations are losing touch with their heritage and history. He feels they are allowing a cultural colonization to occur. The traditional aspects of Carnival need to be taught so that people understand the nuances of Trinbagonian cultural heritage, which has the potential to unite the fragments of people through their learning about and acceptance of difference.

But the current economic-focused trajectory of carnival limits this potential of understanding the historical past while limiting the potential that exists in its futurity. Isaac points to the deeper meaning of carnival when he states that:

I think it's beyond that and I think that it's a really big part of the reason people criticize the new way carnival is in Trinidad. It's become more business-oriented, and it has become cheapened... just make feathered bikinis. Carnival is more than that, it should represent spirits overall and inspiration that you draw from things that makes you, you. So, you see like now you have things like security with ropes and you want to feel safe...you, like 30-40 years ago, people didn't care about that."<sup>347</sup>

People who attend carnival enjoy the beauty, chaos, and energy of the festival. But more so, people participate in the revelry to be free, achieve agency, and find release. Isaac adds:

You went to carnival to be free, to jump up and play in this band or the next because that's the point. So, it is happening in that way where the spirit is being killed by the nurture factor. So that's really how I view carnival. It has to be something that you let go and become part of. You have to let go and let it flow and become part of it and some people may not enjoy that but is it always about enjoyment or it is about being truly able to accept freedom and let go of your ego for a little while...to let that spirit in you.<sup>348</sup>

Carnival is more than a marketing tool. It is about deepening the level of understanding of a people and its culture. It is about finding agency and power through release of structured forms. In these carnivalesque moments, people are able to shed the shackles of colonialism that still taints the society. In these moments, people's cultural confidence is boosted. They achieve a spirit of unity under national cultural identity because they are able to experience a freeness, a chaos of the moment. They are given space to imagine themselves beyond what

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<sup>347</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>348</sup> Rudder, interview.

they have been told they are. They accept one another despite race, gender, class or any other identity categorization. In these moments the fragments revel in their differences and are molded into something completely new that possesses the elasticity to continuously transform.

This sentiment of newness is encapsulated in a quote from Naette when she states the following:

The thing about carnival though and I think that... it's not hard to find but it's there. Carnival...we could think of it in two ways:1) traditional and 2) contemporary. My mother's PhD is in sociology. She did the steelpan but she also talks about carnival more generally, so I grew up thinking about this. Contemporary carnival has taken over everybody. It's just a thing. I don't think that it is more significant than say Diwali because I do think Diwali has also taken over everybody. What I do think is that if you look at the evidence for what east-Indian participation and Chinese participation ... because people tend to think of carnival as creole but the expression of non-black creole participation in carnival does not look like any of the groups that it looked as before because it is a form of masking. So east-Indian participation wouldn't look east Indian in carnival. Chinese participation wouldn't look like Chinese participation in carnival and so I think that the problem is that we want to see those ethnic groups manifest themselves in carnival. But because it has masquerade, you will not see them.<sup>349</sup>

Naette indicates that in the carnival spaces, in carnivalesque moments, the various fragments of peoples manifest themselves differently. Their ties to "elsewhere" become irrelevant.

Though they mask themselves, they participate as uniquely Trinbagonian through the acceptance of difference. They allow themselves to be transformed. Her statements are an excellent example of carnivalesque differential consciousness at work. In doing so, diasporic and *trans*-gender communities can also be accepted in these spaces.

Integrating Carnival's genuine history promotes sustainable cultural development through educating people in this history of its evolution, its importance to Trinidad society and economy, and its potential to be expanded into a carnivalesque worldview that promotes expression and inclusivity. Naette's point also intersects with the many festivals celebrated

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<sup>349</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

by various ethnoracial groups living in Trinbagonian culture. Their customs and festivals are also evolving across time and space. While this research emphasizes the cultural aspects over neoliberal ones, the NCPTT's embrace of these various festivals will lead to more diverse and sustainable year-round tourism and community activity revenue sources. According to Keith Nurse, the sustainable development of culture "should be viewed not just as an additional pillar of sustainable development along with environmental, economic and social objectives because peoples' identities, signifying systems, cosmologies and epistemic frameworks shape how the environment is viewed and lived in. Culture shapes what we mean by development and determines how people act in the world."<sup>350</sup> Nurse's points offer excellent food for thought.

A sustainable development of culture means that the government invests in spaces such as "culture zones" where people of all races, classes, and genders can interact and cultivate an authentic quotidian culture. As I have argued, ole talk interactions and liming culture play crucial roles in the socio-politics of Trinbagonians at home and abroad. In these neutral zones, people can transform these zones into innovative carnivalesque spaces. As the primary goal of what Bhabha designates as third spaces is to celebrate differences, these spontaneous, fluid areas would result in increased equality, equity, and inclusivity. To understand Trinbagonian culture and cultural identity, then, the NCPTT needs to name these other festivals and organize strategies for developing them further. In this way, Trinbagonians can actively engage with their origins and with their current cultural lives.

### *Collate and Preserve Historical and Music Archives*

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<sup>350</sup> Keith Nurse, "Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development," (London: Commonwealth Secretariate, 2006), page 37.

In addition to increasing education regarding Carnival and its associated carnivalesque properties, the government should collate and preserve historical archives that are accessible to both people within and beyond the nation. This initiative was inspired by my interviewee Heather, who has worked tirelessly to map out and preserve her family's history. Although she lives in a small town in New Brunswick Canada, Heather desires to remain connected to her homeland. She provides an example of how she collates pieces of her family's history while also stating that she is unaware of whether or not there is an official national archive of Trinidad and Tobago. She details her possession of invaluable cultural objects such as residential papers and family diaries that:

Yea, for example we have a little round tin canister and when it opened, you saw the residential papers inside, and you had to hang it around your neck and it was...the word B-O-U-N-D. Now if you were a bound coolie, it means you had to have this...it was almost like a government pass that you had to show that you had these residential papers. After the indentureship ended, a lot of Indians threw that away. My great grandmother kept hers, so we still have that in our family, here in Canada, in all places, we have this little artifact. It's a rich family history and I am mourning the fact that none of my kids would ever get to the point where they might be interested. I am looking to pass them on to people who would care about them but the archive...the national archive of T&T...I think there is such a thing but I am not sure what's in it. But also, there is a lot of history in the diaries of the Canadian missionaries and Adela Archibald, the Archibald is named after her, she is not far from here and her diaries are all at St. Andrew's Theological College in San Fernando. My grandfather's diaries are in Canada (dad brought them) and they would have the same things because they knew each other so they would have the same meetings etc. All my grandfather's diaries, I donated to the Canadian United Church Archives because I realized they would always keep them for prosperity. The minute I die, who knows, the kids might throw them out or something. I am trying to preserve history but it's almost like I am treading water.<sup>351</sup>

Interestingly, there is a national archive of Trinidad and Tobago, but the awareness of Trinbagonians having an archive remains low. The National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago facebook page shows they have twenty thousand followers.<sup>352</sup> This either suggests that people are not interested in these archives or people are not aware that they exist, until

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<sup>351</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>352</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/nationalarchivestt>.

prompted to research them. These national archives could also be integrated into educational policies for current and future Trinbagonians, local and diaspora, can access evidence of national history. Heather's residential papers functions as an artifact of memory and records the islands' indentured servitude system and the methods of population control integrated within that system. These types of documents can become integral parts of Trinbago education and acknowledgement of the past in ways that helps people understand their present and determine their future.

In tandem with developing more awareness for national archives, the Trinbagonian government should work towards developing music archives. One reason the music sector has been severely underdeveloped related to Trinidad and Tobago's economic dependence on oil and gas. These two things have been the crux of the Trinbagonian economy since its independence in 1962. Erphaan states that:

Yea, as an artist, or as a creative I should say because I believe that I'm more than an artist in terms of what I do, I travel.... I wouldn't even go as far as North America, but right here within the Caribbean, I see it in Jamaica, and even islands like Antigua and St. Lucia, I'm not sure if it's based on or it stems from complacency because we have an energy sector that kind of fuels the economy to a large extent and things like culture is kind of taken for granted because it's kind of naturally works in terms of it locally, it just happens and we get full of it for carnival and we wait for it again and that stop and go effect, we get so accustomed to it, that like, everybody kind of put a blind eye to it so, definitely, it's something that, I would say the powers at be, for example, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism should really employ and put your people with expertise, especially those who graduated, because I have a lot of friends who would have studied musical arts, theater, and other forms of creative arts studies and they would literally just fall into the teaching institutions or they will open a school or people like myself who are performers nah, so that definitely like lacking, lacking, lacking and I feel its because not much attention is paid to it so... we have an entire department of creative and festival arts but yet still people kind of struggling to find a footing and struggling to get access to stuff like what you studying...<sup>353</sup>

Here Erphaan emphasizes the restricted availability of opportunities for those who are involved in the creative sector along with its underdevelopment. He points out that there is a "complacency" for Trinbago's government and its people due to the fuel-based economy. He

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<sup>353</sup> Alves, interview.

also shares insights into the problems this myopic view of Trinbago economic possibilities produces. These limited views lead to a lack of opportunities for those who dedicate their lives to the musical arts, theaters, and other forms of creative arts. With no other significantly options than teaching, this structure builds a community that is potentially resentful for the limited opportunities in Trinidad and may contribute to people moving outside of the nation to live, work, or to develop their creativity. To combat this, Erphaan also believes the government should invest in promoting entertainment sectors and possibly supporting music industry unions.

Further, Erphaan points to the lack of databases—which would equate to music archives—for the Caribbean’s entertainment sector. In performing research for this project, I personally struggled to find dependable information on carnival and carnival music, especially related to lyrical content and musician’s catalogues of work. The lack of a comprehensive Caribbean music archive was palpable and triggered an awareness for me of the lack of formal acknowledgment of this vibrant and important artistic expression and carrier of human knowledge, culture, and history. For example, I could not find the song lyrics for certain songs, hampering the analysis of the lyrics. I could only glean snippets of information on artists and their catalogues of work and Carnival prizes through researching various magazine and news outlets. Regarding these music archives, education, and industry issues, Erphaan says that:

I had a conversation with the president of the promoters’ associations. He sent me a message reaching out, asking me to suggest some .... anything that I believe is lacking that could really help develop the local entertainment sector but in regards to Carnival, Soca, and Calypso. Umm... and I literally told him “for me , one of the things I see lacking is a database when it comes to archiving nah”... like one of the reasons why a lot of people don't really appreciate our own culture and appreciate the stories that were created....a decent foundation of what people would benefit from like myself, is that they don't know and they don't have access it to and throughout their lives in school, it would have just gone as far as probably taking part in a school competition singing Calypso or Ash Wednesday...<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Alves, interview.

For Erphaan and myself, these types of databases would give people an understanding of Trinbago's historical and present-day culture and people. These historical and music archives and databases and their promotion within the general public and in the education system can arm Trinbagonians with a non-colonized, informal form of knowledge.

The interviewee Kearn, who works at the NCC, also reflects these sentiments. Because his work aims to extend these databases to include youthful voices, the carnival institute does “a lot of interviews with artists, cultural practitioners, who have really done a lot of the work in the industry and to sort of archive and have their stories on record.”<sup>355</sup> The focus on youthful voices demonstrates the struggle that people feel, endure, and overcome. Kearn mentions a wonderful concept of Carnival Reflections, stating:

[For] the last two and a half years, they used to do something called Carnival Reflections where every post carnival, they will bring in practitioners and they will discuss things that happened last season, issues, etc.... I know it is something we would like to resume... I cannot say how many young people will be represented in that...maybe not much... But maybe other people, particularly promoters and event producers...these people are voices who are usually not heard because other people think they are money hungry and they probably hear to kill culture.<sup>356</sup>

In these Carnival Reflections, many voices can be heard—not just those that already have a platform or are already successful. I can easily imagine evolving the current national archives to create modern, inclusive displays of archived material objects; interactive, multimedia displays of Caribbean music and concerts, and voices of Carnival attendees that speak their personal narratives of this central cultural institution.

### *Protect Trinbagonian Creativity and Other Resources*

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<sup>355</sup> Williams, interview.

<sup>356</sup> Williams, interview.



In Chapter One, the NCPTT's Plural Model Society initiative specifically aimed to empower citizens to take control of their cultural assets. However, the cultural sector failed to be appreciably developed due to project misdirection, inadequate resources, and insufficient training. However, several interviewees express specific perspectives regarding Trinbagonian's struggles to manage their cultural assets. Beyond the formal archiving and displaying of tangible objects, two interviewees brought to my attention another vital aspect of Trinbagonian identity—creativity. Creativity goes hand in hand with movement in the sense that it is always changing, evolving, and transforming. Trinbagonians pull from their various cultural environments to fuel their creativity. Isaac states that:

I always feel like...you're asking about culture being fluid, but I feel like life is very fluid. There is a lot of growth and pain and expansion. So just like what you said where carnival came from. We are obviously not the first carnival history in the world or the first festival. So, maybe so but the thing is, just watching the Trinidadians who have made it all over the world, are we limiting it? Because there is a Japanese carnival, Miami, Nottinghill on other islands, so I feel like we are very okay with it expanding. I just feel like one thing Trinidadians are generally poor at is appreciating their own, and it allows a lot of people to take our culture. This is a very recent thing (past month or two), I have been wondering more and more if that's not our beauty...we can create so much that we don't even have to hold out. It's always put forward as a bad thing...that we don't get recognized but when I look twice, yea, we didn't recognize many of our older creators but I know an immense amount of creatives in Trinidad and I've not seen such a collective of creatives in one area before for example, so maybe it's that. I don't think we hold back, but I just don't think we hold on too much emphasis on what we have created.<sup>357</sup>

He brings to light Trinbagonians creativity in conjunction with the way Trinbagonians move both in terms of culture, identity, and carnival. However, he notes the limited appreciation, in terms of ownership, by Trinbagonians of their culture.

