

**IDENTITY AND CARNIVAL IN TRINIDAD**

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## Abstract

The thesis examines the development of ethnic and national identity in Trinidad. More specifically, it examines the tensions and dialogues between the various ethnic identities that co-exist in Trinidad and their role in the formation of the national identity as mediated through Carnival, and its embodiment of the national myth – ‘all o’ we is one’. Durkheim’s concept of ‘collective effervescence’ and Bakhtin’s ‘dialogism’ provide the two analytical poles of the argument. The first focuses attention on the representation of the social collective, whilst the second provides a way to think through the eruption of experiential heterogeneity. The central argument is that despite the high degree of ethnic diversity there is something that can be called a ‘Trinidadian way of life’ or ‘experience’, which is shared across all social identities. Thus the ‘everyday’ is connected with Carnival – its discursive other – as the occasion when the high encounter the low, the polite meet the vulgar, *pretty mas* meets *dirty mas*, and the different ethnicities coalesce. However, while Carnival plays a role in reducing the tensions produced by differences, it is also a celebration of the same differences that tend to undermine the sense of the collective. Carnival, then, is marked by ambivalence in that it both reinforces and subverts the existing order. On the basis of forty depth interviews and a variety of other primary sources, I explore such questions as: ‘what does it mean to be ‘Trinidadian’? ‘Why are primordial ties still powerful in the construction of identities’? ‘What part does the body play in the physical experience of identity’? And how is it that Carnival is symbolic of national unity

and identity for some while for others it simply reconfirms existing structures and hierarchies, which are seen as falsifying this same unity and identity.

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## **Introduction**

I will begin by outlining my personal connections with my research topic. My mother has always loved Carnival and has regularly played *Mas* in Notting Hill as well as Trinidad. She speaks proudly of being part of the first band produced by today's most celebrated designer, Peter Minshall, a 'devil *mas*' he put on the road at Notting Hill in 1975 just before he returned to Trinidad. Nine years earlier I had left Trinidad for Britain at the age of five. I was too young to have any recollection of Carnival back home but somehow I knew about it, probably through listening to the conversation of adults and calypsos. I got my first chance to play *Mas* one Christmas in the Holland Park area of London. I must have been about seven. The occasion was the school nativity play and I was chosen to be one of the three kings even though I desperately wanted to play an angel. I wanted to wear a white gown, a silver halo made from tinsel, and beautiful wings covered in silver stars and glitter. Even at seven I realised that I had not been picked to be an angel because I did not possess the 'appropriate' look which was basically 'white' with 'European' features. This was confirmed for me by the fact that because it was a girls-only school all the masculine roles were played by girls who were either non-white or different for one reason or another. I was not happy but my mother was thrilled and went about making my costume with the same enthusiasm she normally reserved for *Mas*, or decorating the Christmas tree! She decided on a gown that had gold thread woven through it and a head covering of a red silk square that would be held in place by a crown. A Trinidadian friend of hers, who was a skilled *Mas* man,

agreed to make the crown and the matching gold slippers. The crown was beautiful: made of gold wire and studded with coloured stones and beads, and the slippers were made of linoleum and plaited rope and sprayed gold. I was thrilled with my costume. I adored the crown, the slippers and the overall effect. I no longer resented being chosen to play the part of a king. The other mothers and children were stunned by the gorgeousness of my costume. Many of the costumes worn by the angels were not very well made and it was all too clear that in many cases the wings had been made from cornflakes boxes. Just before the performance started I saw that my mother was surrounded by the angels. They were queuing up to receive a dab of red lipstick on their lips. I joined the queue and insisted on my dab of lipstick but instead she pulled out her black eyebrow pencil and drew a moustache and a beard on my face. All my initial resentment about being made to play a king returned. The only thing on my mind was that the girls chosen to play the parts of angels were lucky – they were not simply angels but ‘women’ because of the lipstick. It was my mother’s attention to detail that resulted in the application of a moustache and beard that I took to be a violation of my sense of self as a girl. I was not only ‘racially’ ambiguous but now sexually ambiguous too.

This was my introduction to the gorgeous but also strange and sometimes disturbing world of *Mas* that I eventually came to see as uniquely Trinidadian. As part of the Trinidadian diaspora based in London, Carnival rapidly gained a special fascination for me because of the very apparent desire of members of my family and Trinidadian friends to return to Trinidad for the annual bacchanal. Not only

that but I was also aware of the fact that Trinidadians living in the larger diasporic centres of New York and Toronto were also doing the same thing. Thus I started to wonder why this carnival thing was so important both at home and in the diasporic centres. I also wanted to know what it was about *Mas* that many of the Trinidadians I know love and miss whilst they are away. Why does carnival time become an ‘emotional’ time for Trinidadians who cannot make the trip? What is it they think they are missing out on by not being there? These, then, were the very basic questions I had in mind as I began thinking about this thesis.

### **Substantive Themes and Theoretical Concepts**

It is my hope that some of the themes and ideas that arise in the thesis but are not discussed will pave the way for further investigation such as questions about the manner in which ‘carnival culture’ is transported and transposed to the main centres of the Trinidadian diaspora – New York, Toronto and London – where it has become part of new dialogues of identity. It is also my hope that the issues discussed and approaches developed in the main part of the thesis may also have implications for our understanding of the following topics: identity formation in multi-ethnic societies; the role of ritual in contemporary societies; and the transnational cultural flows that Homi Bhabha (1994: 172) refers to as ‘translational’ cultures.

For the present I have restricted the thesis to its principle substantive aim which is the examination of interaction between narratives of identity and Carnival in Trinidad, and in doing so I employ a network of general and more specific



concepts in order to understand the construction of Trinidadian identity and the role that Carnival plays in defining and sustaining this identity. The general concepts are dialogism, collective effervescence, and the (socially constructed) body. The first refers to the general approach I take which is Bahktin-inspired, whilst the second demarcates my broad area of interest, and the third specifies a major focus of empirical attention. The more specific concepts are 'Carnival' and 'Identity'. Here the first refers to the type of 'effervescence' produced through collective ritual that is most pertinent to national identity in Trinidad today, and the second to the narratives of identity that are produced through national and 'racial' discourses.

The concept of identity is currently fashionable in sociology particularly amongst those interested in ethnicity, gender and sexuality. But what does it mean? Stuart Hall (1996) and Ian Craib (1998) discuss identity in different ways. Whereas Hall focuses upon the external and social dimensions which lead to the privileging of social identities as social positionings, Craib focuses upon the psychological ones in which the internal aspects such as experience – thinking and feeling – have a contribution to make in enhancing our understanding of identity. This combination of these two approaches enabled me to conceive of Trinidadian identity as having social and experiential dimensions and lead to an exploration of the positionings of identities and how that 'reality' is experienced rather than simply perceived in an ethnically diverse society.

By paying attention to experience the body becomes a privileged material site since bodies allow us to communicate and share experiences. Whilst the body has long held a prominent position in anthropology this has not been the case in sociology. Bryan Turner (1991) argues that a secret history of the body may be detected in classical sociology such as the works of Marx, Engels and Weber and later developed through the writings of Nietzsche, Elias, Marcuse, and Foucault (Shilling 1993: 27). According to Turner, an important re-evaluation of the importance of the body has occurred, not just in feminist theory but also amongst those concerned with class analysis, culture and consumption. This turn became particularly evident in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu whose ideas I apply when I discuss social class in terms of 'habitus' and 'taste' within the context of Carnival. More crucially, the body may be seen to be implicit in Peter Wilson's (1973) analysis of Caribbean societies which he took to be structured along the lines of a pyramid where a small group of whites occupied the top position, a group of middle-class coloureds were in the middle, and the bulk of the black masses were at the bottom. Wilson's model has been seen variously as a synthesis of previous functionalist and pluralist traditions (Besson 1993) or a model of conflicting value systems (Van Koningsbruggen 1997). Whichever view one takes, there is no denying that Wilson's model provided a departure from previous approaches in its analysis of social behaviour and internal differentiation on the basis of the conflicting values of reputation and respectability. These values in turn were understood to be gender based and placed the masculine and feminine in fixed

binary oppositions which in turn gave rise to other gendered oppositions such as inside/outside, street/yard, public/private, authentic/colonial to name some. In Wilson's formulation respectability originated in the dominant discourses of the original colonial and subsequent neo-colonial system which espoused the values of the Christian churches, the superiority of European culture over local culture, and the necessity of hierarchy, whether in the class system or institutions such as marriage, the family, and school. Because of women's association with the home and the family, they tend to be associated with the values of respectability and by extension the values of legitimate society. Reputation, by contrast, is understood by Wilson as the antithesis of respectability and to have originated in an 'indigenous' if not 'authentic' counter-culture with its anti-hierarchical forms. Reputation is the value system that gives men a separate identity from women with its emphasis on personal worth rather than social worth, its focus on friendship over family life as the organizing principle of social life, and its valuing of public spaces such as the street and the rum shop over the home. In addition, reputation is associated with masculine behaviour such as '*liming*', verbal skills (Abrahams 1983) and general anti-establishment activities. A number of writers - Besson (1993), Burton (1997), Miller (1994) and Yelvington (1995) – have criticized Wilson for his fixed binary oppositions which are also gender based and therefore obscure the opposition's interaction with other factors such as class, power and wealth. Yelvington (1995: 174-175) argues that reputation/respectability constitutes the idiom through which men control women. Such relations of

domination are made possible through the accumulation of symbolic capital and require objectification on the basis of the strategies Bourdieu (1977) refers to as symbolic violence – the subtle, gentle and disguised means by which domination is achieved and ultimately experienced as legitimate.

Once the body is recognised as an important phenomena in discussions of identity - whether related to race/ethnicity, gender or class - it becomes possible to speak of identity as a lived individual experience albeit culturally constructed but nonetheless physical. With this in mind writers, such as Miles (1997) and Zack (1997) speak of the physical experience of race that is what people experience in their bodies and the bodies of others.

In sum, following the various leads I have identified, I will try to show in this thesis that ‘truth’ should not simply be seen as something constructed in language and discourses but also something that has an experiential aspect arising from the embodied nature of social relations (Zack 1997: 146).

### **Thesis Organization**

Chapter One is a discussion of the concepts of collective effervescence and dialogism as they relate to the main themes of identity and carnival. I indicate the importance of the body in the construction of identity as well as its importance in the performance of ‘rituals’ such as carnival. I argue that dialogism, and collective effervescence can offer new insight into how we conceptualize relations between the self and others and the construction of identities in time and space, as well as

indicate the value of rituals in sustaining a sense of collective life and producing a sense of national identity.

Chapters Two and Three takes the theme of identity first and begin with an account of the development of ‘race’ thinking in Europe since conceptions of race have been an important dimension of identity, particularly as these conceptions have altered with shifts in knowledge, ideological and political formations, and Europe's economic expansion into the New World. Thus these chapters distinguish three time-space periods within Trinidad’s history: discovery and conquest; slavery and indentured labour; and hybridization and Independence. In these contexts I consider the implications that multi-ethnic populations have for the possibility of constructing a national identity through a critical examination of the concepts of creolization, douglarization and the relations between them. Chapters Four and Five further deepen the investigation of Trinidadian identities by concretising them in terms of the narratives of identity produced by my respondents. Chapter Four deals with how Trinidadians construct their ethnic/racial identities, and Chapter Five with how Trinidadians construct their national identity through their everyday lived experiences.

Chapter Six commences the investigation of the second main theme of the thesis namely Carnival; I argue that Carnival is essentially a hybrid festival on account of its historical development. I focus on the role of the body in the ritual of carnival and more specifically still I examine two bodily aspects of Carnival – *masquing* and *wining* - particularly closely. In addition, I argue that despite what is

referred to as the ‘feminization of *mas*’ Carnival nonetheless retains something of the spirit of freedom, renewal and topsy-turvydom traditionally associated with the Bakhtinian style carnival. In the case of *wining*, I argue that the body, performance and movement are woven together to produce a complex web of relations that include the relations generated by Carnival itself with the result that individuals participate in a process of symbolic collective regeneration, renewal of national identity and therefore cultural reinvention.

Chapter Seven is an attempt to concretise the concepts of collective effervescence and freedom in the terms of my respondents’ lived experiences. In addition, I examine the way in which the imagined nature of national identity – that is, its ideological character – is constantly contested by competing, dissenting and co-existing ‘marginal’ identities. I argue that whilst Carnival is a celebration of the collective body it is also a celebration of dialogue, which means that it is ultimately a ritual full of paradoxes and ambiguities.

Finally, I should point out that I have focused upon Trinidad and not included Tobago as part of my study although the two islands together form the nation state of Trinidad and Tobago. My reason for this is that Trinidad has a much higher degree of ethnic and cultural diversity as compared to Tobago, which tends to be more homogenous – mainly African in composition, plus the fact that Tobago did not become a ward of Trinidad until 1889.

**Chapter One:  
Conceptual Resources and Research Process**

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the two theorists Durkheim and Bakhtin who, despite their disciplinary and philosophical differences, have most influenced this thesis. Following that I will then go on to outline my understandings of the concepts I have taken from them - dialogism, collective effervescence and chronotope and the main themes - before finally outlining my methodological stance.

Durkheim is identified as one of the founding fathers of sociology that argued the job of sociology is the study of 'social facts'. What Durkheim meant by social facts is contested. On the one hand, the idea of a 'social fact' is associated with positivistic, mechanistic and objectivistic thinking by writers such as Bilton (1981), Parsons (1939), and Giddens (1989). Whilst on the other, it has been reinterpreted in a non-positivistic manner by writers such as Gane (1995), Craib (1997), Steadman Jones (2001), and Pearce (2001). According to the latter view, which is the one I find most convincing social facts emerge from the structural reality of society and this reality is constituted through association - that is, social life - and exerts a form of external constraint upon individuals. Steadman Jones considers how a 'thing' may be connected to the representational nature of social reality in the following excerpts:

[First] 'thing' belongs to the dialectic of reality: conscience-representation-thing. Durkheim makes it clear that a thing is that which is observed... [Second] a concept is needed to express reality within the logic of representation, and 'thing' indicates this... So when Durkheim says that 'tendencies are things', he means that they are real... [Third] to treat social facts as things, according to Durkheim, is to treat them scientifically and thus to treat them as data... The represented is what calls the object; when we think about something in this logic of representation, it becomes an object of thought. Thinking is the totality of the representative conditions. To be known objectively, social facts - ways of thinking - must become objects of these representative functions. To do so, they must be treated as



the represented – that is, as ‘things’; in this way they become scientific data in an epistemological sense.... Social facts are ways of thinking and acting which stem not from the self but from the system of relations which surround it – in external relations (Steadman-Jones 2001: 142-143).

Thus there is no reason why forms of identity such as those summarised by terms such as nationalism and ethnicity should not be treated as social facts since they involve complex syntheses of material things and processes as well as representations (Steadman Jones 2001: 142).

Bakhtin’s position as a theorist has yet to be clarified and he therefore remains somewhat ‘homeless and unattached’ (Emerson 2000: 4). Most commonly, he is seen as a theorist of ‘otherness’ exemplified in his writing on Carnival and the carnivalesque where it is seen as a means for displaying otherness. As a theorist of ‘dialogism’ Bakhtin starts with the basic idea that language originates in social interaction and as such it is rooted in the struggles and ambiguities of everyday life. As such meaning is not produced through fixed relationships between abstract signs but rather through the constant social use of particular forms of language that may be contested at certain times (Maybin 2001: 65). For Bakhtin the self is an embodied entity situated in time and space which dimensions are constituted in and through the subjects’ dialogical relation with others and the world at large. This means that humans are not simply the effects of linguistic system or apparatuses of knowledge and power but are *positioned* on the boundary between self and other by a wide range of historical and contemporary conditions.

Although these two writers emerged from different intellectual traditions their ideas about the social and the communal played an important part in their

thinking and I employ some of these ideas in the thesis as a means to understand different processes operating at different levels. On one level Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence is a way of explaining the role that rituals such as Carnival play in bonding individuals together which is necessary for social renewal: particularly in renewing a sense of national identity. And, on another level Bakhtin recognizes the materiality of the body engaged in a bodies-in-relation dialogue *situated* in concrete time and space. Thus it becomes possible to conceive of Carnival as an embodiment of social relations, which are taken as deeply felt and experienced and not abstract and external to the everyday.

### **Dialogism**

As Holquist (2000) has pointed out even though one may grasp the nature of dialogism as such that there is always an element of ambiguity and therefore room for creativity in defining its meaning. Weatherall (2001: 24) simply states 'dialogical' means 'talk [...] that when we speak [...] combine together many different pieces of other conversations and texts, and significantly, other voices'. Therefore it is an approach that assumes the subject is produced by language and therefore enters into a network of relationships each with its own language and that the sum total of all these relationships and languages constitutes the world. Time and space may have the effect of producing different configurations of such relations and therefore, given this, dialogism is not simply a multiplicity of different voices but also entails a plurality of relations. With the acquisition of language comes the ability to think, and Bakhtin makes a connection between thinking and the material body in that, 'consciousness could have developed only

by having at its disposal material that was pliable and expressible by bodily means' (Bakhtin 1986: 14). Moreover, the very capacity to have consciousness is based upon otherness, which means that the self is treated as a dialogic relation of self and other as well as a relation of separateness and simultaneity.

As methodology dialogism can be useful as a form of critique of monologisms - 'a master code aiming to speak for the other' and their tendency to homogenize difference (Zavala 1993; Mercer 1994). For example, the monologism of colonialist discourse is revealed as cannibalistic because it devours whole images and returns only selected parts, and 'in the inscription of the Other's body and voice what comes to light is the partiality of what passes for a fixed and universal image' (Zavala 1993: 263). By contrast, the dialogic principle is responsive to the complexities of difference and diversity for what it enables one to question are the claims made by monologic discourses about the distant past and the legitimatising of acts carried out in the name of either 'civilization' or 'salvation'. Thus colonialist discourse created an imaginary and composite category, which became the New World wherein colonial subjects were constructed as a passive, homogenous mass (Zavala 1993: 264). Developing Bakhtin's ideas, Kobena Mercer also sees the value of dialogism as a strategy for providing a 'gesture' towards a counter-hegemonic perspective:

Critical dialogism has the potential to overturn binaristic relations of hegemonic boundary maintenance by multiplying critical dialogues *within* particular communities and between the various constituencies that make up the "imagined community of the nation. At once articulating the personal and the political, such dialogism shows that our "other" is already inside each of us... Moreover, critical dialogism questions the exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based (Mercer 1994:65-66)

Similarly, Bhabha's (1994: 174) post-colonial perspective also employs dialogic thinking as part of a strategy of rethinking and rewriting, reinscribing and reinterpreting colonial narratives. Thus post-colonial critical discourses resist holistic forms of explanations and insist upon the centrality of otherness in the construction of identity (Bhabha 1994:175). Consequently hybridity is regarded as central to identity formation amongst populations who have been dominated, subjugated, or displaced through diasporic movement for one reason or another. Hybrid subjects or cultures therefore occupy a 'third' or 'in-between' space but are essentially not one thing or the other and this third space is characterized by an 'open-ness' that is continuously 'becoming' (Bhabha 1994: 217-219).

### **Chronotope**

Central to dialogism is the concept of the 'chronotope' (literally time/space). Bakhtin employs the term to refer to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships as they are expressed in literature. In his essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* Bakhtin lays down what he considers to be its defining features as constituted in literature however I feel it necessary to emphasize that chronotope remains a difficult, elusive and compounded concept about whose meaning there is much dispute and little clarity. My use of the term is somewhat liberal in that I see it as a suggestive tool to help me understand a range of issues related to temporal and spatial aspects of identity formation. The chronotope is an elemental part of dialogism because of its emphasis on the multi-temporality of social existence where each act of communication emerges from a background of past dialogical and ideological encounters. By taking this as the basis of

chronotope I argue that the dialogues of the everyday contain traces of the past. That is to say the past does not play a passive role since it contains sources of dialogical constitution of meaning. As Sandywell (1998: 202) puts it ‘the past becomes an index for a range of possible chronotopical relations elicited by the speech genres of particular traditions and cultures... every human activity in the ‘now’ is indebted to the reflexivities of the past’. Temporal multiplicity and the historicity of the time-space paradigm therefore come together in the theory of speech genres. Sandywell explains this as the means by which our access to reality is mediated by the chronotopic repertoires of particular speech communities in that it is at this point that meaning becomes bound up with a theory of society and history. Dialogism thus ‘stresses the performative, rhetorical, and expressive aspects of language use in specific historical settings and communities’ (Sandywell 1998: 203). As we can see Bakhtin’s concept of ‘speech genres’, is crucial to dialogical thinking and it basically refers to the expressive aspects of language used in specific historical setting and communities. This means that they are associated with specific contextual features as well as specific kinds of social purposes. The narratives that individuals draw upon to map out their lives are drawn from historical rhetorics, and are also understood to be available to others representing their own location in time and space. More broadly, such chronotopes of identity may be seen to be embedded in collective narratives such as nationalism, and provide some of the narrativising themes that subjects may draw upon in everyday life.

## **Collective Effervescence**

For Durkheim it is the social that that gives individual action meaning, and effervescence is characteristic of those moments when humans are transformed through the performance of ritual. The force generated by effervescence and experienced as external to each individual is the agent of that transformation, but the force itself is created by the fact of assembling and temporarily living a collective life that transports individuals beyond themselves (Durkheim 1995: xli). As part of this process people's behaviour become altered so that they do things that they would not ordinarily do as social interactions become more frequent, and they live an intense life. Such behaviour range from acts of barbarism committed in wars, through to incredible feats of heroism. For Durkheim effervescence is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs in which man becomes something other than what he was for example, speaking of the French Revolution, 'we see the most mediocre or harmless bourgeoisie transformed into by the general exaltation into a hero or an executioner'. Interestingly, Durkheim also says:

And the mental processes are so clearly the same as those at the root of religion that the individuals themselves conceive the pressure they yielded to in explicitly religious terms. The Crusaders believed they felt God present among them, calling on them to forth and conquer the Holy Land, and Joan of Arc believed she was obeying celestial voices (Durkheim 1995: 212-213)

It is in his writing on religion that Durkheim posits a theory of consciousness but [consciousness] not in [the sense of] individual feeling but in collective states of mind (Steadman Jones 2001: 204). For Durkheim the immortality of the soul, although individualized, was symbolic of the continuity of collective life after death since it was the social part of all human beings (Durkheim 1995: xxxix). I

should say that the experience of collective effervescence is also one in which when we are affected by some rush of energy reaching us from outside, in ‘all kinds of acts that express the understanding, esteem, and affection of his neighbour, there is a lift that the man who does his duty feels, usually without being aware of it’. In short, it is one’s sense of ‘moral harmony’ with one’s neighbours that helps to renew social bonds (Durkheim 1995: 213)

For the purpose of this thesis, a number of important points concerning collective effervescence may be identified. First, the base for collective effervescence is ‘social life’. The social acts as an external force in the same way that God is perceived to be an external force in religion, imposing restraint, possessing moral authority over individuals, and extracting sacrifices from them. However, for Durkheim, it would be misleading to see the force of the collectivity as wholly external since it does not move us entirely from the outside: society can exist only in and by means of individual minds, thus it must enter into us and become organized within us. Second, rites play an important part during moments of collective effervescence. Individuals feel themselves transformed and are transformed through ritual doing. The transforming force is the very act of assembling and temporarily living a collective life. Effervescence may become so intense that it leads to outlandish behaviour in which ordinary morality is temporarily suspended and normal rules may be violated with impunity.

Third, a very intense social life inflicts a sort of violence on the individual’s mind and body so that it disrupts their normal functioning, which is why it may only last for a limited time. Also, the settings for performing certain rituals such as

darkness or firelight intensify the excitement of those participating. Fourth, for individual minds to commune they need to come outside of themselves and this can only be done through movement. Thus:

It is the homogeneity of these movements that makes the group aware of itself and that in consequence, makes it be. Once this homogeneity has been established and these movements have taken a definite form and been stereotyped, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But these movements symbolize those representations only because they have helped to form them (Durkheim 1995: 232).

Finally, symbolic reminders become important in extending the effects of the effervescence after the assembly has broken up, and since the symbols on their own cannot prevent forgetfulness, the rites are cyclically and repetitively performed. Thus it becomes clear that at the core of collective effervescence lies the idea of ritual as a form of social bonding. In *The Elementary Forms* Durkheim speaks of ritual as the means by which collective beliefs are generated and experienced by the community. One of the characteristics of religious beliefs is the division between the sacred and the profane:

Sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred. Religious beliefs are those representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things (Durkheim 1995: 38).

This division of sacred and profane is also connected with the division between the social and the individual (Steadman-Jones 2001: 209). Collective effervescence plays an important part in my thesis on two counts: the first relates to the ritual of Carnival and the second to expressions of national identity. In the case of the former Carnival celebrations may be viewed as a structural feature for letting of



steam by the masses and therefore cohesive in effect, whilst in the case of the latter national moments such as Carnival in Trinidad becomes an expression of unity and togetherness in what is otherwise regarded as an increasingly socially and racially divided society.

### **'Race', Ethnicity and Identity**

In his discussion of the development of *race* Michael Banton (2000) tells us that 'race is a concept rooted in a particular culture and a particular period of history which brings with it suggestions about how these differences are to be explained' Further, 'it lends itself to use in a variety of contexts and gets elaborated into a whole style or idiom of interpretation'. In the beginning race meant descent but it was at a time when people understood little of the biology of descent. In the nineteenth century race became identified with a controversial scientific theory based on 'type' until it was rejected. However, with the increasing diversity of human forms racial type still retained a centrality in the classification of people. Thus, old ideas were recycled and emerged but were constituted on a foundation different from that of the pre-Darwinian era. The current usage of the term race is overwhelmingly for the political purposes of identifying communities without intending to imply that the chief differences between them stem from inheritance (Back and Solomos 2000: 62).

What Banton's writings made me aware of is the temporal-spatial dimension to the discourse of race particularly the way in which speech genres could be seen to operate in what may be argued to be the chronotopic repertoires of particular speech communities such as the philosophers, scientists, colonizers,

travelers or texts such as the bible, anthropological books, scientific research, the journals of travelers because it is at this point that meaning becomes bound up with a theory of society and history.

