Playing and Praying: The Politics of Race, Religion, and Respectability in Trinidad Carnival

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ABSTRACT

Theorizing carnival throughout the Americas means dealing not only with class and social issues in the context of modernity but also with the complexities of slavery, indentureship, colonialism, and neocolonialism reflected in this pre-Lenten festival. Dealing with carnival generally, it is impossible to separate its Christian, primarily Catholic, framework from the politics of its evolution and development. In the Americas, and in the island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in particular, the carnival story is further complicated by deeply embedded African and Asian influences. In a nation in which political parties are still largely race-based, with the division identified as “Afro-” or “Indo-,” politics are entwined not only with race and religion but also with class distinctions that realign supposed antagonists. This article traces the Afro-Trinidadian People’s National Movement (PNM) party’s paradoxical attempt to claim carnival as a national festival, while negating the essence of the emancipation carnival narrative that underlay its claim. It then examines warrior traditions crucial to that narrative. Afro-based *kalinda*, the martial art form that spawned stickfighting (or *bois*, as it is called in patois, with the fighters known as “boismen”) intermingled with Indo-identified stickfighting known as *gatka*, and the Indo-based, whipcracking *jab jabs* (devil-devils). Though racially distinct, these Afro- and Indo- traditions, which are actively being revived today, share world views (radically different from the ethos of Christian “respectability”) that honor the living presence of ancestors, acknowledge conflict as basic to life, respect nature as a living partner in human community, and practice rituals that are as sacred and protective as they are fundamentally violent.

1. This essay is dedicated to my close friend and academic partner Tony Hall, who died unexpectedly on April 27, 2020. A Trinidadian filmmaker, playwright, and teacher extraordinaire, he assisted me throughout the research for this article.

2. Initially colonized by the Spanish, Trinidad was ceded to the English by the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, after a virtually bloodless invasion by General Abercrombie in 1797. However, in an attempt to keep the sparsely settled island, known in the eighteenth century mainly as the Gateway to El Dorado, the famed city of gold, in Catholic hands, the Spanish had in 1783 signed a Cedula of population, granting land to any Catholic settlers, with additional land for each enslaved worker. French Creoles answered this call, so that by the time the English controlled the island, the largest free population was French Creole (with a mixture of what were known as “free coloureds,” whom the English did not want to enfranchise). The history of Trinidad throughout the nineteenth century was, thus, distinctive as it did not have a single colonizing hegemony. It was governed by the Protestant English who created the Crown colony system for this colony, governing from England through a governor rather than an elected parliamentary body, in order to avoid the problem of the numerous “free coloureds.” The English made the laws, but remained in differing degrees of tension with the Catholic French and Spanish elites. There were also both English- and French patois-speaking underclasses. Following emancipation, which was completed in 1838, beginning

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The Trinidad Carnival carries a heavy symbolic, economic, and political burden: it is a “national theatre,” the foundation of cultural heritage, and the centerpiece of a tourism industry.

—John Hearne, *Trinidad Guardian*, 1962

A gayelle is like a portal, a place to access transcendence ... kalinda and jab are their own thing. Beyond religion and politics.

—John Stewart, 2013

Theorizing carnival throughout the Americas means dealing not only with class and social issues in the context of the industrializing forces of modernity but also with the complexities of enslavement, indentureship, colonialism, and neocolonialism reflected in this pre-Lenten spring festival. Dealing with carnival in general, it is impossible to separate its Christian, primarily Catholic, framework from the politics of its evolution and development. In the Americas, and in the island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) in particular, the carnival story is further complicated not only by competing European elites (Spanish and French, Catholic and Protestant English), but also by deeply embedded African and Asian influences.² In a nation in which political parties are still to some extent race-based, with the division identified primarily as “Afro-” or “Indo-,”³ politics are entwined not only with race and religion but also with class distinctions that realign supposed antagonists.

In the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, pre-Lenten carnival is characteristically figured as profane, the last carnivorous hurrah before the ascetic discipline of Lent. However, reflecting what Aisha Khan calls “the deeply religious character of Trinidadian society,” in T&T this formula does not hold.⁴ The Afro-Trinidadian People’s National Movement (PNM) party, led by Oxford PhD and ex-Howard University professor Eric Williams, sacralized carnival itself as the symbol of the new nation that gained its independence in 1962. At the heart of that claim lay a contradiction. The 1956 “Trinidad Carnival Issue” of the *Caribbean Quarterly*, which identified carnival with its nineteenth-century “traditional” origins, solidified the idealization of T&T Carnival as an Afro-Trinidadian emancipation festival. However, political governance was firmly in middle-class hands. According to Scott B. McDonald, “by 1962 party politics were firmly established as a middle sector realm. Both the PNM and the D[emocratic] L[abour] P[arty] were nationalistic, largely pro-capitalist, and led by elites that were overwhelmingly middle class in composition. During a brief period of accommodation between the two parties, a tacit, yet uneasy class ‘alliance’ emerged.”⁵ Claiming a carnival that had been shaped in the cauldron of resistance, the PNM attempted to impose on that festival the sober work ethic of its puritanical, British-educated, middle-class “Afro-Saxon” government.⁶

Acting almost as an arm of the government, the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper in the decade leading up to independence repeatedly reinforced PNM exhortations to good behavior. Established in 1917, the *Guardian* is the longest continuously running T&T newspaper. After World War I, the conservative *Port of Spain Gazette* continued to denounce carnival. The Port of Spain evening paper, *Argos*, with a publisher of “Chinese ancestry” whose “editor and staff were black

in 1845, Hindu and (lesser numbers of) Muslim Indian indentured workers replaced the Africans on estates, thus further complicating the racial and religious distinctions. Tobago, which in 1976 became a partner in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, has a separate history. Though conquered by many different European powers, its primary population is Afro- in origin, with English as the primary language and Britain as the main colonizing power. Tobago did not celebrate carnival until the 1920s. Thus, its history is distinct and will not be considered in detail in this study.

3. Throughout this article, "Indian" refers to those whose ancestors came from the subcontinent of India (largely from the north), not to indigenous populations. Indian and African refer to sites of origin and will usually be identified as Indo- and Afro-.

4. *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 19. Such expressions thread through Carnival mas (illustrated by Peter Minshall), music (Andre Tanker, Atakan, Brother Resistance, David Rudder all sing songs of the divine), and even, as will be illustrated in this paper, Power Soca.

5. Scott B. McDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 145.

6. Economist Lloyd Best coined the term "Afro-Saxon" (1965) to designate those of African descent who identify with the ruling white colonial class. See Lise

creoles of liberal persuasion," was, in the terms of Philip W. Scher, "the mouthpiece of the colored middle classes," urging Governor Chancellor to resume carnival in 1919 but insisting on reform while billing itself as the voice of the people against the *Guardian* (representing the elite), which sponsored the "Victory Carnival" of 1919, in Port of Spain at the Queen's Park Savannah and in San Fernando. *Argos* "was eventually forced to cease publication." The *Trinidad Guardian*, still publishing, reinforced the focus on Europeanized, middle-class "respectability."

Using the *Guardian* archives as a primary source, this article first traces the PNM's paradoxical attempt to claim carnival as a national festival, while negating the essence of its history. Then, calling on my nearly three decades of experience, field work/interviews, and research in Trinidad (1991–2019), I examine warrior traditions crucial to the emancipation carnival narrative, which undermined the attempt to enshrine as Afro-Trinidadian a politely tamed, European-influenced festival. Afro-based *kalinda*, the martial art form that spawned stickfighting (or *bois*, as it is called in patois, with the fighters known as "boismen"), intermingled with Indo-identified stickfighting known as *gatka* and the Indo-based, whipcracking *jab jabs* (devil-devils). Though racially distinct, these Afro- and Indo- traditions, which are actively being revived today, share a worldview radically different from the ethos of Christian "respectability." Despite differences in origin, these traditions share beliefs in the ancestral presence that guides the present path, follow similar processes of spiritual preparation, and collectively pay homage to human community as a component of the natural environment.

Neither stickfighting nor whipcracking originated in carnival. The traditions from which they derived were carried to Trinidad, where they evolved within the local Afro- and Indo- communities. T&T Carnival provided the opportunity to publicly perform ritualized martial arts that were in essence religious rites, throughout the island of Trinidad (and ultimately Tobago) in "rings" and "gayelles" (stickfighting rings). In the southern fishing village of Cedros, both stick- and whipfighting occurred as part of the nominally Shi'ite Muharram festival of Hosay. While *kalinda* and *jab*, unlike *gatka*, have for well over a century evolved as forms of carnival mas, they exemplify the ritual practices and religious enactments of enslaved and indentured workers and their descendants, for whom playing is inevitably a form of praying.

Figure 1. Keegan Taylor, co-founder and a current director of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, 2015. Note that the National Carnival Commission-organized finals are not in a gayelle. Photograph by Maria Nunes. All Nunes photographs used by permission of photographer.

Winer, "Afro-Saxon," *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago: On Historical Principles* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press), 7. For a discussion of the ambiguous middle-class attempts to regulate carnival, in relationship to the emergence of "the spirit of canboulay" in the second half of the twentieth century, see Pater van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival: The Quest for National Identity* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1997), esp. 240–56.

7. See John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 208–22, quotations 208, 211, 222, for the post-World War I information; see Philip W. Scher, *Carnival and the Formation of a Caribbean Transnation* (Gainesboro: University Press of Florida, 2003), 45–49, quotation on 46.

8. Quoted in the *Trinidad Guardian*, Friday, March 2, 1962, 1.

9. Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 223.

10. Though this division has been recognized for a few years, 2019 was the first year in which there were two separate Monarchs, one for Power Soca and one for Groovy Soca.

11. "Iwer George - Water Blessings - International Soca Monarch Finals 2019 - Trinidad Carnival 2019," Soca Nation Live, YouTube video, March 2, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dISKVOUqf4&list=RDxdlSKVOU-qf4&start_radio=1.

"Fun without Violence": Cleaning Up and Claiming Carnival as a National Festival

"Play mask, stay sober, and do not misbehave."
—Eric Williams, 1962⁸

There is now both a calypso monarch and a soca monarch in Trinidad Carnival each year. Soca, a term derived from "soul calypso," is, as Jocelyn Guilbault has called it, a "musical offshoot" of calypso:

with which it shares the same space, namely, carnival. Since 1993, soca has used the conceptual framework and infrastructure of competitions that informs the calypso music industry to gain legitimacy and recognition.... [S]oca's sounds ... perform their own version of nation in carnival.⁹

Soca has recently been divided into two categories, "power soca," with a pounding, driving beat, and "groovy soca," somewhat more mellow and melodic.¹⁰ In 2019, each had its own champion, with competitions in the same venue on the same day. The finals took place as usual on the Friday before Carnival Tuesday.