Because of this lack of appreciation for Trinbagonian culture, Trinbagonians allow others to continue to claim it and to name them. Nneka reflects on creativity as a cultural resource when she states that Trinbagonian's playfulness is part of the reason Trinbagonians are so creative. She states that:

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<sup>357</sup> Rudder, interview.

It's in...that playfulness... not being taken seriously enough. Even if you look at some of our strengths... for example, I think Trininis, maybe Caribbean people, are fantastic story-tellers. We are fantastic entertaining story-tellers. That's something that we can market. People love stories. I mean when you go on FB, you set up an online spot or wherever you are on social media, they tell stories. We are great story-tellers. We need to be leveraging all those types of things.<sup>358</sup>

This idea of the value and importance of playfulness echoes the ideas outlined in Chapter Five regarding liming and personal and interpersonal expression through discussion, music making, food cooking. Just as there is a sociopolitical importance to liming and slack culture, there is a seriousness and value in this type of playfulness.

Nneka reflects on this when she ponders why Calypso is not integrated into Trinbago education systems. Echoing Erphaan's points on the complacency promoted by oil dependence, she states that:

I think our government is so focused on either oil or carnival that we don't leverage other aspects of our culture the way the Jamaicans have [...] They wanted to know where they could get the music...why is the government doing more of this, you know [...] You know people are fascinated by the Caribbean and have a very superficial view of what the Caribbean is like. If people only understood how rich the culture is, I think it would be a huge boost for tourism and I really think that again, the government is focused on oil and carnival. But you think of calypso... I know a lot of people. I'm not the only one who wonders why calypso is not being taught as part of our educational system because there is so much social, cultural, historical wealth that is housed within calypso. It's unfortunate that the powers at be don't take these things seriously. I can't remember what your question was and I'm so sorry...<sup>359</sup>

Nneka's statements link with Isaac's points in highlighting the way culture is viewed by the Trinbagonian government. There is a lack of appreciation for culture and its development because there seems to be no immediate economic benefit beyond the Carnival. But, Nneka asserts that:

creativity goes beyond carnival. When you see some of the artistry the art work, the music, and like one of the things that is very popular in Trinidad right now is flea markets. Flea markets have been popping up all over the place over the past 8-10 years. And you see the creativity in our people, it's like "waw" and these things are not really promoted or supported. Yes, you can get a loan from NEDCO<sup>360</sup> and all of

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<sup>358</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>359</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>360</sup> National Entrepreneurship Development. Please see <https://nedco.gov.tt/>.

these things but to say that the innate creativity in our people is really harnessed or leveraged, no.<sup>361</sup>

Nneka raises the idea of Trinidad people's entrepreneurship, which can allow for creative expressions and financial independence. And, she notes how there are institutions in place, such as NEDCO, to support these goals but that people do not access these opportunities nor does she seem to feel that NEDCO is a helpful organization.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago are so heavily focused on certain physical resources that they fail to recognize and incentivize the development of other sectors. Beyond general creativity, Nneka comments on the oral knowledge that has been passed down through the ages in terms of medicines and so forth. She states that:

Again, the fact that they have all these kinds of physical, natural resources. Why aren't we investing in medical research, organic medication, natural remedies for things? All of that... I mean it's upsetting; you know... Even with this, I recall my grandmother teaching me, at a young age, the healing aspects of turmeric root. She would do this whenever she made me a cup of turmeric tea with milk to help with the aches during my menstrual cycle. She attained this knowledge though her elders and passed that knowledge down to me.<sup>362</sup>

Unfortunately, other products and activities that have been handed down through the ages only became appreciated and accepted when the West began embracing those elements.

In her own interview, Naette concurs with Nneka's perspective. Naette points to the deep ridicule, racism, and alienation her mixed ethnic grandfather experienced when he used coconut oil in his hair. She remembers that:

I've always questioned why we do the things we do. One of my favorite examples was when my grandfather was...he was from San Juan and when he worked for BWI. He was an accountant for BWI and went to work for the in the days of BWI and he grew up with his mother putting coconut oil in his hair—she used to make it and put it in his hair. When he moved to town, he got married to my red skinned grandmother and he was going to work at BWI and he was putting the coconut oil in his hair, she said “you really can't put coconut oil in your hair. Them coolie people will think you're from the country.” He didn't put coconut oil in his hair anymore, because coconut oil was a symbol of poverty. And now... (Shari interrupts) Everybody want coconut oil. Naette responds: It's a hundred and something dollars for a tub of cold pressed

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<sup>361</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>362</sup> Edwards, interview.

coconut oil that is made outside of Trinidad. Do you understand what I'm saying? And that is how it works. The same thing that you made that you should have cultural confidence about, you know the value of is nothing, it's bad, it is a source of shame, so you put it away and they go behind your back, they take it, and they sell it back to you.<sup>363</sup>

Naette brings up issues of race, class, and cultural divisions in her reflections as well as the cultural imperialism that continues to occur in Trinidad and Tobago. She reflects on how her grandmother was concerned about putting coconut oil in her grandfather's hair because it would mean he is from the "country." In other words, he is from a backward, undeveloped place which indicates a lack of education and a poorer class of people. She underscores it as a symbol of poverty. Of course, these attitudes remind me of the ignorant questions I endured when I moved from the islands to Boca Raton, Florida. In these situations, cultural imperialism comes into play. As the West (or Americans) embrace the health and beauty benefits of using coconut oil, this product becomes both exoticized as ancient and sanctified by this more economically powerful nation. The West then sells then appropriates the production, manufacturing, advertising, and dissemination of this product, selling it back to Caribbean nations. Globally, these types of situations are too numerous to count—from coconut oil to palm oil—and indicate the cultural and economic imbalance of powers.

### Invest in Education, Especially Music Education

As an international traveler who has been educated in the Caribbean, Thailand, and France, Isaac continues ideas of Trinbago creativity and offers invaluable insights into the special cultural flavor that informs the Trinbago worldview. He states that, "I've lived in eight countries and traveled to probably over thirty, and I have to say it's quite shocking to see such a small island have such a high level of uniqueness. I think one very interesting thing about

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<sup>363</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

Trinidad is that we are very creative people overall. It doesn't matter what sector you're in, that's one thing I realize about culture.”<sup>364</sup> However, Nneka notes that she sees this creativity and uniqueness in danger of being flattened in the Trinbago education system that favors unifying narratives and universalizes personal expression, as seen in gender roles. In her interview, Nneka states that:

I have worked with primary school kids on an informal basis, like teaching art and writing with after school programs, nothing too serious, but from my observations, I realized from soon after I started working with them, I said “you know a lot of these kids are amazing creatives but a lot of them.” By the time they get to high school, standard four or five, they don't have that creativity anymore. They lose it. What can be done to diversify the Trinbago education system where it protects the people’s creativity and increases knowledge regarding the nation’s history and its current status?<sup>365</sup>

Isaac and Nneka point to the crucial need to protect and develop Trinbago creativity and to foster a sense of self-awareness and cultural awareness in its young generations.

During Naette’s interview, I discuss the issue of the Trinbago government mirroring colonial structures that pretend to be modern and democratic but are neocolonial extensions of repressive government structures. I note to Naette that “And again, we reproduce these ideas, these structures, these ideologies, the colonialism within the structure of our society because during that colonial timeframe, you don't go out of line and if you do, there is a consequence to that action. It's the same thing that we reproduce as a society yet we claim independence from the British.” Naette offers a powerful response regarding her understanding of this very issue that seems to elude many Trinbago persons. She rejoins:

Yeah, well it goes beyond colonialism. It’s preceded by slavery. Trinidad is a plantation. You are on a plantation, you have overseers, you have masters, and you have slaves. Overseers keep people in line, police for example, keep people in line. There are some public servants' jobs to remind people that this is not your place. We have that gatekeeping level. The way that slaves responded to oppression was to keep quiet. We were not a revolting colony. Our slaves did not revolt, Jamacia slaves revolted.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Rudder, interview.

<sup>365</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>366</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

Personally, I wonder how the Trinbagonian education system can turn a critical eye towards its own post-independence development in terms of its ethnoracial harmony, diaspora acknowledgment, and gender inclusion.

However, there are many bright lights regarding music education on the twin islands. For example, Calypso legend Roy Cape launched a music school that specifically fosters inclusivity by engaging students of all races, ages, and classes in a love for music. While the Roy Cape Foundation fosters comprehensive music literacy, the curriculum naturally specializes in Trinbagonian music. According to a *Newsday* article, the Roy Cape Foundation works in conjunction with the Music Literacy Trust and the “Sangre Grande Development Foundation, with an emphasis on promoting music literacy in Sangre Grande.”<sup>367</sup> However, this program that serves the public and promotes national culture needs much more financial support. Thus, this school serves as a perfect example of an island institution that the NCPTT and the Ministry of Development, Culture, and the Arts should consider financially supporting through endowments and scholarships.

Still, there are many ways Trinidad and Tobago can harness its intellectual resources and potential. Naette brings in critical points regarding Trinidad and Tobago’s brain drain issue, which she considers one of the most important issues the government needs to address. She states that:

I feel like we have a tremendous resource outside the country and if the country could be made more attractive to them and those people would be allowed to do their work, the resource is there. It’s not like... we do not have to train... I mean I get angry when we talk about this but our government strategy, and this speaks to the point of controlling the population and not allowing the population to decide for themselves... our government strategy for reassimilating graduate students and well-trained people, even undergraduates who come back, is the OJT<sup>368</sup> system.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Joan Rampersad “Roy Cape launches music school,” *Newsday*, Monday 22 July 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/07/22/roy-cape-launches-music-school-for-grande/>.

<sup>368</sup> OJT= The On-the-Job Training Programme.

<sup>369</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

She provides an example of the reality of what happens to many highly trained persons who look for satisfying, meaningful work in the twin islands. She continues:

Now imagine that you are sending, you are paying for students to go away and have them qualify in areas that could change the society and you bring them back and put them to work in the ministry of works...right, like that as a national policy is bollocks. And it proves, it shows where the problem is because if your best are filing papers or answering the phone, then who the hell is running the country? And they keep doing this, they keep stacking them generation after generation in these low paying jobs and particularly not giving them the ability to let them do what they were trained to do. So there is that practice.<sup>370</sup>

She concludes her passionate statement by detailing her personal experience with menial tasks, which occurs for many talented, educated, and trained Trinbagonians in conjunction with pay disparities when considered on international salary scales. She explains:

In my time working in advertising, I was able to do...um create some collateral material for the government and one of the projects i worked on was the International Financial Center (TIIFC). What TIIFC is essentially is an agency that allows Trinidad to position themselves as a location for back-office operations. So basically, take for example, an international bank like Wells Fargo or City bank...City Bank would farm out the lower end operations to Trinidad and we will do that for them as a ...I don't want to call it secretarial because that's not fair, but they just do a task, not creative, not anything like that, not critical in any way. The government of T&T...this is a policy that this is the role we should play and in order to sell themselves...one of the selling points was, of course the usual is location, stable political system but also we have people trained to the standard of Wells Fargo employees but you can pay them less here so Wells Fargo doesn't need to hire people and pay them thirty dollars US an hour. They could pay them seven dollars US an hour because they are based in Trinidad and that is what we do with our talent.<sup>371</sup>

Naette's perspective offers an honest, brutal view into both possibilities open to Trinbago people and the hindrances that must be addressed.

### Increase Political Participation and Gender Equity

#### *Increase Political Participation*

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<sup>370</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

<sup>371</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

Chapter Three and Four include discussions on the intersections of the carnivalesque manifesting a transformative state that can promote agency and participation, especially within the sociopolitical realm of proactive change. In her interview, Naette offers compelling points regarding the non-violent history of major political evolutions in Trinidad's independence and modernization. She states that:

Well, I think that the overall cunning remains because you revolt, but you revolt in a way that allows you to get away with it. You don't...it's not Haitian revolt. It's not axes and guns. It is a sort of masked freedom where you give yourself the opportunity to be something different for this fixed period of time. I think the flipside of that is that...it's like carnival does not allow us, historically and contemporary, it does not allow us to build enough tension to revolt. So, while it is a kind of breakaway from the norm, it is also a release valve that prevents us from getting into violent revolt. We have historically, we have the water riots, every fifty years or so we have a thing, but it's a little blip. It's never complete destruction. Barbados never had complete destruction but Jamaica, Guyana, people had where they put things on the line and they lost those things. When I hear revolt, there is a difference between riot and revolt. Trinidad riots, and other places revolt.<sup>372</sup>

Of course, this research in no way advocates for violence. However, Naette's insights can be understood within the context of other comments on an overall passivity within Trinidad culture.