In examining the question of identity in Trinidad one is looking at a number of related ways of talking about it such as race, ethnicity, culture and nationalism. In Trinidad the terms race and ethnicity are often conflated or used interchangeably. Yelvington, for example, points out that when Trinidadians use the term 'ethnicity' they often invoke the images of immutable biological origins associated with 'race': ancestry, common culture, along with metaphors of birth, heredity and bodily essence which construct an 'involuntary' social identity (Yelvington 1995: 24-25). More importantly there is a sense in which people of the same ethnic identity see each other, not exactly as kin, but as 'possible kin' (Ibid). Similarly, Segal (1995: 90) also shows that the idiomatic expression of the idea of race constructed in the popular imagination prior to 1962 involved the invocation of ancestral lands and genealogical links that were inscribed on the body.

The shift in academic interest from the politics of race to questions of cultural production and the politics of identity has produced a corresponding shift in conceptual terms so that the analytical field has become one of interactions or dialogues between race, culture and nation. Thus Solomos and Back (2000: 20-21) point out that a recent feature of contemporary racist discourses is the way in which terms such as difference and culture are often codes for race and the language of culture and nation invoke a hidden racial narrative. The very idea that social interaction and dialogue between race, nation and culture have entered the

analytical field is an indication that we also need to consider the reality of an intersecting series of space-times or histories (Sandywell 1998: 208) such as those that follow conquest, migration or significant political change and which either involve (revolutions) or are memorialised (Royal Jubilees) in occasions of collective effervescence. Thus my thesis in part is concerned with the way in which the Europeans took it upon themselves to colonize the New World through the imposition of their own social-imaginary time-frames so that the societies of the indigenous peoples were defined within the frame of the events, changes and developments taking place in the societies of the colonizers. For my own practical purposes chronotopes are inflected by the ideological practices, traditions and cultures of a given society with the result that different forms of experience, social interests and world-views may be related to dominant chronotopes. Chronotopes, then are a way of conceiving speech genres as the dialogical products of past dialogues which contain layers upon layers of meanings. The historical events that I have chosen discuss in relation to Trinidad are its discovery-conquest in the sixteenth century, the arrival of slave and indentured labour in the nineteenth century, and the rise nationalism-creolization in the twentieth century. Each is constituted through multiple temporalities that invoke particular forms of social interaction and dialogues thus creating different possibilities for identity formation.

## **Carnival**

Bakhtin's model of Carnival is grounded in his study of Rabelais' writings on medieval culture in which he identified certain elements that formed the

carnavalesque such as popular festive forms, the grotesque body and carnival laughter. Following the Russian semioticians of the Tartu school (Emerson 2000: 172), I believe that his concept of carnival is best understood alongside and in interaction with other Bakhtinian principles such as the dialogic. It is, then, with such an interactive approach to the understanding of the concept that I will approach carnival in Trinidad. One atypical feature of the Trinidadian Carnival is its promotion of ‘national’, or in the Bakhtinian sense official culture. At first sight this strikes a false note since the Bakhtin carnival entails the mocking or degrading of such cultures. However, ‘these abuses were ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying they at the same time revived and renewed’ (Bakhtin 1984: 16). This ambivalence is repeated with regard to the contemporary carnival thanks to the ethnic heterogeneity of the population since carnival's claim to be the symbol of national identity is both undermined by criticisms that it is ‘black’ culture masquerading as national culture, and simultaneously supported by the fact that increasing numbers of Indo-Trinidadians now participate.

In the same way that I argue that ideas about identity are shaped and produced through interaction and dialogues at certain times I hope to show that the evolution of Carnival in Trinidad involves a similar dialogical process. By locating carnival within specific chronotopic times/spaces – the Pre-Emancipation, Post-Emancipation and National periods it is possible to get a sense of the dialogues taking place between the different sections of the population. More importantly, we are then able to see the past in the present or as Bhabha puts it the, ‘ghostly repetitions of other stories’ (Bhabha 1994: 156).

Carnival not only operates within its own ritualistic time-space frame consisting of carnival time and non-carnival time which is structured cyclically rather than in a linear fashion, it is a festival that wherever it occurs monopolizes the street and other public spaces, and imposes a certain intense rhythm to the way people interact or perform in the space. Also as a phenomenon carnivals are continuously evolving either because of new influences or because they emerge in new contexts. There is in effect a creative or cultural dialogue between the main diasporic cities (New York, Toronto and London) and Port of Spain [1] in which physical movements from one location to the other and back again transport fashion, new techniques, styles and music which influence cultural forms in each locale. The presence of the overseas diasporic Carnivals raise a number of questions relating to identity and Carnival as a transnational celebration. Bhabha informs us that ‘culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational’ (1994: 172) where its transnationalism is the result of cultural displacement and its translational nature is the effect of ‘spatial histories of displacement’ along with global technologies that cut across boundaries forming new ‘hybridized’ identities. A consequence of this is that ‘how culture signifies, or what is signified by *culture*, [becomes] a rather complex issue’ (Ibid). And, for Bhabha:

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse of ‘nation’, peoples, or authentic ‘folk’ tradition, those embedded myths of culture’s particularity, cannot readily be referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition (Bhabha 1994: 172).

One thing that should not be forgotten about the Trinidad Carnival is that from the very beginning it was a product of transnationalism emerging out from migration, diaspora and the invention of tradition.

### **Methodological Perspectives**

Prior to starting my own fieldwork I came across something called the 'literary turn' in ethnography that emerged as a response to what some writers saw as a crisis in anthropology. Naturally, I wondered if or how this would influence the way I would conduct my research and write up the results. Before I get to this I will give a brief account of the debates that produced this turn. It begins with James Clifford's landmark essay *Partial Truths* (1986) in which he wrote, 'We begin not with participant-observation or with cultural texts (suitable for interpretation) but with writing, the making of texts' (1986: 2). Clearly there was a shift in emphasis from viewing ethnography simply as the 'innocent' representation of cultures to seeing it as a 'self-conscious' process of 'invention' which is not too dissimilar to the creative fiction genre. As a consequence one of the defining features of the new movement was the application of perspectives from literary criticism to ethnographic writing. From this a number of writing styles emerged some of which fused literary theory with ethnography, some writing styles were even experimental. Not all critical ethnographers saw value in this literary style of ethnography, but they all shared with Clifford a commitment to approaches that combined poetics, politics, and history and they all see ethnographic writing as a changing and inventive, rather than static genre. The significance of the literary critique developed by people like Clifford, as Back

(1998: 291) points out is the argument for a reconfiguring of the relationship between the Western anthropologist and the colonial or post-colonial world.

At the core of the critique of classical anthropology is the problematization of representation that throws the doctrine of objectivity into doubt: how could the researcher be 'inside' and yet simultaneously detached. Such a concern with representation and language revealed a paradox at the heart of the ethnographic genre (Atkinson 1990: 175). On the one hand critical theorists have endorsed a broadly interpretive view of sociology especially within qualitative sociology which is dominated by an interactionist-cum-phenomenological framework where language and meaning occupy an important place. Yet on the other hand they have treated language as unproblematic communication. As a result 'ethnographers are conscious of the cultural conventions that are their subject-matter, but have all too often remained blissfully unaware of their own cultural conventions (Atkinson 1990: 177). The 'ethnographic gaze' was also problematic because of the idea that participant-observation, data collection and description, are based upon the idea of cultural facts as things seen opposed to things heard, invented in dialogue or transcribed. By contrast, the privileging of speech over vision allows for the creation of a space for a cultural poetics which is:

...an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye towards expressive speech (and gesture)... [T]he crucial poetic problem becomes how to achieve by written means what speech creates, and to do it without simply imitating speech (Clifford 1986: 12).

In sum, then, it is questionable whether ethnography can speak with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves. In other words, by

privileging sight over speech we run the risk of placing other cultures on a stage where the repetition of performance may only be seen from a privileged position.

Turning to the question of the nature of the new forms of writing, the first thing to be said is that the emphasis upon writing not only highlights the discursive aspects of cultural representation but also shifts the focus to the self-consciousness of the production of cultural texts. Thus, although these have taken on very diverse and experimental forms all have raised the issues of who speaks? Who writes? When and where do they write? With or to whom do they write? Under what institutional and historical constraints do they write? (Clifford 1986). The rupture produced by social and political events such as the anti-colonial struggles and independence movement inspired by the ideas of Marxism, Feminism and Black Power in the 1960s, started a trend which unsettled the dominant subjective-objective balance. The result has been the emergence of a sub-genre of ethnographic writing, which has notions of *reflexivity* and *rhetorical* analysis at its core. Rhetorical analysis concerns not simply the way statements are put together, but also their effects. Certain statements and forms of arguments are privileged with the result that their users are heard as authoritative. For Back (1998: 286), rhetorical activity is 'the art of persuasion or effective communication, connected with speaking with propriety, elegance and force'. Whilst rhetoric is normally seen to be incompatible with 'science' the inclusion of 'rhetorical' or even 'literary' features with ethnographic writing should not be read as undermining their scholarly credibility or status. In addition, it is important to point out, as Atkinson does, that the 'ethnographic genre' is not a unique and homogenous corpus of texts



with set conventions: in fact it is multiple and diverse. However, there are certain conventions that ethnographies share with other textual types such as the realist and meta-fictional literary modes, and 'factual' historical, biographical and scientific texts. This means that all scholarly or 'scientific' work may be read in accordance with some generic principle, and that our experience of the world is mediated by the conventions of enquiry, which in turn is mediated, by the conventions of writing. The eclectic sources of this approach means that a diversity of perspectives is drawn upon. The contrast between the different perspectives becomes part of the approach because, according to Atkinson, at the 'humanistic' level studies focus upon the social actor as 'subject' whilst at the level of discourse the focus is upon textual meaning and the non-subjective (Atkinson 1990: 8).

To focus upon the discursive aspects of cultural representation is also to cast an eye or ear over what is involved in producing cultural texts. A multiplicity of writing styles has much to offer in terms of 'grappling with new orders of complexities - different rules and possibilities within the horizon of a historical moment' (Clifford 1986: 13). The writer is obliged to discover diverse ways to present realities as multi-subjective, power-laden and discordant. Dialogic reasoning therefore finds itself in conflict with traditional ethnographies because the latter privilege the voice of the researcher/author. 'Informants' are present simply to be quoted or paraphrased. Nonetheless, Rabinow detects in Clifford's 'self-consciousness' an unintended means for establishing authority. He argues that whilst Clifford talks about the inescapability of dialogue, his own texts themselves are not dialogic but written in a modified free indirect style. 'They invoke an "I

was there at the anthropological convention” tone, while consistently maintaining a Flaubertian remove’ (Rabinow 1986: 244).

If the changing tide in ethnography produced a crisis in the academy, Rabinow suggests that this crisis of representation should be seen as a historical event with its own specific historical constraints with the result that post-modern pastiche is seen as both a critical position and a dimension of our contemporary society. This change marks a shift not in any one direction but a number of directions. Further, even though anthropology should be situated within the course of larger world events and specifically changing historical relations, to situate the crisis of representation within the context of decolonization alone ignores other dimensions of power that have bearing on the production of texts. An example would be the micropractices of the academy and its trends since they also constitute a level of power relations, which affect us, influence our themes, forms, contents and audiences. Thus he also suggests following Bourdieu that we should ask questions about the politics of culture such as ‘what field of power are we concerned with? And from what position in that field does any given author writes? Bourdieu by no means reduces knowledge to social position, but he does insist that it be considered within the *habitus* in which it is produced and received.

In sum, there is a wide acceptance in the literary field that fiction and science should be seen as complementary rather than oppositional. But there is no escape from the fact that the core activity of anthropology is the social description of the Other even though it may be somewhat modified by new conceptions about the author, text and discourse. My conclusion regarding the literary turn, then, is

that the ethnographic genre can only benefit from new writing strategies, although ultimately, there can be no escape from conventional forms of some sort as Atkinson (1990) has pointed out. A total commitment to textual practice can result in what Back (1998: 292) calls an 'intellectual vertigo' in which everything becomes so abstracted that the social world with which we are familiar disappears underneath jargon and uncertainty as to what we can say about anything.

Taking into account the arguments I have just outlined above I will now turn to examine the styles in ethnography of four writers: Gilberto Freyre, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, J. O. Stewart and Daniel Miller. The first, Gilberto Freyre, the Brazilian social scientist, began his work in the 1920s and would not have been part of the subsequent literary turn. However, his work both anticipated many of the developments associated with the literary turn, and of particular interest to me, a particular concern for him was the question of national identity formation. Freyre was a member of a group of modernist writers in Brazil in the 1920s. These writers drew upon a number of ideologies ranging from anarchism to fascism in their effort to construct a Brazilian national identity. Although the movement was referred to as modernism it was profoundly nationalistic and not all its elements could be reconciled with modernism. Thus, 'along with Catholic corporate values, many modernists embraced anarchist and positivist influences as well as fascism to help create a Brazilian language, and a new identity through *brasilidade*' (Davis 1999: 58). As part of this nationalist movement the modernists focused on Brazilian texts and celebrated Brazilian heroes and downplayed Brazil's diversity in favour of 'inclusion'. Part of inventing a Brazilian national identity involved

coming to terms with the fact of miscegenation. Popular racist theories prior to the 1920s saw the hybrid as some sort of a degenerate. One of the best-known exponents of such ideas was Da Cunha who was a military journalist. Da Cunha attempted to define Brazil in terms of civilization and barbarianism thus forging a discourse on race, culture, and national identity. Davis writes of Da Cunha:

Pessimistic about race mixture since he adhered to the theories of biological determinism prevalent at the time, his work is filled with patriotic tension, monologues, and incongruent passages which vacillate between national pride and racist rhetoric (Davis 1999: 53).

Da Cunha was influenced by the ideas of Darwin and Spencer, which led him to believe that biological evolution was the guarantee of social evolution. Da Cunha idealized the Portuguese influence whilst denigrating the African and seldom considered the indigenous peoples with the result that he thought that the Brazilian identity should be essentially European. Da Cunha's negative attitude towards miscegenation was in tension with the fact that not only was he himself of mixed ancestry but he also wished to see the *pardo* [2] become a national type (Davis 1999: 55). In tune with Da Cunha, Paulo Prado's *Retrato do Brasil* (1931) identified a particular quality in the Brazilian people, which he referred to as the 'Brazilian sadness'. Parker (1991) locates the source of Prado's sadness in lust-driven miscegenation whilst Davis (1991) locates it more diffusely in the slave influence, which Prado regarded as involving 'terrible elements of corruption'. Either way the African population was seen as the source of the problem. Alberto Torres, a sociologist who published his works between 1909 and 1914, rejected the racist ideas of writers such as Da Cunha. Torres shifted the arguments about race from biology to culture which made it dependent upon history and social habitats

(Davis 1999: 56) and resulted in him, like the modernists, viewing miscegenation positively. Miscegenation was a central theme in Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933) and he too saw it in a positive light in the sense that the mixing of cultures was what was creating a new civilization. It is clear from Freyre's work that he too participated in the shift from seeing race as biological to seeing it as a matter of culture and social context. For him, then, the sexual character of Brazilian life was not the result of miscegenation but of the social context (Parker 1991: 25-26). Like earlier writers, Freyre also argued for the centrality of sexuality in the new civilization. He commented that the sociological treatment of history should be supplemented with by a psychological treatment so that where sociologists might abstract status psychologists might abstract the libido. Consequently Freyre was prepared to affirm the existence of miscegenation in terms of the traces it has left on the Brazilian body and soul:

Every Brazilian, even the light-skinned fair-haired ones carries about with him on his soul, when not on soul and body alike – for there are many in Brazil with the mongrel marks of the genipap – the shadow, or at least the birthmark, of the aborigine or Negro' (Freyre 1968: 278).

Freyre's texts are seminal to Brazilian national myth-making precisely because he argued for the centrality of miscegenation to the emergence of the new civilization. His target audience consisted of the well-to-do white males who formed the Brazilian intellectual elite but had hitherto identified themselves in terms of their European roots.

In sum, Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933) and its follow up *The Mansions and the Shanties* (1936) transformed the way Brazilians thought about themselves. By interpreting Brazilian society in the light of a synthetic principle

that fused Amerindian, African and European cultures, Freyre saw miscegenation as fostering a deep democratization of the society. Freyre's writings are unique on two counts. First, he rejected the prevailing notions of biological determinism, and second, he argued for the value of literary and folkloric approaches alongside scientific analysis because they increased awareness and understanding of the subject. In the preface to the second English-language edition of *The Masters and the Slaves*, inspired by Picasso, Freyre describes his efforts as an attempt to produce a 'creative image' (Freyre 1968: xxi). The result is a form of 'truth' which comes from the unification of the 'rational' and the 'irrational', part history, part anthropology, and part genetic or psychological sociology. The creative image he had in mind was one constructed with the help of literary conventions through a blending of a historical past that was mainly European with an anthropological past that is mainly African and Amerindian. For Freyre, 'the latter was represented by the influence of native women upon the conquerors somewhat lost in the tropical wilderness, of slaves upon the minds, culture, and sometimes the bodies of the masters' (Freyre 1968: xxiii). At the core of miscegenation lies the undeniable fact of sexuality, a sexual intimacy between conquerors and conquered, and masters and slaves. Thus, the social history of the 'Big House' is the intimate history of most Brazilians:

...the history of his domestic and conjugal life under a slave-holding society and polygamous patriarchal regime; the history of his life as a child; the history of his Christianity, reduced to the form of a family religion and influenced by the superstitions of the slave hut (Freyre 1968: xliii).

Widespread miscegenation had the effect of narrowing the social distance between the Big House and the tropical forest, as well as that of the Big House and the slave

hut. The Big House thus created a unique kind of civilization with its horizontal architecture divided into enormous kitchens, several dining rooms, a chapel, numerous annexes, small chambers, a gymnasium, and a slave hut. The Big House stands as a symbol of an intimate history because it exposes a mode of life that is routine whilst revealing how the past is in present. On his style of methodology, Freyre writes:

[T]o recapture that [past] life, one has to attempt to re-people those houses. And no attempt of this sort can be valid without what some modern historians know as “imaginative sympathy” (Freyre 1968: lix).

Therefore, the language may at times resemble the language of the novel or literary essay. Also for Freyre the past is not simply about the dead long gone, but continues into the present so that, ‘...a constant flow of time that never stops to allow for definitive sociological conclusions about rigid historical periods (Freyre 1968: lx).

Critics of Freyre’s work have focused on his style, claiming that it is too anecdotal to be a ‘serious’ work to which he responds by saying:

[T]he sociological, anthropological, and historical-social essay has a language of its own; it is not obliged to limit itself to an exact terminology as conceived by other sciences that are not concerned with human values. Its language may at times resemble the language of the novel or literary essay’ (Freyre 1968: lxi).

Critics have also been suspicious of his preoccupation with sex and its associated preoccupation with the Mulatto, which has come to be regarded as reflecting a desire to abolish blackness as Davis argues:

Indeed the idea of being half-baked, not quite complete, underscored the national desire to move away from blackness, i.e., backwardness. On the other hand, it is no surprise that the mulatto becomes an important national symbol (Davis 1999: 61).

Also, Freyre's big house paradigm was too static to account for 'whitening' where biological Mulattos were considered 'white'. Davis points out that Freyre's views had a damaging effect upon black Brazilian mobilization. While promoting racial democracy, he was dismissive of discussions about racial conflict (Davis 1999: 63). Setting aside the problems with some of Freyre's views his sociology stands out because of his attempt to interpret Brazilian society as a hybrid society embodying his personal desire for a racial democracy.

Turning to the remaining three texts of the post-literary turn period we can see three different styles of ethnography. Stewart (1989) adopts the fictive literary approach while Scheper-Hughes (1992) is sensitive to the diversity of voices, and Miller's (1994) style indicates multiple sources in the production of his data as well as a consciousness about what can be said or not said. To take Scheper-Hughes first, whilst she departs from the classical/traditional ethnographies, she nonetheless retains the view that the ethnographer still has an important role to play. Scheper-Hughes practices what she calls 'good enough' ethnography and whilst she acknowledges that field workers are an instrument of cultural translation that is necessarily flawed and biased, they nevertheless have at their disposal the ability to listen and observe carefully, empathetically and compassionately. Further, there is still a role for the ethnographer/writer in giving voice, especially to those who have been silenced. Scheper-Hughes (1992: 28) writes: 'despite the mockery that Clifford Geertz (1988) made of anthropological "I-witnessing", I believe there is still value in attempting to "speak truth with power"'. She uses the analogy of the country doctor who is positioned as a clerk or keeper of the records



who listens, observes, records and tries to interpret human lives. The ethnographer like the country doctor is separated by class from his/her disadvantaged subjects but will still know the personal history of the community because of his/her presence at births and deaths, as well as other events. Thus for Scheper-Hughes the answer is not to retreat from ethnography entirely but to pay closer attention to the production of ethnography so that it becomes more open ended to allow for the multiple voices in the text, including dissident voices that threaten to deconstruct the position of the narrator. Scheper-Hughes' study is an account of the everyday experience of scarcity, sickness and death in the lives of the women and children of a hillside *favela* in the Northeast of Brazil. She writes:

[L]ike all modern ethnographies this one may be read at various, sometimes 'mutually interfering' levels (Clifford 1988), as a book of voyage and discovery, as a moral reflection on a human society forced to the margins, as a political text... that indicts a political economic order that reproduces sickness and death at its very base (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 30).

It is clear from her account that although she regards the very nature of anthropology as empirical there is also a process of selection and interpretation at work. However, empiricism need not entail a commitment to enlightenment notions of reason and truth such as western cultural presuppositions. For Scheper-Hughes anthropology exists both as a field of knowledge (a disciplinary field) and as a field of action (a force field):

Anthropological writing can be a site of resistance... We can disrupt expected roles and statuses in the spirit of the *carnavelsco*, the carnivalesque. And we can exchange gifts based on our labours and so finally subvert the law that puts our work at the service of the machine in the scientific, academic factory (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 24).

Stewart's and Miller's books deal specifically with Trinidad and once again reveal very different approaches to producing ethnographic writing. Whilst Miller wrote from the perspective of an outsider to Trinidadian society, Stewart's position amongst the 'natives' in the field was not entirely a stranger-native relation since he is originally from Trinidad. The Other Stewart writes about, 'was heavily constituted out of a tension between my own memory of an earlier time, and the recognizable changes of my return: out of the memory of how I used to be, and the inadequacy of my new cultural reflexes' (Stewart 1989: 16), which were those of a Black-American. This meant that he too experienced Trinidad from an external point of view. Stewart's anthropological training and status as an expatriate gave him a particular way of looking at things that was unfamiliar to those who had spent their entire lives there. Thus, 'I returned, then, not as a true foreigner but as a partial stranger, carrying a sense of belonging to a larger world of which Trinidad could only be a part' (Ibid).

The first thing that struck me about Stewart's book was the style, which was clearly different from Scheper-Hughes' or Miller's because of its fusion of ethnographic detail with story telling. Stewart justifies such an approach on the grounds that translating field data into individual thought processes is no simple task: the only way to get inside the other's head is to imagine yourself there. This does not require the invention of a new genre since the latter already exists in the form of fiction. Thus, *Drinkers, Drummers and Decent Folk* combines ethnography with imagination. It contains all the historical, biographical,

descriptive and factual data one would expect to see included as part of an ethnographic study but the ethnographic and fictive are clearly juxtaposed.

Stewart's fictional form of writing paints a picture with scenery and actors, and there is no sense of a watchful 'I' positioned outside of the setting. The advantages as he sees them, can be summed up as follows: first, it allows us to tap into the subjective world; second, it energizes intersubjective communication because it acknowledges that there is a creative relationship between the ethnographer and the people studied since it has impacted upon the written product; third, it 'evokes' rather than 'represents' and therefore frees ethnography from the requirement to use inappropriate elements of scientific rhetoric such as objects, facts, descriptions, generalizations, verifications, experiment, truth and so on. However, by elevating the fictional form Stewart is by no means suggesting that other forms have no place in ethnography. He is simply making the point that observation alone is inadequate if one sees significant aspects of culture as living in the minds of the observed. He writes:

[E]thnography would be a more complete and productive artefact if it undertook to present this interior universe.... Such presentation cannot be done through abstract chatter, or any series of direct expository statements. Indirection has to be the mode. What I can say is that this presentation can be done by drawing on certain conventions (character, plot, metaphor, display, etc.) that are already well developed, and innovations that have already been anticipated in imaginative writing (Stewart 1989: 12).

As Stewart's emphasis is on the interior lives of his subjects it is concerned with how people fashion social and cultural structures, how they manipulate, manage or are controlled by them. Further, 'it is a dramatic relationship, involving people in dialogue with themselves, other people, the things and events which give order and

meaning to everyday life' (Stewart 1989: 13). Whilst Stewart regards his stories as distillations from field notes and other less objective forms of information, he is also demonstrating his presence in the texts, as an ethnographer necessarily engaged in selecting, juxtaposing, and emphasizing particular accounts.

By contrast, Miller's approach is closer to standard ethnographies except that he supplemented his more formal observation with a 'kitchen sink' approach whereby he drew on information from a huge variety of sources: transnational companies, advertising agencies, marketing and retail establishments, doctors and nurses, lawyers and other professionals, as well as people who worked behind bars or as domestic cleaners and the media. Miller's more formal fieldwork was carried out in four communities where forty households were observed. No formal sampling was used and Miller also obtained information through his forming friendships and involving himself in various networks. Miller's reflexivity is most visible when it comes to matters of sexuality:

There are other aspects of this work about which I continue to have doubts. Other things being equal I would not have focused upon sexuality, being aware of the sensitivity of a topic which has been instrumental in the development of racial stereotypes as they pertain to this region. I have been led to this topic, as I perceived it to be a dominant idiom for other concerns that I had intended to focus upon. I now feel it might have been better to attempt to account for and interpret these issues, rather than trying to impose a self-censorship in the interest of some post-colonial angst about what liberalism should or should not allow as the frame of enquiry. Given the complexity of these issues I have no firm idea of what would be the 'right' or the 'wrong' policy to follow, and I have therefore followed what I take to be the integrity of the academic program in the hope that the result is not irresponsible (Miller 1994: 5).