In the International Soca Monarch Finals on March 1, 2019, Trinidadian (Neil) Iwer George began his performance draped in a long robe, before a large, projected Trinidad flag, proclaiming: "I am a king. I came because I had no choice. I came to save Power Soca, my home and the people I love, my country." A female back-up chorus then sang, "When Jesus say it, no one can say no ... because I am blest," before George, divested of his robe, began to sing, positioned before a screen portraying him as Neptune, God-King of the Sea, below "WaTerblessing," the name of his soca, the "t" modified as a cross.¹¹ As he made clear throughout the performance, George portrayed himself as an already crowned king/god-figure, a Jesus of the sea, savior of his island, while appealing to national loyalty to defeat the leading contender, Mr. Killa (Grenadian Hollice Jonah Mapp). As powerful as it was, this combination of religion and nationalism did not earn him the crown. Killa took it home to Grenada, along with the TT \$1,000,000 prize.

Figure 2. "WaTerblessings," Iwer George projected as Neptune, International Soca Monarch Finals, March 1, 2019. Image designed for singles CD cover for "WaTerblessings." Graphic Designer Kyle Awon. Used with Permission.

12. Grenada, an island close to Trinidad, has had its own Caribbean-style carnival for many decades; one of Trinidad's leading calypsonians, (the Mighty)

Sparrow (Slinger Francisco), is Grenadian. Indeed, Point Fortin, lower George's home, is a locus of Grenadian immigrants, as critics were quick to point out, raising questions about George's own ancestry.

13. Woodford Square is a large, central, park-like square in Port of Spain, across from both City Hall and the Red House, which served as the seat of government for many years. Williams created this "university," as he called it, by lecturing to masses of people in the square in 1955, consolidating his political base. His first lecture was said to have drawn 20,000 people.

14. Thirteen years before the creation of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1976.

15. The Carnival Queen competition was essentially a beauty contest (which added a costume component), "part of [a] programme of moral and cultural 'cleaning.'" See Rochelle Rowe, *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood: Race, Nation and Beauty Contests, 1929–70* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988), chapter 2.

16. Rex Nettleford, "Implications for Caribbean Development," in *Caribbean Festival Arts: Every Little Piece of Difference*, ed. John Nunley and Judith Bettleheim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 183.

17. Statement in the *Trinidad Guardian*, March 2, 1962, 1.

Mr. Killa was not the only Grenadian to score big in the "International Soca Monarch" competition in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 2019, nor was he the first.¹² Nonetheless, the combination with which George chose to make his plea—claiming carnival (and soca) for Trinidad, while using the medium to confer a "waTerblessing" on his island, partly for commercial reasons (to win the prize and keep the money home)—captures the religious fervor with which this festival has been embraced as the "national" celebration of T&T, conferring blessings on this favored isle, but with commercially inflected conditions.

Claiming carnival as the national festival did not originate in the 1950s, but it was highlighted in the process of declaring independence. As the short-lived, ten-island Federation of the West Indies stumbled toward its dissolution in the early 1960s, in Trinidad the newly established PNM (Afro-based) party won the national election in 1956, with Oxford PhD, ex-Howard University history professor, and self-professed lecturer to the people in the "University of Woodford Square"¹³ Dr. Eric Williams assuming his two-year role as chief minister. Then, rebounding from an electoral loss, in 1961 Williams was elected prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, which would become independent in August 1962.¹⁴

In 1957, the year following the first PNM victory, Williams's government established the Carnival Development Committee and created the Band of the Year judging category, with the Queen of the (Mas) Bands competition to begin in 1959 (as a rival to the Jaycees ballgown Carnival Queen competition that had begun after World War II, initially sponsored by the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper¹⁵). Though the PNM lost the election in 1958 to the rival Democratic Labour Party (DLP), in the next few years, "developing" carnival—both artistically and economically—became part of what Rex Nettleford would later call "nation-building," with "the manipulation of symbols, festivals included," clearly in Afro-Trinidadian hands.¹⁶ By 1962, the year of independence, Williams claimed carnival as Trinidad's "national festival":

I hope that every one, citizen and foreigner, hosts and guests, masqueraders and spectators, will enjoy every minute of our national festival, and contribute to making this year's Carnival as colourful, as spectacular, as law-abiding, as orderly and as successful as anyone can reasonably ask for. Play mask, stay sober, and do not misbehave.¹⁷

The following year, in the first postindependence (1963) carnival, Afro-Trinidad playwright and carnival scholar Errol Hill directed and Chinese-Trinidad artist Carlisle Chang designed the Sunday-night gala known as Dimanche Gras,¹⁸ using "traditional" carnival characters as a base to inaugurate the new nation. The recently instituted Queen of the Bands and the Calypso King competitions were the capstones of a carefully orchestrated show. A traditional carnival character called the Baby Doll gave birth on stage.¹⁹ The newly crowned Calypso King (Sparrow, singing "Dan is the man in the van" and "Kennedy and Khrushchev") and the Queen of Carnival bands (Miss Kay Christopher, portraying a high priestess of the Etruscans from Edmond Hart's historical mas band) were named "godparents" of this infant, signifying T&T itself. The birth of the nation was memorialized in carnival drama drawing heavily on Trinidadian folklore:

By winning their respective crowns, King Sparrow and Queen Kay earned the right to be godparents of Baby Doll's infant, who was named by Papa Bois, the Independent Nation of Trinidad and Tobago, in Errol Hill's well-co-ordinated extravangaza [sic]. The capacity audience, which included the Governor-General and Lady Hochoy

18. Errol Hill's *Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1972), was a seminal history, though its focus on carnival as a "mandate for a national theatre" somewhat underplayed the street carnival. Chang also designed carnival mas, particularly for bands led by another Chinese-Trinidadian, Stephen Lee Yeung. He headed the group that designed the Trinidad and Tobago flag, red, white, and black instead of blue. Chang is one of a number of Chinese artists, masmen, and designers to participate in Trinidad Carnival. In 1998, he traced their presence in an article entitled "Chinese in Trinidad Carnival," in *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

19. The customary form of this mas is for a woman to carry a doll "baby" on the street, accosting random men and asking them to acknowledge the child as theirs, and to pay for it. There is a similar character in New Orleans Mardi Gras.

20. *Trinidad Guardian*, February 26, 1963, 2. Douæna are mythically unborn children who have lost their way; Pierrot Grenades are carnival figures dressed in patchy strips of cloth who "spell" words creatively, a variant of the Pierrot figure; soucouyants are blood-sucking females, who shed their skin. They represent a combination of folklore figures and carnival characters.

21. "The Usual Medley of Vigour," *Trinidad Guardian*, March 15, 1962, 5; note that the merger of steel and tribal drums with "the

and the Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams, saw earth spirits, douæna, Pierrot Grenades, soucouyants, and a host of dancers.²⁰

Adopting carnival as the national festival meant self-consciously revisiting carnival history, particularly the nineteenth century when the significant Afro-presence in carnival was established, and—as evidenced in the 1963 Dimanche Gras—reviving the "traditional carnival characters" or the "culture bearers." Performances focusing on the "traditional characters" sometimes merged T&T steel drums with European instruments, as for instance, Beryl McBurnie's 1962 pre-carnival dance concert *Quibama*, at the Little Carib Theater, in which, according to Derek Walcott, "[McBurnie] has now been able to cohere such instruments as the fiddle, the steel drum, the tribal drum and a choir, and when these are used together, as they are in the most successful item of the show, 'African,' the effect is powerful and moving."²¹

Significantly, 1956, the year that the PNM won its first election, was also the year in which the *Caribbean Quarterly* (CQ) brought out its special "Trinidad Carnival Issue," in which Andrew Pearse focused on "Carnival in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad" while Daniel Crowley catalogued "The Traditional Masques of Carnival," the two events coalescing around each other. As the editor of the 1988 CQ reprint, Kim Johnson, puts it:

In 1956 the People's National Movement won the elections. And if this represented, in Ivar Oxaal's phrase, "black intellectuals come to power," the cement for this nationalist movement was, to a great extent provided by carnival. If, in every other West Indian territory the nationalist movement had its trade union arm, in Trinidad the PNM had the steelbands. This relationship, unseen by most sociologists and political analysts, lies at the heart of Trinidad and Tobago's modern history.²²

Johnson might well have added mas bands and calypso, which along with steel (or pan) bands constitute the major divisions of Trinidad Carnival competition. However, the contradiction at the heart of the PNM nationalist claim may be illustrated by looking at how the Steel Band Association urged its members to modify their behavior during carnival. Steel band performances had typically included "clashes" on the street, which at times could turn violent. Pan yards themselves had initially been regarded as "bad john" enclaves, with "respectable" middle-class youth forced to sneak off to play pan. Now pan itself was on the verge of being declared the "national instrument" of the new nation. This called for a change of behavior. Steel band leaders in 1962 met with the police to assist in regulating the carnival;²³ in 1963 the Steel Band Association sent "a special notice to members, urging them to conform to the type of behavior which should be coupled with the new status of steelbandsmen and of our country." Trophies were offered for good behavior. In making these accommodations, neither the government nor the steel bandsmen took into account the distinction between what is called "bad john" behavior—thug-like, unruly, chaotic violence—and the ritualized ethos of contestation and challenge at the heart of the emancipation carnival, from which steel bands had directly descended.²⁴

According to Rondel Benjamin, founder of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, as steel drums became "respectable," gaining sponsorship and status within the ruling middle class, kalinda was—in contrast—pushed aside; stickfighters essentially went underground (in Benjamin's estimation, possibly protecting them from gentrification; see the appendix to this essay). Williams and the PNM made their alliance with the increasingly "respectable" steel band movement.

fiddle" and a "choir" is named
"African."

22. Kim Johnson, introduction to
*Trinidad Carnival: A Republica-
tion of the Caribbean Quarterly
Trinidad Carnival Issue* (Vol. 4,
Nos. 3–4 of 1956) (Port of Spain,
Trinidad: Paria Publishing Com-
pany, 1988), xxii.

23. *Trinidad Guardian*, March 3,
1962, 2.

24. The steel bands were not so
easily reined in. There was, for
instance, a violent clash at carni-
val in 1965 between steel bands
Tokyo and Casablanca in which
several were wounded. See *Trini-
dad Guardian*, March 2, 1965, 1.