With a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity, Carnival can become a genuine cultural force for community unity and participation. The ambivalence currently within carnival spaces can be morphed into a space of true revolt. People can express their voices and enjoy a sense of positive revolt in the freedom of this state of becoming.

Recognizing the carnivalesque potential in quotidian spaces can increase democratic participation amongst people. Naette expands on this when she states:

I feel as though that whole "it's the government's fault" ... well yea, because you have no active participation in your democracy. You have no active part in any of the institutions. You take your child to school, the school does what it does, and that's just the school in charge. The school is in charge. The hospital is in charge. The police are in charge. You don't feel, even though you work in the hospital or you work as police, that you are in charge. That control system ensures that nobody is able to change it because every time somebody tries to change it, they get their heads knocked off,

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<sup>372</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.



right? We know very well that somebody will resist the authorities and the response to that resistance is “mah, get rid of them”. They are not...the creative... I mean I would like to talk about the 1990 coup in that way [...] The NAR<sup>373</sup> did a thing, the COP<sup>374</sup> did a thing. We have all these independent candidates coming up and instead of saying “let me hear what this young guy has to say” we are like “nah nah nah, he don’t know nothing” and we bring back the status quo over and over again. So, we have absolutely no sense of intervention in our affairs and that lack of contact with power and lack of contact with resources allows us to accept whatever we are given. It prevents us from changing the system and it makes us selfish because in order to survive, it's like a licensure office...if you don't have a link in licensing, that's it for you. You will be in that line until you're dead. So, people understand this and that use of individual capital, so using... and that's corruption, right? So, using your personal power to benefit...so you are a licensing officer, you understand that you have power, you begin to trade that power with other people so you I've a school principal jump in the line and that person puts your child in a class. You give a policeman a jump in the line, he does something else for you. So, we have this black-market exchange that happens because people cannot access real, legitimate power. So, I think that ability to do that, living there, having the dual mind...and it ties into carnival because people associate carnival with us and they talk about freedom but really, carnival is about masking and so, we are able to...we live masked, and we practice masking but for survival. It's not for fun. You put on a face to use your personal power in a corrupt way to make sure that your children get into good schools. You are not yourself in those situations. You pretend in those situations.

Naette speaks to Trinidad’s long history of colonization where the nation has been under the control of various oppressive social systems. There was and has been a colonization of the minds. This reflects the lack of cultural confidence the people have, as they continuously turn to other for assistance. Current colonial frameworks reinscribe these ideologies in Trinbagonian culture. But, a carnivalesque understanding deconstructs those structures because it disrupts the systems currently in play.

### *Increase Gender Equity and Freedom of Expression for Trans-Gender Persons*

Naturally, this fusion derives from and promotes the second critical element of authentic carnival—diaspora, movement, and fluidity as a process of Trinbagonian cultural

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<sup>373</sup> NAR= National Allegiance for Reconstruction

<sup>374</sup> COP=Congress of the People

identity and life. Trinbagonians are not rooted to their home nation, and they do not have to be born in the twin Republic to be considered Trinbagonian. Trinbagonian identity should incorporate a more fluid understanding of gender and sexual orientation. From this perspective, Trinbagonians can understand gender and sexuality as these identity attributes play out in quotidian culture rather than the current adoption of a heteronormative sexual orientation derived from colonial, Christian morals. As a result, the NCPTT mission statement should adopt gender-neutral language instead of he/she pronouns. From this perspective, the Trinbagonian nation can engender spaces of inclusion for diasporic and *trans*-gendered communities while also creating decolonial frameworks that celebrate nuances of Trinbagonian history, culture, and people.

As Trinshana reflects, “gender is not something that is set in stone, it's a social construct, but people don't see it as a social construct. They just think this is male or female. So, I think when it comes to a Caribbean cultural identity, there is something that needs to be spoken about more, but more towards the line of respecting women, looking at gender roles, seeing the fluidity between the two, not the stringent way that we usually look at it.” In adopting a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity and cultural policy the Trinbagonian government will be able to recognize movements within their quotidian culture. As a result, the idea of fluidity becomes normalized in everyday society. The government should open national conversations through links with local and grassroots non-profit organizations like Feminist Caribbean.

For both Chanelle and Trishana, the conversations stem from the voices of the younger generations who are willing to embrace change rather than shun it. Ashley<sup>375</sup> particularly comments on the openness of the younger Trinbago generations to discuss *trans*-gender topics. She states that “Yea, I was like “Why are y'all even thinking about this?” I

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<sup>375</sup> For Ashley's bionote, please see Appendix 1.

have no idea where they get the boldness, the brilliance, just knowing who they are, they just show up even if it means they know they will be at a disadvantage.”<sup>376</sup> Chanelle follows up Ashley’s statements that people are beginning to speak and question more about gender and sexuality. Chanelle echoes Ashley’s ideas, adding:

I feel like the younger generation now is... even is for doing the older generation who could not have ever expressed themselves openly, just living and stuff. Young people now are doing that and I feel like, idk, this can just be me thinking that but I feel it's also allowing older persons to be a bit more comfortable with who they are, if you're part of the community, to just be a bit more relaxed in some situations....There was this thing i was invited to recently which is so wild to me because when I was a teenager, I had no idea what my identity was, but they have a group called queer teens where they meet weekly on zoom... their zoom is not paid so after 40 minutes they continue rejoining, but they meet and they talk about ... they invited me last week and the kind of questions they were asking me.<sup>377</sup>

The youth are full of questions that are not easily answered and are searching for ways to think about their individual experiences.

Trishana also notices the changing attitudes towards gender roles and expression. She adds:

I mean, it depends on the age demographic that you are having this discussion with. I think that these younger people are definitely more open, more willing to have this conversation about the LGBTQ community. I think a lot of them I know are actually posting... they feel comfortable enough without the judgment, they post their relationships, which is great...but this is just strictly among the younger community. Among the older people, I...there are a lot of them that say nope, we can't have that. That mentality is still there...even with my parents, you know, full disclosure...They still have that mentality that it's wrong and not right. But for me, it's a full generation switch. At the end of the day, let people be who they are, let them express themselves...once they are not killing somebody, murdering somebody...Why do you need to judge, you know?<sup>378</sup>

Thus, having spaces where teenagers can ask questions, as they do in the queer teen group, is crucial to beginning these conversations.

Apart from this, larger companies and organizations can endorse these ideas of inclusivity and offer trainings for their workers and staff. The Canadian-based bank

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<sup>376</sup> Burnett, Ashley A., interview by author, Trinidad and Tobago, July 13, 2021.

<sup>377</sup> Beatrice, interview.

<sup>378</sup> Singh, interview.

ScotiaBank, with branches in Trinidad and Tobago, included an LGBTQ campaign. Their initiatives included allowing same-sex couples to open joint bank accounts and so forth. Ashely, Chanelle's<sup>379</sup> partner, states that "ScotiaBank in Trinidad... I have no idea; I really just want to know who is advising Scotia because they are doing a great job. They have gone on this whole inclusivity campaign. They accept same sex couples to do joint bank account and recognize same-sex couples. They had this whole ad where they were talking about...umm...I was so mind-blown." Given the rise in advocacy within the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago, these large companies offering these initiatives work to normalize the idea of gender being *trans*-. Gender is not bound to the dichotomy of male and female but rather endorses the idea that gender and sexuality work along a spectrum.

Business is not the only realm where gender reforms are needed. Ashley continues with her views on *trans*-gender issues in terms of social attitudes and law reform. She comments on the continuing homophobia, beliefs in biological essentialism, and narrow concepts of gender role. She makes particular comments on the issue of domestic violence in the Caribbean:

But looking at how our government and governments across the Caribbean, how they deal with these issues, 1) we're quite a very homophobic region so there aren't issues or at least in our policies that really protect people that exist outside what they see as being traditionally this gender or sex. And because they use gender and sex interchangeably of course they have an approach of heteronormativity. So even when you look at, say domestic violence, their definitions are so specific, they define what a spouse is, they define those intimate relationships so because of those definitions, the definitely excludes people in same sex relations and stuff. The only country that has an inclusive domestic violence act is Barbados because they did not use gendered language in their definition of a spouse. And even from that, there were a lot of pushbacks that they got from the churches. Because in the Caribbean, whilst we say we are a secular state, we are not. There is little or no separation of church and state and so you don't get many conversations that exist outside of the women's movement that really talks about gender."<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Beatrice, interview.

<sup>380</sup> Burnett, interview.

Ashley's work in gender activism offers her strong insights into how these structures work and how they play out within daily life. She continues with her assessment of the national leadership in relation to gender equity and safety. She adds:

I will say our leaders who are responsible for policy making and stuff aren't well read or at least sensitized, they are brilliant people but they are not sensitized to these kinds of issues and identities. So, when you have the Prime Minister of this country who would say things that are quite misogynistic, you have a lot of people who would... And if people look to you for clarity, they are not getting it because he is not giving it and he is stuck in that mode. There was some training done for law enforcement to sensitize them because we actually have a gender-based violence unit and they were supposed to offer protection to the LGBTQ communities as well as other communities but .... I mean, you are always hitting a brick wall because how can you say you are going to protect the community when legislation does not match up, you know?<sup>381</sup>

Overall, the interviewees' responses indicate Trinidad society slowly opening its mind towards exploring gender roles and sexual expression. As the nation increases its business ties with transnational companies, they can organically incorporate human rights initiatives that foster inclusivity. These values can be osmotically embraced within quotidian culture. And, the government can participate in these gender reforms through altering the gender pronouns used in the NCPTT and by funding gender awareness programs for various *trans*-gender rights and action groups.

### Diversify Celebrating Ethnic and Other Festivals

A carnivalesque approach to cultural identity also encourages the Ministry to develop cultural festivals other than carnival. In the aforementioned NCPTT mission statement, "carnival" is mentioned eleven times, with seven mentions in the body and four in the glossary. Despite the plethora of events and celebrations held throughout the year in Trinidad and Tobago, carnival is mentioned on page one of the NCPTT where it is positioned as the

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<sup>381</sup> Burnett, interview.

mecca for celebrations. Currently, Trinidad and Tobago's government perceives carnival as the primary cultural event to earn revenue. This insinuates that other festivals are less important, suggesting that community commitments to these other events are a naïve waste of time and resources. The NCPTT views a "reeducation" on history and culture as a means for prioritizing the history of carnival in a manner that erodes the validity, importance, and joy accorded to other cultural events. This destructive prioritization of carnival ultimately leads to people losing their connections to their heritages, the twin islands become homogenized, and an overall loss of authenticity.

In order to rectify these situations, this research paper advocates for expanding the NCPTT document to highlight other cultural festivals such as Diwali, Eid-UI-Fitr, We Beat Festival, Tobago Jazz Festival, Bucco Goat Race Festival, and many events not mentioned in the NCPTT. These multicultural events offer amazing opportunities for community development, positive interaction, and economic profit. For example, the April Tobago Jazz festival is described as a place where "Music lovers converge to enjoy eleven days of jazz, world beat, salsa, Latin, R&B, soca, calypso, reggae and many other forms of contemporary music."<sup>382</sup> In 2018, the total revenue earned from ticket sales alone, was \$1,668,600.<sup>383</sup> This does not include the revenue earned from hotel stays, or tourist general spending in Tobago.

In another example, the We Beat Festival is "a week-long mid-year event celebrating rich diversity of cultures as well as the incorporation of the St. James into the City of Port of Spean. The festival features heavily on local culture, so there's a Pan Nigh to celebrate steelpan, kaiso shows, children show, as well as local music genres including Soca, Chutney, Tassa and Jazz."<sup>384</sup> Both of these festivals mirror the same ethos of the central carnival, yet

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<sup>382</sup> Destination Trinidad and Tobago, "20 Festivals You Must Experience in Trinidad and Tobago," <https://www.destinationtnt.com/blog/a-land-of-endless-festivals/>.

<sup>383</sup> Sita Bridgemohan, "Nadine: Jazz not about making a profit," *Newsday*, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018, <https://newsday.co.tt/2018/10/08/nadine-jazz-not-about-making-a-profit/>.

<sup>384</sup> Destination Trinidad and Tobago, "20 Festivals You Must Experience in Trinidad and Tobago," <https://www.destinationtnt.com/blog/a-land-of-endless-festivals/>.

they lack the promotional focus afforded to the hegemonic festival. By investing in the small, medium, and large celebratory events held by various cultures and social outlets, the NCPTT can actively promote the social harmony they seek to foster while simultaneously increasing local revenues. These festivals all represent fragments of Trinbagonian peoples and, more importantly, depict the innovation that stems from these fragments.