Miller's concern here exemplifies the restrictions brought about by ideological shifts, rule changes and new compromises in ethnographic practice, which have

determined what can and cannot be said about particular peoples. In the light of this Miller, a white middle-class male could not help but feel some discomfort when trying to write about the sexual behaviour of an ex-colonial other. Whilst Miller does not adopt the fictive mode of writing, he describes his approach modestly as ‘apt illustration’, to suggest that he uses his material to illustrate his own perspective. Thus Miller regards his work as both empirically informed and infused with moral and interpretive dimensions:

A bias may also be noted as emergent from my background in material culture studies rather than social anthropology. I am more concerned to examine observed practice, while treating language more as a level of legitimation by informants than as privileged access to explanation. I also attempt to construct my observations more as ordering taxonomies which in the tradition of Durkheim and more especially Bourdieu, are used by individuals but not necessarily best constituted as individual subjectivities (Miller 1994: 3-4).

However, Miller found that, whilst the material he generated is open to other perspectives and interpretations, it nevertheless reflected the fact that his actual observations had challenged his expectations. The concerns driving Miller’s work are clearly very different from those driving Stewart’s work. Miller’s concern is to juxtapose general theories of modernity with ethnographic data to open the way for an anthropological analysis of comparative modernities. Stewart, on the other hand, is concerned with how the people in the Trinidadian village amongst whom he lived faced the task of creating themselves, and the active role of the ethnographer in creating the meanings in the texts and exploring the inner world and feeling.

Reading these four texts then suggested to me that there was a kinship between the ‘literary turn’ in anthropology, the social sciences more generally, and

Bakhtin's dialogism. Bakhtin's concept of speech genre allows us to pay particular attention to language, time and space but it also makes us aware of the multiple positionings and dialogues that exist in society. Thus:

These different social languages and genres 'cohabit', supplementing and contradicting each other, and intersecting or becoming hybridized in various ways. Bakhtin uses the term heteroglossia to refer to this dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages (Maybin 2001: 67).

This means that language is 'overpopulated' with other people's voices: therefore discourses are sites of ideological struggle because they are constructed from multiple dialogues that also mean that one's sense of identity is also evaluative and ideological.

At its most basic, 'the study of discourse and persons investigates how people tell stories about themselves and how they present themselves in talk' (Wetherell 2001: 186). This matter impinges on other issues such as how we understand the internal states of individuals, their emotions, desires and their views of the world. Billig (2001) in an essay notably influenced by Bakhtinian ideas argues that the study of memory, perception and emotion should not focus on the inner process but instead on 'language games' or what Bakhtin calls the 'genres of utterance'.

Billig (2001: 214) notes that for Bakhtin all utterances are dialogic in that they are a response to other utterances and their meaning must be understood in relation to these other utterances. 'Attitude-statements' for example, typically bear a rhetorical meaning which must be contextualized in terms of their utterance because they not only contain statements about the speaker's views but also about their positioning. As such individuals then draw upon a reservoir of terms that are

culturally, historically and ideologically available. Thus, 'each act of utterance, although in itself novel, carries an ideological history' (Billig 2001: 217). Since ideology is part of that which appears 'natural', certain aspects of society will appear as inevitable as in the case of Trinidad with respect to race and the language associated with it such as purity, mixed, brown skin, *dougla*, and so on. Billig uses the example of national identity to illustrate the role played by ideological formation. More particularly he uses the concept of 'flagging' which is essentially a metaphor for the 'banal' forms of nationalism associated with nation-states that is taken-for-granted or passes unnoticed in everyday life. I found this concept useful to illustrate the way in which a sense of Trinidadian identity is inscribed on the everyday, and the way in which a particular Trinidadian masculine identity is performed through street behaviour. Using Billig's argument one may see how such 'unmindful' reminders may embody the habits of social life, place, and social relations.

### **The Research Process**

I approached my research subject from a position of familiarity but also distance. Prior to starting my research in 1999 I had been to the Trinidad Carnival on three occasions and played *Mas* on Carnival Tuesday once, and *J'Ouvert* on three occasions. My own methodological style has more in common with Miller's (1994) idea of a mix and match approach, but the main source of inspiration I took from Freyre. I took language to be speech that encodes particular perspectives and judgements and as such my intention was to show how one's positioning, experience and discourses interacted dialogically to produce particular meanings.

More importantly, I wanted to show how these multiple forms of speech coexisted, sometimes supplementing and at other time in direct conflict with one another.

Overall, my own particular biases would indicate a search for something that unites all Trinidadians in the words of Scheper-Hughes ‘a round table envisioned as a great Bakhtinian banquet where everyone can find a place at the table and share in the feasting (1992: 30), and also to subvert the ‘law’ the in the spirit of the carnivalesque that seeks to divides us.

My research was carried out over a period of three years between 1999-2001. Each of my visits coincided with the Carnival season. In the first year (January – March 1999) I visited Trinidad for three months, followed the next year (December – June 2000) by a six months visit and in the final year (December-April 2001) with a visit of four months. During these visits I recorded fifty interviews of which forty were transcribed and these represent my principal body of data. My research was limited to the main Carnival in Port of Spain since I do not drive and getting around Trinidad can be difficult. This means that most of the people I interviewed were from the part of the island known as the East-West Corridor which contains the highest proportion of urbanized areas in Trinidad and the most ethnically mixed areas. My main place of observation was called D’Yard located in the Woodbrook district of Port of Spain, which was the base for the *Rapso* and *J’ouvert* band known as 3Canal. I could travel there easily and it seemed a good place to build a network of contacts and relationships because of the diversity of the people who dropped in – males and females, the employed and the unemployed, musicians, children, teenagers, and tourists including returning



Trinidadians. In addition, I could also observe and participate in the yard activities such as the Friday Night Lime and assist with the registration for the *J'ouvert* Band. I gathered my sample through what is called snowballing, which means that I started with a few initial contacts and gathered my fifty interviewees through introductions. I tried to ensure as far as I was able that there was some balance in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, as well as between those who participated in carnival and those who did not. However, there was a bias in favour of those who participated in carnival because of my place of observation.

In preparing for the interviews, I did not construct an extensive formal list of questions but used variations on the following as prompts: 'How do you describe your ethnic background?' 'Do you describe yourself as a Trinidadian first or something else?' 'What is special about Carnival?' 'What do you think about when you're *wining*?' On the basis of the answers I got from such initial questions I asked follow-up questions either to fill in gaps or that were guided by new themes raised during the course of the interviews. In addition to the interviews I collected newspaper cuttings during the periods of my fieldwork though I have to confess a bias toward the *Express* since it was the paper that was most readily available in my corner shop. These I classified under various headings such as carnival, ethnicity, culture, politics, elections and so on. They were useful in terms of getting some idea of what the contemporary opinions and concerns of Trinidadians are and how information is reported to the population, especially race/ethnicity and Carnival.

The most creative part of my research was transcribing and analysing my interviews. Transcribing is part of the process of analysis since it involves a process of selection and interpretation. Given this my selection was determined by the aims of my research and my theoretical and ‘moral’ commitments in that I was looking at the resources – discourses – Trinidadians draw upon in talking about their identities, and the role of Carnival in sustaining a sense of national identity. Trinidadians tend to use the official census categories but it soon became clear these were often subverted when more biographical detail was introduced. Once the transcriptions were completed I classified the data into various categories and sub-categories. This categorisation process was a product of the interaction between the data and the theoretical concepts that informed the thesis, and the categories involved changed several times in the course of writing up. Finally, my influence as the researcher has left its mark on the thesis since I embody many of its themes since I am Trinidadian, mixed, female, and a carnivalist.

## Notes

[1] This is more the case between Trinidad and New York and Trinidad and Toronto.

[2] *Pardo* is a synonym for Mulatto. It is also used to signify that a person is of ‘dark’ complexion (in between black and white if not ‘greyish’). It was and still is the official census category for Mulattos in Brazil, although it is rarely used in everyday language.

**Chapter Two**  
**The Chronotopes of Identity (1498-1960)**

By introducing this chapter with Banton's (1977: 2000) discussion of the development of 'race' thinking in Europe, I hope to show how time and space – chronotopic formations - produce different types of race speech through the incorporation and mixing of past dialogues and therefore meanings. Since race speech may be seen as a kind of speech genre, it forms part of the expressive elements of language used in specific historical settings and communities. This means that race speech is associated with specific contextual features as well as particular social purposes. It is against this background that I wish to outline the constitutive dialogues that interacted to produce particular formations of identity in Trinidad. Thus these dialogues will be presented as a set of dialogically formed inter-discursive processes centering on the changing meaning and salience of the race concept. I have distinguished three general historical periods that produced differing contexts for identity formation. These I have labeled as follows: discovery and conquest; slavery and indentured labour; and hybridization and independence.

### **A History of Race Thinking**

Although particular concepts of race arose in specific times and spaces, Banton stresses that old meanings and new ones have always existed, and indeed continue to exist, side by side. Also, Banton is critical of what he terms an 'unreflecting presentism' that fails to allow for changes in the meaning of race (Banton 2000: 51-52). Banton's statement provides strong support for treating the topic of race as a dialogical product because it draws attention to the fact that the past does not play a passive role, instead it becomes an index for a range of speech genres and

human activity. For example, the Enlightenment's passion for the new sciences and its continuing reliance upon the classics as a source of authority produced hybrid forms of knowledge. Nature as determined by the natural sciences and the moral and aesthetic ideals of the ancients joined hands (Mosse 1999: 40) so that, 'resemblance to ancient beauty and proportions determined the value of man' (ibid). For Mosse, this link between science and aesthetics is a cardinal feature of modern racism and it soon combined with evangelism and pietism to produce the belief that 'man's outward appearance [indicated] his place in nature and the proper functioning of his soul' (Ibid). Thus, western conceptions of race cannot be reduced to the simple products of European voyages of exploration to the New World in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Instead, they should be seen both to be much older and to have developed from the need to interpret the changing or new social relations that appeared after these voyages (Banton 1977: 13). Scientific enquiry for one examined man's place in nature and the environment as well as developing modes of classification which would play an important part in the development of anthropology. Observation, measurement, and comparison between groups of men and animals became basic to the new sciences.

Banton locates the dominant European source of early race thinking in the Old Testament (2000: 52), which provided a source of knowledge about difference around the idea of descent. Coupled with this was the idea of a series of genealogies that originated with a particular event: for example Noah's curse upon the descendants of Ham meant that they should be the servants of his sons and so provided an explanation for the inferiority of black people. Within this paradigm of

explanation there were a number of explanations for physical variation: first, it was the result of god's design for the universe; second, it was a consequence of climatic and environmental influences which had nothing to do with god's will; and third, differences between Africans, Asians and Europeans meant that they must have had separate ancestors. This view conflicted with the belief that Adam was the ancestor of all humankind, thus Adam became the ancestor of Europeans alone. This did not overturn the dominant paradigm but it now it involved a choice between monogenesis and polygenesis explanations (Banton 2000: 53). The former tended to believe in a common origin of humans but explained variation by referring to intervening factors such as climate and environment. The latter thought that humans had differed from the beginning and it was this strand of thought that eventuated in the idea of race as a type.

Whilst contact with the New World played an important part in the development of European racial categories these were largely formulated in the context of the European pursuit of material gain. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the term race was used to refer to 'a group of persons, animals, or plants connected by common descent or origin' (Banton 2000: 53), but there were also situations where race was used without any reference to common descent, for example 'the race of good men' (Ibid). Also emerging in the eighteenth century was the natural history paradigm as exemplified by the work of the Swedish naturalist Linnaeus (1707-1778) who developed a method of classification for plants and animals based upon a rationally ordered system. He also developed a simple racial classification based upon skin colour – white, red,

yellow and black – that he connected to the four continents (Curtin 1999: 33). Cuvier (1769-1832), the French comparative anatomist, was influenced by Linnaeus' methodological success and developed his own method of classification based on the idea of 'types'. Cuvier identified three main subspecies or races – Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian – which could be subdivided further (Ibid: 55). Ability was perceived to be the difference between these races and this in turn was biologically based. Such typological thinking was not only agnostic about origin, but also relied upon science and offered a historical explanation of difference based on differential degrees of progress. Development was seen to be the result of special cultural attributes that coincided with physical differences. In short it could be said that there was a shift from perceptions of race as descent to one of it as a matter of type.

Darwin's *Origin of Species* introduced a new way of thinking based upon the idea of natural selection in which races were ecologically determined. On this basis Darwinism provided a challenge to typological ideas in that the term 'population' replaced that of racial type. Later in the nineteenth century Darwin's ideas were expressed genetically so that human variation was understood to depend upon the frequency of specific genes appearing within a particular population (Banton 2000: 57; Goldberg 1999: 365). When Darwin's theory of evolution was applied to social affairs the idea of environmental adaptation was displaced by the idea of differential capacities for progress. Thus, although Darwin's theory had destabilized previous conceptions of race as classifiable types, race nevertheless remained the explanation for social evolution: 'Race had

set the parameters that could be rational and unreasonable, credible and utterable. It had drawn the bounds around common sense' (Goldberg 1999: 365). From the late nineteenth century race became important to Europeans because it provided an explanation for their successes in terms of their innate superiority. The term was questioned in England as both a biological and sociological concept just before and after World War II. The revulsion at Nazi ideology assisted in reducing its usage but it remained in popular usage.

In Banton's view, race is a concept rooted in a particular culture and particular history that has evolved over time therefore in order to locate its development and understand its impact it is necessary to have some knowledge of the societies that produced the concept. The developments outlined by Banton indicate the way in which the idea of race interacted at different times with a number of different discourses such as those intrinsic to knowledge, science, colonialism, migration, and nation building. It was not necessarily the case that as new ideas took hold old ones disappeared since the new ideas were not necessarily a complete break from the past, and the result was that old and new meanings interacted and combined to produce other meanings. Finally, race is not only a discourse about the other but also one concerned with the self. The white European norm provided the standard against which all others were judged. Thus, '...racialism operated both according to the same-other model and through the computation of normalities and degrees of deviance from the white norm' (Young 1995: 180-181). Young therefore argues that it was through the category of race that colonialism was theoretically focused in the nineteenth century and it was



through race relations that a large part of cultural interaction was practiced.

However, nineteenth century race theories were not simply about essentializing difference between self and other but also about a fascination with people having sex – interracial sex. Such fascination was manifested in the fantasy of the sex drive and promiscuity of non-whites, their limitless fertility and huge genitalia.

I will now examine the formation of identity in the periods I have outlined: discovery and conquest, slavery and indentured labour, and hybridity and independence.

### **Discovery and Conquest**

At midday on Tuesday July 31<sup>st</sup> [1498] when the sun is in Virgo above their heads, a sailor atop the main mast sights a cluster of peaks. The Admiral names the cape Galera because it resembles a ship's sail. The hills, three of them, recall the Holy Trinity and Columbus appends to the island a name he has chosen long before – Trinidad (Cohen, Sauer, Morrison quoted in Johnson 1997: 14).

The Europeans on the ships were coming from a different world. Although they had no idea what they would find they had probably heard stories, imagined and fantasized about what lay across the sea. A long disconnection from the wider world characterized the Middle Ages in Europe and the rise of Islam produced a physical and psychological division between East and West (Latham 1958; Hall and Gieben 1992). This physical barrier rose and fell according to the fortunes of Islam so that when, for example, Islam was weakened by the Tartar's invasion in the thirteenth century, movement outside the boundaries of Europe became possible. It was during this period that Marco Polo undertook his journey to the East (1255-95). With the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the thirteenth century such

explorations became difficult once again. Divisions were also emerging between Western (Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) Europe and with them different patterns of development. Alongside the physical barriers to exploration there was another in the form of the way in which the Europeans conceptualized and imagined the outside world:

To the north, they believed that there was ‘nothing – or worse...barbarian peoples who, until civilization by the church, were only a menace’ (Roberts 1985: 117).

To the east, across the plains, there were barbarians on horseback: Huns, Mongols and Tartars. To the south lay the shifting empires of Islam, which despite their early tolerance of Christianity and of the Jews, had advanced deep in to Europe – Poitiers and Constantinople, across North Africa and into Spain, Portugal and southern Italy. The cradle of European civilization and trade was the Mediterranean. In the eastern Mediterranean, there was Byzantium – a civilization that was part of Christendom (Hall and Gieben 1992: 289)

At the same time Europe was becoming interchangeable with Christendom although Christians in the Ottoman Empire were not regarded as Europeans. The early formation of a European identity could be seen to be accompanied by a eurocentric view of the world.

European expansion coincided with the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age (Hall and Gieben 1992). This period was characterized by expansion in trade, commerce and markets. Feudalism was already established in Western Europe and brought with it an improved standard of living, rapid population growth, and the flowering of culture, which became known as the Renaissance. In a way that usefully brings out some of the connections between spatial and temporal matters, Hall and Gieben divide the process of expansion into five main phases: the period of exploration, when Europe ‘discovered’ the New World; the period of early contact, conquest, settlement and

colonization when parts of the New World were annexed to Europe as possessions or through trade; the time of permanent European settlement which began to take a specific shape such as that exemplified by the plantation societies of North America and the Caribbean; the 'high noon of imperialism' when the Europeans became involved in a scramble for colonies, markets and raw material which peaked around the time of the First World War; and finally the present time when although most of the former colonies are formally independent they remain economically dependent on the 'West' (Hall and Gieben 1992: 281-282).

The 'Age of Exploration' is a euphemistic phrase referring to the period during which European nations conquered and dominated what became known as the New World. The phrase also embodies a temporal and spatial metaphor in that the 'age' refers to a particular moment in Europe's expansionist history during which it paid particular attention to spatial matters. 'Exploration' which denotes place began in 1430 with the Portuguese exploration of the African coast and Columbus's first voyage that commenced in 1492. If we examine the discourses articulated around this period we can see the prominent part played by the narratives of Columbus and Vespucci (who reached the mainland of the Americas in 1497 before Columbus) in shaping and transmitting European conceptions of the civilized and uncivilized, the 'Old' and 'New' Worlds, nature and culture. Some of the earlier texts (such as Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter to the Portuguese King Manuel about the 'discovery' of Brazil in 1500) deploy an Edenic metaphor in which the natives are described in terms of their innocence, beauty and nakedness. Later these terms would be replaced by a new set of terms such as savagery,

cannibalism and perversity as they were constructed as barbarians and cannibals who required taming or enslaving. Acts of aggression perpetrated against them were political acts deemed necessary to save their souls or to hold them as private property. Underlying the ideological base of these actions were the binary oppositions of civilized/barbarian and culture/nature, which in time became codes that could be reproduced and re-accentuated. Thus, Indian, savage, barbarian, and cannibal became free-floating identities that could signify Arawaks, Mayans, Aztecs, or still other groups (Zavala 1993: 266). The body of the other was given meaning through a focus on sexuality wherein the other's nakedness symbolized not only their close proximity to nature but also their immoderate lust and lack of inhibitions in sexual matters. The texts of Vespucci, for example, told of the erotic skills of women, 'being lustful [they] caused the private parts of their husbands to swell up to such a huge size that they appear deformed and disgusting' (Vespucci, quoted in Zavala 1993: 272). Moreover, Hall and Gieben (1992: 302) argue that the very language of exploration, conquest and domination was marked by the asymmetries of European gender relations.

According to Zavala (1993: 262), the prevailing view of otherness constituted a 'monologic' discourse, which constructed an imaginary and composite category called the New World. Difference between the encountered aboriginals were erased so that they constituted a homogenized entity and difference was only acknowledge in the sense of those who could be saved and those who were fit for enslavement. Part of deconstructing such monologic discourses through dialogic interpretation involves locating the construction of the

identity of the Other within the context of an 'encounter' between two worlds in which the powerful European observer interpreted, and attached their values and economic and commercial interests to the observed world. This also involves a recognition that a counterpart to this discourse of the Other is the discourse of the self, which was about the forging of a European identity that was distinct and unique, namely civilized and Christian (Roberts 1985). Church and state articulated a dominant moral and cultural authority in which their economic interests and serving god was one and the same thing. The effect was that the aboriginal subject was captured as a reified object without a history in a monologic discourse in which static chronotopic views helped to justify colonial domination and enslavement through stereotypes about 'primitives' (Zavala 1993: 264).

Columbus is credited with creating the designations 'Caribes' - *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (1990) defines Caribes as meaning 'brave and daring' - and 'cannibal' as transliterations from the 'Indian' languages (Zavala 1993: 265).

Within European usage the terms Carib and cannibal seem to have been used interchangeably and connected with the idea of Indians as frail animals needing to be tamed or barbarian cannibals having to be enslaved. Thus:

[T]he political distinction was made between *tainos* and *Caribes*, one denoting malleable material for 'evangelization', while the other came to connote the rebellious barbarian to be conquered and owned as private property. The 'war against the Indian' thus became sanctified as a re-accentuated holy war against the infidel, who had been finally crushed in 1492 with the fall of Grenada. [...] With time, these idioms ossified into codes of what Bakhtin calls a model of monads acting according to rules, and were aimed at fixing a closure or an identity based on an axiology (Zavala 1993: 265).

Contact with the New World in the fifteenth century thus raised questions about the status of its inhabitants. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain issued a decree that ‘certain people called cannibals’ and ‘any, whether called cannibals or not, who were not docile’ could be enslaved. One argument at the time was that ‘they probably descended from another Adam...born after the deluge and...perhaps have no souls’ (Quoted in Hall and Gieben 1992: 309). A priest sympathetic to the Indians called Bartolome de Las Casas (1474-1566) who became protector of the Indians, argued that the Indians did possess their own civilization, customs and laws and however barbarous were still in possession of the faculty of reason. Ironically, whilst Las Casas succeeded in outlawing Indian slavery, he accepted that Africans were suitable replacements (Hall and Gieben 1992: 310).

In 1580 the French philosopher Montaigne in his essay *Des Cannibales* popularized the idea of the ‘noble savage’ in which he represented the American Indian as a heroic, tall, proud, statuesque and naked imaginary ideal: a counterpart that was essentially a non-european other. In 1749 Rousseau further developed the idea of an unsophisticated man living at one with nature and lacking laws, government, property and social divisions in his account of an ideal society. Challenging this idea of the noble savage was that of the ‘ignoble savage’ which emerged in the context of discourses of Western civilization and progress. Progress was seen in terms of a single path of development from savagery to civilization and all societies could be ranked at varying points on the same scale. What these texts reveal are not just statements about the writer’s views but also about their positioning.

In sum, the arrogance of the ‘discovery’ narrative begins with the idea that places or people did not exist until they had been (re)named by an authoritative European ‘father’ and stamped with an identity – constructed through a particular apparatus of power, namely, colonialism. The markers that became signs of otherness such as nakedness, sexuality and cannibalism were not straightforward facts but became distortions when they became part of an authoritative discourse, which simply summarized and presented the other in ways that suited the ideological practices of the colonizers. The chronotope of native constructed the Indians in a timeless stasis in a space/land that was considered *terra nullius*. The chronotope of the colonisers by contrast positioned themselves in the time frame of progress and civilization and so creating a space they renamed the New World. The initial representation of the New World was that of an earthly paradise; a European fantasy constructed out of pre-existing dreams, images and vocabularies.

### **The Encounter in Trinidad**

[July 1498] Coasting, they scan Indian houses and gardens which seem to the Admiral *as green and lovely as the orchards of Valencia in March....*

From the east a canoe approaches. These men aren't black, unfortunately, but they have their hair long and tied with a colourful cloth. Maybe, thinks the Admiral, they are wearing *almaizaires*, in which case they are Moors. Then they would know where gold is to be found.

There are twenty-four of them, *all young, well built and not black but fairer than the other natives...in the Indies*. They wear patterned scarves in place of breeches and carry bows, arrows and shields.

The Indians shout but no one understands. The Admiral beckons them to come closer but they vacillate, edging up and sheering off, edging up and sheering off for over two hours... (Cohen quoted in Johnson 1997: 15.)

Although contact with the island of Trinidad occurred as early as 1498, the Spaniards did not construct a permanent settlement in Trinidad. Even when formal colonization and settlement took place a century later, it remained superficial and

Trinidad remained undeveloped as a colony (Brereton 1981: 7). Trinidad's lack of precious metals plus the absence of an established peasantry to exploit made the prospect of developing and defending the island unfeasible particularly since there were more valuable territories to defend. Spain's weakness as a European colonizing power meant that she was unable to provide the men to defend Trinidad and as a result Trinidad was constantly under attack most notably by Walter Raleigh in 1595 and by Dutch forces in 1637.

The Spaniards established the *encomienda* and the mission – the two great arms of Spanish colonialism (Brereton 1981: 6). The *encomienda* was a form of feudalism under which some land was granted to the Indians but they were subjected to a tax in the form of crops or labour. In return the *encomendero* was expected to Christianize and protect 'his' Indians. The missions differed according to whether they functioned as agricultural colonies or were under the direct control of the missionaries and church. The missions were abolished in 1708 and replaced by 'Indian villages' and the *encomiendas* were also abolished 1716. But these two developments only opened the way for greater exploitation of the Christianized Indians. An 'untamed' and 'wild' population of Indians remained in the forests until the end of the eighteenth century (Brereton 1981: 6-7).

Lacking a productive base, experienced planters, slave labour, and capital, the Spaniards realized the island had to be populated if it was to be developed. This strategy was formalized in the 1783 *Cedula of Populations* under which the Spanish government invited White Catholic French slave-owning planters and property-owning Free-coloureds to settle in Trinidad. They were granted land



commensurate with the number of slaves they brought with them except that the free-coloureds received half the amount of whites. Because the *Cedula* linked land grants with slave ownership it meant the settlers were almost exclusively wealthy French planters accompanied by their slaves who were Creoles, mainly Catholic, and patois-speaking (Brereton 1981: 25). Other slaves were transported to Trinidad from neighbouring colonies after they had been bought, stolen or kidnapped. The free-coloureds from the French colonies and ceded lands came in such substantial numbers that they outnumbered the white immigrants (Brereton 1981: 14). Their presence transformed the island through their capital, technical knowledge of the cultivation of cocoa, coffee, cotton and sugar, and their slave labour. However, it was the British who came to dominate Trinidad's trade, which consequently was oriented towards Britain, and the other West Indian islands rather than Spain and the Spanish colonies (Brereton 1981: 18). The old Spanish capital, St. Joseph, declined in importance as Port of Spain was transformed from a small fishing village to a busy trading port. The new French arrivals had settled around Port of Spain and its surrounding valleys whilst the Spanish remained towards the east, around St. Joseph. Ethnically speaking, the old society of Trinidad was Spanish and Indian whilst the new society that was becoming dominant was African and French (Brereton 1981: 20). Trinidad remained a Spanish colony but the dominant culture was that of the French planters and the foundation of the new society they created in Trinidad from 1780 was based upon African slavery (Williams 1993: 40).