25. Pamela Franco, "The Invention
of Traditional Mas and the Politics
of Gender," in *Trinidad Carnival*,
ed. Garth L. Green and Philip W.
Scher (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 2007), 36.

26. Calypso Sparrow, 1963,
quoted in Louis Regis, *The Polit-
ical Calypso: True Opposition in
Trinidad and Tobago, 1962–1987*
(Gainesville: University Press of
Florida and The Press University
of the West Indies, 1999), 16–17.

27. See Cowley, *Carnival, Canbou-
lay and Calypso*; Bridget Brereton,
"Carnival in Nineteenth-Century
Trinidad," in *Carnival: Culture in
Action*, 5; for a history of race
relations, see also Brereton, *Race
Relations in Colonial Trinidad,
1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cam-
bridge University Press, 1979).

However, Williams's exhortations to "stay sober" had been directed primarily at foreign as well as local masqueraders in mas bands, not in steel bands. The Afro-centric PNM nationalist theme was perhaps reinforced most effectively in George Bailey's 1957 mas band "Back to Africa," the winner of the Band of the Year award, beating out Harold Saldenah's "The Glory That Was Greece." Bailey had dignified the return to the mythically evoked, reimagined homeland of "Africa," portraying it not as a society of "Juju" warriors but in the style of elegantly costumed European (especially Greek and Roman) history bands, like Saldenah's. As Pamela Franco explains, "Some carnival aficionados interpreted Bailey's triumph over Saldenah as Africa's triumph over Europe (colonialism)."²⁵

Williams's political victory, as the first Afro-Trinidadian chief minister, was symbolically reinforced by "Africa's triumph over Europe," highlighting the Afro-base of both Williams's constituency and of carnival. However, the Africa that triumphed was far different from the African presence that in the nineteenth century took to the streets in what came to be known as the *jamette* (beyond the boundary) street carnival or the predawn *cannes brûlées* (*canboulay*, burning of the cane) or *jour ouvert* (break of day, now called *jouvay*) celebration, all components of emancipation carnival, with its emphasis on resistance and ritualized violence, claiming power as one's right, despite authorities who would deny that power. The street carnival (as distinct from the Euro-centric carnival balls and house visitations) had from the mid-nineteenth century taken on the character of an Afro-Trinidadian emancipation festival, essentially using the period of license allowed for masking on the two or three days before Ash Wednesday as an opportunity to celebrate and effectively to reclaim emancipation, which had been finalized on August 1, 1838 (after a four-year phasing in).

Now, by claiming carnival as the signifier of the new nation, Afro-Creole Trinidadians, under the leadership of Dr. Williams and the PNM government, configured the move into independent nationhood as firmly in Afro-Trinidadian control, but with an eye always on internationally marketing both carnival and Trinidad itself, as what calypsonian (The Mighty) Sparrow in 1963 designated as a "model nation."

*Trinidad and Tobago will always live on
Colonialism gone, our Nation is born...
Spread the word anywhere you pass
Tell the world there's a model nation at last.*²⁶

Herein lies the paradox at the heart of what it meant for a new government to claim, attempt to regulate, and most of all *market* a carnival that had evolved from the festive resistance of an oppressed, formerly enslaved population. Williams's appeal for good behavior—"Play mask, stay sober, and don't misbehave"—ironically echoed a theme sounded frequently in Trinidad Carnival from the mid-nineteenth century on and aimed at Afro-Creoles. The bands of "vagabonds" who established the emancipation carnival, idealized in the 1950s and 60s as heroic ancestors, had been denounced as "vile wretches," singing "obscene songs" and performing "lewd dances," "howling like demons," or "exhibiting hellish scenes."²⁷ Now, although the accusations were muted in appeals directly to revelers, a similar moral standard was being used by an Afro-Trinidadian government to control a portion of its own racial constituency.

At the time of independence, the PNM's appeal for good behavior became a virtual law-and-order mantra, the clarion call of Puritan-influenced, middle-class ruling elites taking their cue from their

28. To provide just one example of many, a *Trinidad Guardian* editorial in 1965 suggested "that the Tourist Board really throw its weight into realizing the tremendous amount of publicity to be gained for the country by the proper promotion of Carnival abroad" ("For Bleary Eyes," March 1, 1965, 6).

29. Peter J. Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 233, quoted in Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 158.

30. For a discussion of Wilson in relationship to T&T Carnival, see Scher, *Carnival and the Formation of A Caribbean Transnation*, 31–53; see also Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival*, 177–91.

colonial predecessors. The *Trinidad Guardian*, a sponsor of the 1919 Victory Carnival and first sponsor of the Carnival Queen (essentially beauty) contest, was the self-appointed promoter of carnival as virtually everything that the explosive, resistant, Afro-derived emancipation festival was not: "respectable," well-mannered, "fun without violence," nothing risked.

The impulse to claim the festival nationally involved marketing T&T Carnival to tourists (and measuring its success by the number of filled hotel rooms).²⁸ This heightened the stakes for taming carnival, in the name of the nation and its commerce. "Senator Ronnie Williams, chairman of the CDC, yesterday reminded masqueraders: 'Play mask but play it in the spirit of give and take. Let us maintain our reputation for fun without violence,'" announced the *Guardian* front page on February 24, 1963. Eight years earlier, on February 20, 1955, a *Guardian* editorial had framed this issue thus:

Carnival and calypso in Trinidad have received so much favourable publicity of late that it behooves us to make special endeavours to prove that we can really keep this season free of the grosser undesirable features....We wish Carnival to be bright, gay and agreeable, with a twinkle of mischief in its eye and a fascinating insouciance in the tilt of its nose and the toss of its head. But we wish no steelband clashes, no broken pates, no obscenity. Regulations ought to be obeyed; they should not have to be enforced. In this connection we commend the Port-of-Spain City Council's Carnival Improvement Committee for offering trophies for the best-behaved band of masqueraders as well as the best-dressed band. (p. 6)

Carnival was here anthropomorphized, described as if it were a charming lass, little Miss Jekyll, as it were, whose toss of the head, tilt of the nose, and safely mischievous "twinkle" in her eye concealed a Mr. Hyde whose "grosser undesirable features" had to be hidden from public view. However, Trinidad Carnival was not a single festival with a split personality, one charmingly benign and one monstrous. It was at the very least an amalgam of two different celebrations: the "respectable" one originating in Europe as a pre-Lenten carnival replete with masquerade balls, affirming class and status in its well-behaved elegance; the other, the "steelband clashes, broken pates, and [presumed] obscenity," was the festival of the "vagabonds." It owed its origins to enslaved Africans. Bred in conditions of deprivation and oppression, it produced kalinda, calypso, and steel drums.

The effort to make carnival "respectable" may have driven kalinda temporarily underground. However, "respectability" itself is, in colonial terms, a suspect concept. Peter J. Wilson defines "respectability" as "the normal force behind the coercive power of colonialism and neo-colonialism."²⁹ Wilson's paradigm of "respectability" versus "reputation" is relevant here; "reputation" in a warrior context signifies honor and respect, key concepts in the emerging jamette carnival world. However, Wilson's gender binary, which defines "respectability" as feminine and "reputation" as masculine and which underlies many heroic representations of masculinity (such as US Western films), is troubled in this context. While the form of combat was masculine, the Afro-emancipation celebrations themselves were communal, celebrating communities of men, women, and children still in many ways under siege after emancipation. Conversely, the 1950s–60s nationalist effort insisting on "respectability" was, to a large extent, in the hands of men.³⁰

In the beating of its sacred rhythms on often forbidden drums and in the clashing of its sticks and whips, the nineteenth-century Afro-emancipation festival had precisely resisted

31. Kirk Meighoo, *Politics in a Half-Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago, 1925–2001* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers; Oxford: James Currey; Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener Publishers, 2003), 62–78; and Kate Quinn, “Conventional Politics or Revolution: Black Power and the Radical Challenge to the Westminster Model in the Caribbean.” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 53, no. 1 (January 2015): 71–94.

“respectability” as the despised moral veneer of enslavement. This was the festival—with its ritualized forms of violence—that underlay the emancipation carnival narrative, evoked at a time of new emancipation from colonialism to nationhood, but with a clear mandate to take the celebration to the higher, safer “moral” ground. The internal contradictions, which seem now so clear, were not registered in the naïve assumption that a history of resistance could be quietly defanged, sanitized, and put on public display.

The divide between the Afro- and the Indo- political elements remained, though the DLP deconstructed in the 1960s. Indeed, the history of political parties and elections in Trinidad remains embroiled in the presumed opposition between the Indo- and Afro- elements, which in 2005 Lloyd Best had said existed mainly during elections. In 2010, the People’s Partnership (PP), a political coalition in Trinidad and Tobago between four political parties (United National Congress, Congress of the People, Tobago Organization of the People, National Joint Action Committee) formed as a multiethnic opposition bloc against the PNM government of Patrick Manning. The PP won the election, bringing into power Kamla Bissessar-Prasad, the first female prime minister of T&T. This political history continues to impact carnival in ways that have not yet been fully explored.

However, one of the biggest challenges to the PNM/Williams government came from Afro-Trinidadians. The steel bands that Williams had championed turned on him, as the Black Power revolution began during carnival, February 9, 1970, when a group called Pinetoppers portrayed revolutionary leaders like Stokeley Carmichael, a Trinidadian, in the mas band “The Truth about Africa.” The newly created National Joint Action Committee insisted on recognition and authority that were not cloaked in the polite moralities of political rhetoric.³¹ It may well be that Williams’s model of good behavior, based essentially on the Puritan ethics of the British colonizers, eventually provoked more than it persuaded significant portions of his Afro-power base.

The nationalistic rhetoric of the ‘50s and ‘60s devolved into widespread self-congratulation and celebration, accompanied by an echoing call to “decency.” On the eve of the first postindependence carnival, Sunday, February 24, 1963, a *Guardian* editorial entitled “A Crowning Achievement” contained the following exhortation:

The joy of the festival can be spoilt quite easily if participants lose their heads or abandon *their customary sense of decency*. We are confident, ourselves, that Carnival, 1963, will give no grounds for regret—except, that is, the usual one: that it is rather a long wait for next Carnival. (p. 10; emphasis mine)

There were, however, countering voices. This editorial appeared alongside a column by Derek Walcott, a regular *Guardian* contributor (subsequently the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature winner), in which Walcott lamented what he felt was diminished linguistic sting in satirical carnival forms:

The polysyllable, surrealist, free-form rhetoric of robber talk is a parody of Biblical or English literature, just as the involved infinite spelling examination of the Pierrot Grenade is parody of mission school education and the magistrate’s court.