Additionally, the Trinidad and Tobago government can partner with visionary soca artists, like Erphaan, to further develop and promote the “no seasons” campaign, which is discussed further below. This would lead to a development of year-round events connected to carnival. With these efforts, Trinidad and Tobago can increase the revenue. They can do this through cultural ambassadorships. Overall, the Trinbagonian people can deeply benefit from tangible acts that the NCPTT can enact, starting with revising their mission statement.

Currently, this document asserts purist claims regarding carnival in a way that conflates Trinbagonian cultural identity with carnival itself. By embracing the fusion, movement, and fluid attributes of syncretic Trinbagonian identity, the NCPTT can naturally decentralize the focus from Carnival. Trinbago’s Ministry of Arts and Culture can implement the NCPTT’s revised mission statement by establishing government-funded cultural ambassadorships. These cultural ambassadors can be people from various cultural arts sectors, from home and abroad, who can showcase the dynamic Trinbagonian festivals, music, and way of life. These ambassadors can organize and facilitate inclusive culture zones that can foster the development of equitable, sustainable cultural activities among people of different races, classes, and genders.

*Diversify the Range of Trinbago Festival Celebrations*

Cultural ambassadors, such as musicians and other local artists, could potentially take soca genres of music global, which is the goal of Erphaan's #NoSeasons campaign. He states:

I decided to create something so that people could understand what no seasons mean and I couldn't be more direct with that title. I was so glad to be able to conceptualize that idea with no seasons so they know for sure that I am not dissing Carnival. Carnival made me. It was the platform that I had access to to actually become who I am right now, but I feel as though if we are talking soca global, we need to pay attention to the other genres and understand how they got success.<sup>385</sup>

His approach to carnival and “no season” is a carnivalesque one. Through the movement of sound, it defies the boundaries of seasons and defies the boundaries of geography.

As it stands, the genre of soca music remains limited to Trinibago and carnival spaces. It is labeled and sold mostly under the genre of reggae. It does not have its own identity and faces similar problems as Trinbagonian people who are fighting for their voices. Erphaan reveals that:

I realized that's not really making sense if we are trying to go international. Keith Anthony told me that soca music doesn't really even count for 1 percent of the revenue of the global music economy. He used to work for Apple, so they would basically study the metadata of songs. He said these people actually know about soca, but they are not even gonna create... the majority of soca music is created and listed under Reggae platforms. That's the closest we could really attach ourselves.<sup>386</sup>

One aspect of cultural policy is to build relationships with the global community. This can be done through music, which engenders collaborations between and among people from different regions. A good way to build these partnerships would be to tap into the Trinbagonian diasporic community who work in the music and entertainment industries abroad.

Erphaan spearheads the #NoSeasons campaign to evolve the concept of Carnival from a time-limited annual event to a series of interconnected events and an overall lifestyle connected with Caribbean musical genres. He explains his vision that “the No Season’s

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<sup>385</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>386</sup> Alves, interview.



campaign is an initiative geared towards increasing the impact of the growth of soca music outside the carnival season which ends on Carnival Tuesday. Now, I explain this to people all the time. It would not happen overnight.”<sup>387</sup> He acknowledges some of the obstacles, stating:

Soca music will not become a genre that people willingly listen to on a large scale throughout the year. Why? Because carnival stems from a religious dynamic and years ago, when carnival wasn't this popular as it is now, from the French perspective because we have different types of carnival all over, so from the French perspective in terms of what they brought here for us, we experience and we kind of change up a little because of the enslaved the people and they mocked their masters and that's how a lot of the ole mass come about.<sup>388</sup>

Erphaan expresses an interesting idea that holding a #NoSeasons perspectives equates to a sociopolitical rebellion. He explains:

That little idea of my parents telling me stories of “they wouldn't be able to sign a calypso song on Ash Wednesday because they were forbidden” ...that taboo actually persists years and years and years mentally within the fabric of the culture that it would have prohibited the idea of even people actually considering the thought of even trying to promote soca music outside of Carnival. So, we have to be grateful for where we are right now with me boldly saying No Seasons. Back then, you wouldn't even think that. So that's the religious aspect.<sup>389</sup>

Part of Erphaan's vision includes extricating Carnival and Caribbean music, especially and soca music, from being tied to a specific time of year. He explains this perspective:

The psychological aspect of the people now that year after year when it wasn't even that serious and tied to religion, it just became deconstructed. It is what it is. This is the type of music that we dance to and party to and enjoy during this time. Just like for Christmas time, its parang<sup>390</sup> and after December, we don't hear parang, soca was in that box. Now, as a young artist, I fell in love with the culture from the age of nine onward and I realized that everyone wants soca to reach someone but it's not in a position to reach somewhere because the stop and go effect prohibits growth.<sup>391</sup>

Erphaan has a solid knowledge regarding the international music scene. He explains how soca's strong association with the spring Carnival season limits artists to having narrow

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<sup>387</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>388</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>389</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>390</sup> Parang is a style of music usually played around Christmas time, that pulls from Venezuelan musical beats. There is even a subgenre of parang, called Soca-Parang which blends soca and Latin sounds.

<sup>391</sup> Alves, interview.

windows to release music that gathers large audience. He contrasts this time-limited market with international artists whose music is not seasonal. Erphaan states that:

And the artists and them don't even have real fans... soca fans are fans of hit songs. The radio with the soca swift that takes place in December or January, soca music floods the airways, people fall in love with what is played mostly and who performs in the fetes more so they tie that to bigger artists for the season. When you go to London and you are a fan of Burner boy or Wizkid??. he could not release a song for a year but the relationship in terms of the fans buying his album, when he had his tour dates, they would leave the country to go to another country to see him. That is created between fans and artists.<sup>392</sup>

Then, Erphaan explains the competition among the musicians during the Carnival season, which beings in later winter. He details the calendar cycle:

But when you have a festival that creates who are the leaders of the genre because it's race time now in December and you have to make sure you have a hit for January and February, and if it is you don't have a hit because these people are... The psyche is... the people whose songs are playing the most are hot right now and once the songs are not playing, you are not hot.... And the soca artists aren't really in a position to say, "alright, let me do my own event" because they are trying to run down being popular for that season and they are trying to run down the stage. And they use that as a trampoline to learn in the "touring season" for the rest of the year which would be the same form of carnival in any other Caribbean country or any other kind of party in the world...

Contrasts this limited cycle with international artists, Erphaan compares these systems:

Afro-beats got a lot of success in London, from Africa to London, because they were able to consistently generate that culture and then the fans were always connected because the artists kept the momentum. Not every artist might be able to produce that volume of music because they are not touring etc., but I always say there is always a way around it and now social media kind of puts everybody in a position to be an influencer. You can be a soca artist and produce one song every three months but your content, your relevance, what you are providing to your social media platforms pertaining to soca could still give me enough momentum to kind of pivot and remain in contact with the fans so they could kind of still be on you.<sup>393</sup>

Erphaan explains how this Carnival cycle negatively impacts artists and their ability to produce artistic creations, reach fans, and build a viable career. He adds, "So if it is that they are not seeing much impact consistently, people are not buying soca albums, people are not

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<sup>392</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>393</sup> Alves, interview.

buying singles or streaming it as often because it's not enough. If I hear the same set of songs for January and February and I am getting ghosted for the rest of the year, till Christmas comes again, I don't have any relations with you. I can't be your fan because you are leaving me hanging.”<sup>394</sup>

Erphaan discusses how he and his colleagues work through these stresses, which only increased during COVID. He explains the comradery among musicians.

I would say in terms of momentum right now, I would say it's about 30 percent but stagnant and COVID had a real impact... a lot of soca artists throw up their hands and say “I not making no money, it have no carnival, so I not really going to produce.” That's what some people would say.... “I not making no money, so I not going to pay no producer”. Me and Alex worked around things... I said to Alex, “oaky, I can't pay you upfront, but let's split the royalties, so this song is not mine alone. You get something and I get something. And for the life of this song, as long as we live, we will be benefiting from the streams and whatever.” I mean that's how I move. I try not to make excuses, there are always ways around it. So, that's basically it. I have verbal communications with a lot of the other artists to release stuff even if it's not a new song, release content.<sup>395</sup>

Overall, the Trinbago's music represents an intangible cultural heritage of the nation and an incredibly lucrative financial sector. Although this research avoids a neoliberal policy perspective, Erphaan's practical viewpoint on actively expanding Trinbago's music culture beyond Carnival and beyond the limits of the Trinbago borders can reap benefits for all.

### Research Conclusion: Moving Forward

In looking over these policy evolutions advocated by these interviewees, the gaps between the aesthetic model and anthropological model becomes clearer. It seems the focus on commercializing Carnival occurred in tandem with the appropriation of this cultural event as an icon of national identity. In this nationalization process, people's individuality becomes

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<sup>394</sup> Alves, interview.

<sup>395</sup> Alves, interview.

flattened in a false narrative of ethnoracial unity and gender normativity. At the same time, this project sees how the paradigm shift towards an anthropological view of Carnival can actually increase revenues, especially in sustainable ways that promotes longevity and increases participation. Heather makes a solid point about people earning money through Carnival and other business ventures. She states that:

So, everyone thinks that's what they are and I really try to give some of them a voice to let people see something different and not assume that everyone doing that is killing culture. I think that it is harmful when there are people who have genuinely made a lot of sacrifices to be where they are and it's not their fault if they are making money as far as I see it. It is unfortunate that there have not been proper business models for the practitioners but if we for years have been clamoring in the industry about people not being able to live well and be profitable, why all of a sudden people who are being profitable are being seen as a problem, you know?<sup>396</sup>

There is no issue with Trinbagonians increasing profits. In fact, this research hopes to promote sustainable, inclusive ways to raise the entire local and diaspora person's quality of life.

In terms of the intersections of genuine history, cultural policy, and cultural identity, Naette offers a powerful and inspiring concluding statement regarding respecting the local Trinbagonian intellectual foundations that built this modern nation. And, she emphasizes the importance for Trinidad people to understand and assert their own identities. Without asserting their own identities, other nations and cultures will assign condescending, inaccurate, manipulative, and/or pejorative identities to Trinidad's syncretic culture filled with diversity and passion. Naette intones that:

I do not ever forget the intellectual legacy of Trinidad. Erik Williams, CLR James,<sup>397</sup> etc. And I think that the way that I address that sort of boxing in is to lean into my intellectual heritage which automatically makes me away from how I am identified. Because the way I am identified... when they hear the Caribbean, its fun-loving, its steelpan, its rubbish. But the moment I start to lean into the theory in my everyday conversation... I will be very relaxed and talk how I talk and someone will question me and we will get into a confrontation, I don't default to an American accent. I

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<sup>396</sup> Ferguson, interview.

<sup>397</sup> Cyril Lionel Robert James (January 4, 1901—May 31, 1989) was a Trinidadian journalist and historian who favored postcolonial Marxist ideals.

default to a very proper T&T accent that is difficult for you to misunderstand. Slow down, but I never go over to your side. Because when I go over to your side, I become something you know.<sup>398</sup>

After considering larger national identities and how people attempt to identify her, she proceeds to explain her self-determined identity and how she continuously informs her students about Caribbean thinkers and influential leaders.

So, I think my individual, the way I identify as a form of resistance to the way I am identified is to hold a resistant line, to stay in that place of resistance. And it's hard. It's not easy and not fun because you don't get to relax. But every time I feel like I'm put into a box I tend to go back to a place that draws on all the influences, including the African-American influence... like I've had to tell students in my classes... because I teach classes in rhetoric black America... Stokey Carmical,<sup>399</sup> was born in Port-of-Spain. Malcolm X's mother was from Grenada. Marcus Garvey is from Jamaica. Do not forget for a minute that when Martin Luther king was under pressure and he fled for time away...where did he go? In UWI, in Jamaica. Our...we have been in your space for the longest while answer have been feeding you for the longest while and that is where I go back to. I don't ever go back to any particular box and it's not a nice place to be.<sup>400</sup>

Naette continues to explain how her expression can cause friction. But these tensions can be considered positive and can promote interpersonal growth. She states that:

Again, when you resist like that, you become a target because you have to speak your mind. And I developed quite a reputation in the mind department for... You know somebody said "we refer to people as how they would like to be identified" and I said "well I am a rich white man from Europe, please call me sir". Because it is frickin' ridiculous and I have to remind you and bring you face to face with your ridiculousness. So, I think that my identity is a creator of disruption and discomfort and that's what I go back to over and over again because it's the only way that I could... if we have these boxes, the only way I can inhabit my own space is to move those boxes around. So, I will constantly be wiggling and constantly be challenging in order for that to be possible otherwise I will just get squeezed in.<sup>401</sup>

Naette's depth of personal and historical understanding as well as her knowledge of global interactions offers inspiring and critical ways for Trinbagonians to increase their

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<sup>398</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

<sup>399</sup> Kwame Ture (née Stokely Standiford Churchill Carmichael, June 29, 1941-November 15, 1998) was a prominent pan-Africanist in the civil right movements.

<sup>400</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

<sup>401</sup> Yoko Lee-Kirilova, interview.

understandings of their history and place within local and global events, including Carnival, diaspora carnivals, and the carnivalesque.