It would be mistaken to homogenize the French immigrants since they consisted of elite planters who were loyal to the French crown, revolutionary whites, free-coloureds, and 'Creole' Africans slaves. Ideological differences gave royalists and revolutionaries different reasons for fleeing and their contempt for one another was simply transferred to a new location. The uprising in Haiti in 1791 resulted in the abolition of slavery in French colonies by the French Revolutionary government in 1794. In addition there was a declaration that men of colour were French citizens with the same constitutional rights, which caused slave-owners all over the West Indies to tremble. In Trinidad, Chacon [the Spanish governor] and the French landowners who ran the colony watched with dismay as white and coloured Frenchmen of all shades of ideology entered the island' (Brereton 1981: 29). The British kept a close eye on what was going on particularly since their commercial interests could be threatened if control of Trinidad passed from Spain to Republican France. There had been frequent confrontations between French and British ships around Trinidad, and the French government eventually forced Spain into a war with Britain in October 1796. The superior naval might of the British meant that the war ended a mere four months later with Chacon's surrender. The French Republicans were guaranteed safe conduct off the island whilst others had to swear an allegiance to the British Crown. Thomas Picton was installed as the military governor and the harshness of his regime and tyranny of his reign along with his animosity particularly towards the Free people of Colour is noted by various historians. As the victims of Picton's worst excesses, the Free Coloureds saw the rights they enjoyed under Chacon violated and gradually eroded.

The particular problem facing Britain was how to govern Trinidad given that, unlike the other British colonies, it had a sizeable free-coloured population, a white planter class of foreign composition and a large number of Creole slaves who were patois-speaking and mainly Catholic. Although elected assemblies existed in the older colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados this was not seen to be appropriate for Trinidad. Picton in his role as Governor advised the Secretary of State of the British Government against a Popular Elective Assembly because it would undoubtedly sow the seeds of discontent and dissatisfaction. As Picton pointed out, 'One of the objects, first and most important to determine will be the right of voting, and it may be thought expedient to, as in the old Islands, to exclude the Free People of Colour; here by far the most numerous class in the Colony and of whom many possess considerable property' (Picton quoted in Williams 1993: 69). Instead Trinidad would be administered as a Crown Colony with all the essential powers reserved to the British Government through the Governor, a system that would be applied later to other equally 'unreliable' populations in Asia. It is Williams' assertion that the reason for the implementation of the Crown Colony system was essentially to deny the vote to the people of colour, which was informed by forms of colour discrimination practiced in Trinidad at the time (Williams 1993: 72).

In sum, this first period saw the indigenous peoples, Europeans, several kinds of Creoles, and, increasingly, Africans settled on the island which laid the foundation for the multi-ethnic society that would later evolve.

### **Slavery and Indentured Labour**

My second historical period is defined by the arrival of slavery on the islands. The chronotope of race contained views of Africans that helped to justify slavery and European domination through accounts about the African's inferiority based on their position at the bottom of the great chain of being [1], their proximity to the animal world and their related suitability for hard labour. The chronotope of race contained traces of past interactions and dialogues that were formed in a particular culture and period of history and contained views of difference based upon differential degrees of progress so that race and place coincided. This section therefore begins by focusing on the justifications provided for slavery and how it was both supported and criticized on the basis of competing conceptions of man and race. It then looks at the changes brought about by the importation of indentured labour as a replacement for slave labour, the most significant of which was that religion and culture once again become the dominant markers of difference, this time for East Indians [2].

Growing contact with black people also played an important part in the development of racist ideas. Increased contact brought fears of miscegenation that would result in the inevitable decline of the superior race. It is clear nevertheless that there were a number of competing views concerning nature and its relation to the positions of different sorts of humans in society. Intellectuals and slave owners held different views on the humanity and individuality of the slaves. Many of the former recognized slaves as god's creatures and very possibly equally human, whilst many of the latter regarded them straightforwardly as sub-human. Others such as J.A. Froude (quoted in Alonso 1990: 85), the author of a book about the

English in the West Indies written in 1888, combined both positions and argued that the African's natural savage state meant that slavery would be their salvation: '[t]he Negroes who were taken away out of Africa, as compared to those who were left at home, were as the 'elect to salvation' who after a brief purgatory are secured an eternity of blessedness'.

Patterson (1999: 91) has approached slavery as a 'relation of domination'. One advantage of such an approach is the attention it draws to the relations that are bound up with the conceptualizing complexities of dependence. Patterson uses the term *parasitism*, which he borrows from social biologists because of its emphasis on the asymmetry of relations inherent in slavery. The interesting aspect of Patterson's argument is the key role he attributes to dependence in the parasitical relationship of master and slave. The slave owners disguised their parasitism (dependence) through various ideological strategies, which helped to construct the slaves as dependents. This suggests an 'ideological inversion of reality' (Patterson 1999: 93) in which the master wore the mask of superior to and provider for the slave, and the slave wore the mask of inferior to and dependent upon the master. For the slaves, accommodation and 'adaptation' did not necessarily mean 'submission' given the overwhelming value of survival. As Mintz explains:

Within the structure of slave society, the slaves were required to engineer styles of life that might be preserved in the face of terrible outrage. The daily demands – to eat, to sleep, to love to grow, to survive – do not become less imperious because their satisfaction is persistently thwarted by oppression. Men organize themselves to resist according to their estimates of the distribution of power and the potential for changing it - sometimes coolly, at other times in a blind rage (Mintz 1989: 77)

Whatever approach one takes when examining the nature of new world slavery there is no doubt that slavery was an inherently degrading institution: for the slaves who endured the most horrific conditions and were susceptible to developing a sense of self-loathing; and for the masters who perpetrated obscene acts of violence and cruelty on other human beings for profit. The masters rationalized their actions by blaming the victims for licentiousness, stupidity and savagery.

However, we are reminded by Mintz that:

[I]f the slaves were licentious...who was the sexually omnipotent and who was defenceless against sexual advances; if the slaves were lazy...who worked and who did not; if the slaves were cruel...who were the tyrants and the tyrannized... (Mintz 1989: 80).

The relationship between masters and slaves 'were of stringently limited and highly specific sorts' two of the most important being economic and sexual interdependence (Mintz 1989: 308). Sexual relationships were formed on the basis that the masters had complete control over the slaves who had to yield to their desires. In addition, under the traditional plantation system, it was often the case that the master did not intend to settle permanently in the colony which meant that the masters would acquire temporary sexual partners who were usually slaves. It was also not uncommon for the master to keep a slave as his mistress although he was married. Whatever form the sexual and domestic arrangements took they contributed to the establishment of Creole society and culture.

The new colonial society emerging in the 1780s and 1790s was no longer feudal but one based upon slavery. However, even in this period Trinidad was still not dominated by the slave economy even though the number of slaves more than doubled between 1797 and 1802. In addition, a conflict was also developing

between those who favoured slave plantations and those who preferred to employ free labour. Mintz (1989: 61) points out that what distinguished African slavery in the Americas from the Amerindian experience of it was the greater extent of the former's subjection to the will of the colonizers. African slavery, which spanned some 400 years, institutionalized certain social and cultural forms, which became embedded in the social fabric of new world societies. Often these were not seen to be the result of slavery but a matter of innate characteristics in the population concerned, that some historians and sociologists took to be the Africans' natural predisposition to enslavement. In this context slavery, then, was more than an economic system in a particular place at a particular time, and also came to summarize and symbolize the 'black experience' in the Americas.

Slavery as a mode of production is not typically associated with modernity. However, Mintz in particular asserts that the plantation societies of the Caribbean were by no means feudal in form, but rather were hybrid societies exhibiting many of the characteristics normally associated with modern commodity production and the global market. The 'industrial character of the plantation system meant a curious sort of 'modernization' or 'westernization' for the slaves – as an aspect of their acculturation in the new world...' (Mintz 1989: 9). Further:

[t]he stimulus to overseas commodity production originated in European developments accompanying the accelerated breakdown of European feudalism, the growth and unification of international trade, and the disenfranchisement of vast rural European populations as part of the creation of factory sites... the growth of the slave based economies in the new world was an integral part of the rise of European commerce and industry... (Mintz 1989: 9-10).

Thus, the tendency to associate new world slavery with the pre-modern has obscured its connection with modernity and its 'enlightened rationality and capitalist industrial production' (Gilroy 1993: 49). After the abolition of slavery in 1834 in the British held colonies the colonial authority experimented with new sources of immigrant labour. European immigration occurred on a small scale and was short-lived as was Chinese immigration. There were also immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean attracted by the higher wages, free blacks from America, slaves liberated from foreign ships, and immigrants from Sierra Leone. But by far the largest group of new immigrants was indentured labourers from India who were particularly desirable because of their apparently inexhaustible supply and their possession of the skills and resilience necessary for agricultural labour under tropical conditions. Thus between 1845 and 1917 around 143,939 Indians came to Trinidad to work on the plantations.

### **The Arrival of Indentured Labour**

With the abolition of slavery in 1834 the planters required a cheap source of labour. Between 1845 and 1917 around 143,939 East Indian indentured labourers were brought to Trinidad to work on the plantations because they were regarded as a 'docile', reliable, cheaper and most significantly controllable alternative to the labour of free wage earners (Brereton 1981: 86-87; Haraksingh 1987: 63; Vertovec 2000: 43). Typically the indenture system featured: recruitment by indigenous agents; an inducement to enter an agreement to work on a plantation for a period of five years; transport to the port of embarkation (Calcutta or Madras); receipt of basic pay; rudimentary housing; rations and medical attention during the period of



Indentureship; and a partly or fully paid return passage to India at the end.

Vertovec further points out, however, that whilst the system appeared to extend a helping hand to the poor it in fact often did no such thing since it was often associated with poverty, disease, malnutrition, and social oppression.

Variation in locations in terms of recruitment coincided with recruitment strategies based upon government restrictions as well as famines and droughts (Vertovec 2000: 45). The bulk of the Indians were Hindus and came from the vast northeastern and southwestern areas in India which meant that there were differences in language, religion, dress, cuisine, caste composition and so forth. Specifically, 'the Hinduism that came to the Caribbean was comprised of a complicated array of religious traditions determined by the heterogeneity of the Hindu migrants themselves. Out of such profusion, however, common forms were forged' (Vertovec 2000: 47).

Indian culture played an important part in keeping Indians separate and distinct from the remainder of the ethnically diverse Trinidadian population. There was also a tendency to see Indians as a homogenous group, which had the effect of denying any differences between them. The Hindu Religion played an important part in uniting what was a diverse group of people in the sense that initially Hinduism was not a unitary religion. However, in order to keep Christianity at bay it gradually became more unitary as practices and beliefs became standardized. According to Vertovec (2000: 69), this process was completed by the 1920s as 'beliefs and practices associated with local caste-based traditions in India had

largely given way to the homogenized, essentially Brahmanic tradition forged in the island to provide common socio-religious forms' (Ibid).

Diversity within the Indian migrant group on a plantation was preferred since it prevented any attempt by dissenting migrants to organize them. Gradually a local, creolized Indian language also emerged based on Bhojpuri and Avadhi. The indentured Indians were permitted to perform their religious activities even though they were ultimately perceived to be 'heathen' both by the colonial authority and probably by the majority of the population too since the latter all practiced some form of Christianity. Muslims, however, who came in much smaller numbers, were accorded some respect for not being heathen. Certain peripheral Hindu practices such as hook swinging, fire walking and animal sacrifice caused outrage in the local population and some restrictions were imposed on certain activities such as hook swinging. Defined as 'heathen idolators', Hindus became the objects for conversion by missionaries who succeeded in converting some to Christianity. The non-Indian population of Trinidad did not draw any intra-communal distinctions between Hindus and their practices, which meant that all Indians were perceived to be the same, and all their rituals perceived to be repugnant. According to Brereton (1981) geographical, residential, and occupational segregation was reinforced by the East Indian's protective use of caste, religion, village community and the traditional family organization. This separation continued even after the indentureship system ended in 1917 on account of nationalist pressure in India (Haraksingh 1987). Thus they were never considered part of Creole society nor part of the 'creolizing' process.

Brinsley Samaroo (1987) points to the similarities in the conditions encountered under the system of slavery and those of indentureship such as the restrictions on freedom of movement, lack of choice over master, and resistance in the form of riots, desertions as well as murder. An elaborate system of control over the indentured Indians emerged which could be seen in legal and spatial terms (Haraksingh 1987: 63) that included laws curtailing freedom of movement and confinement of indentured Indians to the plantation estates and or its vicinity; the psychological hold of the guaranteed return trip to India which could be delayed or jeopardized if all conditions of the Indentureship were not executed to the satisfaction of the planter; the promotion of indebtedness; and the fact that time-expired Indian workers were encouraged to reside or settle on the estates if not nearby where they would be compelled to seek their livelihood on the plantations and undermine the bargaining power of free workers (Haraksingh 1987: 67-70).

By the early part of the twentieth century most Indians had become small-scale peasant farmers producing food crops. But their continuing 'cohesion' marked them out as an identifiable out-group despised for a number of reasons. First, they did jobs Creoles avoided if they could. Second, their inferiority was apparently confirmed by their wretched living conditions. Third, Trinidadians of all other ethnic groups evolved a set of stereotypes of Indians as miserly, deceitful and litigious as well as violent. In addition, they were considered 'uncivilized' because they did not embrace western dress or Christianity. Finally, their marriages were performed under Hindu or Muslim rites and so were not

recognized by the state until 1945 with the result that most of their children were considered illegitimate (Brereton 1981: 111-112).

Interaction between Indians and non-Indians during the period of indentureship was infrequent. After the indentureship term ended Indians remained in the rural areas unlike the black population who headed for the towns after the abolition of slavery. The village community in the new 'Indian' villages meant that Indians could feel protected in their communities. Brereton (1989) identifies the right to a return passage to India as the most compelling factor in preserving Hindu culture since this right discouraged adaptation by Indians to their new environment. Another explanation offered by Brereton was the reluctance by Indian men to form unions with black women despite the shortage of Indian women. Language and culture may have been important factors along with contempt for dark skin because of its association with low caste. Another reason offered by La Guerre (1999: 42) for the preservation of Indian identity was the fact that the constant renewal of culture through continuous migration helped to reinforce primordial sentiments.

### **The Origins of the Three-Tier System of Stratification**

A three-tier model is often invoked to describe stratification in the societies of the Caribbean: a white elite at the top consisting of planters, merchants, and administrators; coloureds in the middle and occupying professional positions; and the black masses of slaves and/or former slaves, agricultural labourers and peasants

at the bottom. Whilst this model suggests the centrality of ethnicity it does not capture the evolving complexities of Trinidadian society. The main problem is its tendency to homogenize the three main classes when there seems to have been a high degree of internal differentiation on the basis of class, ethnicity, and culture. Although Trinidad in 1797 exhibited some of the dominant features of a three-tier model of stratification, it differed from the older slave societies such as Jamaica or Martinique (Brereton 1981; 1993). First, African slave labour was not important until 1780s. When Trinidad became a British colony in 1797 slaves constituted just over half of the population, and this meant that the ratio of slaves to free persons was much lower than elsewhere. Second, the history of intensive plantation slavery was also brief by comparison to elsewhere. Third, by the time slavery was abolished Trinidad already had an unusually large 'middle-tier' made up of free-coloureds and free blacks. Included in this group were people who had been estate owners and even slaveholders and thus part of the economic elite but who had also encountered discrimination from whites on account of their colour. For these reasons the three-tier model is best viewed as a model of stratification that was continuously evolving. Because each stratum was made up of different groups of people differentiated by status, culture and ethnicity, some academics have preferred to view each stratum as internally segmented with its own top, middle and bottom. For example, Powrie (1988) observes that unlike the other West Indian territories the population of Trinidad was not split horizontally in the sense that there were three homogenous upper, middle and lower strata which cut

through the entire society, instead, there was a complex pattern of self-contained, parallel, social hierarchies – each with its own upper, middle and lower classes.

Brereton's (1993) study of ethnicity and class in nineteenth century Trinidad indicates some of the shortcomings of the three-tier model of stratification. She describes a segmented society but also draws our attention to the complexities that result from the interaction between race and class. In the top tier was the white elite who controlled the colony's resources as landowners, ex-slave owners, merchants and bureaucrats. However, they were not a homogenous group since they differed on the bases of national origin, language, religion, economic interests, and political positions. The identities that made up this group were diverse and included British expatriates, English Creoles, French Creoles, and those descended from Spanish, Irish, Italian and German immigrants. The French Creoles in particular resented what they perceived to be the English attacks on their cultural, economic and political privileges implicit in the process of anglicisation.

Brereton (1993: 39) identifies a small, mixed-race, middle stratum, which she describes as 'closer to the traditional elite' who were the descendants of Trinidad's long established 'free-coloured aristocracy'. Louis Gustav Borde, the French Creole historian writing in the 1880s, acknowledged the existence of such a group, which he thought to be a 'parallel elite'. In the main the intermediate class had its origin in the 'second tier' of slave society which at the time of emancipation consisted of the mixed or coloured population who were professionals, reasonably well-off, and European in their cultural orientation. But

within the middle stratum there was again further differentiation, this time based upon economic position, lightness of skin tone, education, and occupation.

The black slaves originally formed the 'bottom' tier of slave society although some people of mixed heritage were also included in this stratum. After the abolition of slavery the Creole 'labouring population' became more diverse in its composition. It consisted of: ex-slaves and their dependents, who were Catholic and Creole-speaking; immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean who were mainly Protestant and English or at least 'English' speaking; liberated Africans from various regions in West Africa; black ex-soldiers of the West India Regiment that was disbanded in 1815; ex-slaves who fought on the side of the British in the War of 1812; the descendants of free-coloureds and free black peasants and labourers; and peons of Spanish-Amerindian-African descent who originally came from Venezuela (Brereton 1993: 41).

In short, the arrival in Trinidad of other ethnic groups from the Eastern Caribbean, Africa, Venezuela, Europe, the Far East and Asia in the post-Emancipation period complicated the three-tier model. The largest of these new groups were the East Indians who according to Brereton initially constituted a fourth tier until socio-economic differentiation transformed their initial homogeneity and so facilitated their absorption into the dominant three-tier system. The three-tier model continued to evolve as a result of social and political developments in which the middle-stratum of coloureds and blacks started to challenge the power of the traditional elite. This was also true of other ethnic

groups who became economically successful and included later immigrants from Portugal, China, Syria and Lebanon.

### **Race/Ethnicity and Colour in Trinidad**

The discovery of new worlds, economic exploitation and the emergence of slave-societies resulted in an interaction between peoples from the Americas, Africa, and Europe. The complexities that emerged as a result of this are elaborated upon by Segal in *'Race' and 'colour' in Pre-Independence Trinidad and Tobago* (1993). Amerindians, Africans and Europeans were located in their respective ancestral territories, 'a delimited area belonging to and occupied by its own race' (Segal 1993: 83). However, in the case of the later arriving East Indians the connection with an ancestral territory was modified in that they were not only from India but also 'of the East'. The arrival of still other races such as the Chinese, Portuguese and Syrians did not lead to a blurring of the three core ethnic groups. Instead, the latecomers were considered less significant components of the population and were distinguished from the whites, blacks and East Indians. But there was the additional factor that race was now represented in terms of ancestral lands as well as colour and phenotype, and an indicator of group positioning within the colonial social order. For example, the white category included French, Spanish and English, but excluded the Portuguese. Segal (1993), citing the work of Braithwaite (1975), Mendes, (1980), and Ryan, (1972), points out that this exclusion was not based upon skin pigmentation, but rather on their 'unclean' economic behaviour which rendered them 'un-white'. The Spanish, French and English were positioned



differently as masters and rulers; whilst the Portuguese by contrast were positioned as social inferiors who entered colonial society as dependent labourers but soon became successful in small trade; to be black was to have been a slave and to be Indian was to have been an indentured labourer. Thus, according to Segal, 'the idiom of race memorialized particular pasts and connected those pasts to contemporary social groupings' (Segal 1993: 84). As we can see this idea of race not only contained narratives about populations situated in discourses about ancestral lands, but also narratives of European superiority and imperialist desires. Africans and Europeans were located in a system of colour at opposite end points with a spectrum of in-between shades produced through mixing. The existence of the coloured population was emblematic of such mixing between two dominant races, and the term coloured referred specifically to black-white mixtures which symbolized a shared localness. This intermediate category of not one or the other occupied an ambiguous position with regard to discourses of the 'purity of blood'. Coloured slaves were given the better work since it was believed that their superior aptitude for skilled labour was proportional to the amount of 'white blood', whilst their ability to perform hard, physical labour was proportional to the amount of 'black blood'. Even amongst the slaves such ideas were prevalent and a social hierarchy based on the status of their occupation was a form of differentiation amongst them.

Segal discusses the notion of 'mixing' as an exercise in 'racial accounting' since mixing between races did not alter the incontrovertible fact of race. Racial accounting in Trinidad begins with the idea of 'pure races' namely, African, East

Indian, European and Other. Mixing between black and white was symbolized by the existence of the coloured category that gave rise to a set of colour terms evidenced by a continuum of shades on the bodies of Trinidadians - fair, red and brown, although there were no clear rules about where one shade ended and another began. Pointing out the ambiguities of colour, Segal, agreeing with Braithwaite (1975), emphasizes the point that whilst colour was taken as a sign of ancestry it was not necessarily determined by it: ancestry and appearance could give the same individual different colour identities so that a person with an admixture of blood could simultaneously be regarded as white (Segal 1993: 90). Another important point made by Braithwaite, and identified by Segal is that colour may act as a 'shifter' depending on the relationship between the observer and the observed. So a darker person may make distinctions that a white or fair-skinned person would not, or lighter persons may seek to emphasize the differences between them and relatively darker persons. In addition, there was a sense in which a black person's skin colour could be masked through their achievement of 'respectability'. Although respectability did not constitute whiteness it nonetheless was an approximation to whiteness (Segal 1993: 92). Respectability then, 'extended the idiom of colour beyond physiognomy to all aspects of personhood, but at the same time it defined blackness solely as the absence of whiteness' (Segal 1993: 93).

Turning to other mixtures, the offspring of East Indian and European unions were considered 'mixed' but there was no corresponding system of colour grading as with African and European mixtures. Since East Indians were not

placed on a colour-scale with whites there were no oppositional end points with whites at one end and East Indians at the other; nor were there lexical terms for such persons; although such scales existed in India where dark skin was associated with low caste. According to Segal this lexical absence cannot be interpreted as a lack of social relations between such groups since unions between the white supervisory staff and indentured East Indian women were not unheard of, and occasionally modeled on the concubinage arrangement that existed during slavery; also there were unions between East Indian men who were upwardly mobile and white women. It is most likely that the offspring of such unions were simply identified as near-white, East Indian or coloured (Segal, 1993: 94).

Both Africans and East Indians were positioned as inferiors vis a vis Europeans but their subordination in the semantic structure was different. If we accept Segal's argument that 'blackness' was constructed negatively and denoting an absence, mixing with blacks was not a matter of combining two elements, but of filling a void. African inferiority and East Indian inferiority took on different forms, and this difference was due to a partial acknowledgement of East Indians possession of an ancestral culture, even though it was deemed an inferior one within European discourses. The African by contrast was seen to be without any recognizable ancestral culture or as 'culturally naked', and this absence meant they had no choice but to embrace 'Europeanization'.

Slavery and Indentureship thus produced different experiences. In the former case the uprooting of a population which was seen to have obliterated the means of cultural reproduction whilst in the latter case allowed for the retention of

language, religion and customs. This, then, may be what explains the absence of a particular term for 'mixing' between 'whites' and East Indians since East Indians were already in possession of a culture. In addition, because East Indian was defined mainly in terms of ancestry, 'achievement' and 'respectability' could not alter their East Indian identity: in other words, they could not become 'white'.

Whilst there is a general sense in which 'mixing' was associated with social mobility within the Creole status hierarchy, mixing between Africans and Indians proved to be the exception to the rule. In the case of African-Indian mixing, the term *dougla* is used. Unlike the term coloured, *dougla* did not refer to a collective group, nor did it preserve a record of mixing: therefore the original mixing was erased over time (Segal 1993: 100). This in effect means that the progeny of one side of the mixture was simply absorbed into the other. In short, East Indians, never became Creoles and had no place on the Creole scale of colour, they were emphatically East and not West Indians (Segal 1993: 97).

Limited interaction between the black and East Indian segments of the population, allowed for negative stereotypes of the other to develop. Ironically, the plantation owners who had initially viewed blacks as suitable for plantation labour, now viewed them as lazy, irresponsible and profligate. East Indians transferred such negative views to blacks and in return, blacks viewed Indians as miserly, clannish, acquiescent to authority, prone to domestic violence, and heathen (Yelvington 1995: 50).

To sum up, the pre-emancipation and the early post-emancipation periods of the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago may be described as a series of

arrivals which vastly complicated the possibilities for identity formation.

Interactions between these groups resulted in a complex set of evolving relationships understood in terms of race, colour and culture as well as class. This complexity was particularly apparent with respect to the phenomena of mixing:

‘we have one case where ‘mixing is systematically erased, indicating an either/or relation between ‘civilizations’; one where it is fetishised, providing a measure of ‘improvement’; and one where it is acknowledged, but not elaborated upon’ (Segal 1993: 100).