The source of the calypso, everyone knows, is in the slaves or the descendants of slaves guying or picconging each other, in mock quarrels, which are indirectly aimed at owners, high society or Government....

This element is dying, since there is nothing left to mock now but ourselves. The satiric sting has gone out of the old mas’ costume, since it lacks enemies....

The old mas' has deteriorated into mild, off-colour humour. Much of the bite has gone out of the satiric calypso as well and sung picong is practically dead....

Because Carnival has grown more commercial, a source of tourist revenue, Government-controlled, and a tie-in for recording companies, radio, merchants, advertising, etc, the nature of the calypso has changed.

There are several fakes in the art, and its ephemeral or topical nature is being devoured in the carnival machine. (p. 10)

Resistance requires an authority to resist. Colonialism had provided that authority. Once it disappeared, taking the "enemy" with it, it was only a matter of time before core energy would have to be redirected. Thinking that time had already come, Walcott pinpointed the contradiction at the heart of the nationalist claim.

Two years later, in 1965, Walcott himself designed the Dimanche Gras presentation, which he titled *Batai* (Battle) in homage to the struggle of the nineteenth-century stickmen battling "for their right to play mas." "Decency" was presented as the weapon of the enemy, not an ideal. The *Trinidadian Guardian* described the action thus:

[A] Grenadian called Napoleon Small [described] the way in which Carnival began; how the Napo gate crashed the Governor's Ball in 1785; how he later led the slaves in the battle for their right to play mas' and the eventual victory of the slaves.

Throughout the whole setting a *prophetess of gloom and anti-carnivalist "decent citizen"* Miss Cassandra George, did her best to try to get the Governor to ban the bacchanal, while Julian White Rose [an early twentieth-century calypsonian, chantwell, and stickfighter, one of the first to sing and record in English], Aeneas Bat, a blind beggar and former stick-fighting king, took it all in with the aid of Douxdoux, a flower seller.³²

By portraying the "decent citizen" as an "anti-carnivalist" and locating the essential energy of carnival in battle rather than in good behavior, Walcott took aim at the "carnival machine." *Batai* staked its carnival claims on the kalinda of the nineteenth century. According to Benjamin, Walcott understood the link "between the ancestral world and the now world." The calypsonian, chantwell and stickfighter ally with the "former stick-fighting king" who classically learns to see when he has been physically blinded, seeing through the spirit. The flower girl, recalling a "famous lavway called 'Rosie,' a flower girl, a bunch of roses coming down," reminds one of the way in which, according to Benjamin, in kalinda "internal beauty is reflected in the external": Grace under pressure imbued with power.³³

From this perspective, the "play" of carnival is not "fun without violence." It is ritualized, even sacralized violence that positions itself in resistance to oppressive authority. Kinesthetically encoding a remembered, transnational, to some extent essentialized ancestral past that crosses the diasporic lines from one location to another, from Haiti to Trinidad to Brazil, for instance, the kalinda of Trinidad's batonniers arose in circumstances that distinguish Trinidad among Anglophone Caribbean colonies. This article will now focus on the Afro- boismen and the Indo- jab jabs, two warrior-oriented forms of resistance play. These derive from disparate origins with much in common, in which the Indo- and Afro- underclasses, on the surface so much at odds with each other, joined in a kinship of the oppressed to create mas, now being revived, which is as spiritually significant as it is physically violent.

32. *Trinidadian Guardian*, March 2, 1965, emphasis mine.

33. Rondel Benjamin, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Chaguanas, Trinidad, January 7, 2020.

Figure 3. Rondel Benjamin and Keegan Taylor, co-founders of Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, in the Alfred yard, the garden site of the Original Jab Jabs (or Whipmasters) in Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

Kalinda and Jab Jab: Finding the Common Ancestral Path

If you don't understand the spiritual aspect you won't last long in a gayelle.

—Nolan Cummings, *Our Souls Turned Inside Out*, 2015

The focus was on the African ... so we [jab jabs] had the opportunity to showcase our worship without being noticed.

—Ronald Alfred, Interview, Dec. 22, 2019

Talparo, Trinidad, Carnival Monday morning, sometime before the early 1990s:

From Talparo Junction, there is a good view of the road coming down the hill. And a crowd is waiting, the moment is charged with the light of dawn, but even more with the magic of the moment. All night long, you would hear them, maybe five of them, say the Frederick Brothers, getting ready. They are taking their last bush bath; they are singing lavways. All night long, lavway. No drums, just the song so you know they are getting ready. From the Sunday evening, they are preparing what they do when they are going through the night, that is like taking the final bath. They go into a ritual forty days before carnival, during that time they have a specific number of bush baths to take. The cleanliness is very important, clean up the interior and outside. Perhaps they are sewing beads on the fals [mirror-shaped fols] on their chests, the mirrors, and other things. But always singing the lavway, without drum.

When they are ready, you will see the door push open. A blaze glitters when the door is opened. You would see the blaze. You are anxious to see who is wearing the kandal [the fancy stickfighter clothes]; not everyone will. Those who do will have a ribbon belt that flies over the pants, the front of the pants will be laced with beads and mirrors and ribbons of all different colors. And then the head tie. You spread a cloth over the two ends and tie a

34. Lord Kitchener calypso 1963, which has become iconic. Elder Felix "George" Defour, who is quoted here, thinks it refers particularly to stickfighters taking the road.

35. This description has been distilled from the author's interviews (January 4 and 7, 2020) with Defour, who has for many years prepared the Talparo gayelle, as well as working with the NCC to organize stickfighting. For a narrative that captures what he called the "transcendence" boismen reach, while also portraying the movement between the Caribbean and the United States, see John Stewart, "Stick Song," in *Curving Road: Stories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), reprinted in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten Jr., vol. 2. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

36. Quoted in Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 60.

knot so that the cloth will cover the ears. Moses [Ralph] would always wear the head tie. That is how the head player would prepare.

They will come to the door and come down the steps and then they will turn around and jump on the earth, one by one. When they hit the earth like a springboard, they would just keep jumping. They would dance and intermingle with one another in the yard. Dancing and singing the lavway and the woolloo bells on the pants, the English bells, making all the noise. Leave the house and go up in the road. No lash flying there, everybody just dancing and singing. No drums there, just lavway from the mouth and the bells. Singing loud. People will help them with the lavway also. When they reach the road, on the pitch, they will dance and dance and dance. Other stickfighters who might be dressed on the road, they will try hard to meet them there rather than higher up on the road. You might see stickfight, because the one that came to meet them, "Take stick like rain," he will have to play—he can't just come and meet them. They will charge him, so he has to fight there just in the road in front of the house. They join and things. And then they will march to go into the road. That is the time the Kitchener tune jump in—"the road make to walk on Carnival day."³⁴ That's what this is about. They will take the whole road, jumping from side to side, who going straight, some jumping around and the crowd will follow them singing the lavway. Coming from the road coming down the hill—everyone looking to see them. They have a long view of them coming down the road. A car coming down has to pull aside and park. They really using the road. The drums will be at the junction. From the time they reach the foot of the hill, the drums will cut in and give rhythm to the tune. That is where you will know how important stickfighting is and that it is born of one of the most authentic African rituals imported to Trinidad and infused into the carnival tradition. You will understand how stickfighting can entice a crowd; when they reach the hill, they form one line, and then the crowd doing the same thing, forms the gayelle, in themselves. One line and then circle back to be by the drums; the crowd follows them and make the gayelle. From that point the real battle starts—stick like rain...³⁵

In 1871, the *Trinidad Echo* newspaper described "the barbarous *Cane-bouler* of the lower orders, by which Sunday night was made so hideous."³⁶ Contrasting that characterization to Defour's memories of the "magic" of Carnival Sunday night and Monday morning in Talparo, Trinidad, reminds us of the limitations of histories written only from the perspective of Christian colonizers, encoding Victorian codes of decency and respectability even fiercer than those that drove the rhetoric of independence in the 1950s–60s.

Figure 4. King Rato, Peter Noel (also a master drummer), from Talparo, Stickfighting Finals at Mayaro, Trinidad, 2012. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

37. The concept of the "plantation economy" was defined by the New World Group, led by Lloyd Best, in the 1960s. See Best, "Outline of a Model of Plantation Economy," *Social and Economic Studies* 17, no. 3 (1968): 283–326, and "A Caribbean Life: An Interview with Lloyd Best," in *The Thought of the New World: The Quest for Decolonization*, ed. Anthony Bogues and Brian Meeks (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 284–85.

38. See Karen S. Dhandu, "Labor and Place in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad," *New West Indian Guide* 75, no. 3–4 (2001): 233–35; Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1942; repr. Brooklyn, NY: A&P Books Publishers, 1993), 83.

39. See Dhandu, "Labor and Place," 240, for a description of the free labor force and the forms of interaction between the enslaved and free laborers in pre-emancipation Trinidad. See Williams, *History*, 70–71, for documents relating to the importance of "free coloureds" in creating the "Crown colony" system of government; see also Carl Campbell, "The Rise of a Free Coloured Plantocracy in Trinidad 1783–1813," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 29 (Diciembre 1980): 33–53.

40. Quoted in Williams, *History*, 96.

41. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 74.

42. See diagram in J. D. Elder, "Cannes Brûlées," in "Trinidad and Tobago Carival," ed. Milla C.

Enslaved Afro-Creoles across the British Caribbean had been emancipated in 1838 into stratified plantation economies, whose sole function was to fuel and feed an industrial revolution in faraway Europe.³⁷ Among these, Trinidad was distinguished by crossed lines of colonial elites (Catholic French-Spanish/Protestant English); fewer, though more commercially "valuable," emancipated enslaved laborers (c. 20,000, "valued" at £56 each, compared to 65,000 in tiny Barbados, £25 each, and c. 500,000, £34 each in larger Jamaica);³⁸ "free coloureds," ranging from day laborers to estate owners fighting to restore rights the English had curtailed;³⁹ and after 1845 the increasing presence of indentured Indian laborers. Governed by the priorities, prejudices, and at times whims of various Crown-appointed governors acting on behalf of a distant colonial power, Trinidad was a place of which the governor Lord Harris said in 1848 that "a race has been freed but a society has not yet been formed."⁴⁰

Within this context, Afro-Creole stickbands emerged as territorial, protective groups, their sponsorship divided "along linguistic lines" into the French and English, although "fights between bands did not always conform to this pattern."⁴¹ In the predawn light of Carnival Monday, 1881, according to an eyewitness, a large "*neg jardin* stickband" with revelers from outside and inside Port of Spain came together. Their king and queen were in the second rank, fronted and flanked by stickmen with flambeaux and bois, their drums and musicians protected in the center of their formation, followed by children and women carrying extra bois and "some other kinds of weapons, stones and all."⁴² This was the inclusive act of resistance against police captain Arthur Baker, a Barbadian immigrant, immortalized in the history of Afro-emancipation carnival as the "Canboulay Riot."