### **Project Conclusion**

To conclude this project, Tsuji provides an insightful overview to understand how the Eric Williams vision of a postcolonial, independent Trinbago fails to provide an inclusive cultural identity for its people. Tsuji summarizes that, “In order to equalize, if not homogenize, putative cultural origins, Williams attempted to detach them from particular historical contexts, and to (re)attach them to a common national past of colonial subordination. However, the same historical contexts not only stratified cultural objects and practices but also became the ground for claiming the purity of ethnic cultural traditions.”<sup>402</sup> Through this research process, I have come to understand my own experiences and to appreciate my interviewees’ perspectives that align and conflict with my own ideas, with the official cultural studies narratives, and the official national cultural identity policy. My genuine hope is for this research to increase people’s internal awareness and their appreciation of others as we move towards increasingly equitable societies.

To conclude this policy report, the great Destra Garcia’s 2006 hit song “Max it Up” encapsulates the ethos of Trinbagonian culture that might be better understood as one centered on cultural fusion, diasporic movement, and personal expression. Garcia encourages her thronging crowds to:

Take it to d limits till we reach d top  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it up, max it up  
Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Take out allyuh rag and start de waving, waving<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Tsuji, “Villaging the Nation,” 1170.

<sup>403</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

As seen in all the many music examples incorporated in this report, carnival music exemplifies the transformative potential of the carnivalesque approach to cultural identity. Lyndon explains how “the music—historically with calypso, expressing whatever social ailed that we’ve been through throughout the year, we express it and accept it and its heard. And even soca music now [...] it’s still an expression of freedom.”<sup>404</sup> Lydon’s quote captures the catharsis the Trinbago and Caribbean community can experience in the deeper aspects of the carnival experience, especially when the carnivalesque is viewed as a fluid, inclusive worldview.

This report offers a complex, nuanced understanding of how to dissever the essentializing of Trinbagonian culture into a commodified and controlled manifestation of the annual Carnival event. Instead, this policy change encourages a newfound freedom of expression through carnival music that shows how this freedom is not limited to carnival spaces. The carnivalesque also thrives in quotidian spaces, which readily manifests in Trinbagonian liming and ol’talk, both within the nation and in the diaspora. These liming sites exist as spaces of transgression and unite all fragments of Trinbagonians and Caribbean people alike. Therefore, a carnivalesque approach to cultural identity would benefit Trinbago’s government and people as it creates welcoming spaces for diasporic and *trans*-gendered communities. As a source of practical guidance, this research in Chapter Six proposes several elements of carnivalesque culture that can be embraced to liberate stifled Trinbagonian cultural identity.

When considering the fusion inherent within Trinbagonian culture, Garcia’s lyrics offer more insight into this hybrid way of life. Garcia cites multiple music genres the crowd knows well and has already heard. But now is the time for the island fusion genre of soca. Garcia baits the crowd:

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<sup>404</sup> Gomez, interview.

Hip-hop in we rass, jazz in we rags  
Dey done hear de disco, de rock, and de reggae  
De best must come last, let we fix it fast  
Is time for d soca to rock with dem up dey  
On de road is platinum, in de fete is maximum  
Forget about minimum  
So leh we max it up, max it up, max it up, max it up<sup>405</sup>

Garcia’s listing of the evolutions of music genres highlights how Trinbagonian cultural identity exists in a state of being that changes overtime. It is of the utmost importance that the Trinbagonian government remember that the Caribbean—as well as the twin islands—is the original, the purest diaspora. As Stuart Hall notes of the Caribbean community, “everybody comes from somewhere else.”<sup>406</sup> In true carnival fashion, I conclude this policy change report by embracing of the deeper meaning and potential of the carnivalesque worldview.

Garcia, sing us out:

(Maaaaaaax it up) oh father finally u set de soca free  
(Maaaaaaax it up) We on category inside ah d carni...  
(Maaaaaaax it up) And now yuh blessing we internationally  
(Maaaaaaax it up) So wen yuh watching me feel proud ah we on MTV and BET and dE  
Grammys is all ah we so support yuh soca music, so put yuh soca music.  
Yes yuh IDENTITY<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.

<sup>406</sup> Stuart Hall, “Negotiating Caribbean Identities,” 6.

<sup>407</sup> For singer backgrounds and song lyrics and videos, see Music Bibliography and Appendix 3.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interviewee Bionotes

#### Alves, Erphaan

The Trinidad-born Erphaan was thirty years old at the time of his interview. He holds an undergraduate degree and is a prominent soca artist who promotes the “No Seasons” initiative to expand a Carnival-related mindset and activities throughout the year. He also values the sociopolitical power and archival functions carried within Caribbean music’s past, present, and future. While he does hold Trinidad’s Carnival as the height of the carnival experience, he values diaspora carnivals and promotes musical collaborations.

#### Bissoondatt, Shari

Shari, this project’s researcher and writer, was born in Trinidad and emigrated to South Florida as a teenager. She has lived in Georgia, New York, and California and currently resides in South Florida. She holds a BS in Psychology with a double minor in Women’s Studies and Religion from Berry College, GA, USA. She has an MA in Media and Communication from Pace University, New York, USA. And, in completing this research, Shari will hold a PhD in Cultural Studies from Claremont Graduate University, CA, USA.

#### Beatrice, Chanelle

Beatrice lives in Trinidad where she was born and identifies as a queer feminist. She holds a BA in Journalism from the University of the West Indies (UWI). She currently works in the Communications and Outreach department at Feminist Caribbean and works as a gender/orientation activist. In her interview, Chanelle comments on gender issues in general but makes special note of the young generation’s openness to freedom of gender expression.

#### Burnett, Ashley A.

Ashley is also a gender/orientation activist who holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Southern Caribbean. In addition to being the founder and managing director at Feminist Caribbean, Ashley also functions as the Project Coordinator at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at UWI. In her interview, Ashley makes important points on the provocative wining dance style being impacted by the #Metoo movement, about her experiences with ongoing homophobia, and her hopes for policy changes in government and businesses related to gender freedom.

#### Cape, Roy

Roy is a legendary Calypso saxophonist from Trinidad and Tobago. His maternal grandparents were from Granada, but he has no information on his American father’s identity. Roy’s musical education began in 1953 at the Belmont Orphanage and includes receiving an honorary degree in 2011 from UWI. As discussed in detail in the dissertation, Roy founded the Roy Cape Foundation, which seeks to bring hope to local Trinbagonians through formal music education. He specifically focuses on uplifting at-risk youths with access to music lessons, instruments, and supplies to prepare them for a possible career in

music. Roy appreciates diaspora carnivals, but he holds the Trinidad Carnival as the mecca originator and emphasizes its importance economically to the island.

### **Edwards, Nneka**

Nneka was born in Canada but moved to Trinidad when she was three years old. She holds a BA in East Asian Studies from McGill University (Montreal, Canada) and an MA in International Cooperation from Yonsei University (Seoul, South Korea). Nneka is a poet, author, and language consultant who is a global citizen. She has spent ten months touring Taiwan and worked one year in Japan teaching English as a Second Language. She identifies as a practicing Christian and notes the deep influence of religion in the Trinbagonian psyche. In her interview, Nneka expresses her views on Carnival as a time for individual and social release. She juxtaposes the warmth of Trinbagonian culture with negative attitudes towards her non-Trini accent. Ultimately, she expresses strong opinions regarding the government supporting people's creativity and protecting and appropriately using the twin islands' natural and creative resources.

### **Ferguson, Heather**

Heather is a retiree who was born in Trinidad but currently resides in New Brunswick, Canada. In her interview, she emphasizes Trinidad's melting pot, or callaloo in the parlance of Trinbago, social configuration but notes she can feel frustrated by Trinbagonian people's negativity towards her non-Trini accent and at times being treated as a token "outsider." Heather makes important points advocating for archiving material objects from colonial history for educational purposes and for deepening the people's sense of continuity and identity.

### **Gomez, Lyndon**

Born in Trinidad, Lyndon holds a BA in Popular Music with a minor in Engineering from Florida Memorial University. He is a music manager at the influential management company VoicetheArtist and owns Purple Robe Entertainment. Lyndon adheres to the concept of Trinidad's Carnival as the mecca of all carnivals, as he notes the event's importance to Trinbagonian identity and economy. He holds a deep love for Caribbean music and supports collaborations across the genres. Lyndon particularly advocates for Trinidad and Tobago to mirror other Caribbean islands and develop cultural ambassadors and other tourism elements to increase the island economy, especially in connection to Carnival. He deeply believes Trinbagonians must represent themselves and claim their identities.

### **Lewis Arri, Lisa L.**

Lisa was born in Dominica and moved to St. Thomas in her mid-twenties. She later lived in Washington, D.C., and now resides in Southern California. She holds a Masters of Law and currently tutors through Professional Tutors of America. In her interview, Lisa offers important views on the inter-Caribbean views among the various island communities, Southern California racism she has experienced from the local Black community, and being welcomed as a tutor by families in Southern California's Russian/Armenian community.

### **Plaza, Lauren**

Lauren was born in Montreal, Canada in the 1960s to Trinidadian parents. She received her early education in Canada, started high school in Trinidad, and finished her secondary education in Montreal. For her higher education, Lauren graduated from the Colin Ives School of Art and Design in Oregon, USA, where she completed her thesis in 2011 entitled “College Students’ Multiracial Identify Perceptions and Experiences of Programs and Associations.” Lauren then received an Education Specialist degree from the University of Aruba. She works as the Principal Consulting/Education Specialist at Lauren Plaza Consulting and is an Advocate and Workshop Facilitator at the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence (CARDV). At Oregon State University, she has taught sociology and psychology classes such as “Culture, Conflict, and Globalization” and “Canadian Economy, Society, and Culture through Film.” In her interview, she makes insightful points regarding the islands’ identities within the Black diaspora, the whiteness presented in Carnival advertising, and classism associated with Carnival. She makes important comments regarding the twin islands’ fusion of food, language, and music and how all these fused aspects of Trinbagonian life mutually reinforce the national identity.

### **Rudder, Isaac**

As the son of famed soca musician David Rudder, the musician Isaac is part of Caribbean music heritage. The internationally educated Isaac earned his BA in Music from Crème Academy in Thailand, BS in Psychology from UWI (Cave Hill Campus), and his Diploma in French Studies from the Universite de Bourgogne. Isaac has lived in more than eight countries, including Trinidad, Barbados, the Netherlands, Norway, France, Belgium, Thailand, and Canada. While he appreciates global culture and diaspora carnivals, he emphasizes the warmth and authenticity of the Trinidad Carnival. As a world traveler, he expresses complex insights into the push-and-pull nature of the Trinbagonian diaspora experience. He adds important analysis on Carnival’s role in manifesting a space of freedom, acceptance, positivity, and transformation. Like Lyndon and Naette, he emphasizes the creativity and potential of the Trinbagonian people.

### **Singh, Trishana**

Trishana holds a BA in History and a postgraduate diploma in International Relations, both from UWI. She works as the Production Coordinator at Caribbean Ideas Synapse and as Treasurer at the Humanitarian Association of Trinidad and Tobago. In her interview, Trishana expresses the common idea of Trinbagonian identity fused with Carnival and that the island’s version equals the mecca. She also openly discusses her nuanced views on the destabilizing of cultural ties among diaspora peoples. She offers important points on the positivity that can be experienced during Carnival and the complex, changing gender roles in terms of liming culture and general Trinbagonian worldviews.

### **Williams, Kearn**

Kearn holds a BA in Journalism with a minor in Cultural Studies from UWI (Mona campus) and an MA in Media and Creative Industries from Loughborough University, London. He serves as the Director of Operations for Karnival by Kandi and as the Research Assistant at the Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago’s National Carnival Commission (NCC). This position provides him with an insider’s view into how this government department functions. In his interview, he discusses the reality of ticket sales preferences and the ways certain female body types are promoted in the advertising and music venues. While he deeply values

Trinidad's Carnival, he holds as a holistic, global view of the various nations' strategies to promote their carnivals and appreciates their systems that foster inclusion for the diaspora and extend tourism in those places. Kearn puts forward interesting points regarding creating an archive of Carnival Reflections and regarding global carnivals working together to uplift and coordinate their festivals.

### **Yoko Lee-Kirilova, Naette**

Naette was born in Trinidad and lives in Maryland where she was pursuing her doctorate at the time of interview. She works as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Maryland and graduate assistant for Research and Programming at the Center for Access, Success, and Achievement. In her interview, Naette contributes important points on the neocolonial structure of the current Trinidad and Tobago government as well as the islands' global position within the Black diaspora. She also offers excellent examples of how the fusion of foods reflect the nation's hybrid culture. Like other interviewees, she expresses the hope that the twin islands' personal skills and natural resources can be supported and appreciated in ways that develop the national identity and economy.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Cultural Identity:**

1. What does culture mean to you?
2. **On Caribbean culture:**
  - a. Is there a Caribbean culture?
    - i. If yes, what is it?
    - ii. If no, why isn't there one?
  - b. What is Trinidadian culture? OR when you think of Trinidadian culture, what do you think about?
  - c. What is Jamaican culture? OR when you think of Jamaican culture, what do you think about?
  - d. What does "limin' culture" mean? OR what does it mean to "lime"? OR how would you define "limin' culture"? OR what role does "liming" play in Trinidadian culture?
  - e. What does slackness culture mean? OR what does it mean to be "slack"? OR how would you define "slackness" culture"? OR what role does "slackness" play in Jamaican culture?
3. What do you think of when you hear the word identity? OR how do you define identity?
4. **On Caribbean Identity:**
  - a. Is there a Caribbean identity?
    - i. If yes, what is it?