### **From Emancipation (1834) to Independence (1962)**

Brereton (1989) informs us that at the time of emancipation only sixty seven percent of the population was slaves as compared to the ninety percent, which was characteristic of the older slave colonies (1989: 54). In addition, an unusually high number of slaves were urban with twenty-five percent living in Port of Spain in 1813. Amongst the rural population, twenty percent lived on coffee and cocoa producing estates, whilst just over fifty percent lived on sugar estates. The planters hoped that the freedom granted to the slaves would be nominal whilst the slaves hoped for economic independence. The difference in perception between the two groups is captured in the following passage:

The... Negroes believed that Massa King George had said they were to be free – a term very differently understood by the Negroes and by their advocates on this side of the water. By free, a Briton means that the Negro is no longer to be the property of his master, but situated as labourers are in England; that is, he is to work for his own and his family’s support, or starve. But the word free means quite another thing in the Negro sense; for they tell me it means “there is going to be no massas at all, and massa King George is to buy all the estate and give them to live upon”: for as they have often added to me – “Misses, what signify free if we have to vorck” (Carmichael 1833: 164).

The Act of Emancipation became law in August 1834 freeing the slaves from their bondage. According to Brereton, the Act represented a compromise between the anti-slavery lobby and the planters' interest. A transitional apprenticeship system was introduced under which former field slaves were required to work for their former masters for three-quarters of the working week without wages (Brereton 1981: 63). Because of opposition from the former slaves this system was abolished in 1838 two years earlier than it was due to end.

The freed slaves attempted to create a new identity as free persons and often this meant that they rejected plantation work because of its association with slavery. Instead, where they could, they became skilled tradesmen or adopted servile indoor occupations, which were seen to be of higher status than that of mere fieldworkers. In addition, the freed slaves were unwilling to work on the plantations under the same indentured terms as the Indians. Some black Creoles became small-plot-holders. During the 'crop' season they worked on the estates but in the boiling house or grinding mills that also had more prestige than field labouring (Wood 1968: 137). The ex-slaves who moved to the towns such as Port of Spain or San Fernando became artisans of various kinds, petty traders, domestics, porters, carters, cabdrivers, dockworkers and so forth (Brereton 1979: 116). An urban lower-class came into existence which included a large number of unemployed blacks who were involved in petty crime, prostitution and gambling and became known as *Jamettes* – people below the diameter of respectability, or the underworld (Pearse 1988: 31) – and were later accused of hijacking the Carnival celebrations in the 1860s and 1870s and bringing it into disrepute. These

lower class urban blacks lived in ‘barracks ranges’ that were essentially slum areas hidden from the sight of respectability:

They were situated behind the frontage of each city street, with its respectable stores and houses, and hidden from the passer-by. The barrack range consisted of a long shed built against a back wall, facing a strip of yard, often with a similar shed on the other side (Brereton 1979: 116).

In the countryside the Indian labourers performed the unskilled fieldwork whilst the former slaves performed the more skilled jobs (Wood 1968: 136). After their contract term of five years was up some re-indentured or worked part-time on the plantations, and when Crown lands became available for lease or sale in the 1860s the Indians acquired them. These plots of land were located in the sugar belt areas of Western and Southern Trinidad and as a consequence Indian villages were established in these areas. By the early twentieth century these rural Indians had become independent cultivators of crops such as rice, cocoa and sugar.

Agriculture, rural communities and alien culture characterized the post-indenture population, which remained outside of the Creole hierarchy. A Hindu ethnic ideology was established in the earliest phase of post-indenture settlement in which:

Brahman priests and Sadhus wandered throughout the island in the nineteenth century, and their sermons and services – structured so as to be of interest and importance to Hindus from a number of pre-migration traditions, and conducted in the creolized Bhojpuri tongue which functioned as an Indian lingua franca - doubtless acted to bring the immigrant Hindu to a common cause (Vertovec 2000: 68).

Thus by the 1920s Hinduism had become homogenized as caste-based traditions had given way to a Brahamic tradition ‘re-invented’ in Trinidad (Vertovec 2000: 68-69). Hindu organizational activity was energetic in sustaining Indian

'traditions' in the face of discrimination from the wider society. Vertovec (2000: 69) argues that it was not this discrimination that was the decisive factor in stimulating Hindu self-consciousness but rather intra-communal conflict between competing Hindu organizations such as the *Arya Samaj* and the *Sanatan Dharma*. This had the effect of forcing Trinidadian Hindus to define their community and their religious traditions. The *Sanatan Dharma* Association reorganized itself in 1932 but a rival organization calling itself the *Sanatan Dharma* Board of Control was established almost simultaneously. Both organizations lobbied the colonial government to get legal recognition for Hindu marriages, permission for cremations, and for the full franchise to be granted to Indians. These two organizations were not united until the 1950s when under Bhadase Maraj (a self-made millionaire and leader of the sugar workers union) they became the *Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha*, which worked towards standardizing ritual procedures and building Hindu schools.

The political activity that took place between 1890 and 1914 was concerned mainly with the creation of representative groupings: the Trinidad Working Men's Association (TWA), whose membership was predominantly black and urban and which stood for reduced taxes on food amongst other things; the Pan-African Association, a pressure group that stood for racial pride and lobbied for the rights of black and coloured people; and the Rate Payers Association (RPA) which was predominantly a middle-class organization mainly concerned with civic issues. The First World War put an end to political activity but in 1918 a new era of radical politics opened. From 1919 to 1920 there was considerable industrial



unrest stimulated by high inflation, worsening economic conditions, a new found sense of 'race-consciousness' brought on by the discrimination endured by Trinidadian servicemen abroad, and the growing influence of the writings of Marcus Garvey. The strikes of this period contributed to the development of both political and labour organizations since industrial grievances and radical political demands became fused together (Brereton 1981: 163). Demands for constitutional reform dominated the 1920s and the divisions within the society were clearly exposed in that the businessmen and planters, whatever their ethnicity, were far less keen on representative institutions than the Blacks and the Coloured Middle-class. Also, although the leadership of the East Indian National Congress, the voice of wealthy Indians, used the argument that most Indians were uneducated, their real fear that a black Creole electoral majority would thwart the ambitions of the Indian masses (Ryan 1972: 69).

The indenture system provided an army of cheap labour and poor working conditions. It also had the effect of depressing the wages levels of the non-agricultural working-class groups who were mainly black, and therefore caused deep racial antagonisms between Indians and Blacks – resulting in working-class disunity. Even the prominent, and charismatic working-class labour leader, Uriah Butler, had limited success in terms of creating a national popular movement because of this disunity (Lewis 1968: 211). The 1930s were characterized by strikes, demonstrations and hunger marches in response to deteriorating economic conditions that brought increased unemployment, malnutrition and the worst living

conditions. Even under these conditions the cultural heterogeneity of Trinidad remained an obstacle to popular unity:

[...] the fact of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, so different from the relative homogeneity of Barbados and Jamaica, for the mosaic of the Trinidadian types – French Creole plantocrat and Chinese merchant, Spanish cocoa farmer and Grenadian oil worker, English expatriate and the mulatto professional, Negro urban worker and Indian peasant – had had little time; historically speaking, to jell into a sense of overriding common identity (Lewis 1968: 211)

The American occupation in the 1940s had a significant impact on the island.

Lewis identifies such negative developments as the transformation a small-time hoodlum, Boysie Singh, into a Chicago style king of the Port of Spain underworld, and the establishment of ‘money politics’ as local businessmen became very wealthy serving American needs. On the positive side the occupation brought an economic boom and better wages, which resulted in an exodus of workers from agriculture. It is thought that around fifteen to twenty percent of the national adult workforce was employed on the American bases. In addition, the war also encouraged the growth of local industries in food-processing and the manufacturing of other products. It also meant that Trinidad became more economically interlinked with the USA than with Britain. The US hence became another source of cultural influence as a result of which ‘Trinidad, twenty years later, has become a roughly-hewn combination of British snobbery and American vulgarity’ (Lewis 1968: 212). The American presence also stimulated the development of calypso as ‘almost over night an entertainment industry mushroomed’ (Rohlehr, 1990: 356). The calypso *Rum and Coca-cola* (1943) by Invader is a commentary on the impact the American occupation had on the lives

of Trinidadians – particularly the increase in prostitution in which younger and older women, African and Indian competed for the Yankee dollar.

The struggles for independence in various parts of the world such as India, Burma, the Gold Coast, Indonesia and so forth, inspired West Indians to feel that they too should govern themselves. As a consequence the West Indian National Party (WINP) was formed in 1942 with the aim of contributing to the formation of a ‘West Indian national consciousness’ that was not based on racial origin but on serving the interests of all West Indians (Ryan 1972: 71). Ideologically the WINP was socialist and offered a programme that called for the redistribution of land, nationalization of the oil industry, agricultural and industrial diversification, state control of public utilities, and the introduction of a welfare programme.

The General Election of 1946, which was the first to be held under universal suffrage, was the first opportunity for the new nationalist force to test its strength (Ryan 1972: 73). The WINP joined a coalition, which included the Federated Workers Trade Union, the Negro Welfare, Cultural and Social Association and the Indian National Council under the banner of the United Front. The Front presented itself as a genuinely multi-racial organisation concerned with class rather than race. However, the Front was still identified with black progressivism and failed to gain support in the Indian constituencies (Ryan 1972: 76). The 1946 election saw the fragmentation of the labour vote because a number of leftwing unions and parties competed with one another. This state of affairs ensured that the middle-class would dominate politics after 1946 (Brereton 1981: 195).

During the 1940s Hindu pundits traveled the island warning the Indian community of the dangers of a black majority should self-government be granted. Similarly, other non-black Creoles thought that universal suffrage would result in an anti-white bias and the emergence of labour militancy. In 1953 Maraj who had succeeded in creating a unified national Hindu body in the *Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha* (SDMS) set about launching the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which functioned as a Hindu political organ, or in Dr Eric Williams' words 'the political voice of the *Maha Sabha*' (Ryan 1972: 141). In addition, it served as an Indian alternative to the Afro-Creole dominated Peoples National Movement (PNM) formed in 1956 and led by Williams (Vertovec 2000: 71). Williams, who was also known as the 'doctor', unified 'the Creole intellectual and the colonial crowd' with the consequence that the creation of the new national identity depended upon a 'political leader' who could 'feed the infant indigenous culture' (Lewis 1968: 213). The PNM [3] was made up of coloured and black urban middle-class intellectuals and professionals. Unlike the PDP the party did not have any links with trade unions, and was not socialist organization.

Whilst the PNM stressed the historical legacy of slavery, the inequities of the colonial system, the illegitimacy of the colour hierarchy, and the jewels of Afro-Creole culture such as Carnival, Calypso and Steel Pan, the PDP appealed to traditional values; that is, respect for property, religion and the family. These symbols and values provided the basis for a set of identity codes:

[W]hen Creole parties spoke of 'the new order' or 'massa day done' the message was clear to the African- descended constituent, just as the concept of 'Neemakaram' as used by the Indian party was meant to convey loyalty to culture.

In the much the same way dialect and local illusions were used to appeal to ethnic instincts (La Guerre 1999: 48).

Both the PNM and PDP used race as a major strategic theme in their political campaigns. Williams played on the fears of Afro-Trinidadians of being swamped by Indians whilst playing on the fears of non-Hindu Indians such as Christians and Muslims, of Brahmanic control of and Hindu support for the PDP.

In the 1956 elections the PNM beat the PDP by a narrow margin. This defeat resulted in a transformation of the PDP into the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) under the leadership of Capildeo. The DLP was an amalgamation of Creole, westernized Indian elements and high caste Indians leaders. The cultural difference between the westernized elements and the majority of party members who were mainly Hindus was a constant source of conflict. In 1958 the DLP won their first election defeating the PNM in the Federal elections although Capildeo would later on write off the party as a bunch of Hindu reactionaries (La Guerre 1991: 98). Williams put the blame for the defeat on 'pure unadulterated race' (Ryan 1991: 114). Ryan's examination of the voting behaviour for that year indicates that there was a strong if not total correlation between ethnicity and voting behaviour. The election intensified racial divisions and made the PNM and its supporters determined to win the next election. The next PNM victory was not too long in coming in the 1961 elections. Race had become the key issue over all others and it is widely believed that Trinidad almost descended into a race/civil war at this point because tensions were running so high (La Guerre 1999: 47; Regis 1999: 13).

The PNM's 1961 victory signaled the appearance of a new nationalism that was essentially Creole and so one that alienated the Indian community. In the case of rural Indians most were untouched by the creolizing process, whilst articulate Indians considered creole culture to be inferior to that of India and objected to the view that Indians would inevitably become creolized. A 'Trinidadian' consciousness was slow in developing but it is possible to detect elements of one emerging in the speeches of Cipriani after his return from the First World War, and in Gomes' vigorous criticism of Anglo-American imperialism. In the 1930s there was also the influence of native literature by authors such as Alfred Mendes and CLR James, and areas of the arts such as painting, theatre and dance. In 1945 the changing attitude of the Creole middle-classes to the celebration of Carnival assisted in converting the event into a 'national' celebration, and the calypsonians became recognised as true men of words and even national heroes. This newly conferred 'respectability' was far removed from the pre-war image of Carnival as a lower-class black activity. The PNM was able to draw upon these sources and include them as part of their nationalist ideology. This indicates that creole culture was not only segmented but continuously evolving to the extent that one can detect a shift away from Europeaness as the dominant ideal, particularly in defining physical attractiveness to an idealization of the light brown Creole. With the dawn of formal Independence on the horizon, creole nationalism on the rise, and the alienation of the Indian community, there appeared to be very little on offer by way of reconciling the two dominant ethnic groups. The arrival of mass politics on

the island simply seemed to entrench the set of identity moulds provided by the experience of slavery and indentureship.

## Notes

[1] The idea behind the 'great chain of being' is that God created a hierarchy of living things.

[2] In Trinidad the term East Indian is used to refer to people of East Indian descent, which also has the effect of separating them out from West Indian – normally taken to mean black or Creole.

[3] The PNM in its early years was a national organization rather than the party of a particular sectional interest (Brereton 1981) with the result that initially it had some success in capturing the support of 'assimilated Indians'. It was not until the PNM embraced a racist policy agenda that its Indian supporters withdrew their support. Failure on the part of Hindus to give their support to the PNM was viewed by the Afro-Creole community as treachery, as well as an indication of their anti-nationalist and reactionary tendencies.

**Chapter Three**  
**Hybridisation and the 'Racialization' of Consciousness (1960-2000)**



This chapter looks at post-independence developments in Trinidad and considers two important processes characteristic of Trinidadian society namely creolization/dogularization and the more general racialization of consciousness and their implications in the creation of a nation and a national identity. As already indicated Trinidad very early on became a society of immigrants in which various ethnic groups not only transported but reinvented cultural differences within their new milieu. At the same time contact between ethnic groups resulted in the creation of new cultural forms. Creole culture emerged out of contact between the different groups as they adapted to their new environment and one another. But, as I will demonstrate, the terms creole and creolization can be problematic. On the one hand, they are taken to refer to a dynamic process of inter-cultural fusion which is unstoppable with the result that later arrivals and influences such as contemporary North American media can only mean the continuation of the creolizing process. On the other hand, in the English-speaking Caribbean and in its simplest form, creole/creolization is identified as a much more restricted mixture of African and European elements (Braithwaite 1971, Nettleford 1978). To complicate matters further, in Trinidad, Creole in the local vernacular also means 'black'. Thus when Carnival, Calypso and Steelpan are identified as creole cultural symbols they also connote an exclusionary process and the absence of any equally prominent Indian cultural symbols tends to reinforce the view that creole culture means 'black culture'. As creole culture developed around its dominant symbols, there was a parallel development of interest on the part of many Indians in their motherland since many of them saw themselves as having an existence outside of creole, if not alienated by the emerging creole nationalism. As will become

clearer, many Indo-Trinidadians equated creolization with assimilation into the dominant national Afro-Creole culture of Trinidad and Tobago. In recent years douglarization, that is the Indianization of the dominant creole culture, has been advocated by some Indo-Trinidadians as an alternative, which recognizes the presence of Indo-Trinidadians and their contributions to Trinidadian culture. However, one could argue that the concept of douglarization is not a suitable substitute for creolization since it too is not fully inclusive since it depends on the African/Indian opposition alone. I will now explore what these terms mean.

### **Creolization and Douglarization**

The concept of creolization has a special place in the Caribbean region because it emphasizes the process of hybridization that is the product of histories of dislocation and migration (Hall 1996). The New World is not simply a place or territory but:

...the juncture-point where the many cultural tributaries meet where strangers from every other part of the globe collided. None of the people who now occupy the islands – black, brown, white, African, European, Spanish, French, East Indian, Chinese Portuguese, Jew, Dutch – originally ‘belonged’ there. It is a space where the creolizations and assimilations and syncreticisms were negotiated (Hall 1996: 118).

Braithwaite’s (1971) seminal work on the development of creole society in Jamaica between 1770-1820 is an account of how a specific Caribbean colony evolved its cultural forms and institutions at a specific point in time. What is clear is that the term creole was used differently in different new world societies with the result that it referred to different mixings of peoples. For example, the Spanish applied the term *Criollo* specifically to Spanish persons born in the new world, whereas the British used it to refer to both the slaves and the colonizers born in the new world (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 216).

Stoddard and Cornwell's discussion of creole and creolization indicates the existence of a paradox:

...“Creole” and its cognates, contrary to the term “hybrid”, carries the concept of naturalization or nativization within it. But this is where the term “Creole” is uncanny: it means to be native to a place, i.e. at home there, yet it applies only to people who are not indigenous to the place, i.e. not at home there. This paradox or ambiguity remains central to Creole identity and pushes us to reflect on the biologicistic and essentialist roots of the concept “indigenous” (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 217).

Braithwaite (1971) himself argues that it was mixed unions that gave birth to the coloured class that formed the bridge between African and European cultures. As such the coloured middle-class became emblematic of the creolization process in which the body took precedent over discursively based explanations. Braithwaite's specificity with regard to time and place indicates that others born outside of the of the plantation economy were not involved in the process of creolization because they were outside the relations between the European owners and the slave labourers involved in the plantation economy. Nettleford (1978: 185) adopts a similar view but departs from Braithwaite's view by extending it so that creolization is a dynamic on-going process of intercultural fusion that also incorporate later arrivals.

By extending the meaning of creolization beyond persons and practices the process becomes a fixed openness similar to Bhabha's ‘third space’

(Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:220):

The non-synchronic temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to the borderline existences [The specific border Bhabha is speaking of is the US-Mexico border].... This new society is characterized by mass migration and bizarre interrelations. As a result new hybrid and transnational identities are emerging.... (Bhabha 1994: 218).

Moreover,

[W]hat is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulations: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'open out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignations of social differences – where the difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present' (Bhabha 1994: 219).

In short, creoleness with its multiple, diverse and complex forms stands as a prototype of what will later emerge as the processes of globalization intensify. This wider conceptualization of creole and hybridity is preferable because it is acknowledged as an on-going process, and not 'fixed' in any specific time or place. Thus, creole cultures are, 'fixed in a state of openness, primed to appropriate, incorporate, synthesize, and play with cultural forms whatever their source' (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 220). The term creole/creolization indicates a particular form of hybridity/hybridization in the new world and whilst the initial chronotope of creolization referred to a specific set of relations in a specific place at a specific time, it was also used to designate a racial type as exemplified by the existence of the 'coloured' category. Its appropriation by some cultural theorists has meant that creole/creolization is also used as a metaphor and used interchangeably with the term hybridity.

In Trinidad creolization has complex and contrary significations. The most common usage of the term is within a narrow context, which is less celebratory of its 'unfixed', inclusive and complex play with cultural forms. A discussion between academics, musicians, journalists and government officials reproduced in the *Caribbean Dialogue* (1997) was an attempt to elicit its various meanings and significations. The diverse backgrounds of the

participants produced a wide range of views on the subject. Roy McCree, a researcher at the University of the West Indies, (UWI), identified two levels of meaning that operated in an exclusive as well as inclusive sense. In the exclusive sense, Creole is used to distinguish African from Indian. Plus there is the local usage of “French-Creole” to mean anybody white although the person may be of Portuguese, Spanish or even English origin. In the wider inclusive sense all Trinidadians are Creole because they identify with a particular space whether it is territorial or cultural. Rhoda Reddock’s contribution was illustrative of this inclusive meaning. For Reddock the essence of creole is the creation of something ‘new’ in a new space. But herein also lies its ambiguity since creole simultaneously means not only indigenous to a particular space but originally from elsewhere. Setting aside this ambiguity, for Reddock, creole is empowering because it allows the people of the Caribbean to think that they also have indigenous possibilities as creators. Those who were most critical of the term such as the calypsonian Gypsy and the theologian and Newspaper columnist Sankeralli, saw it in its most narrowest and exclusive sense. Sankerelli argued that the term was not only derogatory but also carried connotations of ‘second rate’, ‘not original’, and not of ‘the ancestral land’. Reddock responded to such a criticism by pointing out the term creole is undergoing a reconstruction and redefinition, and even between the Caribbean Islands the meaning varies so that creole in Jamaica does not mean the same thing as in Trinidad. Further, the creole culture of the region is changing so that it is no longer what initially started out as the combining of European and African elements, but a reconstitution that includes other elements, such as Indian ones, which are also part of the Caribbean creole reality.

The term post-creole emerged with the passing of PNM dominance in 1995. For some social commentators such as Sankerelli (1997) it marked the collapse of 'African' hegemony. Whilst for others such as Reddock, what may be seen as a shift is not so much an 'ending' but part of an on-going syncretic process of change:

It makes the clear intense relationships which cut across cultural mixing, relationships of exclusivity, symbolic identification, openness to change, social mobility, multi-cultural nationhood, cultural preservation and more. It lays bare the roots of anxiety over miscegenation, anxiety about belonging and political clout, not the anxiety of a master race maintaining boundaries between itself and its subjects' (Reddock 1999: 231).

The discussion so far indicates a considerable slippage between the notion of Creole as the African side of the population, the notion of creole culture as the national culture of Trinidad and Tobago, and the notion of creolizing as a continuous process of intercultural mixing and creativity (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 223). It is in the last sense that it has become a synonym for hybridity. However, Stoddard and Cornwell urge approaching the metaphor of 'hybridity' with caution on the following grounds. First, they reason, 'the hybrid is a metaphor drawn from biology, and it is interpenetrated with biologicistic metaphysics' and could quite easily end up 'anchored to a metaphysics of natural types' bearing in mind that the creation of a hybrid is always a subversion of a pure type (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 236-237). This they argue is in contrast to creolization, which signifies a process of change, interaction, adaption that makes a language or culture Creole (Ibid: 238). Second, its biological origins has connotations of mechanism, passivity and sterility since:

Plants and animals do not hybridize themselves. The agency resides in the

horticulturist or the animal breeder. This works in emphasizing the forces of colonization and enslavement, but it takes away agency, creativity and reproductive power from the colonized (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 239)

Third, hybridity and creole imply different political agendas in that whereas the former emphasizes multiple roots the latter emphasizes new connections. Hall uses the term as a metaphor to signify ‘a necessary heterogeneity and diversity’ (Hall 1996:120) at the centre of identity. Mercer (1994) underpins the concept of hybridity with a ‘critical dialogism’:

Across a whole range of cultural forms there is a powerfully *syncretic* dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and creolizes them, disarticulating given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise. The subversive force of this hybridizing tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where Creole, patois and Black English decentre, destabilize and carnivalize the linguistic domination of “English” – the nation-language of master discourse... Creolizing practices of counter appropriation exemplify the critical process of *dialogism*... (Mercer 1994: 63-64).

Thus, the concept of hybridity signifies that difference is at the core of all identity and these differences are part of a dialogical process wherein the different relational elements interact.

If creolization is a dynamic continuous affair that undergoes reconstruction at certain moments, then it is also open to transformation through douglarization. Like Creole, Dougla refers to a specific category of person but it may also signify the continuous process of interculturalization in creole culture. Dougla is a Bhojpuri-derived term used in some parts of India such as Bihar to refer to the progeny of inter-varna marriage and therefore also carried the connotation of ‘bastard’ meaning illegitimate/son of a prostitute (Reddock 1999: 209). In Trinidad the term is applied to African-Indian mixes. Because the world-view implicit in the word is Indian, its adoption in Trinidad

may be taken as indicating a desire on the part of Indo-Trinidadians to preserve some notion of cultural purity and separateness (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 222). Thus, the theme of douglarization is always present in Indian narratives of purity (Hintzen 2002: 488). Patricia Mohammed (1995) argues that the Indian patriarchal system that was reinvented in Trinidad between 1917 and 1947 required female subservience since women were important to the physical reproduction of the group. Thus, 'the trajectory for Indian masculinity and femininity was the continued redefinition of sexual identity still framed within a notion of an Indian ethnic and the consolidation of an Indian community in Trinidad' (Mohammed 1995: 42).

Although, traditionally, Indians were a subordinate group in terms of power and prestige in creole society, their association with the rural areas, 'backwardness', unsophistication, and 'coolie' labour did not prevent many Indians from believing that they possessed cultural capital because of their connection to an ancient written tradition. From a particular Indian perspective Creoles were stereotyped as lacking in morals, possessing a poor work ethic and as partygoers, with the result that Douglas were seen as a threat to the purity of the Indian community. Because of the derogatory origin of the term dougla, it was rejected by many Douglas as a form of self-description.

However, with African-Indian mixes becoming more dominant in the mixed category, the mixed category can no longer be thought of as meaning African-European mixtures. With the emergence of Dougla as a racial category, the question also emerges of where it fits in creole society bearing in mind that it disrupts the racial accounting that depends on identifiable races (Puri 1997: 128). The Mighty Dougla asked this very question in his calypso *Split Me in*



*Two* (1961) by pointing out that if Indians should be returned to India and Africans to Africa he would have to be split in two!

The concept of douglarization emerged in the 1980s and was employed mainly by Indian political and cultural leaders who used the term negatively because its syncretic nature was seen to compromise the integrity of Indian identity. Puri distinguishes between douglarization and creolization, but she also argues that both African and Indian orthodoxies seek to erase this difference. On the one hand, the Indian orthodoxy conflates creolization and douglarization so that it has the specific meaning of assimilation of Indian culture into creole culture and the Indianization of creole culture. This means that both creolization and douglarization are seen to pose an equal threat to cultural purity. On the other hand, Afro-Trinidadians have also used douglarization as a code word for assimilation and therefore creolization. Both positions are motivated by racial politics since both subscribe to views of racial purity and to a view that douglarization represents racial dilution and African self-contempt (Puri 1997: 131). This agreement between the African and Indian orthodoxies leads Puri to suggest that they are in many respects partners.