This description speaks to the social, as well as processional, structure of an Afro-Creole stickfighting "band": centered on a king (and, here at least, apparently also a queen), led by boismen with flambeaux, accompanied by drums, drummers, and chantwells, and supported by women and children. This historical confrontation has in perpetuity enshrined boismen and their stickbands in the T&T Carnival story. Each year, early on the Friday morning before carnival, this event is reenacted "behind the bridge" on Picadilly Greens, the section of Port of Spain where the emancipation carnival is said to have started (close to but no longer at the corner of the original clash).⁴³

However, this martial art predates its relationship to carnival. Its form is kalinda, a West African ritual of music and dance that added the stickfight in the Caribbean, while embedding the Afro-imported notion of kingship: "To earn the right to be king means to earn respect that has nothing to do with economic success."⁴⁴ Long before bois became a carnival form, "Kalinda Secret Societies (formed before and after emancipation [as part of African resistance and cultural retention]) ... deriving from West African Fraternal Societies, [were] critical in the development of Slave Networks—for planting, music, fighting, mutual aid, education, and community outreach."⁴⁵

In *The Festive State*, David Guss reminds that "the same form ... can easily oscillate between religious devotion, ethnic solidarity, political resistance, national identity, and even commercial spectacle.... In each case, the festive form will remain what Mikhail Bakhtin claimed it was: 'a powerful means of grasping reality ... the very process of becoming, its meaning and direction.'"⁴⁶ Transformed from its hybrid West African origins, Trinidad kalinda is such a form: a warrior sport, a dangerous, aggressive form of play that is in its essence an act of religious devotion, political

Riggio, special issue, *The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 39, based on information from Edric Connor. The rare description of the procession and event is from Tony Hall's 1990 interview with Lenox Pierre, based on a first-person witness account. Lennox Pierre, interview with Tony Hall, "Late Night Lime," *Banyon*, Trinidad, 1990, published in "Trinidad and Tobago Carnival," ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, special issue, *TDR: The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 41.

43. This event has been reenacted each Carnival Friday morning since 1999, initially directed by Tony Hall, of Lordstreet Theatre and Trinity College in Hartford, CT, and Norvan Fullerton of the Malick Folk Performance group, with Professor Milla Riggio, Trinity-in-Trinidad students, and Malick dancers, at that time reenacted in front of Hell Yard (a barracks now torn down), on the actual historical location, reinforced by traditional Carnival character performances; now scripted and directed by Pearl Eintou Springer on Picadilly Greens where a reviewing stand accommodates an increasingly large crowd.

44. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

45. Benjamin, "The Four Phases of Kalinda in Trinidad," appendix.

46. David M. Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 9, 12.

47. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

resistance, and a marker of cultural identity, carried across the Middle Passage. But it is also a ritual of containment, violence governed by rules to create a safe space where young men learn to manage the aggression that is an essential aspect of life.⁴⁷ Such a concept of containment reinforces René Girard's 1972 identification of religion itself as a vehicle designed to ritualize and, thus, contain inevitable violence.⁴⁸ Jibari Stewart claims that "Combat dancing can serve a beneficial function in human societies, providing ... a larger sense of community, a means of releasing real transgressive violence detrimental to the well-being of a society."⁴⁹

The spirit of kalinda is invested as much in its music as in its fighting. The drums call the fight; the fight ends when the drums stop, though of course, the drums stop when one fighter legitimately cuts his opponent, drawing blood. The chantwells with their lavways invoke the spirit. "How," Benjamin asks, "do you balance the warrior and the singer? This mystical warrior who was both performer and martial artist? Fathers of the bois, we call them."⁵⁰

Figure 5. Drummer Cindy Noel, master drummer Desmond Noel's daughter, with Kwasi Noel, King Rato's son and Desmond Noel's grandson (on the left), with drummers from Mayaro, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, in 2015. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

According to Andy Patrick, who for the past fifteen years has organized "Black Indian" bands in Port of Spain and is also great-grandson to boisman "Bad Jerry" (Jeremiah Trim), who took stickfighting with him when he moved from Toco on the north coast of Trinidad to Canaan, Tobago:

Stickfighting is a spiritual thing that comes with the drums, the natural ability to fight, but in the gayelle with training.... [There are] three people in the gayelle, the chantwell (the fellow who sings), the fellow who plays the drums, and the fellow who fight the stick. The man who play the drums right, he could put the energy in the man who dancing stick by the way he beating drums. He could also get the man playing stick cut now, if he playing a

48. *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1977). Girard's analysis has been criticized for the extent to which it makes Christianity itself the paradigm for his concept.

49. E. (Jibari) Stewart, "The Soft Power of Violence: Towards a Definition of Combat Dancing," PhD diss., University of Washington, 2009, abstract.

50. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

51. Andy Patrick, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Santa Cruz, Trinidad, December 31, 2019.

52. Shamsu Dean, a T&T expert in tracing indenture roots, personal communication with Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji), January 7, 2020. See also the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, <http://www.natt.gov.tt/node/133>; and Sherry-Ann Singh, "The Experience of Indian Indenture in Trinidad: Arrival and Settlement," 2013, The Caribbean Atlas Project website, ed. Romain Cruse and Kevon Rhiney, <http://www.caribbean-atlas.com/en/themes/waves-of-colonization-and-control-in-the-caribbean/waves-of-colonization/the-experience-of-indian-indenture-in-trinidad-arrival-and-settlement.html>.

53. https://www.indexmundi.com/trinidad_and_tobago/ethnic_groups.html

54. Errol ("Toy") Bunsee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Dow Village, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

bad note on the drum, if he don't like the stick man, he very important. The drummer. The chantwell, sometimes the man dancing the stick, he calls the song. So he calls the chantwell to sing for him. The fourth person is the audience, the crowd.⁵¹

Patrick's family, as he describes it, is Yoruba; his grandmother's husband's mother came "straight from Africa," though he is not quite sure exactly where in Africa. This side of his family also "has some white in it," and on his father's side, there are Amerindian (or as they are called in T&T, "first people") ancestors.

This family history is characteristic of the racial intermixtures in Trinidad, though the two largest ethnic groups with the greatest dominance culturally, politically, and in the festive history of the island are the Afro- and Indo-. First brought in as indentured laborers in 1845 on the *Fatel Razack*, by the time the practice ended in 1917, roughly 150,000 Indians had been indentured in Trinidad, some voluntarily, some by force. Contracts were generally for five years, with a first placement of three years. However, to get the promised free ticket home, another five years had to be served. Relatively few returned after ten years. Recruitment was suspended on March 12, 1917; the last arrival came on April 22, 1917. Suspended because of the demands of World War I, the practice was not resumed. All contractual obligations of indentured laborers were ended three years later, on January 1, 1920. A total of 147,592 indentured workers were brought to Trinidad on 327 voyages.⁵² Most remained in Trinidad. These two groups constitute about 75 to 80 percent of the T&T population (as of December 2019, Indian, 35.4 percent; African, 34.2 percent; with mixed African-Indian, known as dougla, 7.7 percent, according to the *CIA World Factbook*).⁵³

While Afro-Trinidadians born in the Caribbean were identified as African Creoles, Indian laborers—the *jahaji bhai* (the brotherhood of the boat)—were called "Coolies." Nominally separate, these two laboring forces, the Afro-Creoles and the indentured Indians who lived in barracks and worked under conditions not much better than enslavement, were in practice often entwined with each other, particularly through their festivals, in ways that the rest of this report will explore through the personal narratives and memories of practitioners and their heirs.

There is a form of stickfighting, called *gatka*, which the Indians brought with them from northern India and developed in Trinidad. According to Errol Bunsee (known as "Toy"), the son of a *gatka* fighter from Rousillac in the south of Trinidad, close to San Fernando: "The bois is a different game; they use a shorter stick. *Gatka* has a longer stick; you can hit with both hands. You could only hit with one arm with the bois."⁵⁴ As Toy explains, in the south, Indians and Africans played together, bois and *gatka* side by side, though never in the same fight. Both used goatskin drums, usually African keg drums (bullah, fullah, or cuttah) for bois and Indian tassa drums for *gatka*.⁵⁵

They played both sticks—took part in both games. Two boismen in a ring at one time; the next fight will be two *gatka* men. No more than two in the ring. I know it as a ring—the ringmaster would start off with the drum. They called it the keg. The *gatka* was on the Hosay side. This is what was the difference in the two games. Stickfighting now is for carnival only.

The mention of Hosay highlights both the separation and the intermingling of the Afro- and Indo- laborers in colonial Trinidad. If carnival is in many ways the foundational festival for Afro-Creoles, the nominally Shi'ite Muslim Hosay is the celebration that seems to have most united Indo-Trinidadian indentured workers in the nineteenth century. Unlike carnival, Hosay—which

55. Lorna McDonald, "Trinidad and Tobago," in Terry E. Miller et al., *The Garland Encyclopedia of Music: Southeast Asia* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 959; also private communication with Ron-del Benjamin, January 7, 2020.

56. See Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); see also Milla Cozart Riggio, "For the Sake of Allah and All Humanity: A Jihaji Journey into Trinidad," in *Muraqqa'e Sharqi: Studies in Honor of Peter Chelkowski*, ed. Soussie Rastegar and Anna Vanzan (Repubblica San Marino: AIEP, 2007).

57. Benjamin, interview by Milla Cozart Riggio, December 22, 2019.

58. See McDonald, "Trinidad and Tobago."

brought me to Trinidad for the first time in 1991—is funereal, its processions commemorating the assassination of Hussein, the grandson of Mohammad, and his family and followers on the plain of Kerbala (in modern-day Iraq) during the first ten days of the first Muslim month Muharram in 61 AH (680 CE), as well as honoring his brother Hasan, who was poisoned in Mecca. Carried to Trinidad from northern India, Hosay engaged the more numerous Hindus as well as Muslims.