- ii. If no, why isn't there one?
- b. What does Trinidadian identity mean? OR how do you define Trinidadian identity? OR What is Trinidadian identity? Or What do you think of when you hear Trinidadian identity?
- c. What does Jamaican identity mean? OR how do you define Jamaican identity? OR what is Jamaican identity? OR what do you think of when you hear Jamaican identity?
- d. When you think about Caribbean identity or culture, do you think about or include first peoples like the Caribs and Arawaks? OR what role do first peoples play in conceptualizing a Caribbean cultural identity and heritage?

5. **On Diaspora:** Questions for people who reside in the Caribbean:

- a. Do you think that people who live abroad, but who were born in the Caribbean, are authentically Caribbean? Why? OR do you consider people who live in diasporic communities are "true" Caribbean people? Why? OR What do you think of when a Caribbean person lives abroad? Are they truly Caribbean?
- b. Do you think that people born abroad, and have Caribbean parents or heritage, are "true" Caribbean people? Why? OR do you think second, third and farther generation of Caribbean heritage/ ancestry born abroad are authentically Caribbean? Why?
- c. Do you think that Trinidadians who live on another Caribbean Island, or internationally, is a "true" Trinidadian? OR What do you think about when you think of a Trinidadian living in another Caribbean Island or abroad? Are they part of the Trinidadian identity?
- d. Do you think that Jamaicans who live on another Caribbean Island, or internationally, is a "true" Jamaican? OR What do you think about when you think of a Jamaican living in another Caribbean Island or abroad? Are they part of the Jamaican identity?
- e. What is at stake in considering diasporic groups to be either insiders or outsiders?
- f. Would you consider someone living in a diaspora an insider or outsider of Caribbean culture?

6. **On Diaspora:** Questions for Caribbean Diasporic Subjects

- a. What does it mean to be Caribbean/Trinidadian/Jamaican?
- b. To what extent do you see yourself as Caribbean? OR do you see yourself as Caribbean? OR do you claim a Caribbean cultural identity?
  - i. Describe your culture
  - ii. Describe your identity
- c. To what extent do you see yourself as Trinidadian? OR do you see yourself as a Trinidadian? OR do you claim a Trinidadian cultural identity?
  - i. Describe your culture
  - ii. Describe your identity
- d. To what extent do you see yourself as Jamaican? OR do you see yourself as a Jamaican? OR do you claim a Jamaican cultural identity?
  - i. Describe your culture
  - ii. Describe your identity

- e. Do you think that Caribbean people living in the Caribbean see those living abroad as “true” Caribbean people? OR do you think that Caribbean people consider diasporic subjects as part of a Caribbean identity?
  - f. Do you think that Trinidadian people living in Trinidad see those living abroad as “true” Trinidadians? OR do you think that Trinidadian people consider diasporic Trinidadians as part of the Trinidadian identity?
  - g. Do you think that Jamaican people living in Trinidad see those living abroad as “true” Jamaicans? OR do you think that Jamaican people consider diasporic Jamaicans as part of the Jamaican identity?
7. **On Gender:** Questions for both Caribbean people who reside in the Caribbean and Caribbean Diasporic Subjects:
- a. When you think about identity, do you think about gender? Why? OR what role does gender play in the formation of Caribbean cultural identities?
  - b. What does it mean to be a Caribbean/Trinidadian/Jamaican man or woman?
    - i. What do you think about people who identify themselves as other genders; that is people who claim to be something other than male or female?
    - ii. Do you know what LGBTQI means?
    - iii. Do you know about LGBTQI Caribbean/Trinidadian/Jamaican movements?
  - c. What do you think about the decriminalization of homosexuality in Trinidad? OR what are the implications of the decriminalization of homosexuality in Trinidad?
  - d. What do you think about the criminalization of homosexuality in Jamaica? OR what are the implications of criminalization of homosexuality in Jamaica?

**Carnival:**

1. What is carnival?
2. What does carnival mean to you?
3. What does carnival mean to the Caribbean? OR what are the implications of carnival in the Caribbean? OR is carnival important to the Caribbean?
4. To what extent is carnival an essential part of Caribbean culture and identity?
5. What do you think about Trinidad’s carnival? OR how do you feel about Trinidad carnival? OR why is Trinidad carnival important?
6. What do you think about Jamaican carnival? OR how do you feel about Jamaican carnival? OR is Jamaican carnival important?
7. Is Trinidad’s carnival perceived as the original Caribbean carnival?
  - a. To what extent is this an accurate perception?
  - b. What is at stake in that claim of originality?
8. How do you think other islands view Trinidad carnival?
9. What do you think about carnival in other Caribbean islands?
10. Do you think that other West Indian carnivals in the Caribbean archipelago or internationally are equally impactful? OR What do you think about West Indian carnivals abroad such as Caribana in Toronto or Miami Carnival?
  - a. Or is Trinidad carnival the most important?
11. Are there any social or political benefits of carnival in the Caribbean or in diasporic communities?

12. What do you consider carnival music?
  - a. When thinking about carnival music do you include sub-genres of soca like chutney soca and ragga soca? OR where does chutney soca and ragga soca fit into carnival spaces?
13. How do you feel when you listen to carnival music?
14. Do you think carnival music is powerful? Explain.
  - a. Do you think carnival music can bring about social change outside carnival spaces?
  - b. Do you think carnival music can help create acceptance for diasporic peoples and LGBTQI communities?
15. As an artist, how does it feel to perform in carnivals outside of Trinidad/ the Caribbean?
16. What are some unexpected places where carnival music is popular?
17. How do you communicate with your fans? OR what do you think your music does for your fans? OR how does your music impact your fans in carnival and in their everyday lives?

### **Cultural Policy:**

1. How do you define culture?
2. How would you define cultural identity?
3. What is the purpose of policy?
4. What is cultural policy? Does this fall under the category of public policy or is this kind of policy its own category?
5. In your opinion, what is the function/purpose of cultural policy?
  - a. What is the role of cultural policy in Trinidad? OR how does cultural policy function in Trinidad? OR what is cultural policy's purpose?
  - b. What is the role of cultural policy in Jamaica? OR how does cultural policy function in Jamaica? OR what is cultural policy's purpose?
6. Is cultural policy important for the Caribbean archipelago? If yes or no, explain.
7. Who are the stakeholders and actors of cultural policy?
8. What are some cultural, geographical, economic, and political considerations that need to be acknowledged/ researched when drafting cultural policy?
  - a. Does cultural identity play a role when drafting cultural policy?
  - b. How do constructs of the nation influence the writing of cultural policy?
  - c. Are diaspora and gender identities considered when drafting cultural policy? OR how do gender identities and diaspora influence the writing of cultural policy?
  - d. Does cultural policy affect constructs of diaspora and gender?

### **Appendix 3: Song Lyrics<sup>408</sup>**

#### **Singer and Song Background:**

The Trinbagonian soca artist Iwer George began his music career in the 1980s and remains one of the biggest names in Trinidad's Carnival. Kes, another Trinbagonian soca artist, headlines the group "Kes the Band," which launched its first album *Three Baldheads and a*

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<sup>408</sup> When formally publishing this document, I will secure all the needed lyric copyright permissions. However, my research indicates it is acceptable to publish copyrighted materials in internally published dissertations. <https://www.writersdigest.com/legal-questions/can-i-use-song-lyrics-in-my-manuscript>

*Dead* in 2006. “Stage Gone Bad” won the Road March title in 2020 and was the most popular song for that carnival season. “According to the official results released by the Trinidad Unified Calypsonians Organization ‘Stage Gone Bad’ was played 386 times on Carnival Monday and Tuesday.”<sup>409</sup>

**“Stage Gone Bad” (2020)  
By Kes and Iwer George**

Bad  
Bad  
Bad  
Bad  
Stage gone bad  
Kes  
Bad  
Iwer  
Bad  
Well x6  
When ah went to Panorama  
De stage was good  
Ah come back for Dimanche Gras  
De stage was good  
Even for Kiddies Carnival  
De stage was nice  
Ah paradise  
It was ah paradise  
But when ah come back on Carnival Day  
and ah hear dem big truck start to play  
Tell them when me and my section  
Touch down is trouble  
Because the stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again  
After we trample Port of Spain  
Tell them the stage nah good again  
Ayyyyyyyy  
Cause  
We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over x2  
Come let we mash it up shell it down and turn it over  
We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over  
Make a mas on de stage  
Jump and throw yuh rag in dey face  
Jump and Make a mas on de stage  
Jump and throw yuh rag in dey face  
Now the people asking  
How could the stage  
How could the stage

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<sup>409</sup> Donstan Bonn, “ ‘Stage Gone Bad’ Captures Road March Title,” *Daily Express*, February 28, 2020, [https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/stage-gone-bad-captures-road-march-title/article\\_4431bab4-58b8-11ea-8d1a-df45fabdcdbf.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/stage-gone-bad-captures-road-march-title/article_4431bab4-58b8-11ea-8d1a-df45fabdcdbf.html).



How could the stage  
Be good when we behaviour so bad  
On de road dun behaviour  
Bad  
Run in every direction  
Bad  
All de gyul in my section  
Bad  
The stage gone bad  
Look at how we behaving  
Bad  
Look at how we behaving  
Bad  
Look at how we behaving  
Bad  
The stage gone bad  
Call de contractor  
Call the mash up doctor  
Call the inspector  
Call the commissioner  
Call the minister  
and Call the fire brigade  
Because the stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again  
The stage nah good again  
When we dismantle Port of Spain  
Tell them the stage nah good again  
Ayyyyyeeeeee  
Cause

We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over x2  
Come let we mash it up shell it down and turn it over  
We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over

Make a mas on de stage  
Jump and Throw yuh rag in dey face  
Jump and Make a mas on de stage  
Jump and Throw yuh rag in dey face  
Now the people asking  
How could the stage  
How could the stage  
How could the stage  
Be good when we behaviour so bad  
Fuh de road  
Bad  
Fuh de Road  
Bad  
Fuh de Road  
Bad  
Fuh de Road  
We getting on  
Bad

Fuh de Road  
 Bad fuh de, bad fuh de, bad fuh de road  
 Jump up, take a jump up  
 Jump up, take a jump up  
 Jump up, take a jump up  
 Hands up, put yuh hands up  
 Hands up, put yuh hands up  
 Well x6  
 Ayyyyyeeeeee  
 Cause  
 We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over x2  
 Come let we mash it up shell it down and turn it over  
 We come to mash it up shell it down and turn it over  
 Stage gone bad  
 Bad x3  
 Stage gone bad  
 Bad x4  
 Stage gone bad

**Singer and Song Background:**

Denyse Plummer began as a Trinbagonian calypso who has evolved to become a gospel singer. She is the daughter of a white Irish father and black mother. Plummer endured intense prejudice due to her white complexion. However, she eventually made a name for herself in the carnival scene. Her song “Nah Leaving” garnered her the respected title of the 2001 Calypso Monarch. Despite the stress of Trinidad life, her song expresses a profound refusal to emigrate from the islands.