Finally, in Trinidad both creolization and douglarization are deployed in cultural contestation. Stoddard and Cornwell tell us:

[Douglarization] highlights the power struggles inherent in those processes. It makes clear the intense relationships of exclusivity, symbolic identification, openness to change, social mobility, multi-cultural nationhood, cultural preservation, and more. It lays bare the roots of anxiety over miscegenation; anxiety based more on cultural identification and definition than on biological notions of purity. This is a late twentieth-century anxiety about belonging and political clout, not the anxiety of a master race maintaining boundaries between itself and its subjects (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999: 231).

Douglarization contains an inherent ambiguity because it may be employed to

indicate the centrality of Indian culture to contemporary Trinidadian culture whilst at the same time it may also indicate the 'loss' of Indian culture as it becomes creolized. My view is that douglarization is perhaps best read as a continuation of the process of inter-culturation that started during the plantation era. In this respect douglarization is a variant of creolization if the latter is understood as a general, inclusive and syncretic process of cultural formation. The loss of culture through creolization argument is fatally flawed by the fact it assumes that Trinidadian Indian culture was pure to start with as opposed to 'reinvented' and adapted to fit a new locale.

A symbolically important event for the Indian community occurred in November 1995 when the first Indian Prime Minister was elected. The year 1995 was also the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Trinidad. This landmark event for Indians and Africans alike signaled a rupture in creole hegemony. The greater visibility of Indians in public life brought further attention to the African-centeredness of creole in Trinidad and the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean. This period was also viewed as a time of growing confidence for Indians as certain sections of the Indian population became prominent members of Trinidadian society through economic prosperity, or their rise to political power. Whilst Trinidad has acknowledged African influences on its cultural forms it has been late in accepting its Indian influences. The national cultural symbols of Carnival, Calypso and Steelband are Creole forms, which meant that Indian cultural forms were effectively excluded and remained positioned outside of the cultural mainstream. This raised the matter of whether, in order to become part of the national culture, Indo-Trinidadians had to assimilate into a hegemonic 'Afro-creole' culture.

More importantly, could they be equal owners of it? Is the national culture an adaptive on-going creation appropriating and incorporating all cultural influences whatever their source may be? If, as Sankerelli (1997) argues, Creole culture has been dealt a deadly blow, where does this leave the old national Creole symbols – Calypso, Mas and SteelPan – which have served to define Trinidadian national identity?

In my view the creolization/douglarization debate is a clear illustration of Bakhtin's double hybridity because of the dialogizing space it creates in which contesting views meet. More importantly, creolization/douglarization is an on-going and infinite process, which means that new meanings are constantly being produced. To restrict creole to its narrow definition of European and African mixing simply removes the possibility of creativity from subsequent generations of Trinidadians, whilst ignoring the influences of other external forces. By way of illustration, Calypso as a national cultural form has been adept in resolving internal ethnic and aesthetic conflicts by blending two or more of the available musical idioms; for example: calypso/chutney or calypso/raggae/rap/dub. Calypso has also been mixed with Latin rhythms, jazz, soul and Zouk styles and even Orisha/Shango rhythms (Rohlehr 1999: 32). According to Rohlehr what this suggests is that a conflict lies at the heart of all calypso discourse in that it is part of a greater conflict between competing ethnic groups as well as part of a struggle to affirm one's sense of identity from the 'homogenizing' influences of the global market place. Thus, 'if Trinidad has dealt with internal variety by blending rhythms, it has tried to cope with the pressures of foreign popular musics and market forces by a strategy that is part confrontation and accommodation' (Rohlehr 1999: 33).

Soca [1], which is sometimes used interchangeably with Calypso, is perhaps best viewed as a hybridized form of Calypso that has produced its own sub-genres such as Ragga Soca with its Jamaican influence, Rapso which is rooted in the Carnival tradition of Robber talk, and Chutney/Soca which is a development from a particular bawdy style of Indian women's folk music combining Calypso/Soca rhythms with risqué Indian lyrics and more often than not accompanied by vigorous *wining*. The popularity of Chutney/Soca is often seen as part of the 'Indian Renaissance' in Trinidad and its success is seen to parallel the political movement of Indians into the cultural mainstream (Balliger 1999: 70). Reddock (1999) argues that a genre of 'douglamusic' sung by persons of different ethnicities emerged, which became known as Soca/Chutney and took the form of Calypso/Soca songs or melodies incorporating Indian words, rhythms, themes and instruments such as the dholak, dhantal, and tassa. The most notable example is Brother Marvin's *Jahaji Bhai* that was a hit in 1996.

In sum, Trinidadian's awareness of the 'creoleness' of their culture and what is perceived to be a lack of originality is a source of cultural anxiety. The diversity that many claim to be a source of cultural richness is also regarded by others as the source of its fragility. 'Indigenous' Trinidadian creole cultural forms are continuously changing to accommodate new influences and challenges not only from within but also from external sources. The result is that whereas the calypsonian Rootsman [2] takes the view that 'Trinidadian culture' is under siege from external influences, particularly Jamaican dancehall and dub, calypso producer/DJ Chinese Laundry is of the view that Trinidadian culture is a hybrid one and as such inherently receptive to outside

influences. Rootsman's view is fairly typical amongst Trinidadians of a certain generation who feel that if the 'new' creations borrow from a foreign style then it is no longer 'Trinidadian' but simply mimicry.

### **The 'Racialization' of Consciousness**

Despite increasing creolization/ douglarization, there has nevertheless been a tendency for the two main communities to be considered in terms of a dualist polarity (Miller 1994: 279). Miller's research supports a general shift towards a larger syncretic pattern that produced a reduction in the significance of ethnic differences across a range of social and cultural practices. However, discourses of race, the ancestral impulse, along with political manipulation have all had the effect of keeping ethnic identity in the foreground. Some commentators have therefore referred to a 'racialized consciousness'. In order to understand the sources of consciousness and its power to override the importance of class as a political or analytical category in the explanation for inequality, a number of points need to be considered. Trinidadians tend to use the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably when referring to aspects of an individual's physical appearance, such as skin colour, hair type, bodily features, blood and ancestry, as well as to indicate membership of a specific homogenous cultural community such as Indian, African, Chinese, Syrian and so forth. Biological notions of races as distinct species are less influential these days but they seem to have been replaced by cultural definitions, which become markers of difference and are still framed within a 'racial logic'. Academic writers have tended to see these distinctions as ideological constructions that require deconstructing. In the popular imagination, however, ideas about racial purity are linked to longings for ancestral homelands produced by an emotional need

for 'authenticity' and belonging. These racial/ethnic differences and notions of ancestry produce different narratives of colonial domination and oppression.

The Indians who accepted the terms of indenturship were a heterogeneous group in terms of differences in region of origin, language, religious practices, and caste systems. As soon as they arrived in Trinidad and other parts of the Caribbean they had to reinvent a symbolic identity that would transcend their difference, and this took the form of a 'fictive form of kinship' *jahaji bhai* or 'boat brother'. Their economic, political and social marginalization positioned them outside the mainstream of creole society and provided the conditions that would allow them to reinvent, consolidate and assert their distinct identity.

Similarly, the memory of slavery provides a symbolic meeting point for Afro-Trinidadians. One major difference between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians is that the former, also a heterogeneous group was unable to transfer their cultures to the New World in any significant way with the result that the development of Afro-creole cultures was the result of the physical and social conditions the slaves had to deal with. Afrocentric Trinidadians have also engaged in reinventing their 'African' heritage with Orisha [3] worship as its spiritual core.

As consciousnesses become racialized, race becomes the overriding principle that governs all behaviour and the main justification for maintaining separate identities (Allahar 1999). For Allahar, the racialization of the Trinidiadian/Tobagonian consciousness derives from seeing the historical development of the island in terms of the times and conditions of immigrant arrivals. Allahar thus locates its origins in the realm of the political where it has been used as part of a strategy to maintain economic and social privilege.

Rohlehr (1990) and Brereton (1981) use the term to refer to a form of self-discovery in which Afro-Trinidadians recovered a sense of 'African-ness' that had previously been obliterated by the colonial masters. From the 1920s one may see a parallel development of political consciousness between Africans and Indians with Ethiopia and India providing the symbolic points of identification. Rohlehr's discussion of racialized consciousness on the part of black Trinidadians is partly located in the discourses about blackness and Africa that gave rise to a growing racial self-confidence. The racialization of Trinidadian's consciousnesses has drawn much of its ideas about the Other from colonial racial discourses, which provided Africans and Indians with a vocabulary to structure and express their relational antagonisms (Puri 1997: 120). For example, European ideas about the lazy, thriftless African with an uncontrollable sexual appetite culture were assimilated into Indian consciousness, and the Africans' views of the Indian as thrifty, docile, and corrupt were partially derived from European orientalism. Whilst biological and cultural creolization has destabilized notions of racial purity, on a political level the fiction of race remains dominant in terms of the suspicions it creates between communities and the divisions it imposes.

Finally, Miller (1994) locates this 'ethnic consciousness', within a 'dualism', which is manifested in the intrinsic contradictions of modernity where the articulation of dualism and ethnicity means that each ethnic group perceives itself as a polarity within the existing structure.

### **Ethnicity, Independence and National Identity**

The period from the mid 1950s to the early 1960s was an important time for the mapping out what Trinidadian identity might or should be since it coincided

with the granting of formal independence. As a nation constituted through immigration and with the status of British Crown Colony, the very nature of Trinidadian society raised questions about whether or not it was possible to transform the population into a nation with a distinct identity and its own national symbols. Once independence was declared on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1962, the island's leaders set about creating symbols of nationhood such a flag and an anthem. Afro-Trinidadians considered themselves to be the natural heirs of the new post-colonial society with the result that all these symbols were drawn from Afro-Creole culture to the exclusion of 'Indian' derived ones. Moreover, Carnival, Calypso and the Steel Band formed the national cultural triumvirate.

The PNM election victory in 1961 left Trinidad on the 'brink of civil war'. Trotman (1991) argues that the 'struggle' for independence did not produce a common struggle by all the ethnic groups, rather it was a struggle conducted by political leaders waiting on the pleasure of the colonial power. The result of this was that there was no single institution that emerged from a united struggle against colonialism that could symbolize a budding nationalism. Thus, 'the population had no folkloric tradition, no concrete symbol, no actively remembered experience, no historical consciousness of having fought together to create a nation' (Trotman 1991: 393).

Since nations usually consist of an amalgamation of disparate cultures that often become unified as the result of conquest in which cultural difference is suppressed, they should be thought of as constituting a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity: '[Nations] are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and "unified" only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power' (Hall et al 1992: 297). In the case of



Trinidad, Williams attempted to unify the diverse ethnic groups by telling them that there could be no Mother Africa, Mother India, Mother England, Mother China, or Mother Syria, the only Mother to be recognized is that of Mother Trinidad and Tobago (Williams 1993: 297) 'Trinidadian' would be the national identity that would override all others providing a point of allegiance and symbolic identification for everyone. However, this new identity as conceptualized by Williams required the suppression of difference rather than its recognition and since the structure of cultural power had favoured the Creoles the Indians were alienated and many failed to embrace this new identity.

Clearly, the two main ethnic groups were fearful of domination by each other and this served to reinforce the African/Indian divide. Africans outnumbered Indians by only a small margin but they were very much a cultural, social, political, and economic minority. Indians were also absent from the critical areas of power such as the Police, Armed Services, the Civil Service, and the media, but nor was there an influential local intelligentsia to argue their case (La Guerre 1999: 49). In addition, Indian culture was devalued on account of its pagan rituals, its patriarchalism and its inward looking character. Unsurprisingly, then, when political independence came to Trinidad it was 'black in complexion' (Allahar 1990: 252).

### **The 1970s Uprisings**

The Carnival celebration of 1970 was an indication of things to come. Raoul Pantin, a journalist, recalled, that alongside the traditional collection of red and

blue devils, an assortment of men in nighties, women in men's briefs, transvestites, saga boys, jagabats (skettels), policemen dressed as Rastas were several Black Power Protest Bands, the largest of which came out of Belmont (a traditionally Afro-Trinidadian area in Port of Spain) and called *1001 White Devils* (*Express* 5<sup>th</sup> March 2000). Other such bands featured band members dressed as revolutionaries, which alongside the *Fantasy* and *Historical Mas* bands must have provided quite a stark contrast. Keeping to the theme, the former used the license granted to the carnival revelers to air their scathing commentary on the social, economic and political conditions of the country. The economic and development strategies that the new nationalist movement adopted to transform the economy – ‘industrialization by invitation’ – had failed. Little was perceived to have changed by the mass of the population – the white elite still controlled the economy and colour discrimination was still rampant. The revolutionary ideals that gripped the imagination of many Trinidadians caused many of them who would not have identified as black on the Creole colour-scale in the past to do so as a form of protest. When the Black Power protesters complained about their poverty, inequality and the discrimination against them, this struck a chord with some sections of the Indian population though many maintained a distance from movement. The climate of popular unrest gave rise to strike action by workers, protests and rallies by students and middle-class radicals, and even a mutiny in the army. The National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) was a committee of a number of groups which included progressive academics and other individuals; students and trade unionists as well as community, youth and cultural organizations. It had considerable success in mobilizing popular support and was regarded as the

spearhead of the Black Power Movement in Trinidad. Ideologically the NJAC was revolutionary, anti-imperialist and committed to racial unity. Their planned march to Caroni (the sugarbelt and a predominantly Indian area) on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1970 was an attempt to demonstrate for African and Indian unity. As part of this unity the NJAC adopted a broad definition of the term 'black' so that it included Indians. However, the Indians rejected it on the grounds that they were not prepared to relinquish their identity as Indians for symbols, which did not reflect their ancestral heritage and their desire for historical continuity (Parmasad 1995: 316). The NJAC's variant of Black Power was ultimately viewed as a 'Negro' thing and this was partly because the American Black Power Movement represented a particular source of ideological inspiration, not least because one of its leaders, Stokely Carmichael, was a Trinidadian, but also because the symbols were those of black groups and there was also a symbolic identification with Africa. Unsurprisingly, for many Indians, the adoption of the Black Power symbols and a 'black' identity spelt cultural suicide.

### **'One Love': The 1986 Elections**

The oil boom began in 1973 and, through bringing prosperity and affluence to the island, saved the PNM government. The Afro-Creole middle-class expanded and the economic fortunes of the Indians improved too. The effect on the lives of the Indians was particularly dramatic as they moved to the urban areas, took up professional occupations and entered other non-traditional areas of activity (Trotman 1991: 387).

Oil revenues accounted for forty-two percent of the GDP in 1980 and sixty-five percent of government spending in 1984. Unfortunately, following

the OPEC cut in oil prices in 1983, oil revenues fell to twenty-four percent of the GDP and the economy went into a steep decline (Yelvington 1995: 64). In this context a number of political parties emerged to challenge the PNM, which was now led by George Chambers following William's death in 1981. One such party was the Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR) led by the former PNM stalwart Karl Hudson-Phillips, which was critical of Williams' legacy of corruption, and multi-racial in the composition of its support. Other parties included the Indian-based National Alliance (NA) which was an amalgamation of the old Tobago-based Democratic Action Congress (DAC) led by another ex-PNM member, Arthur Robinson, and the United Labour Front (ULF) led by Basedo Panday who was the leader of the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and General Workers Trade Union. The ONR and NA joined forces to defeat the PNM in the county council election of 1983. The national elections of 1986 marked the end of twenty-five years of PNM domination. The Tapia House Party led by Lloyd Best joined the ONR-NA coalition and the overall coalition took on the name of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). As a party NAR was perceived to be French Creole and representative of an inter-ethnic middle-class culture, and explicitly committed to ethnic reconciliation. NAR remained unified as a party while it was opposing the PNM, however once the PNM was defeated cracks appeared in the 'rainbow party' that had campaigned under the slogan 'one love'. Robinson was chosen to be the leader of NAR but he went on to choose his cabinet without consulting his coalition partners. NAR's Indian supporters felt betrayed when only five cabinet posts were allocated to Indians. Panday emerged as the main challenger to Robinson in the NAR, he criticized Robinson's leadership style

for being no better than Williams'. In 1988 Panday and his supporters were expelled from Robinson's cabinet and the imminent collapse of the NAR brought fears of ethnic war: fears that appeared to be confirmed by Abu Bakr's attempted coup of April 27th, 1990 (Premdas 1993:159). In 1991 the PNM was returned to power after defeating the NAR in the general election of that year, but at the next election in 1995 they were defeated.

### **'Ah Juk for a Juk': The 1995 Elections**

The success of the United National Congress (UNC) in the 1995 elections was generally perceived by Trinidadians as an 'Indian victory' or even 'Indian revenge'. It was particularly symbolic that this victory coincided with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indian arrival in Trinidad since for many it marked another turn in the race politics of Trinidad and Tobago. Some political commentators saw the result as proof that Indo-Trinidadians as a group had come of political age. With Indo-Trinidadian success came Afro-Trinidadian angst since the latter's confidence that they would always dominate if not economically then politically and culturally was shattered. The elections were tied with both the PNM and the UNC winning seventeen seats but the UNC was able to form a coalition with the NAR who had won two seats in Tobago.

Indo-Trinidadians now constituted 39.60 percent of the population whilst Afro-Trinidadians constituted 38.90 percent. In Trinidad interethnic rivalry, distrust and communal identity had become symbolically interwoven with the political system and control of the government was always perceived as crucial to the well being of each community (Premdas 1999: 324). The political system based on the Westminster model with its competitive party system did not allow for a system of representation that would take into account

the potential for the inter-ethnic contestation of political power. The PNM and UNC represented the old style ethnic politics, which could depend on a solid core of ethnic constituents to support them; the collapse of NAR meant that Indians and Africans returned to their old ethnic allegiances since it had no natural core supporters. According to Premdas (1999: 336-337), race is a very important theme in the strategies of the PNM and UNC and it starts at the grassroots level where each constituent group maps out an image of potential voters based upon ethnicity, class, religion and so forth that can be divide in to categories of voters – core, marginal, or die-hard opposition supporters. It is when canvassing house to house that the activists invoke ethnic symbols, stereotypes, metaphors, and prejudices to consolidate support. At the public level the campaign is different since it shifts from ethnic identity to issue orientated arguments and concerns. It is at this level that mass meetings occur and the ‘multi-ethnic’ composition of the party is displayed as part of the public façade of cross-ethnic partisan support. In addition, these mass gatherings are often both theatrical and musical with *tassa* drumming and chutney tunes to symbolize the Indian presence and steel pan and *soca kaiso* to symbolize the African presence. Another important element of the mass meeting is *picong* – poking fun and ‘bacchanal’ – usually in the form of the telling of scandalous topical stories:

Speakers engage the crowd in ‘street theatre’ as they slurred the reputation of their adversaries by innuendoes and *picong* that evoke emotional rapture, uncontrollable laughter, horror and tears. Often the *picong* would thinly disguise unflattering ethnic jokes that serve to maintain the boundaries separating each of the major communities (Premdas 1999: 339).

In one popular ‘attack calypso called ‘Mr. Panday Needs His Glasses’, the calysonian Watchman portrayed the Prime Minister to be an alcoholic and

sexual abuser. Panday accordingly denounced all such calypsonians for using the national art to denigrate innocent citizens and to perpetuate the division between the races. In addition, he argued that since Trinidadian society was 'plural and fragile' he could not allow such a symbolic national occasion as Carnival to be used to spread racism and denigrate women. Accordingly, he announced that the Calypso Monarch competition would not be held as part of the Dimanche Gras Show (the central carnival show). Unsurprisingly, Panday's actions provoked strong condemnations from the calypsonians, the Creole community, the PNM, and some sections of the Indian community. Moreover, Panday's action was seen as posing a more general threat to Afro-Trinidadian culture. Obviously this raises the question that if calypso was Afro-Trinidadian culture how could it then be national culture? As Rohlehr argues:

'National' remains a highly questionable and politically manipulable concept in the multi-ethnic state, and 'unity' a laughable fiction, particularly in the mouths of politicians whose naked pragmatism has deepened popular skepticism to the extent that the most significant fact of the 1995 elections was that more people (thirty-six percent) did not vote at all than voted for either of the major parties (Rohlehr 1999: 41).

If calypsos have always attacked political leaders, then why should an Indian Prime Minister be treated differently? Certain Trinidadians across ethnic lines saw a development occurring in that calypso had become vicious and bitter rather than humorous and critical. Of course there are many Trinidadians who see calypso as having evolved into a universal art form and therefore defend the right to free expression on the part of its exponents. In their view calypso survives because it remains 'a form of people's conversation about the political culture of the nation' (Rohlehr 1999: 46).

### **Keith and Daphne: The 2000 Elections**

The December 2000 elections returned the UNC to power with nineteen seats as opposed to the PNM's sixteen and the NAR's one. The UNC won the popular vote but there were PNM accusations of electoral irregularities, and allegations of false declarations were made against two UNC candidates that put the validity of the results in doubt. The PNM declared that they would challenge the validity of the candidates in question in court if necessary. An impasse followed caused by a political deadlock between Prime Minister Panday and President Robinson that turned into a two month long squabble. Robinson addressed the nation and warned of a creeping dictatorship (*Express*, February 18<sup>th</sup> 2001). In defence of his actions Panday [4] claimed that there were interests opposed to his government that were 'colluding to seize power – some by violent means' and as a consequence he would take control of the National Security portfolio since the President refused to swear in the man of his choice. Panday also claimed that there were certain groups amassing arms for what was to be believed to be a violent attempt to take control of the country (*Express*, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2001). In addition, Panday linked Robinson to the 'unfolding conspiracy to defeat the will of the electorate' by saying that the 'forces of insurrection were bent on exploiting the flagrant and continuing contravention of the constitution by the holder of the highest office in the land' (Ibid).

A poll carried out in May 2000 indicated that there had been significant drop in support for Prime Minister Panday amongst his traditional East Indian base, whilst the PMN had increased its support amongst its traditional African and Mixed base. Whilst twenty-nine percent of Afro-Trinidadians said they were satisfied with the performance of the government, only nine percent said



that they would vote UNC, thus confirming that people tended to put 'racial interest' or political ties above other issues. Figures also indicated that twenty-one percent of Afro-Trinidadians, sixteen percent of Indian-Trinidadians, and nine percent of Other-Trinidadians saw racism as a problem in the nation.

However, and more importantly, Indians did not generally see the 'their' government as discriminating against anyone. The poll also showed that UNC enjoyed more support amongst Afro-Trinidadians than the PNM did amongst Indians. An earlier poll conducted in 1997 indicated that more Chinese, Syrians and Whites supported UNC than PNM but this trend was reversed in the 2000 poll. All this would indicate that UNC went into the election knowing that they needed to win the votes of the 'others'.

The UNC's secret weapon turned out to be two soap-opera characters, Keith and Daphne. Keith and Daphne was the creation of Steve Ferguson, a successful construction tycoon and UNC campaign official, who was helped by a US strategist James Carville. It is thought that around 60,000 viewers would have seen the Keith and Daphne advertisements and the hour-long special shown on the eve of the election. The politically divide husband and wife couple and their attempts to resolve which party they should vote for proved to be very popular amongst Trinidadians. After one particular airing Prime Minister Panday commented, 'I hear it getting PNM supporters vex'. Another advertisement featured PNM leader Patrick Manning driving a maxi-taxi backwards. Thus, if the advertisements were vexing to PNM supporters there was good reason for UNC supporters to love them. The UNC campaign office claimed that the advertisements were not intended to target UNC or PNM supporters but the twenty percent swing voters in the marginal constituencies.

The profile of such voters tended to be people who were well traveled, educated, and interested in the affairs of the economy. The UNC campaign was built around past UNC performance and a desire for unity whereas the PNM's was built around the issue of corruption. Selwyn Ryan commented that the Keith and Daphne advertisements annoyed the majority of PNM supporters but also had the effect of softening up the edges of the PNM base already disenchanted with PNM's leader. According to Ryan, the success of the UNC is something he predicted six years earlier on the basis of demographic trends, as Indians became the dominant ethnic group. Thus, the Afro-hegemony institutionalized in 1956 with the triumph of the PNM has now been replaced by a *jahaji bhai* hegemony, which comes disguised as national unity and inclusiveness. Consequently, as columnist Denis Solomon and many other Trinidadians believe, whichever party ends up in power in the future there will continue to be bad feelings on the other side.

To sum up the main points I made earlier, Caribbean identity is best understood as formed within the discursive space of the 'Creole' (Hintzen 2002: 475), which is constituted on the basis of varying degrees of cultural and racial mixing. Creole is both inclusive and exclusive in that, on the one hand, historically everyone who entered the discursive Creole space was transformed, whilst on the other hand Creole also provides a boundary marker between local and foreign, Caribbean and non-Caribbean. One result was that when the Indians arrived they were regarded as neither Caribbean nor locals. Creolised forms vary from place to place for example Jamaican Creole society differed from Trinidadian Creole society because of the differences between the initial colonizing powers. Also, in Trinidad's case the African-European hybrid was

modified by the eventual incorporation of diasporic populations originating outside of Africa and Europe and specifically from India. The incorporation of Indian cultural forms into the creolizing process has led to what some commentators view as douglarization. Douglas have come to symbolize the threat posed to Indian purity by creolization because they, along with douglarization, are symbolic of the polluting consequences of sexual and other contact with Africans. Therefore, it is viewed with suspicion by conservative Indian leaders who see it as a means of transforming Indians into racial and cultural Creoles.

In conclusion, 'creolization' in the Caribbean began as a process in which a number of cultures adapted to their new Caribbean environment. Although cultures interacted they were not ascribed equal value in that certain cultural forms were privileged above others because of the power relations that lay behind them. The meaning and significance of creolization differed for the Europeans, Africans and Indians since each group was positioned differently in the colonial society. Both Africans and Indians were *forced* to adopt European forms, whilst the Europeans simply *absorbed* some of the cultural forms of the subordinate groups. This has meant that both Afrocentric and Indocentric Trinidadians have viewed the process as one that is contaminating and have looked to re-Africanize or re-Indianize 'their' cultural forms by purging them of their Creole impurity. The result is that Trinidad currently presents a schizophrenic condition wherein a pull toward assimilation into the dominant Creole culture coexists along side strong desires to return to one or other set of ancestral roots.