Though it was widely celebrated in the nineteenth century, particularly in the south, there are today only two major commemorations: Cedros in the south and St. James in Port of Spain. In Cedros, Hosay is still commemorated almost entirely by Hindus, whereas in St. James, a Port of Spain suburb, those who honor it are largely Muslim. Though in itself both religious and funereal, it draws a large crowd of revelers, often drinking alcohol forbidden by the ritual. The assassination of Hussein and his family is the seminal event that historically distinguishes Shi's from Sunnis. Because it is in its origins Shi'ite, a distinction from Sunnis that is not always clearly marked in Trinidad, the festival, in fact, is critiqued and even rejected more by Muslims than by Hindus, for whom it seems to have served as an event tying indentured laborers to their Indian homeland. Because it follows the entirely lunar Muslim calendar, Hosay is not seasonal; it moves through the entire year.⁵⁶

Like the Afro-Creole jamette carnival, Hosay ran afoul of police captain Baker and the British authorities. In 1884, three years after the first canboulay riot and the same year as the smaller but more lethal second canboulay riots (in San Fernando and Princes Town), the so-called "Jihaji [or Hosay] massacre" occurred in San Fernando, when authorities killed twenty-four celebrants in an assault on the procession they had attempted to outlaw. Two factors make this commemoration and this event important in this study: The first is not only that those killed in the Hosay massacre were largely Hindu, but that they also included Afro-Creoles. Benjamin explains this as an expression of brotherhood:

In 1884, Africans always played stick in Hosay, so the Indians knew to call them [when they were in trouble]. When you fight someone for a long time, you become friends. Our bond as warriors is more important than our racial identity. Less to do with politics, race or religion, our sharing is about a deeper kinship—if I see someone who understands the source of my soul. Jab jabs are spurned by the Indians; stickfighters are spurned by the Africans. But we love each other. We understand the sacred shared community; we broke bread together and drank wine together. We have in common a shared mystical world.⁵⁷

Secondly, Hosay in the south was an event that brought kalinda and gatka together as joint celebrations, while also including whipmasters, all as warriors whose fighting was thought to symbolize the conflict on the plain of Kerbala.⁵⁸ Ronald Alfred, from Central, knows nothing about this participation in Hosay, but growing up close to San Fernando and going each year with his father to Cedros for Hosay, Toy identifies this processional ritual as the "religious" occasion for practicing stick, in contrast to carnival, which he considers profane, a view concentrated among Hindus in the south and not shared by boismen. According to Toy:

Many different class of people—Indian, Africans, all used to join in. They have plenty people fighting stick [everywhere around].... You have to buss one another's head in order to fulfill the game. Boullas Village, Cedros ... Moruga, Rio Clara, Sangre Grande. They come down and used to have a wonderful time. Competition and money.... The Hosay was the religious part of it. They build the castle [the tomb of Hussein, known as a *tadje*h]. We are Hindus, and my grandfather was one of the Hosay builders: Gildarry Bunsee. He was also a class

59. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019. Identifying the tadjeh as the "Taj Mahal," a sacred Indian palatial tomb having nothing to do with Muharram, is unusual. I have not heard this identification before.

60. Daniel Crowley, in the 1956 special issue of the *Caribbean Quarterly*, used the term "Coolie devil," which is popularly assumed to have originated decades earlier; see Crowley, "Traditional Masques of Trinidad and Tobago," *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, nos. 3–4 (1956) (repr., *Trinidad Carnival*, Trinidad: Paria Publishing, 1988), 74.

61. Though essentially imported from India, jab jab did consistently have Afro-Creole practitioners, and those of other ethnicities, who now in its revival phase are being invited to join the Original Jab Jabs, in a typically T&T show of inclusiveness.

62. Ronald Alfred, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Couva, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

stickman. Used to be taking part—we used to go see them. I myself ended up playing stick—different game with whipmasters (such as Phaye, pronounced *Peou*) ... who cut one another (a dangerous game that stopped for a while. But coming back on the scene). The stickfight started on the first day [of Hosay processions]—when they come out on the street, the stickfight start. A big yard and they play. Tassa men waiting. The kegmasters. The ringmaster's drum to start the stickfight was an African keg. They draw a big circle in the yard where the tadjehs would be brought out. For carnival a different thing, they have a ring in a yard where they have alcohol. Without any substance of Hosay.... The true meaning of the stickfight, the bois and the gatka, you have to watch it through the Hosay aspect of the game. One would know where it originated from—when the two brothers, Hasan and Hussain were fighting. One drop of blood on the ground, appears, do not know where it comes from. When it appears, they know to move the Taj Mahal [tadjeh].⁵⁹

As Toy implies, gatka was never centrally a carnival form. However, the whipcracking martial art called jab jab or "rope jab," popularly known throughout Trinidad in the first half of the twentieth century as "Coolie mas" or "Coolie devils,"⁶⁰ became associated with carnival early on as an Indo-Trinidad tradition. As Ronald Alfred, the current whipmaster of the Original Jab Jabs,⁶¹ says: "The rope jab mas in Trinidad and Tobago was right through an Indian mas. Many people in the outside world have whips in one form or another, but the rope jab mas in T&T is the contribution of the Indian people."⁶²

Figure 6. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster, Traditional Mas Competition, Adam Smith Square, Port of Spain, 2017. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

Unlike kalinda, which still has practitioners in what are called "action gayelles" throughout T&T, the form of which can still be differentiated from region to region, jab jab at the present time is sustained by Alfred's Original Jab Jabs, a family-led team that traces its performance history through four Indo-Trinidad generations: grandfather Alfred Bachu; father Winston Alfred (whose surname was mistakenly inscribed in his birth registration as Alfred, rather than Bachu); the

63. Ibid.

64. Ronald Alfred, interview, January 7, 2020. Also information provided by Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji), private communication January 8, 2020.

current whipmaster (jab jab equivalent of the king) Ronald Alfred and his family, including his wife, Shalima (the first woman to play jab jab) and children, sons Ronaldo (twenty-two) and Revaldo (thirteen) and daughter Renella (nineteen), all of whom play jab. Ronald says:

My father told me that my grandfather, who lived in Central, was part of a jab jab group. They went to San Juan, to Diego Martin, then back to Central. He left a jab jab band everywhere he went. It was an indigenous martial art form. (Riggio: When in Trinidad did it start?) Alfred: Three generations. Back it up. It was the time when they came from India with it. They used to practice it in the barracks where they were living. In the village, in the barracks, in the bush. They practiced wherever they were. Before the turn of the twentieth century.⁶³

Figure 7. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster, with his daughter Renella, now Whip Princess, and son Ronaldo, now Whipmaster d 2nd, and his father, Winston Alfred, the Original Whipmaster before Ronald, at home in Couva, January 2004. Photograph by Pablo Delano. Used by permission of the photographer.

As Alfred insists, like kalinda, this whipcracking martial art predates carnival. The Alfred family attributes its origins to the “Kali worship” of their Indian ancestors, which Ronald says distinguished them from other Hindus. Processions honoring Kali (or other female deities) generally, it is said, included whipcracking as an essential component.⁶⁴ As part of their current effort to sustain and grow this tradition, the Alfreds are attempting to trace their history back to India. But it has been difficult. They believe themselves to be Madrassi (coming from Madras, in the south of India from which indentured workers were brought relatively late, now known as Chennai, the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu; in appearance Ronald appears to be Madrassi), but they also believe they are from northern India; the name Bachu is a northern Indian name, and their own oral tradition identifies Bhojpuri, northern India (in Bihar) as their region of origin.

65. This phenomenon is also characteristic of diasporic Africans. For a discussion of what Michael Hanchard called the "supranational formulation of people of African descent as an 'imaginary community' that is not territorially demarcated but based on the shared belief in the commonalities of Western oppression," see Milla Cozart Riggio, "The Power of Play: Time and Space in the Caribbean Carnival World," *The Caribbean Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2019): 95–122, esp. 104–5. See Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 248.

66. Camille A. Brown, interviewed by Audra McDonald, February 1, 2020, as part of the HD live simulcast performance of the Metropolitan Opera revival of *Porgy and Bess*, of which Brown is the choreographer.

67. Leda Martins, "Performances of Spiral Time," in *Performing Religion in the Americas: Media, Politics, and Devotional Practices of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Alyshia Galvez (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 174.

68. Ronald Alfred, interview, January 5, 2020.

69. Alfred goes on to say, "It died out because all the older fellows would never talk about the mas outside the circle. Could not take the story outside—if you keep it yourself and have no children, then it dies. Them fellows—ask them a question and they would not answer you. 'Go back and play. What you want to know that for?' They hid the tradition. If I should

The mystery shrouding this family history characterizes the cultural retention that this tradition embodies. Crossing what the Indo-Trinidadians called the "dark waters" often blurred memories of precise places of origin, which were further complicated by intermingling and intermarrying (which might account, for instance, for the Alfred family's apparent identification with both northern and southern India).⁶⁵ The crucial point, however, is the importance of the ancestral presence in the lives of both the Indo- and Afro- communities, whatever their place of origin, together with the kinesthetic "memories" of the body ("memories of the blood," according to choreographer Camille A. Brown).⁶⁶ These reinforce the retention of cultural practices, such as African kalinda or the Indian use of whips in religious processions that traveled across the dark waters, to be transformed in the new home. So important were the ancestors that "it has been said that, for a long time, African slaves in the Americas drew cosmograms of their original cultures on turtle shells and bird feathers, so as to indicate to their ancestors, who were buried in Africa, the location of their exile in the faraway American landscape."⁶⁷ Ronald Alfred says that their ancestors play jab jab with them, even now: "My father and my grandfather [both deceased]; they walk with us; they play with us."⁶⁸

The survival of jab jab is now largely in the hands of the Alfred family, who welcome others into their "yard," as the gathering place for jab jabs is commonly known. In 2019 this group numbered more than sixty. Alfred says that in the past, "Jab jabs were called by the name of the towns—Princes Town Jabs Jabs." But so far as Alfred knows, these groups are now gone:

The only other group—the old fellow died. He came to me to ask for help. Gilbert—that is what we knew him as. He moved from one area to another, he came by us but he did not finish the training. The fasting and everything. He went out. That band squashed. So as far as I know there is no other group now. There are a few small groups in different areas—community centers. I go to the schools and community centers and some people come by me. We call it a yard. They come by me and practice. We are trying to bring back bands. We need someone to go in different areas to bring back bands.⁶⁹

The Alfreds weave whips for others, feed them during the carnival season, and train them through the year. Rondel Benjamin, too, has through the Bois Academy undertaken a program of training and retention designed to honor a martial arts form that, like jab jab, is also a sacred communal rite. (Benjamin and Alfred are, in fact, now working actively together for mutual development and preservation).⁷⁰

Figure 8. Rondel Benjamin, co-founder and Chief Dreamer of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, teaching the basics of stickfighting in the Alfred yard in Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

die with this knowledge and don't share it, it will be a great loss for the art form" (interview, January 5, 2020).