**“Nah Leaving” (2001)**  
**By Denyse Plummer**

They say meh country so stressful, so tense  
 With race hate, young jail bait, too much violence  
 Girl pack up and go, this sweet Trinidad  
 I tell dem no way (no way)  
 How de people small-minded, macoscious and loud  
 Of bobol and scandal they boastful and proud  
 Yet somehow I see, all this foolery  
 As window dressing, dey still ah blessing

You see ah just eat ah curry cue  
 Peas, rice and cascado  
 Two crab and callaloo  
 Meh neighbour just gimme  
 Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
 Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap

Where else in de world you know  
 Sweet Pan and Calypso  
 People just overflow two days in the street

Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead

I see a people creative who must overcome  
Make magic from old steel, from rusty old drum  
So why should I fear, some tears here and there  
I tell dem no way (no way)  
Comradery so special like natural instinct  
Dey meet you by de river, is come take ah drink  
Unspoken but kind, no silent bad mind  
So forget New York and and de old talk

You see ah just drink some babash brew  
Puncheon rum and Mountain Dew  
Ah hot plate ah pelau too  
Meh macomere just bring me  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap

Where else in de world you know  
Jump high then wine down low  
And if you don't get on so, dey watch you silly  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead

Mayaro, Maracas Bay (Nah Leaving)  
Savannah wey children play (Nah Leaving)  
De sorrel, de mauby bark (Nah Leaving)  
The corn soup, de bake and shark (Nah Leaving)  
The Oval, see Lara bat (Nah Leaving)  
The picong, de tit-for-tat (Nah Leaving)  
The ritual of Carnival (Nah Leaving)  
The Soca Chutney bachannal (Nah Leaving)

I wake up one morning and before I stretch  
Is fry bake, my doubles, meh nostril done ketch  
And there for my view, an ocean so blue  
I going no where (no where)  
Humming birds and black birds dat sing in de trees  
Chaconia and spices dat pass in de breeze  
Wild meat by de grap, agouti and lappe  
In forest grazing, it so amazing

You see ah just watch ah football match  
Wey Trini and Yankee clash  
So much fun, de balls dat lash  
Meh head still dizzy  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap

Where else in de world you know  
Milk and de honey flow  
Vagrants does bend down low and drink from ah drain  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead

Barbwire, roll wire, we living in jail  
Somehow I know, Denyse will prevail  
As folks will recall, our problems are small  
I going no where (no where)  
The heart of my people is of solid gold  
Of Soca dey move you with rhythm and soul  
So who want to leave, because dey believe  
Dat out dey easy, I say dey crazy

You see ah just eat ah curry-cue  
Peas, rice and cascadox  
Two crab and callaloo  
Meh neighbor just gimme

Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Meh navel string so deep and freedom doh come cheap  
Where else in de world you know  
Sweet Pan and Calypso  
People just overflow two days in the street  
Nah leaving (nah leaving)  
Is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead

Mayaro, Maracas Bay (Nah Leaving)  
Savannah wey children play (Nah Leaving)  
The sorrel, de mauby bark (Nah Leaving)  
The corn soup, de bake and shark (Nah Leaving)  
The Oval, see Lara bat (Nah Leaving)  
The picong, de tit-for-tat (Nah Leaving)  
The ritual of Carnival (Nah Leaving)  
The Soca Chutney bachannal (Nah Leaving)

### **Singer and Song Background:**

Known as the “Queen of Bacchanal,” Destra Garcia is one of the most popular female Trinbagonian musicians, singers, and songwriters of soca music. In 2003, she released her first solo album *Red, White, Black*, which included the single “It’s Carnival.” Featuring the Soca King Machel Montano, this now-classic track became an anthem for the 2003 Carnival and continues to be played at festivals.

**“It’s Carnival” (2003)**  
**By Destra Garcia featuring Machel Montano**

Yeah, baby you know how we do  
You, me  
You tell your friends  
I'll tell mine  
It's dat time again

[verse 1: Destra]  
Carnival in T and T  
Is so special to all ah we  
Like we need blood in we vain  
Dats how we feel about Port-of-Spain  
When de posse dem come in town  
Beating pan and ah bongo drum  
Is madness everywhere  
Carnival is ah true freedom  
Make ah noise or ah joyfull sound  
And jump up in de air  
So...

[Chorus:]  
Everybody take ah jump, take ah jump, take ah jump up now  
Start to wave, start to wave, start to wave up now  
Start to wine, start to wine, start to wine up now  
Because, it's Carnival

[Bridge 1:]  
So put yuh rag dem in de air, in de air, in de air  
Stomp yuh foot dem on de ground, on de ground, on de ground  
And lemme see you jump around, jump around, jump around  
And let dem know we comin' down, comin' down, comin' down  
Yeah ya

[verse 2: Destra]  
All de pettiness have tuh down  
We is de soca vagabonds  
Is madness everywhere  
Marinating under de sun  
Dis is how we does all come one  
And jump up in de air

[Chorus x2]

[Bridge 2:]  
So put yuh bumper like ah truck, like ah truck, like ah truck  
And lemme see yuh push it back, push it back, push it back  
And now yuh ready take ah jump, take ah jump, take ah jump  
Well lemme see yuh jook it up, jook it up, jook it up  
And lemme see yuh roll

[verse 3: Destra]  
Seasons come and seasons go

But Carnival will last  
From Port-of-Spain straight to S'ando  
Take it out, take it out and play ah mas'

[Chorus x2]

[verse 4:]

Carnival when I comin' down  
Jumpin' to dis crazy song  
People spreading rumours in town  
Machel is ah mad man  
You know you love bacchanal  
Is part of dey festival  
All dat is Carnival

[Bridge 3:]

So put yuh flag dem in de air, in de air, in de air  
Stomp yuh foot dem on de ground, on de ground, on de ground  
And lemme see you pull yuh rag, pull yuh flag, pull yuh rag  
And let dem know we comin' down, comin' down, comin' down  
So push yuh bumper like ah truck, like ah truck, like ah truck  
Well lemme see yuh push it back, push it back, push it back  
And when yuh ready take ah jump, take ah jump, take ah jump up now  
Because, it's Carnival

[Outro:]

Watch de ride...  
Push it, push it, push it  
And everybody take ah, take ah, take ah  
And lemme meh see yuh push it, push it, push it  
And everybody take ah, take ah, take ah  
And lemme meh see yuh now  
Like ah truck, like ah truck, like ah  
And lemme meh see yuh take ah wave, take ah wave, take ah  
And lemme meh see yuh take ah jump, take ah, take ah  
And when yuh ready push it, push it, push it  
Yeah, ha

### **Singer and Song Background:**

Brother Marvin, née Selwyn Demming, holds a more controversial place in the Caribbean music scene. In 1996, his powerful anthem “Jahaji Bhai” was a crowd favorite that also stirred controversy in its commentary on the ongoing racial divisions between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian populations.

**“Brotherhood of the Boat” (Jahaji Bhai, 1996)**  
**By Brother Marvin**

*Kumayayo Zindaweyo Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo*

I am the seed of mih father, he is the seed of mih grandfather  
 Who is the seed of *Bahut Ajah* [great grandfather], he came from Calcutta  
 A stick and a bag on he shoulder, he turban and he *kapra*  
 So I am part seed of India, India.  
 The indentureship and the slavery bind together two races in unity [*Achcha dosti* - good  
 friend]  
 There was no more Mother Africa, no more Mother India, just Mother Trini [*Janmabhumi*  
 - homeland]  
 My *Bahut Ajah* planted sugarcane down in the Caroni plain  
 Ramlogan, Basdeo, Prakash and I, *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*.

I would be a disgrace to Allah if I choose race, creed or colour  
*Bahut Ajah* had to make that journey for I to have *Zindagee* [life]  
 So it is a great privilege to have such unique heritage  
 Fifty percent Africa, fifty percent India, India  
 I have "*do chuttee*" two holidays Emancipation and Arrival Day [*Anth bhala to sab bhala*" -  
 all's well that ends well ]  
 Since Fattel Razack made the journey 150 years gone already [*Bahut achcha* -very good]  
 Whether you're Hindu, Muslim or Christian, let's walk this land hand in hand  
 We could only prosper if we try a *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*

Kumayayo Zindaweyo Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo Kumayayo Zindaweyo

*O mera dost mera saathi* [O my friend, my companion]  
*Chal tahalna ek matt agal bagal....* [let's stroll together side by side]

For those who playing ignorant talking 'bout true African descendant  
 If yuh want to know de truth take ah trip back to yuh root  
 And somewhere on that journey, yuh go see ah man in a *dhoti*  
 Saying he prayers in front of a *jhandi, jhandi*  
 Then and only then you'll understand what is ah cosmopolitan nation [*Haat melawo* - let's  
 join hands]  
 There's no room for prejudice at all, united we stand, divided we'll fall [*Bete baat ko garro* -  
 child, pay heed to what I'm saying]  
 So to all races here in Trinbago *Aapko kalyan ho dhaniaho* [May you be blessed, may you  
 prosper]  
 Let us live as one under the sky, *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*  
 Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*

Kumayayo Zindaweyo Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo Kumayayo Zindaweyo

*O mera dost mera saathi* [O my friend, my companion]  
*Chal tahalna ek matt agal bagal....* [let's stroll together side by side]

*Extra verse sung in this rendition:*

Indo and Afro Trinbagonians, we should learn to be one  
Our ancestors came by boat, is de salt water in we throat  
-----, mih great grandpa and grandmama  
One was a slave and one was indentured, indentured  
But the religion neither colour didn't interfere  
With their love for each other, *Nani Nani*  
I am proof of racial unity and that is the way everyone should be [*achcha ----*] Everyone  
should have each one in their prayer  
Let's show each other we care  
As we all know -----, *Jahaji Bhai*  
Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*  
Brotherhood of the boat, *Jahaji Bhai*

Kumayayo Zindaweyo Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo Kumayayo Zindaweyo

*O mera dost mera saathi* [O my friend, my companion]  
*Chal tahalna ek matt agal bagal....* [let's stroll together side by side]

### **Singer and Song Background:**

Erphaan Alves is a Trinidadian soca artist and songwriter who gained recognition when he became a finalist in the Groovy and International Power Soca Monarch Finals. In 2016, Alves founded his “#No Seasons” campaign, which seeks to promote a year-round soca music scene. These ideals are reflected in his song “Soca Global.”

### **“Soca Global” (2019) By Erphaan Alves**

Ah goh go to meh grave to support this thing yeah

Ah goh wuk like slave to build up this thing yeah

No Seasons, is a full time thing dey  
Watch all d vibes da we bring yeah  
Soca bound to reach Broadway  
Don't surprise when the billboard chart we

Tell yuh some ah dem dey does talk the thing  
But I come out here to walk it

Right now Soca music in a nice position,  
To the world we goh cause ruction

So tell them we bad, we badder than bad  
Tell them we mad, we madder than mad

I now to push d soca global



Wa we tell them

In a club in a blocko, dey we ready  
In a fete in d Street, Dey we ready

In a uptown dance everybody ire  
In a downtown dance everybody

There'll be a time I claim  
That the Soca goh reign again  
Kaiso once made the breakthrough  
So let we plant back da rose  
Calypso

But first let we fix local now  
Then we goh take off global now  
All ah d doubters wa know how  
Link the iTunes category now

Tell yuh some ah dem dey does talk the thing  
But I come out here to walk it

Right now Soca music in a nice position,  
To the world we goh cause ruction

So tell them we bad, we badder than bad  
Tell them we mad, we madder than mad

I now to push d soca global  
Wa we tell them

In a club in a blocko, dey we ready  
In a fete in d Street, Dey we ready

In a uptown dance everybody ire  
In a downtown dance everybody

**Singer and Song Background:**

David Rudder is a one of the most well-known Trinbagonian calypsonians. He began his career in 1977 and rose to prominence in 1986 with his collaborations with other artists on the songs "The Hammer" and "Bahia Girl." Rudder now resides in Canada but remains a prominent figure in Caribbean soca music. The song "Trini 2 De Bone" became an anthem that evokes a sense of national pride and patriotism, especially for diaspora persons.

**"Trini 2 De Bone" (2003)  
By David Rudder**

Islands in the sun  
Islands in the fun

Welcome, welcome one and all to de land of fete  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
When it come to bacchanal, well they can't beat we yet  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
Look, sweet women parade abundantly  
De brendren dey full ah energy  
Some people say God is a Trini  
Paradise and all convincing me  
God gave us a spirit- firey  
But nut'in in de world don't bother we  
But look a smart man gone wid we money  
We still come out and mash up de party

(Sweet sweet T and T) Oh how I love up dis country  
(Sweet sweet T and T) No place in dis world I'd rather be  
(Sweet sweet T and T) Oh how I love up meh country  
(Sweet sweet T and T) All dis sugar can't be good for me

(Oh oh) From Toco to Caroni  
(Oh oh) Maravel to Sans Souci  
(Oh oh) From Scarborough to Coco Reef  
(Oh oh) Profiling on Fredrick Street

All these years I spent abroad in de cold, longing to be home  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
God I pray that some sweet day, I will no longer have to roam  
Trini to bone, trini to de bone  
De problems we have are plain to see  
We prove we could stand de scrutiny  
All and all, a true democracy  
How we vote, is not how we party  
There's no place like home some people say  
Though some have to leave to make their way  
But in their hearts I know their destiny  
To come home and big up they country

(Oh oh) From Couva to Signal Hill  
(Oh oh) Arima to Charlotteville  
(Oh oh) Matelot down to Port-A-Spain  
(Oh oh) We playin' mas sun or rain

(rudder chant)  
Look ah Trini gyal dey, she breaking away  
Tobago gyal, oh what a bacchanal  
De men gone wild, de wickedest style  
De gyal look back, dey on de attack  
De style just change, man re-arrange

De fete gone clear, cause nothing can compare to a Trini rising  
Oh no no, nothing can compare to a Trini rising

As crazy as we might seem to be  
We still fight to be a family  
Indian, African or a Chinee  
Serian, French-Creole and Portugese  
We vex with a spirit fiery  
Some people say God is a Trini  
Sweet women parade abundantly  
Now de problem is plain to see

(Oh oh) West Mooring to Locirof  
(Oh oh) From Sando to Mayaro  
(Oh oh) From Penal to Grand Rivière  
(Oh oh) Sweetness in abundance everywhere

No no no no  
Nah nah nah nah nah nah nah  
Sweet T and T

### **Singers and Song Background:**

Machel Montano, known as the Soca King, was born on November 24, 1974, and represents a musician who believes in collaboration and inclusivity. Drupatee Ramgoonai was born on March 2, 1958, in Trinidad to a Hindu family, who taught her classical Indian singing. As the originator of the hybrid music genre of chutney soca, she truly represents an artist who promotes, embraces, and produces syncretic music. Montano and Drupatee's song title and lyrics express their worldview regarding peaceful relations among people of all backgrounds.