## Notes

[1] The creation of Soca is attributed to the calypsonian Ras Shorty I who incorporated the Indian Dholak in his calypso *Indrani*. Later the bass guitar trying to imitate the sound of the Dholak gave Soca its distinctive beat (Mungal Patasar).

[2] Rootsman's perception of a general decline in Trinidadian culture may be interpreted as an argument about the 'decline' of Trinidadian Creole culture, which is in the hands of a powerful producer, Chinese Laundry who perhaps may not be seen as 'Creole' in the narrow sense. Chinese Laundry has been criticized on a number of occasions as an influential figure in the local music industry for his lack of commitment to calypso and bias towards Jamaican dub. Rootsman produced a calypso for Carnival 2000 whose theme was this subject.

[3] Orisha began as a transplanted African religion, but also came to take on religious elements drawn from Catholicism, Protestantism and Hinduism, and some Orisha worshipers are also involved in the Kabbalah. Fifty percent of Orisha worshipers in Trinidad are also Spiritual Baptists. Indians also participated in Orisha Feasts because from 1950s selected Hindu gods and rituals were incorporated into the worship ritual. From the 1970s the new African consciousness that emerged as out of the Black Power movement meant an 'Africanization' of the religion occurred at the expense of the Hindu and Catholic elements (Houk 1993: 175). Houk argues that this 'Africanization' is a response to the 'demographic threat'.

[ 4] Prime Minister Panday's statement to the House of Representatives on January 23<sup>rd</sup> reported in full in the *Express* 24<sup>th</sup> January 2001

**Chapter Four**  
**Narratives of Identity: ethnic/racial**

This chapter examines some of the themes contemporary Trinidadians use when speaking about their ethnic identities. I have organized the data under a number of classifying themes that emerged from the interviews. The sub-theme of the body may be seen to cut across ethnic/racial identity as well as national identity. All of my respondents with the exception of one describe themselves as Trinidadians before anything else although some qualify this description by terms such as Indo-Trinidadian or Afro-Trinidadian. Interestingly, people who do not fit in to either of these groups such as the mixed sections - Chinese, Syrians, Portuguese and Others - do not use a prefix before Trinidadian. The interview extracts present a general picture of how Trinidadians see themselves and what cues they use in identifying other Trinis. In my view Trinidadian claims of ancestral 'purity' are to be treated with suspicion since there is clearly a process of racialization at work which keeps the ideas of separate races and purity very much alive but which do not reflect the historical reality.

### **Ethnic/Racial Identity**

In Trinidad there is a tendency to use the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably and this is because race sometimes takes on significance in terms of ethnicity, both (and relatedly) through ordinary folk usage and in virtue of the prevailing paradigm of social science reduction (Goldberg, 1999: 373). However, this is not to say that race may be explained in ethnic terms. A basic demarcation would be that physical differences are usually associated with race whilst cultural differences are associated with ethnicity. Although race has no meaning as a scientific category it nonetheless remains as a historical, political and social reality. Thus the

idea of race remains as a naturalizing motif in the process of racial formation; that is, in the relations and discourses that interact to produce ideas about the self and other. In Trinidad Indian and African identity evolved through the experience of colonialism, which also involved physical and cultural displacement as well as domination by the white rulers. In the post-independence period the racial formation of Indian/African underwent a 'new' transformation this time in its internal structure. This transformation coincided with an attempt by the first nationalist government to forge a new national identity that was to be the meta-identity that would override all others.

Contemporary Trinidadians construct their ethnic/racial identities in a number of different ways. To begin, there are the identities created within the context of the national Censuses. These are official classifications and representations created on behalf of the state for various purposes such as keeping records or compiling various kinds of information on the population. This form of classification is regularly used by academic and governmental researchers to classify people's attitudes on a number of social and political issues such as choice of marriage partner, voting behaviour, and even pathological types of behaviour. Since Trinidadians are predisposed to thinking about their society in terms of race and ethnicity, all Trinidadians can readily identify themselves in such studies despite the widespread awareness of ambiguities that I will bring out later. The main ethnic categories are Indian, African, Mixed, and the Other which comprises Chinese, Syrians/Lebanese, Portuguese, White/European, and Carib/Amerindian. One effect of the compilation of official statistics in racial terms, then, is that it

helps to keep alive conceptions of identity in terms of race, which are therefore available to be exploited for political purposes. Census and census-based studies thus not only help to construct but also reaffirm the existence of separate races.

The fact that people are required to identify themselves and others in a particular way means that they begin to see society in those terms. For example, Myra when describing Chaguanas, the area she lives in, says:

...ethnically, there are two major groups. Just like Trinidad. But because of where we are in the central plain you have a sharp distinction - Afro-Trinidadians and Indian-Trinidadians. And what you have in Chaguanas or county Caroni, you have pockets of these people. Yuh have very strong Afro-Trinidadian pockets and strong East Indian pockets. Of course you will have different ethnic groups in these pockets but they are basically either Indian or African.

Thus, the state categories may be seen to provide an overall narrative in which people locate themselves. The basis upon which the official classifications rest is seldom challenged directly, but indirectly it is challenged all the time. Hence

Jerry's struggle to identify himself using the Census categories:

I would say that I am Afro-Trini. My parents... Well my mother is... her mother was a Spanish my father was Martinique-French... I ain't no French; I'm an African!

Jerry's assertion that he is African could be read as a statement of self-ascribed 'purity' to counter the ambiguity that his Spanish mother and French father introduce into his African-ness, or alternatively as a political statement. During the course of my interview with HJ, who has lived for several years in England, he identified himself in at least four ways – Black Caribbean, Black, Mixed, and Trinidadian. Indeed HJ uses 'Trini' to refer to the inherent ambiguity of his identity:



Well our family's mixed up with everything, so...alright well my mum's side of the family is Indian, so they're pure Indians and my dad's side of the family they're a mixture of Indian, Spanish and Chinese. The reason I say I'm Trini first is because I'm so mixed up!

Moreover, HJ's response also makes clear the role of racialization in producing his personal sense of ambiguity - he uses the term 'pure', thus evoking the symbolic role of blood in determining ethnicity/race, and the idea of different bloods mixing. HJ's response therefore simultaneously suggests the contrast between the symbolic meanings of race and creole as 'untainted pure' and 'tainted impure'.

The idea of 'purity' originated in the belief that each of Trinidad's races entered as pure types and it gradually became a means of defining boundaries between those who were in creole society and those who were outside. Thus the discourse of purity constructed Indians as a homogenous other and kept them outside the creole mainstream both upon their arrival (1845-1917) in Trinidad and later whilst the national space was being created. Since amalgamation is integral to the historical reproduction of creole identity it requires a racial and cultural miscegenation (Hintzen 2002: 486). Thus HJ simultaneously demonstrates the symbolic meanings of 'purity' and 'Creole', which are in stark contrast to one another in the form of the 'untainted pure', and the 'tainted impure'. It may also be argued that the maintenance of opposition of pure categories such as African/European or African/Indian is made possible by the existence of impure margins such as the Mixed and Dougla categories.

### **Essentialising Forms**

Essentialism is based upon the Aristotelian notion of things having the essences of

the kind, which defines them; it is a specialness or quality that comes from within. Thus by essentialist forms I mean certain forms of political and cultural discourses that naturalize difference and so dress the historical and cultural in the clothes of the natural, biological or the genetic. On this basis the concept of blood operates as both a biological and metaphorical symbol of ancestry and place within in a particular geographical area. Seen as a source of one's inherited identity and culture it also creates an imagined unity between groups of people perceived to be of the same blood, which in turn may be coded as race. Trey describes his ethnic/racial background in the following way:

I have Indian in me, I have Negro, I have part Spanish blood in me and it's a mixture and I feel, I have seen on forms that you fill out that people ask you either you're a Negro, a Indian - so I can't class... even though I have a Indian Surname, I would consider myself more Negro.

Blood is placed alongside the race designations of Indian and Negro, which could also presumably be represented by their own bloods. Interestingly, Trey does not use the term African but the term Negro which, although it has associations with African, and a certain physiognomy – protruding lips, woolly hair and black-skin – it is also a different form of classification from African, Indian, European and so on. Negro does not directly relate back to Africa in the same way as Indian and India, European and Europe or African and Africa. It may be that when Trey chose Negro over African he was alluding to a displaced black identity that is Trinidadian rather than African particularly since his Indian mixed-blood could presumably disqualify him from being African. Trey could have used the term Creole instead of Negro but his failure to do so might be explained by the fact that

in Trinidad the popular usage of Creole is often derogatory in that it means low-class black. It could be the case that Trey's use of the term 'Negro' is a code for 'Creole'. Whilst Trey describes himself as having Negro and Indian in him, he also states that he would consider himself to be 'more Negro'. This is reinforced by his description of his physical features, which are those he associates with Negroes. Trey also indicates that his grandmother was Bajan (from Barbados) with some Spanish blood, which suggests that she was Creole and so could be easily assimilated into Trinidad's creole society. Also, Trey points out an inconsistency in that his family name is Indian but it now belongs to a Negro, which indicates that all is not what it seems. Trey's father being half-Indian and half-Negro would have been classified as Dougla; however, his marriage to a Negro is not seen to produce further mixing along the Indian continuum, which confirms Segal's view that Dougla does not carry on after one generation (Segal 1993). Once again the discourse of purity is illustrated since Indian notions of identity do not allow for being 'mixed' and retaining Indian identity unlike the Creole or African identities. Thus if a Dougla person has a child with an Indian person that child could on a 'pragmatic and conditional basis' become assimilated into the Indian category, always assuming they looked the part although at certain moments the person's lack of purity might be a significant factor (Segal 1993: 96). Indra told me, 'Thomas [her surname] is not an East Indian name ... I do have family of African descent too but I wouldn't say immediately, it's more East Indian'. Indra's family provides an example where after a generation Dougla identity was absorbed into the main Indian category.

In Tanty's description of herself she repeats and thereby confirms the Census reality of race but at the same time demonstrates her Creoleness through her acceptance of mixing. She uses the local term *callaloo* (a local Trinidadian dish containing various ingredients and often used as a metaphor for Trinidad's cultural mix) but her overall description of herself is Negro:

I am all mixed up - a *callaloo*! My grandfather is French; my grandmother is Spanish. My mother's side, my grandfather, he was half Indian and then my grandmother she was half Chinese; so you see it's a whole mix-up and if you see my sisters, well you would know we are sisters, of course but... well you see this is it, in Trinidad, you have Indian, you have Chinese and you have Negro, that's it. I fall under Negro.

Like Trey, Tanty uses the term Negro, 'I could tell you I am mixed, if I have to refer to group, it's a Negro'. The reason Tanty gives for this is that 'mixed' is not a 'pure' racial category and every individual may be classified along ancestral and racial lines. Tanty also classified people on the basis of their appearance: 'Indians, their hair is straight and they have certain features, you know, a Negro now have broad nose, full lips...' However, Tanty acknowledged that appearance might not be the whole story:

...maybe when you get to talk to them they tell you well no, I am mixed, my grandfather was a Chinese, and they would tell you whatever...

In order to determine the part played by physical appearance in determining an individual's ethnicity I asked Trey if how he would classify me:

Well, from your physical outlook, I can see your eyes and I would immediately pick up that ... there is part of you that has some sort of Chinese background or I would say Chinese mix in you, if I may be allowed to say so, and I would class you as Chinese.

[But don't you think its odd that I can be 'classed' as Chinese and my mother's not Chinese?]

Yes and no, because I have seen a Negro person and a White person make a very... I mean, someone your complexion. And I talking about a very dark Negro person and a white woman. So it depends on, I guess your blood type and your mix; whatever you may call it.

[So you think its blood?]

Yes, I could be wrong, but this is my opinion...

From Trey's response we can see that the racial designation of an individual is perceived to say something about the biology of the individual and not about an individual to whom they may be related. Trey's response also reveals that aside from the discourse of blood physical appearance, especially in the case of physiognomy and colour, plays an important part in determining a person's ethnicity/race.

Colour has played a very important role in the Caribbean in general as I have already indicated. Colour and status were generally imagined to be coincident and indicative of 'race' (Segal 1993: 86). Although there have been and still are exceptions, individuals have always been ranked by skin-tone according to what Segal describes as the 'creole scale of colour'. Colour introduces an element of ambiguity since shades of colour are ranked on a scale ranging from light to dark. In Trinidad 'red' refers to someone who is 'fair' but it is also a classification that emerges from the relationship between the individual being looked at and the person doing the looking:

My name Red-man comes from my complexion. In Trinidad, when you're this complexion you're known as Red-man. There are many guys in Trinidad called Red-man. I don't like to use the word nigger but they call that a red nigger.

Redman makes a number of implicit and explicit points about race: first that different races may co-exist in one body. At one point he states that: ‘there’s a mixture of a couple of other races within me’. Second, that this mixture produces a blend, which determines complexion. Third, that any blend nevertheless has a distinctive overall character. Thus he says, ‘even though my complexion, my features are African features, my hair as well’. Fourth, that race has an emotional component since his African-ness is something that he feels: ‘it’s what has touched me the most within myself as a person and in going in depth into the culture and whatever I pay more attention to the things that are more African’. Fifth, that your race is something that is defined for you more than by you; that is, Redman considers himself a blackman despite his complexion because, ‘in the world you are classed by the texture of your hair in many respects and my hair is African. And because of my features the lips, the nose... Mostly, for me, because of how I feel’.

Macky’s statement highlights the lack of clarity concerning colour since in-between white and black there are a number of other descriptive terms that are used. ‘Red’ for example is only one. There is also brown skin, fair, light skin. Sometimes ‘high’ might be prefixed to red or brown as an indication of class positioning. Macky explains what he means and understands by red:

Well, high red really is just ahm when yuh mix with black and white yet yuh more on the light side in yuh pigment then and yuh skin sometimes is blochy... basically is just means very fair. Very fair skinned but not white....

[KA: Is such a person a ‘black’ person overall?]

Yes. I personally consider them black. Some of them don't consider themselves black. And I know places where they would hang out where predominantly whites go. The white holes as ah might call them in Trinidad. The golf course and the country club business. They'll find deyself there. Trying to pretend to be white. Those sorts of place you doh get any black people going there at all. The exceptional few who in the income bracket. Yuh find East Indians too [...] who are fair-skinned. They almost think they are white. They love that whole class thing and they's predominantly class-ist. Yuh know... [Because of their caste system?] Yeah. Because of their caste system.

Macky uses the term 'mix' to refer to the means by which skin-tone is achieved, but he also make a connection between light-skin and social class which indicates the degree of cultural capital that is attached to white, near white, fair or red. To Macky 'high and red' go together. White people in Trinidad are automatically believed to live privileged lives as members of the Country and Golf Clubs, whereas most black people are perceived to be 'ordinary' without access to the same lifestyle, privileges or places unless they are of 'high' class – wealthy or a prominent public figure – in which case they are seen to be 'pretending' to be white and denying what is inscribed on their bodies. Segal makes an important observation with regard to the way in which 'achievements' and 'respectability' are coded as white (Segal 1993: 92) and this is confirmed by Macky saying that the blacks who do visit the 'white holes' are 'trying to pretend to be white'. In this context respectability is not 'whiteness' but an approximation to or even pretence of whiteness (Segal 1993: 92). Segal argues that colour was also an idiom of valuation for comportment and life ways so that speech style can be marked as black or white, and education and church weddings also have colour identities that were both white. I would also add *playing mas* with certain bands; attending certain fetes and going to certain clubs also carry symbolic 'whiteness' with them.

Thus respectability extended the idiom of colour beyond physiognomy to all aspects of personhood.

Macky also thought that, 'East Indians too ... who are fair-skinned. They almost think they are white. They love that whole class thing and they's predominantly class-ist'. This suggests that the overriding principle at work is closeness to whiteness. Segal argues that there was no colour-scale with whites and Indians at end points in the same way there was one that operated for white and blacks. Nor is there a lexical term for persons of Indian and European descent that functioned in the same way as *Douglas*. Since Indians are not placed on a colour-scale with whites achievements do not alter an Indian's identity. Whilst blackness is defined by an absence of whiteness mixing with blacks does not combine the two elements but rather fills a void. For Segal, this marks the differences in African and Indian inferiority since Indians are thought of as already possessing an ancient culture, unlike Africans who are deemed not to have one. However, there is some evidence that dark-skinned Indians, usually referred to as *Madrassi* Indians, tend to be treated with disdain by the rest of the Indian community since their dark skin is understood through Hindu association between caste and colour. Miller (1994: 277) has observed that by 1988 Indians had been incorporated into the general creole-scale of colour with the result that it was the lighter skinned Indians who were most likely to be seen doing the same banking and media work as the light skinned Africans. In addition Miller found that Indians are more likely to express a desire to emulate whites.



One would expect the concept of purity to breakdown in the case of biological hybridity but instead such cases appear to reinvent the myth of pure origin and indeed reinforce it. Macky who describes himself as a Dougla informed me that:

ah could see meh 'African' and 'Indian' features merged to create the features that ah have and ah would see other people who have my features and know automatically they mixed.

And:

Ah might not know what percent of them is African or Indian but ah could also tell a Dougla who has more African in him, and who has more Indian in him. Yuh understand da's the texture of dey hair. Yuh might find a Dougla person with a more tight curly hair. Yuh know he ha' more African in him. Yuh know that he mudder or he fadder is African and Indian, and he mudder is African, or he fadder is African. So it ha' more African in da' whole mix. Or yuh could tell the Indian Dougla, cause he hair might be more straighter than mine but still curlier than a Indian person, that one of his parents is a Dougla and one is a Indian. As opposed to one is a Dougla and one is a African.

What then does 'mix' mean in this context? From what Macky is saying an individual receives 'purity' in different percentages and this is represented in their physical features – an Indian nose, African hair and so forth. Does the idea of a 'mix' not subvert notions of purity? Does it not bring forth something new? In responding to these questions I will be drawing on Young's (1995) reading of Bakhtin's concept of hybridity. Bakhtin uses the term to describe a process of language, which he regards as 'double-voiced'. This doubleness both brings together, fuses but maintains a separation. Since a hybrid construction consists of more than one voice this means that the emphasis is on the contestatory and politicised elements, contrasts and oppositions that operate dialogically. Bakhtin

takes this type of hybridization to be a form of 'intentional hybridity', which is distinguishable from unconscious 'organic hybridity'. Unconscious organic hybridity involves mixing and fusion but as a consequence remain 'mute and opaque' since they are symbolic of a process of fusion bringing forth new mixes rather than contestation and opposition. Young (1995: 21) regards Braithwaite's description of creolization or the French *Metissage* as an example of this kind of hybridization. Bakhtin was more interested in the former kind of hybridity as instanced by carnival and other heteroglossia wherein two or more points of view are not mixed but set against one another dialogically. Thus,

Bakhtin's doubled form of hybridity therefore offers a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically. Hybridity therefore, as in the racial model, involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against the divisive, and the generative against the undermining. Hybridity itself is an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that brings both together, fuses, but also maintains a separation (Young 1995: 22).

Bakhtin's concept of hybridization provides some help in decoding Macky's statements since they seem to instance both types of hybridity. In the organic hybrid sense the Dougla involves a fusion of African and Indian elements to create a new form. As part of the process notions of purity are challenged by the impurity intrinsic to the fusion. From what Macky tell us Dougla is the outcome of a fusion but the elements remain separate and antagonistic in the intentional hybrid sense particularly since African and Indian are often cast as symbolic opposites. The following passage from Macky gives some idea of how the ambiguity of Dougla identity is expressed as an everyday experience:

I always knew ah was a Dougla because I've seen meh mother and meh father. But where I grew up was predominantly African so they used to call me Indian. Indian was meh nickname... likewise my partner (friend) Selo who is Dougla too as well. They used to call we the Indian connection on the football field and we coulda well play the same sports everybody play so we didn't get prejudice in terms of sports and ting. But like they would heckle you the whole game "Indian connection coming" and two ah we more used to *lime* together and when we used to go to play cards, All Fours or whatever, two ah we, me and Selo would partner and they say "buoy... the Indian connection buoy" and we winning the whole night. We'd sit down playing cards whole night winning... we just had it that kind of bond but we weren't Indians we weren't pure Indians. Right out de road is a place we does call Little India not far from the housing scheme where I live in, some people who have private land an' is predominantly Indian is only Indians who live there. Long time as youths when we go to, bussing (bursting) bamboo is a big ting in the Indian community, and da' is wha' dey like to buss bamboo around Divali and all dem kinda ting. [Bussing bamboo] is where yuh cut the bamboo, yuh take out the inside and yuh leave a lil' groove to the back and yuh pour some pitch oil or kerosene down in the back and yuh have a stick with a flambeau an' yuh light the stick and yuh touch it on the gas through the lil' square and it does make the bamboo make a crackling noise like a gun. Bamboo eventually split, the bamboo does get hot and yuh have a nex' bamboo line up at the side to come in know what ah mean is a noise maker. [...] pitch oil is a ting yuh cya buy after six so if you bussing bamboo and yuh pitch oil dregs-ing down reaching to done you know dem Indian and dem across bussing bamboo too. Yuh walk to where yuh hearing the next bamboo bussing and try to buy some pitch oil from them. As a youth man a dollar pitch oil is plenty. Yuh getting a whole bottle of pitch oil for a dollar. So we gone round by dem Indian and dem and we say we want a dollar pitch oil. They gi' we a bottle and we gone up the road but nobody eh crack, cuz the bottle what we came with before wha' had pitch oil in it. Nobody eh crack the bottle to smell to see if is pitch oil dey sell we. When we reach back and we start to pour it into the bamboo we realize buoy dis' fucking water, we pour it on we hand and we realize this is water. We swing back and we beat every fucking body. Pick up dem Indian and dem and ...it wasn't like a man go tell yuh "buoy yuh fighting own people" or nutten like dat. No, because at dat point in time I's not, is now my bredren an' dem saying, is now dey go tell me "buoy Indian is now we going an' ride for dem Indian and dem. Leh we move". I riding cuz I know I's not no Indian an' I know is we get rob'.

Lolo, is also a Dougla who when describing her family said that her mother is East Indian and her father is of 'African' descent, which she then 'modified' by saying he was 'mixed' 'race' as well, 'he looks African, black. My mother looks East Indian'. Lolo constructs her father's 'African-ness' on the basis of his looks,

especially his hair type and nose type.

If I say my father is of African descent is not true because he's not pure African and then yuh have to go into...well he's mixed and it always seem like yuh trying to shy away from yuh blackness, yuh know the more yuh go into it, even my father says well...you should see my father he's a red-skinned man and we ent pure African we ha' white people in we an all dat kinda ting they would say...it always seem like yuh trying to shy away from black' so dat ahmmm...my aunt now who I was with in New York is red-skin, my cousins are red-skin, they have sorf hair and they're red-skin people. So when yuh look at it yuh telling people yuh black and yuh Indian ahmmm. Well oh that's what you are in terms of the division of race's Indians go under Caucasian, but yuh cyah go around saying yuh ha'f white...

She uses the same criteria when describing her mother. And concerning her brother, she says: '[he] looked like an Indian boy growing up and now he has, he has this Rasta thing on his head (dread locks). He's very black-looking now, he's very, well yuh know, African...' Lolo points to the discrepancy between her father's 'black looks' and her 'red-skin' looking grandfather and aunts. The fact that she chooses not to refer to her father as 'mixed' is revealing because for Lolo there is something else that rules out this possibility. And from the way that Lolo speaks this something else is class. The interaction between colour and class causes Lolo to see her father's class position as a more important determinant of her father's skin colour than the fact of his being the son of a 'red-skinned' man. Hence, 'my father looks black but my grandfather is a red-skinned man. My aunts are red-skinned women... high colour people kinda ting...' For this reason, then, colour identity must be regarded as inherently ambiguous since it involves a dialectic between physical appearance and a knowable reality. This also supports Segal's thesis that members of the same family can have different colour identities and, by extension, class identities too. A further ambiguity arises in relation to

Lolo's father, because she also states that, 'I think even my father lost his blackness, because his wife is Indian and my brother and I looked Indian' which means that his association with his wife and children has disrupted and destabilized his black identity.

Lolo's father is black and of 'African' descent because this is what his overall 'look' suggests. But at the same time her own Indian identity is undermined or contested by the fact she does not want to appear to 'shy away' from her father's blackness and therefore her own. When Lolo says 'yuh cyah go around saying yuh half white' it is because 'whiteness' is an identity that must be pure; blackness can be lightened but whiteness cannot be darkened. Lolo indicates that she would like to be 'more Indian'. Bearing in mind that she already 'looks Indian' and 'pass through'. Lolo's ambiguity about her identity is summarised in the following statement:

I feel that I want to be more Indian, my children have to be more Indian and I've seen children of this union and they look very Indian and they pass through, I pass through. Indian women look at me and think I'm Indian. Indian men look at me I'm Indian and I have to tell them I'm not Indian, yuh know, so that I use it to my advantage, yuh know. The more I could disassociate myself...it's racist, it's bad, but the more... if I could hide my father, I would do it, cuz when they see him they say "Oooh da's yuh fadder, I cyah believe da's yuh fadder, cuz you doh look like him yuh know".

Bakhtin's double form of hybridity may be seen to operate here since Lolo is Indian and at the same time not Indian, which produces a contestatory dialogue within her self. Yet, Lolo indicates that she is not adverse to using her ambiguous positioning to her advantage, presumably where and when there may be beneficial

social consequences. Lolo told me about her friend Valerie who is mixed but dark in skin tone:

She's [Valerie] dark and that's another thing that she lives with, the fact that she's dark, cuz her mother is a dark Indian, what you would call a *Madras* Indian, dark skin Indian, cause even among the Indians you stratify according to colour an all dem ting. So she's dark and she had a chile, my goddaughter, is a black ... and she has sworn and promised that she's not going to have any more children by a niggerman right, because she sees colour as currency as well and hair texture as currency that you need now in terms of moving up, yuh know, in terms of social mobility and what not...

Within the terms of 'racial accounting', Valerie's child has been absorbed into the African category and located along the creole scale of colour at the dark end with all of its negative implications. Traditionally, racial mixing resulting in 'lightening up' was seen as desirable because it was a basis for social mobility, but because of the particular mix in her case Valerie felt that her child was at a great disadvantage.