70. Peter Noel, King Rato, has youth groups he trains as part of the effort across Trinidad to revive kalinda.

71. Benjamin, interview, January 7, 2020.

72. Defour, interview, January 4, 7, 2020.

73. Though these bells are in appearance identical to those worn on the pants of the stick-fighting kandal, they are assumed to have different origins: Defour identifies the bells as English, Alfred and Raviji are certain that they are Indian. The same may be said of other costume decorations—the fols (or, as boismen call them, "fals") worn on the chest, which resemble European (primarily French) Pierrot costumes, but also are characteristic of and claimed as Indian by jab jabs.

74. Benjamin, interview, January 10, 2020.

However, kalinda is more dispersed and differentiated. Differences in kalinda traditions still exist in various regions of T&T. Benjamin's family settled in the Moruga region, where Afro-Americans who had fought with the British in the war of 1812 were given land to cultivate. His traditions, he says, are largely from the Congo, which has a style of its own. Boismen from Moruga, for instance, do not wear the kandal, so characteristic of Talparo fighters, and Benjamin believes they never did. Their sticks are somewhat different; they hold them in a different way. Similar distinctions may be found in action gayelles throughout T&T. Moreover, each gayelle (often in front of a rum shop, frequently with a Chinese owner) will have its own kalinda society, headed by a king whose title must be consistently defended, including drummers and chantwells. Though they will practice together, sometimes even fighting each other, the main focus, according to Benjamin, is to show the "supremacy of their own gayelle, their jumbi, their Wanga (energetic force) and their king."⁷¹ To this end, they "roam" or travel and welcome boismen from other gayelles. As Defour puts it:

We started a group in 1994. They had a gayelle in Brazil (the club would have been Parliament Cub). The Fredericks [brothers from Talparo] had already stopped fighting. But Joey [Sanchez, known as Bangoes] was going strong. He did a lot of fight with Hector Frederick (died now), the last of the Fredericks. The eldest was Bertie, Sonny, Henry, Hector, and Sammy, the youngest. They used to roam. When the time came for the people who reach, they start their rituals, a week or two after New Year's, according to what time carnival falling (in early March or February). They practice every weekend by going from gayelle to gayelle. When it reaches the highest pitch, they know there is a king in Couva, they will get ready to match that king in Couva. If they play and don't cut the king, or fulfill what they went to do, it would have been trouble for anyone who tried to play them. When they reached back and had a victory, they would be more calm. But if they did not win—they were sullen and dangerous.⁷²

Kalinda and jab jab are distinct traditions, coming from different continents (Africa and Asia). One of the major differences is their music, kalinda involving lavways, drums, and chantwells (as does gatka, though its drums are different). Jab jabs also chant lavways, but their music is provided by the gungaroo, the bells worn around their ankles that resound as they move, clearly announcing jab jab presence.⁷³ What may seem to be the central distinction, the contrast between sticks and whips, however, is to some extent illusory, as often stick play and whip play are practiced by the same people (Alfred's father practiced both whip and stick, as did Toy's grandfather). Now stickfighters from the Bois Academy meet each Sunday in the Alfred jab jab yard, to be trained with whips and also in the healing traditions of herbs grown in the Alfred garden. Moreover, the rituals and sacred practices—the cutting and preparation of the stick and whip, the consecration of the instrument, the fasting and cleansing bush baths of the warriors—so strongly resemble each other that Benjamin and Alfred are speculatively certain that the connections began before they arrived in the Caribbean:

[We are sure that they were] interacting as martial forms for a long time before coming to Caribbean. We speak two different languages, but we have certain things in common—they knew how to enter the ring, how to interact, how to seek the blessings. Some common "warrior" language.... This is less about accommodation and more about seeking respect.⁷⁴

As communal rituals and sacred rites that bind communities together, kalinda (also gatka) and jab jab follow similar patterns of prayer, fasting, preparation, and performance outlined below:

75. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019.

76. Angenie Lee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Dow Village, Trinidad, December 22, 2019.

77. Toy, interview, December 22, 2019.

78. Oliver Pierre, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Manzanilla, Trinidad, March 3, 1997.

79. Patrick, interview, December 31, 2019.

1. *Cutting the stick or material for the whip.* This is a ritual that takes place in the forest during “the dark moon,” linked both to the lunar cycle and, in the spring, the vernal equinox. The stick is cut mainly from hardwood Poui trees (yellow or black), the material for the whip from what Alfred calls a hemplike “lash plant.” The cutting is an act of respect, taking place only after the warrior talks to the forest, asks permission to cut, and pays for the stick or the lash cutting (either in silver or gold coins, or according to Toy, sixty cents if you cannot afford more). The weapon is cut with a special cutlass (machete), used for no other purpose. A respect for the forest as part of the living world, of which humans are themselves only one of the blessed creatures, characterizes both traditions.

2. *Preparation of the weapon.* After cutting, there is a process of tempering the weapon, one version of which is described by Toy:

Used to dry for 3–4 days in the sun. Then they peel off the skin and get a smooth finish. The hand would not slip out. Use a knife or bottles, sandpaper to smooth it. That was the preparation of the stick. When they finish with the stick, they hang the stick on the wall. No one could touch it until the stickman would come for it.⁷⁵

A similar process is used for the whips:

Some of them would make it from rope—would use the agave plant, the ones that the Mexicans make the tequila with, the leaves. They would take the leaves and dry it and then strip it, soak it in water, and then plait it. It would cut into rope. It is very strong. They did say prayers—when they make anything to do with the Hosay. They used to pray over the whips and the stick as well. They had prayers for protection ... fasting and mantras, recited for protection. Some people used tantric mantra (dark side of mantra) as well as the other side. To harm people.⁷⁶

3. *Christening of the weapon and drums.* These traditions do not link godliness with self-righteous denial of the body, which—so long as it is “clean” and respected—is perceived instead as a conduit to the soul. In kalinda and gatka the sacred liquid is not wine that, in transubstantiation, becomes the blood of Christ, or “holy water.” Puncheon Rum is the “spirit” used to christen both the sticks and the drums (a tradition not followed, as far as I know, by jab jabs), recognizing always that the first sip of rum must be offered to the ancestors.

4. *Living partners.* Both the sticks and the drums are imbued with life. The sticks must prove their mettle, either (according to Toy), by standing up when they are thrown down (“only the stick that stands up will be chosen”) or, according to Benjamin, floating when thrown into the water. They are cut when the moon is dark, I am told, to ensure that they do not die.⁷⁷ An old stickfighting king named Victory (Oliver Pierre) from Manzanilla, ninety-five years old in 1997, told me that he once hung a stick over his bed while he went to purchase puncheon rum with which to christen it. When he returned home, the thirsty stick had gotten off the hook, rolled to the door and was bouncing up and down, waiting for its rum.⁷⁸

According to Patrick, sticks can themselves be protectors, particularly if they are “mounted,” that is, made lethal by a process of burying them in a cemetery, ordinarily beside the grave of a stickmaster and sometimes rubbing them with frog guts or other toxic substances: “My ancestors would have a mounted stick in the house. That stick will beat you if you come in the house and damage the people.”⁷⁹ “Mounting” a stick is considered “bad obeah,” the practice of

80. Quoted in the film by Christopher Laird, dir., *No Bois Man, No Fraud* (Port of Spain: Banyan and the Bois Academy, 2013).

81. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

82. Benjamin says, "Stickfighters were never just drunk men fighting with a stick" (interview, March 22, 2019). However, he started the Bois Academy in Port of Spain in the 1980s because he perceived that the martial art itself had begun to degenerate, with the result that it was devolving into something like drunken fighting, at times, without the ritual base so essential to its meaning.

which is often hidden, even from family members. Patrick's grandfather had hidden a mounted stick and a mounted ring together in the attic of his house, which was not discovered until the roof was replaced about ten years ago, long after his death.

Like the sticks, the drums are also imbued with life; according to Desmond Noel, the drum, which like the stick must be anointed with rum, "this too, this have life." A guitar?—no, that is lifeless, but though the "goat done been et," the drum covered with the goat skin is, like the stick, a living thing, a participant in the mystical partnership between chantwell, drummer, and stickfighter.⁸⁰

Figure 9: Desmond Noel (center), master drummer from Talparo, Stickfighting Finals at Skinner Park, San Fernando, Trinidad, 2015. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

5. *Rituals of fasting and purification.* As Benjamin says, "you cannot play stick (or whip) with a dirty soul—or dirty hands."⁸¹ Cleansing oneself is crucial. Kalinda, gatka, and jab jab all require periods of fasting—forty days for kalinda and gatka, fifty-two days, according to Alfred, for jab jab. During this period, they all abstain from eating meat and having sex, the jab jabs, at least, also eschewing eggs and dairy products. They take a specified number of bush baths, using special cleansing oils, the last of which is taken on the night of Dimanche Gras (the Sunday night before carnival). Where they differ is in respect to alcohol. Whereas jab jabs refrain from alcohol during their fast, stickfighters continue to use what Benjamin calls "high spirits" (not corn-based liquor), not for recreation purposes or to get drunk, but as essential components of the ritual process.⁸²

6. *Ritual of containment.* Ritual violence must follow the rules. Even though, like all forms of the sacred, these warrior rituals can be turned to evil uses, the fighters are not bad Johns wreaking havoc for its own sake. Theirs is a structured and disciplined world, guided by rituals and a sense of respect, not chaos. The blood that is shed in the gayelle has a sacramental quality, in establishing the brotherhood of the bois.

83. Benjamin, interview, January 6, 2020.

84. Ibid.

85. Marisa Lee, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, St. Augustine, Trinidad, December 20, 2020.

86. All quotations from Shalima Alfred, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Couva, Trinidad, January 5, 2020.

One year, following the jab jabs from their home to a demonstration in Talparo, I discovered that they had packed up and gone home. Later, I learned that a group of young thugs ("bad johns") had begun pelting rocks at their maxi (short for maxi-taxi, a bus-like van in which they travel). Rather than engage in undisciplined, senseless fighting, they had simply left.

7. *Role of women.* Women have in different ways supported both kalinda and jab jab from the beginning, in a union dependent on the alliance of male warrior energy with a "comparable female spirit."⁸³ In the past there have been women stickfighters, known in the nineteenth century as "matadors." And it is said that a woman named Sophie Belle organized the 1881 canboulay procession.⁸⁴ During that procession the formation of stickfighters was followed by women (and children), carrying additional supplies. Though women did not typically accompany the jab jabs, Ronald Alfred's mother, Doolan, performs a *pooja* (Hindu prayer) around their maxi before it leaves for any encounter, battle, or demonstration.