### **“Real Unity” (2013)**

**By Machel Montano ft. Drupatee Ramgoonai**

Spoken: Well this one is about uniting a nation!  
Why can't we all get along?  
Why we fuss and fight?  
Tonight we got to unite  
Mister Machel and Drupatee  
Wah yuh say?

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaye  
Ahaan baat ban jaye  
Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaaye  
Ahaan baat ban jaye.

Hear me now! Say...

Nothing wrong with wining on a Indian girl  
Nothing wrong with wining on a Chinee girl  
Nothing wrong with wining on a African girl

Nothing wrong with wining on a Syrian girl  
Is huge unity

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaye  
Ahaan baat ban jaye  
Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaaye  
Ahaan baat ban jaye.

Hear mih story...

Me eating mih curry from Harrylal  
Me invite him out to piece ah pelau  
Leh we take a little jump in the bacchanal  
Take a chook and a wine in the Carnival  
----- and he eating dumpling and dahl  
Curry crab, fry rice from de Chinee gyal  
Now we take a trip down to the Port of Spain  
Make a little stop by the Textile King  
Pretty in we costume with plenty sequin  
'Cause yuh know we love we jumping, jumping  
And that is real unity [huge unity].

Drupatee!

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaye  
Ahaan baat ban jaye  
Come again!  
Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaaye  
Leh me see yuh dancing! Dance together!  
Ahaan baat ban jaye.

Unite the nation, unite the nation!  
This is jam!...This is jam!  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!  
This is jam this is a soca tassa jam!

Har kisi ko chahiye tan ka milan  
Kash mujhpar aaisa dil aapka bhi aaye  
We have to unite the nation!  
Baat ban jaye ahaan baat ban jaye

Watch me now! Say!

Every creed and race, we jumping as one  
Every creed and race could jump in a band  
Love on another, unite the nation  
Prime minister, all politician  
President, police and also -----  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!

Nothing wrong with wining on a Indian girl

Nothing wrong with wining on a Chinee girl  
Nothing wrong with wining on a African girl  
Nothing wrong with wining on a Syrian girl  
Nothing wrong with huge unity [huge unity].

Show me, show me!

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaye  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!

Ahaan baat ban jaye  
Sing it again!

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaaye  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!  
Ahaan baat ban jaye.

Everybody looking at we  
How we wining down in ah unity  
----- is Mister Machel with Drupatee  
----- moving like ah big family  
And that is real unity [huge unity].

----- we jumping up in a band  
Every single man and every woman  
Arawak, Carib, Amerindian  
Unite the nation, unite the nation,  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaye  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!  
Ahaan baat ban jaye

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi main aaye to baat ban jaaye  
Unite the nation, unite the nation!  
Ahaan baat ban jaye.

Everybody hug up together as one together  
And love yuh sister and love yuh brother  
We got to unite the nation, unite the nation!  
Bang ba-dang ba-dang, raise up yuh hand...  
This is not 'bout Carnival you know? Is about cosmopolitan.  
This is jam! Huge unity!

### **Singer and Song Background:**

A Caribbean music icon, Calypso Rose, née Linda McCartha Monica Sandy-Lewis, was born on April 27, 1940, in Tobago. She is a prolific songwriter known as the Mother of Calypso. Rose is also an activist who writes about social issues as evidenced in this song, which can be viewed as a feminist #Metoo anthem.

**“Leave Me Alone” (2016)**  
**By Calypso Rose, ft. Manu Chau and Machel Montano**

Yeah!  
Is Calypso Rose.  
D Calypso Queen of d world.  
Manu Chau, Machel Montano.  
Here how it go! Heh Ha!  
Boy doh touch me  
Like you goin crazy.  
Let go me hand  
Lemme jump up in d band.  
I don't want nobody  
To come and stop me.  
Leave me let me free up,  
Myself let me jump up.  
(Leave me a lone, leave me)  
So leave me alone  
I aint goin home  
Let me party (4X  
Leave we let we party,  
We havin a ball!  
Nobody cant stop we  
No not at all!  
An I dancing  
I I I when yuh see me  
Oi Oi Oi music in me  
I I I, i does break way  
Gettin on bad with somebody.  
So when you see me in d lime  
No matta what d time I ready for d pumping!  
From back in d day.  
Till I whole and I play I prepared for d jumpin!  
If yuh 15 or 25  
If yuh 50 or 75  
Once yuh breathing and you alive  
So we whining all day!  
I aint going home  
So leave me alone  
I aint going home  
So leave me alone  
I aint going

**Singer and Song Background:**

Dubbed the “Queen of Soca,” Alison Hinds is a British-born Bajan soca artist based in Barbados. Though she began her career in 1986, as a singer in the soca Band Square One, Hinds soon began her solo career with her debut album titled “Soca Queen.” Her first hit single “Roll it Gal” focuses on women’s empowerment and boasts several versions due to its powerful message and popularity.

**“Roll it Gal” (2008)  
By Alison Hinds**

[Chorus]

Roll

Roll it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Control it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Roll it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Control it gal, roll it gal

[Verse 1]

When dem fly up in yuh face, gal

Make dem know dem place

Numba one in ah di race, gal

Could neva replace

Independent and yuh strong, gal

And you set di pace

Fit and healthy living long, gal

Free yuhself gal, you got class and you got pride

Come together cause we strong and unified

[Chorus]

Roll

Roll it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Control it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Roll it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Control it gal, roll it gal

[Verse 2]

When dem start to talk and chat, gal

Let dem run dem mouth

You believe in Father God, gal

He will run dem out

Strength and wisdom you must have, gal

Try to seek dem out

Liberate yuhself and live, gal

Thank di father that you've grown and still alive

If you feel me ladies, roll it's time to rise

[Chorus]

Roll

Roll it gal, roll it gal

Roll

Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal

[Bridge]  
Go to school gal, and get yuh degree  
Nurture and take care of yuh pickney  
Gal, yuh work hard to make yuh money  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
If yuh know yuh smart and yuh sexy  
Never let dem abuse yuh body  
Show it off gal, and let di world see  
Roll it gal, roll it gal

[Chorus]  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it  
Roll  
Roll it, roll it  
Roll  
Roll it  
Roll  
Roll it gal

[Interlude]  
Free yuhself gal, you got class and you got pride  
Come together cause we strong and unified

[Chorus]  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal



Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Roll it gal, roll it gal  
Roll  
Control it gal, roll it gal

### **Singer and Song Background:**

The popular Trinidadian soca singer Patrice Roberts began her music career in 1994 by participating in soca competitions. Her music is well-known both in the Caribbean and internationally. Her hit “Big Girl Now” emphasizes women’s freedom of sexual expression. Her 2022 song “Mind My Business” became a viral TikTok sensation. In this recent hit, Roberts revels in her ongoing success as a soca artist in conjunction with her roles as an independent woman and mother. She emphasizes the view that women should never compromise who they are and should keep pushing forward. This feminist, celebratory attitude can be seen in “Big Girl Now” as well.

### **“Big Girl Now” (2017) By Patrice Roberts**

[Intro]  
Patrice again  
Patrice again

[Verse 1]  
I give meh all no turning back  
I wanna wine up wine up  
I not gonna cut no style if any man wanna wine up on meh  
I behaving rude meh bumper slack  
I wanna grine up grine up  
cant you see how i grew up?

[Chorus]  
Das why when i dip down low and bruck it up doh watch me no face  
mind yuh business hush yuh mouth qhen i pelting meh waist yeah  
Imma big woman not ah little girl I now sixteen again  
so doh expect me too be the same cuz  
I's a a big girl now  
watch how meh fat bumper wokin it wokin from night til morning  
and i doh give a damn cuz  
I'sa big girl now  
expensive liquor i drinking have meh licences now i driving  
so dont judge me now

[Verse 2]  
they used to go out and leave me all d time  
they used to go out, fete and enjoy the lime  
now i turn a big woman i not wasting time i feel like i miss out a big part of meh life

[Chorus]

Das why when i dip down low and bruck it up doh watch me no face  
mind yuh business hush yuh mouth qhen i pelting meh waist yeah  
Imma big woman not ah little girl I now sixteen again  
so doh expect me too be the same cuz  
I's a a big girl now  
watch how meh fat bumper wokin it wokin from night til morning  
and i doh give a damn cuz  
I'sa big girl now  
expensive liquor i drinking have meh licences now i driving  
so dont judge me now

[]

oh, oh, ooohhh  
oh, oh, ooohhh  
oh, oh, ooohhh  
oh, oh, ooohhh

[Verse 3]

I giving my all no tolling back  
I wanna wine up wine up  
I not gonna cut so stlye if any man wanna wine up on me  
I behaving rude meh bumper slack  
I wanna grine up grine up  
can't you see how I grew up

[Chorus]

Das why when i dip down low and bruck it up doh watch me no face  
mind yuh business hush yuh mouth qhen i pelting meh waist yeah  
Imma big woman not ah little girl I now sixteen again  
so doh expect me too be the same cuz  
I's a a big girl now  
watch how meh fat bumper wokin it wokin from night til morning  
and I doh give a damn cuz  
I'sa big girl now  
expensive liquor i drinking have meh licences now i driving  
so dont judge me now

[Outro]

I's a big girl now  
Bumpa rockin'  
Night 'til morning  
I's a big girl now (x3)  
now (x4)  
I's a big girl now!

**Singer and Song Background:**

Princess Anisa, née Anisa Singh, is the lead singer for an International Chutney Soca Band known as The Supertones Band. Her cheeky queer anthem “Tek Sunita” (Nadia’s Reply) won the 2011 video for the year at the West Indian Music Awards.

**“Tek Sunita” (Nadia’s Reply, 2009)  
By Princess Anisa Lyrics**

If you know what went on  
In yuh bruk up Corolla  
Mek Sunita leave you and go  
Because I do it better

Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
If you know what went on

In yuh bruk up Corolla  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva

You say you want to grow old  
With my Suni  
But the gyal tell me you old a'ready  
Is no wonder then  
She catch you with she Nani

Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
If you know what went on  
In yuh bruk up Corolla  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva

Sunita tell me how you  
Does drink rum whole night  
And when she start to complain  
It's one fuss and fight  
So while you gone, boy  
Ah mek she feel real nice

Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
If you know what went on  
In yuh bruk up Corolla

Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva

Only a woman knows what it takes  
To make another woman's  
Legs start to shake  
So in your car, boy, it  
Was a real earthquake

Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
If you know what went on  
In yuh bruk up Corolla  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva  
Tek Sunita from Barataria  
And bring she to Couva

### **Singer and Song Background:**

Destra Garcia's hit "Max it Up" was produced as a single from her 2006 album *Independent Lady*. It captures the exuberant physical and emotional release that can be found in carnivals.

### **"Max it Up" (2006) By Destra Garcia**

(Jumping jumping) Ah wanna see you jumping  
(Pumping pumping) Everybody start d waving now  
(Reach de top) rag in de air, flag in de air DE SOCA GONE Clear  
(And we deserve to max it up, max it up max it up)

*[chorus:]*

Everybody start de jumping jumping  
Take out allyuh rag and start de waving, waving  
Max it up and take it to d limits boy  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it, up, max it up

*[verse 1:]*

Ah say we love mas, ah say we love brass  
Yuh know we love steel band and chutney and tassa  
So come out de pass and step on de gas  
Is time for we culture to go ah step further  
This year we want platinum, forget about minimum, soca on de maximum  
So leh we max it up, max it up, max it up, max it up

*[chorus:]*

Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Max it up and keep de party pumping pumping

Take it to d limits till we reach d top  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it up, max it up  
Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Take out allyuh rag and start de waving, waving  
Max it up and take it to d limits boy  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it, up, max it up

*[verse 2:]*

Hip-hop in we rass, jazz in we rags  
Dey done hear de disco, de rock, and de reggae  
De best must come last, let we fix it fast  
Is time for d soca to rock with dem up dey  
On de road is platinum, in de fete is maximum  
Forget about minimum  
So leh we max it up, max it up, max it up, max it up

*[chorus:]*

Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Max it up and keep de party pumping pumping  
Take it to d limits till we reach d top  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it up, max it up  
Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Take out allyuh rag and start de waving, waving  
Max it up and take it to d limits boy  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it, up, max it up

(Maaaaaaax it up) oh father finally u set de soca free

(Maaaaaaax it up) We on category inside ah d carni...

(Maaaaaaax it up) And now yuh blessing we internationally

(Maaaaaaax it up) So wen yuh watching me feel proud ah we on MTV and BET and dE  
Grammys is all ah we so support yuh soca music, so put yuh soca music. Yes yuh IDENTITY

*[chorus:]*

Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Max it up and keep de party pumping pumping  
Take it to d limits till we reach d top  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it up, max it up  
Whole year we only jumping, jumping  
Take out allyuh rag and start de waving, waving  
Max it up and take it to d limits boy  
Cause we deserve to max it up, max it, up, max it up *[x3]*

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