However, just as women now claim the right to do battle as members of military units, so too the situation with kalinda and jab jab is changing. Many of Benjamin's students, including artist Marissa Lee, are women, learning not only stick but also other forms of martial arts.⁸⁵ Alfred's wife, Shalima, is the first woman to play jab jab, which she has been doing since she was sixteen, for twenty-four years (one year before her marriage to Ronald). She says:

I contested with my father-in-law, and maybe because I am stubborn. I believe in half and half, Ronald and I live like that. After marriage I get to find out about rituals and the dos and the don'ts. And who knows it open up a new door for female on the whole and it opens up a new door of empowerment. It was a nice experience for me, to come out and be in competition. For me and other women—kind of opened up a way. If I could do, they could do it too.⁸⁶

Figure 10. Ronald Alfred, the Original Whipmaster and his wife, Shamila, Whip Queen, with their eldest son Ronaldo, Whip Master d 2nd, at Traditional Mas Competition, Adam Smith Square, 2016. Photograph by Marie Nunes.

87. Ibid.

There is now a female unit in the jab jab yard, in which Shalima and her daughter Ranella teach other women each Sunday, not only how to “play” whip but also how to develop strategies of self-protection:

The whip give you the energy to know how you could protect yourself. We living in a time, when women are in danger—not me, but I hear the stories, about women and abuse. We had a few women coming to our yard to learn how to handle themselves with the whips, to give them a little comfort, not to stand up and be bullied ... [or] going down the road [to protect your bag]. The actual ritual becomes protective in regular life.... You don’t necessarily have to have a whip; you could use your belt; your bag have a strap.⁸⁷

Though their unit is separate from the men’s, they also fast and take their own bush baths. Their numbers include women with diabetes and at least one with cancer, who just keep coming. Asked how the purification process has transformed her life, Shalima says: “I don’t know how to explain that feeling to you. I eating just vegetables. We just relaxing, praying, asking god to guide you.” For the women, as for the men, these rituals are as meditative as they are combative. When effective, they encourage a surrender to forces larger than the single self.

Figure 11: Renella Alfred, Whip Princess, performing Kali. Traditional Character Competition, Adam Smith Square, February 18, 2020. Photograph by Marissa Lee, used with permission.

Conclusion

Pamela R. Franco argues that the “return to Africa” was a gender-based, masculine construction essential to the move to national independence during the 1950s:

[I]n their articles Pearse and Crowley tacitly molded our perception and thus understanding of the origins of the modern Carnival.... Applying ... a West African model of masquerade, they constructed a particular

88. Franco, "The Invention of Traditional Mas," 43.

89. "It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelated-ness.... The first is of society [societas] as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.'

The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured ... and relatively undifferentiated ... community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. I prefer the Latin term 'communitas' to 'community.'" Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977 [1969]), 96. See also Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111.

90. Benjamin, interview with Milla Cozart Riggio, Port of Spain, Trinidad, February 13, 2020.

91. Of course, the Obeah of the stick and whip may be malevolent as well as benevolent, as in the case of mounted sticks and whips, in the hands of those who use the power in a dark way. This was true for none of my informants, who see their traditions as sacred, honorable, and beneficial.

92. Benjamin, interview, March 22, 2019.

93. Shalima Alfred, interview, January 5, 2020.

image of Carnival in which black men were the preeminent performers.... The hallmarks of performance were a combination of aggression ... stylized movements ... verbal artistry ... and theatrical reenactments.... This particular construction of the authentic mas is heavily indebted to the 1950s political climate, which required efficacious images of blacks that paralleled the imaginings of a new nation.⁸⁸

However, though unquestioningly under the control of Afro-Trinidadian men, the carnival enshrined in the independence movement was not based on the "West African model of masquerade" with its combination of "aggression" and "artistry." Quite the contrary. The aim was to cleanse carnival of all aggression, essentially negating its emancipation resistance energies, while celebrating and marketing it as the signature festival of the new nation.

In 1965, Derek Walcott had identified the "decent citizen" who wants to "ban the bacchanal" as the enemy of a carnival ethos that sees conflict as basic to life. The T&T emancipation carnival looked both inward to the community it was designed to honor and protect, and outward to the oppressive structure of servitude it resisted, not only subverting or temporarily inverting the energies of what Victor Turner called "societas" in favor of "communitas," but staking a larger claim both to the festival and to the emerging nation.⁸⁹

This model of resistance is also in tension with Bakhtin's notion that the essence of carnival is located in the "laughter of the marketplace," expressed grotesquely and satirically. While both the grotesque and the satirical are components of Caribbean carnival, its epic beauty as well as its combative energy are grounded in a more profound sense of the sacred. Building on the work of John Stewart, Benjamin identifies the gayelle as "a portal of shared experience, the mystical and the now, the spiritual and the physical.... John Stewart would say you enter space where you become stalwart.... Through music, alcohol, dance, you experience an integrated self... [you enter] sacred spaces where you can access your ancestral self.... For a brief second you become a glorious representation of all your ancestral glory."⁹⁰

Kalinda, gatkan, and jab jab are ritual performances of the sacred, portals through which to achieve "transcendence."⁹¹ Typical of intercultural Trinidad with its many faiths, they cohabit with other religions. Boismen may be Orisha worshippers, Spiritual Baptists, or Catholics (though Benjamin says that "Christianity is the biggest impediment to our work").⁹² Gatkan fighters and jab jabs are often practicing Hindus, though the jab jabs now welcome into their ranks people of all religions: "We have Muslims who play; Baptists; Christians, Hindus, Pentecostal; we have everybody.... A lot of people from our band invite us to Baptist prayers, Muslim prayers. We as Hindu people respect their faith. We as Trinidadians respect all their faiths."⁹³

These traditions honor the stalwart, both in body and spirit. Taking a lash without flinching determines your place in the Original Jab Jab band. The Kalinda King takes his licks without complaint. They wear their battle scars proudly. The stoic bearing of blows may well reflect the experiences of enslavement and servitude in which these rituals evolved, unflinchingly standing up under extreme conditions of oppression and abuse while maintaining a stalwart inner self with its pride and dignity intact. Lavways frequently speak of death: "When I dead bury my clothes / I don't want no sweetman to wear me clothes." And of loss, with an emphasis especially on maternal loss: "Mooma Mooma, yuh son in de grave already / take a towel and ban yuh belly." According to Benjamin, "Someone is trying to kill you, but you must transcend this moment of

94. Benjamin, interview, February 13, 2020. These lyrics are from traditional lavways, sung by kalinda fighters and chantwells for well over a century.

95. See Stewart, "The Soft Power of Violence."

96. This is an alternate name, now used along with the Original Jab Jabs.

mortality and show us your beauty."⁹⁴

However, such heroic pride is leveraged by a kind of humility, what Jibari Stewart calls the "soft power" of "combat dance," which both releases and contains destructive energy.⁹⁵ The self is defined in relationship to the larger world not only of ancestors but of community shared with Nature. The warriors speak to the forest, from which they claim their weapons. The Alfred garden contains herbs designed to cleanse both the inside and the outside; for bush tea as well as oils for bush baths and to heal the wounds inflicted in battle. Artificially generated "competitions" with monetary prizes belie the essence of a martial art that does not gain its value from the world of profit and loss. Rich in their art and powerful in their practice, the Alfreds are, economically, a poor family, their lives given to sustaining their jab jab tradition. Without money, they plait whips for those who join them; they feed more than sixty people for the two days of carnival. If they have to put off the telephone bill, they willingly do so.

The Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago and the Original Whipmasters,⁹⁶ under the direction of Benjamin and Alfred, are now actively reviving kalinda and jab jab. They are nurturing the reality of Indo- and Afro- brotherhood, which began under conditions of oppression but expresses itself in a shared, partially essentialized worldview that sees destruction as a form of transformation in a cosmos in which nothing is ever truly destroyed. Using the locus and the multigenerational jab jab lineage of the Alfred yard, they are reviving traditions that honor and respect the natural world as part of a sacred mission. This is timely. Only too aware of the costs of global warming and climate change, we live in a time in which respect for the natural environment, so crucial to both these traditions, is required for survival. It may be that boismen and jab jabs, openly acknowledging conflict, containing combat within rules of respect, while recognizing the forest, the trees, the mountains, and the ancestors as living partners could point the way to a reconceptualized modernity.

Figure 12. Ronaldo Alfred, Whipmaster d 2nd, son of Ronald and Shalima Alfred, bandleaders of the Original Whipmasters, demonstrating how a whip is made. Alfred yard, Perseverance Village, Couva. Photograph by Maria Nunes.

The Four Phases of Kalinda in Trinidad

Prepared by Rondel Benjamin, founder of the Bois Academy

- I. Resistance and retention: 1600 to 1880–81/84.
A critical part of African Resistance and Cultural Retention, Kalinda secret societies (formed before and after emancipation) were fraternal orders, deriving from West African fraternal societies, critical in the development of slave networks—for planting, music, fighting, mutual aid, education, and community outreach. Territorial stickbands appear on the streets from the 1850s on during carnival.
- II. Transformation: 1880–1940.
Kalinda practiced during key festivals including Easter, Emancipation, and Cane Harvest begins to influence carnival music. Chantwells/Singers lend voice to emerging calypso, both men and women. After 1884, the Government begins active suppression, driving participants to transition Kalinda and its complex social network into other forms, pre-pan drumming (tamboo bamboo, biscuit tin), labour movement, calypso and masquerade.
- III. Rejection: 1940–60.
A time of political turmoil and radical cultural change for Trinidad. The British actively attempt to fight the labor movement in conjunction with the US-led anticommunist/anti-labor activities, part of their regional policy. It becomes politically expedient for the PNM under Williams to drop Kalinda and suppress the influence of mutual aid societies in an effort to gain the necessary support of Britain in the move to independence. This drives Kalinda underground and, oddly, may have protected the form from political manipulation and gentrification. Kalinda is even pushed out of the pan movement at the request of sponsors.
- IV. Reemergence in 1962 and postindependence takeover of Carnival.
The government begins using Carnival and Culture as tools in the formation of a new national identity. Initially Kalinda does not fit well with the story they chose to tell. At the grassroots level Kalinda communities keep the form alive. Key figures in the CDC recognize that omitting Kalinda would be a critical error and begin to include Kalinda as part of the CDC/NCC Regional Carnival program. Slowly the form begins to reemerge, demanding its space on the national and world stage.

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