In the context of seeking a partner, Lolo explained that:

She's [Valerie] looking at Indian guys, red-skinned guys, white guys. A black fella ain't have a chance. First to begin, no matter what, just by looking at what he look like, she ain't want no more of dat she ain't want no more of that. That's what she said and I can't fault her for dat. I don't want that either. Because I see the way the country is. Is either yuh red or yuh brown for me. I don't want to know nutten about being middle-class black, because I find middle-class black behave like house Negroes...

Lolo's ambivalence is further indicated by an occasion she recalls:

I remember one time my family and I went to the river. I might have been about twelve. When it was hot we would go to the river. There were always a lot of East Indian people cooking by the river and liming. My mother stayed in the car, she would always stay in the car for a while, my father was on the bonnet, and I remember feeling how – for the want of a better word – to go into the water because there were only Indian people in the water. That was the first time I really felt different. I felt oh these set of Indian people in the water; I'm not Indian.

The occasion is symbolic of the tension between Lolo's desire to be Indian and 'go in to the water' and so be with the other Indians, and her feeling that she does not belong because she is *not* really Indian. Lolo believed that she was in 'essence' different from the people in the water and her feelings may indicate a fluctuating ambivalence between desire and repulsion.

### **Indo-Trinidadian Identity**

The circumstances and conditions the Indians encountered upon their arrival in Trinidad played an important role in determining how their sense of identity would develop. Haraksingh points out that the Indian emigrants on the same ship developed the enduring ties of *jahaji bhai*. Not only that, this new bond was also an example of cultural diversity that transcended differences in terms of caste and religion. 'Culture defined an area to which Indians, after defeats at the work place, could retreat to heal and bind the wounds, before sallying forth again' (Haraksingh 1987: 73). As such cultural resilience and adaptation enabled Indo-Trinidadians to reconstruct a distinct identity in their adopted homeland.

As I have already indicated in the previous chapter, the nationalist movement was essentially a Creole movement with the result that all the national symbols were also creole. By the 1970s the spread of radicalism amongst some sections of the Afro-Trinidadian population created a space to question some of the stereotyped judgements of Indo-Trinidadians. One way to map this turn is to examine how it was manifested in the popular culture that is calypso. Trotman (1991) cites the calypso *Reconstruction* (1971) by Composer as an example:

Slaves from India who come later by indenture to the massa  
They fared a little better

They were told that they are weaker so that they could use their daily language  
Keep their names and keep their culture  
Keep together, separated from their black African brothers  
Yes that was the massa's plan  
Till it reach down to this nation the between Negroes and Indian  
We still have division

Talking English every where you go because I massa order so  
And not that stupid African lingo, that nonsensical mambo jambo  
They had to follow and they could not say no  
Till up to now some of us eh know  
That names like Johnston, Joseph and Granado  
Our ancestors was never named so

Chorus:

Why should we imitate the Englishman or copy the American  
And if your religion is not Christian why should they call you heathen  
Opportunities for every man, whether Indian, white or African  
And that's the way to the solution of Black Power demonstration

Composer's lyrics talk of similarity if not unity between the African and Indian experiences. However, he also acknowledges differences in that the indentured were able to transfer their cultural forms whereas those of the enslaved were largely wiped out. In the past Indian names had been laughed at by the Creoles because they sounded 'strange', as exemplified in the Mighty Killer's 1952 calypso *Indian People With Creole Names* which contains the line, 'Long time was Ramkaisingh, Boodoo, Poodoo, and Badoo' (Puri 1997: 126). By contrast Composer in his calypso draws attention such mockery and turned it around by pointing to the loss of African names and customs. The Calypsonian Maestro (1974) also criticizes the denial and complacency of Creoles, as well as Indian denial of creolization in the following verses:

Afro-Trinidadian talking Black Power  
Is not wrong for a man to love his culture  
Yes you walk around with your Afro plait



And you dragging alpagat and fat sapat  
But although they rapping about Africa  
You eating roti like you born in India  
So who you go blame when you make you bouf  
And end up like a cat on a hot tin roof.

Indian Trinidadian naïve as ever  
That's why they form the Maha Saba  
The conservative only talking 'race'  
Yet so much Dougla all over the place  
They say they doesn't eat pork but then  
How come them and black pudding is such good friend  
You making you own self a pappyshow  
You might end up like Rumpeltstilskino

As can be seen, for Maestro both Africans and Indians are 'culturally confused' (Trotman 1991: 396), which point he makes through his critiques of both Black Power and the conservative Indian notion of cultural purity.

Some of the traditional markers of Indian-ness such as dress, names, occupations, eating habits and female behaviour have been on the decline.

Calypsoes between

1946-1956 focused on the changing behaviour of Indians as in the case of the Mighty Killer song of 1952, and the Might Cobra's of 1954. Language was another source used by Afro-creole calypsonians to identify Indians because they not only retained their Indian languages but they had also developed a form of English based upon plantation Hindi: these speech patterns and Indian forms of standard English became the subject of humour in the Mighty Skipper's *Ramjohn* (1959). Traditional Indian female behaviour that was once a source differentiation was seen to be in decline by calypsonians as Indian women became more creolized. Nevertheless, whilst such calypsoes mocked and stereotyped, they also and

paradoxically creolized and therefore subverted the same. The threat to the creole-dominated social order posed by the emergence of the creolized Indian was contained in the reduction of the significance of the cultural gap between the creole self and its other and its replacement by a competition waged on the basis of wealth, resources and broader claims to West Indianness.

Creolized Indians were regarded with disdain by some calypsonians who mirrored the opinions of mainstream Afro-Creole society. They were not only mocked for taking creole names, eating creole food, wearing western-style clothes and stealing creole wealth, but for the appearance the creolized Emily, Jean and Dinah who go to dances and prostitute themselves to the Yankee man and so steal the Creole woman's source of income (Puri 1997: 126). By 1960, then, there was a growing unease on the part of Afro-Trinidadians that their world was being invaded and they began to fear economic dominance by Indians. In response, Indians were represented by calypsonians as a racist and clannish group who opposed inter-racial unions for the sake of cultural conservation. Geographical location is also a symbolic marker of difference in that Couva and Caroni in Central were identified with the Indian community, just as Laventille was identified with the African community.

Myra lives in an African pocket located between Montrose and Enterprise in the ward of Caroni. Enterprise is a predominantly African area, although in her opinion Chaguanas is mixed in the sense that:

...you would see a lot of mixed couples Africans and Indians. There are a lot of what we call Dougla children... Dougla people living in Chaguanas... Felicity on the other hand is predominantly East Indian. You would hardly get a mixture in Felicity simply because Felicity holds on to that whole tradition of that racial

division crap...where if a young man or woman is to get married they must marry under Hindu rites which is under bamboo [1]...they must marry an Indian and that type of thing...

Myra also constructs Indians as 'holding steadfast to India', a dominant group who see themselves as neither Trinidadians nor as blacks:

...they would cling to the Caucasian group, the white people, they would cling 'cause if they have a choice between being grouped with blacks or being grouped with white they would go for the white and never go for the black. It would be a cultural shock when they realize that the whites don't want them. And, strangely enough the black population might be the population that, and when I say black I'm speaking not about Africans but everybody who is considered black, would quicker absorb them than the whites.

Historical antagonisms between the black and Indian segments of the population bred mutual mistrust and fear. Indians were initially positioned outside of Creole society where there was little interaction with the rest of the main population and this isolation was reinforced by residential and occupational segregation. For Brereton (1974) such low levels of interaction assisted in breeding mutual contempt. In the post independence period the African-European dualism was replaced by one that was African-Indian in which an Afro-Trinidadian hegemony prevailed until 1995 when Afro-Trinidadian fears of a dominant Indian hegemony took hold in which claims that Indians had replaced Europeans as the new oppressors were frequently heard. This may partially explain the foundation upon which Myra's belief is held.

Since the creole colour-scale was defined by the end points black and white (Segal 1993: 87) signifying respectively African and European, Indians were not located anywhere along this continuum. Steve Ouditt in his essay *About My Sweet*

*Brown* (1997) explores the possibility of brown as a symbolic signifying term for the experiences of Indians in Trinidad. Brown is neither black nor white rather it is appropriated as a symbolic term by Ouditt to write the historiography of the contributions made by Indian indentured labourers in the political and cultural economy of what he calls *sucrotopia* (the combination of sweat, and labour that produces the sugar which is transformed into profit). Ouditt writes:

I shall compare this sweet of my brown to a much earlier term, the one of 'black is beautiful' which emerged in the United States during the civil rights uprisings of the 1950s and 1960s.

In this great struggle blacks were marching against whites who had everything, did everything, said everything, and were everything. But something else happened when this useful anthem was transported to and transplanted in communities and countries of diasporic blacks who shared their space with browns; a blackwashing happened which dissolved the political culture of brown. It was an oversight of great hope, which assumed that the 'coolie' was a facsimilised post-emancipation 'nigger'. It was a red euphoria, which blinded people into de-browning a pigmentocracy to leave only white, red and black (the colours of the Trinidad flag) (Ouditt 1998: 46).

On the basis of Ouditt's fragment it may be suggested that although the browns became creolised they remained outsiders in a place that they helped to create, and where they were expected to become black but would not be accepted as black. In this essay Ouditt is contesting the privileging of black in the creole space and I think it is particularly useful in shedding some light on the double nature of hybridity in the sense that hybridity involves not only a fusion but also a separation which means that ethnic and cultural differences are forever critically engaged in dialogue with one another. Hybrid cultures undergo a process of translation in that they are separated from their place of origin and become transformed although they still bear the marks of the origins that shaped them. Any claim to purity is

'lost' because hybrid cultures are the result of several interlocking histories and cultures (Hall et al 1992: 310). Ouditt, who is a Trinidadian artist, takes as his theme that of identity and its relationship to place and through his questioning he reveals the dialogic processes at work in the 'who came first' struggle. In the 'no-man's land' where he exists as 'no land's man' Ouditt is marked by the 'sweet of his brown' that is symbolic of his ancestral past which he recognises as not the total sum of his identity. There are occasions when Ouditt appropriates the term black and on such occasions black is not the equivalent of 'Afro':

I think I consider myself black in terms of my politics... there are times when black is African black is Asian... (Interview with Ouditt May 2000, St. Joseph).

In this context black does not refer to a specific race but to a positioning within a particular structure of domination and exploitation such as colonialism, where it becomes a strategic form of identification. By contrast, my respondent Ola who describes himself as an 'African Trinidadian' rejects the term black because he sees it as symbolic 'denial of Africa' as well as being part of a colour coding imposed by the white colonial regime for the purposes of erasing African culture. For him African Trinidadian means African but born in Trinidad. Ouditt describes himself as 'Indian Trinidadian' but rejects the notion of identity as ethnicity. His self-description reads, 'an urban-East-Indian-West-Indian-American-English-educated-Christian-Trinidadian-Indian-creole'. Although Ouditt describes himself as Indian it is solely because of his physiognomy as is the Trinidadian norm. Ola is attempting to reconstruct his African identity in terms of a lost purity that he believes to be recoverable through the development of an African consciousness. Ouditt adopts black as a means of referencing a diasporic experience similar for

both Indians and Africans despite their different histories, culture, and ethnic identities. Black becomes a symbolic 'homogenization' that combines Bakhtin's unconscious organic and intentional hybridisation processes and so results in dialogization of ethnic and cultural differences. Thus through a syncretic process elements of black are rearticulated to create new spaces, relations and meanings. This hybridisation process subverts and carnivalizes purity and fixity in a way that Ola rejects entirely. Tinny a young Trinidadian in his early twenties grew up in what he considers to be a cosmopolitan environment. Tinny never knew his grand parents because his maternal Indian grandmother died before he was born, his maternal grandfather returned to India, and his paternal grand parents never left India. Yet Tinny describes himself as 'Trini-mixed':

I'm not necessarily Indian cuz I'm Indian, well watch meh hair and meh face, meh outlook, meh heritage yeah, basically I'm Indian; I'm more into African stuff. So physically I'm Indian but mentally I'm African.

Clearly Tinny is not speaking about a biological hybridity but a sense of self that emerges from his experience, which in turn cannot be separated from the historical, economic social and cultural experiences of a diasporic population. He explains his Trini-mixed-ness by saying:

There are some things that I [observe] ...for example Divali, prayers and Indian weddings and things like that... I've been to Shango churches and things like that. I'm not really a Shango but on the Christian side so to speak. Ahmmm most of my friends are Africans. Well is basically not with African culture... I know about Trini African culture rather than African culture.

Tinny's appropriation of 'Trini-African' cultural forms is an indication of what he sees as his entitlement as a Trinidadian to participate in any area of Trinidadian culture he chooses. On the basis of his experience of Trinidadian-ness, Ouditt is

also critical of the British use of the term 'Afro-Caribbean' as a general description for any person from the Caribbean since for him it led to the question: "You are from the Caribbean, how come, you are not even black, you look Asian?" In his essay *Engima of Survival* (1998) Ouditt recounts his experiences whilst living in London:

In London it seem to me that I am an enigma of survival because I come here as 'not an Afro-Caribbean' from Trinidad, the most multi-coloured bead in that chain of variegated islands. The wider geography is know to us who live there as the Caribbean, or the West Indies for the English-speaking islands. But for people who live here, or those who don't but read British cultural texts, the place is pre-fixed as the turf of 'Afro-Caribbeans' (Ouditt 1998: 8).

Afro-Caribbean as a generic term for all the peoples from the Caribbean erases the histories and existence of other Caribbean types. Slavery becomes the symbolic emblem that supersedes all other Caribbean subaltern horrors. Ouditt is critical of the conflation of black with Afro and Caribbean that he encountered whilst living in the UK:

Around Brixton I had had experiences where the Afro-British, black British would see me as Asian, and the Asians would tend to think I am Asian, so when the black-British found out that I'm not Asian a distance also developed...and I had once to quarrel with some blacks in Brixton in front of a barber shop and say to them 'watch nah yuh see me I is more West Indian than you, cause I born dey you born here and yuh talking like yuh father, and yuh mother, yuh never went back there in yuh life. Yuh never was in Trinidad in yuh life, yuh doh know nutten bout dey, yuh doh know wha's a roti, yuh doh know wha's a doubles, yuh doh know wha' kuchella, yuh ain't know wha' ackee is so hush. When I first went to Goldsmiths and Asian girls came up to me and ask me to join the Asian club I tell them no. They was aghast and say why I ain't joining the Asian club...I ain't no Asian, and I ha' no Asian interest.

Ouditt's anecdote illustrates a contestatory dialogue over what the terms 'West Indian' and 'Trinidadian' mean. Because Trinidadian is essentially a hybridized

identity the differences that constitute it are always critically and dialogically engaged.

One of the ways in which Indo-Trinidadians construct their identity is through religion. As Vertovec (2002: 86) argues, religion is often fundamental to the way in which people construct their identities. Derek defines his ethnic background as Indian with religion being one factor in determining ethnicity but not necessarily the most important. Derek indicates that although he and his wife are Hindus, he is not particularly religious. Whilst Derek described himself as both Indian and Hindu, he sees himself foremost as a Trinidadian. Derek's claim that he is not religious may be read as an attempt to distance him from any claims to 'purity', and the aggressive separationist Hindu nationalism represented by organizations such as the *Maha Sabha*. Derek grew up in an area that is predominantly Afro-Trinidadian which may explain this partial 'distancing':

...When I tell people I'm from Laventille they say they didn't know they had Indians living there. I wouldn't move from Lamentable for anything. Like my brother he comes in and out 4-5 o'clock in the morning...people living in Valsayn and West Moorings have to lock up their house, they can't go anywhere. So I feel safe there. Somebody in our area said thieves don't thief around their own area...

(Laventille is an area just outside of the capital Port of Spain, and is considered to be a working-class 'Afro-Trinidadian' area. Valsay is predominantly an Indian Middle-class area whilst West Mooring is considered 'white' and middle to upper class).

Vertovec points out:

Greater self-consciousness among groups may be stimulated by migration, economic shifts affecting traditional livelihoods, political change wrought by decolonisation, rapid governmental swings to the right or to the left, or by other conditions perceived by members to be somehow unstable, unfair, or threatening



(Vertovec 2000: 63).

and:

[M]uch of what of what can be considered 'ethnic' among members of a community lies in largely non-conscious phenomena. Such phenomena are comprised of unarticulated, though shared sentiments, dispositions, aesthetics, rhythms: in short, as 'culture' habituated and inculcated through 'practice' (Vertovec 2000: 64).

While cultural differences may divide a society without a high level of consciousness with regard to membership or communal interest, in response to various conditions members may undertake forms of mobilization to achieve some goal that is defined as the collective interest. Thus, 'the formation of an ideology is often the key to the process of ethnic mobilization' (Ibid: 64). When religion forms part of the core of an ethnic ideology its references tend to 'carry and bestow authority because they seem to emanate from a transcendent source' (Ibid: 65). These sets of references define the group, its history and its place in the world.

Another way in which Indo-Trinidadians define their ethnicity is through the family structure. Indra told me that she came from a traditional Hindu family but did not see herself as a typical Trinidadian Indian. Indra's own definition of Indians included references to a 'closed people' who tend 'not mix outside of their own kind', and possess a culture in which women marry young and produce large families. Female lives are typically centred on the home and domestic pursuits:

I find that Indian women are taught from early to be good wives and take care of children and keep up the house; you growing up and your parents are teaching you to cook and to clean properly and you know, you're not really allowed out of the house, you don't get involved in too much sports or extra curricular activities or any of those things. If you do it would be something like sewing or baking - a cookery course you know, embroidery - anything related to house or family, so yeah I think so, most girls are taught to be good wives from very young.

Whilst Indra states that she comes from a ‘very traditional Hindu family’ which she defines in terms of family, religion and gender expectations, she also reveals that her parents would not be concerned if she were to marry outside as her elder sister had already done so and so ‘broken the barrier’. Indra indicates that the traditional element in her family derives from her mother’s rather than her father’s side. The main issue for Indra with regard to tradition appears, overwhelmingly, to be gender conformity. Her mother’s side of the family is the more traditional side because of its focus on the family and the home. Whilst these things are not inherently Hindu or Indian, in the context of Creole society Indra like many other Trinidadians codes and constructs them as such.

‘Indian-ness’ and ‘African-ness’ are often coded as opposites as for example when my respondent Kerry describes herself as East Indian but Catholic. When explaining what it was that made her East Indian she did not refer to physiognomy but rather the way in which she was brought up mainly with strictness and clear moral standards which she coded as East Indian values:

The way we was brought up...morals...standards, values it was East Indian.... [sense of] right and wrong. What is right is you’re supposed to get married, and then you have your children. And wrong is like the opposite of that. That is what I consider East Indian.... Basically strict.

This would suggest that there is a tendency amongst the population to regard Indians as upholding virtuous ways unlike the Africans whose values are those of ‘carnival’ and so the antithesis of hard work, family values and achievement. This is summed up in Macky’s feelings about Indians:

East Indian people they really make something of one, even if is ten children dey have one go be a doctor, nine go wuk garden and plant garden to sen' da' one to school. An' he go become a doctor and earn TT\$20,000 a month and build one big house wit' fourteen rooms: he mudder, fadder, he nine brudder and who ever making baby. An' da's how dem does live. An' dey go still have dey big big garden...[...] the rest a dem cyah read and write yuh know dey have a brudder who is a fat fat doctor though. So I think I geh dat from meh mudder things like always wanting to be something...[...] yuh had to go and do yuh A's, yuh ha' to ting and yuh ha' to be something odder than if yuh look at we sitting down block. I was fortunate in many ways to fall into something, to do something dat I like... [...] I think we had better educational values in my household growing up in a housing scheme.

Certain types of behaviour both positive and negative become naturalized and therefore ethnicized. For example, Deja is in her early teens and attends a Hindu school, which means that her contact with non-Indians is limited. The area that Deja lives in does not have many Indian families. In fact Deja's family is one of only 'two' Indian families in the street. On the whole the neighbourhood would be considered a low-income one. Deja informed me that she didn't like Trinidad:

...because of the mannerisms of the people and because it is so dangerous at nights... how they address you, in a very vulgar way and like very aggressive as in contrast to the people in... like the Americans or British or whatever, they address you in a more pleasant way than they do down here and that's basically why I don't like Trinidad.

When Deja speaks of the 'mannerisms of the people' it becomes clear that she is speaking of Afro-Trinidadians. Deja's sister Indra explains on her behalf:

I think it has a lot to do with the type of people she's been exposed to, especially the area that we live in, ok and...she goes to a Hindu school and I mean the street that we grew up in, there are not a lot of Indian families, we are probably one of the only one or two...its where we live and we don't live in a very rich area actually, so its not like a socially superior place and being one of the few Indian families, that's why her perception of the other race would be limited to that view that they are vulgar because that's the way that the girls in the neighbourhood behave, and then me teaching at public school, that is primarily Negro because most of the population is from Maloney, that's her perception too because she often meets me at school...

Growing up Lolo also found that black children were more unruly, difficult, performed less well at school and were less well mannered. Lolo's association of blackness with bad manners and poor educational performance and low class status caused her to want to identify more with her Indian side rather than her black side:

I always felt that black people had no manners and training, they were making a set of children, they were the ones on welfare, and bandits. And yuh wouldn't want to be associated with them and even my friends today, its very bad of us, we would make that kind of statement about black people this and that and the other. Is a shameful part of yourself that you want to disassociate yourself from because of their behaviour and how they are viewed in society as being unproductive and lazy and those kind of things. And I still think sometimes like that although I try to think that people are people it doesn't matter what their race is but I think I sometimes buy in to that stereotype.

From the responses I have quoted above it becomes clear that conceptions of ethnicity/race are never simply biologicistic nor are its categories simply essentialist: 'the racial was always cultural, the essential never unequivocal' (Young 1995: 28). Vertovec (2002) has shown that processes of 'ideologization' play an important part in shaping identities. On the one hand, there are the ordinary daily routines that become established as culture through practice, whilst on the other hand the formation of ideology involves a process of defining the boundaries of the group in relation to other groups, the dominant culture and so on.

### **Afro-Trinidadian Identity**

Whilst culture and religion in particular played an important part in defining Indo-Trinidadian identity it has played a lesser role in defining Afro-Trinidadian identity although Trinidadian Africanists have sought to reconstruct Afro-Trinidadian identity around African derived religions such as Orisha beliefs and practices. As I

have already indicated the main dichotomy that characterized the colonial period was one in which black and white were positioned at opposite ends but since independence this has been displaced by a dichotomy between Africans and Indians. Consequently, Douglas have displaced the coloureds or creoles as the critical ambiguous status. Thus, the contrasting collective identities of African and Indian have been recoded in relation to one another. The growth of Indo-Trinidadian political and cultural assertiveness in the early 1990s provoked a counter-reaction in Afro-Creole society. If Hindu fundamentalism was on the rise so was a Christian fundamentalism that sought to counter the non-Christian forces. In addition, there was an Afrocentric reawakening in which the Spiritual and Shouter Baptist groups – largely syncretic forms that mixed African and European elements - became more vocal in their demands for recognition. Similarly, Orisha worship also became more visible and there was also an increase in the number of Orisha devotees particularly amongst prominent members of Trinidadian society. One explanation for this is that the Black Power Movement of the early 1970s brought in a heightened African consciousness that opened the way for Afro-Trinidadians to embrace the African religions that managed to survive in Trinidad. Although the Orisha religion is African derived, it incorporates elements of Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and the Kaballah in its modes of worship (Houk 1993: 162). Houk argues that the ‘Africanization’ of the religion from the 1960s onwards in which an increased emphasis was place upon the African rather than Catholic and Hindu aspects of the religion may be seen as a response to the influx of non-African peoples – mainly Indians – into the religion thus posing a

particularly sharp threat to the identity of Afro-Trinidadians (Houk 1993: 177).

Pearl Eintou Springer, Africanist and Orisha devotee, in an interview for the *Express* said that she joined the Orisha faith because Christianity's ethnocentrism cannot accommodate an Africanist outlook:

African religion is the key to enunciating a world view to propel a people to their right world place. So my view of beauty would not be Princess Diana looking anorexic but the Orisha goddess Oshun. Eurocentric values are implicit in Eurocentric religions (*Express* July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002).

African religion did not present an ethnic ideology in the same way that Hinduism did although there were attempts to purge it of external influences by excluding Christian and Hindu elements whilst returning to a liturgy and practice that is Yoruba. This reflects Africanists' desire that African religion remain the property of Africans because it is seen as an integral part of African identity as Springer explains:

I am against the concept of the rainbow culture. It's an erosion of identity, this merging. We need to celebrate each other and eliminate fear and difference. Where mixings and mergings occur we accept them as part of the alchemy of cultural evolution that is inevitable. But we do not postulate that as an ideology for dealing with the plurality of our society (*Express* July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002).

The development of an Afro-Trinidadian consciousness went hand in hand with attempts to develop a positive collective identity that sought to challenge white domination and black oppression. The process of defining one's collective identity is also part of a process of defining a dominant other or others with whom one can contrast and distinguish oneself from. In Trinidad although this collective identity was acknowledged to be a plural one it nonetheless came to be represented in terms of an African/Indian split. Gordon Rohlehr's discussion of the 'racialized

consciousness' of black Trinidadians is partly located in discourses about blackness and Africa that gave rise to a growing racial self-confidence in which the twin themes of blackness and citizenship were accompanied by romantic notions of Africa. Garveyism provided the ideological foundation for celebrating Negritude whilst Abyssinia and Haile Selassie assumed a symbolic importance for sections of the African diaspora. The post-war period saw mass migration from the villages to the urban centres by all groups in search of the Yankee dollar. The American presence in Trinidad between 1941-1945 had enormous impact on Trinidadian society and this included a heightened consciousness of black/white 'race' issues. Another consequence was the far greater visibility of Indians in urban and semi-urban areas. The racialized consciousness is clearly manifested in Calypsoes. Between 1943 and 1945 a number of calypsoes about Indo-Trinidadian were produced. In these calypsoes Indo-Trinidadians were marked as different by their customs, language and food. The theme of food was particularly prevalent because it functioned as both a marker of difference and a symbol of unity (Rohlehr 1990: 494).

Reciprocally, the Indo-Trinidadian's construction of Afro-Trinidadians attributes to them a number of undesirable characteristics such as idleness, vagrancy, vice, 'going off' (mental problems), illegitimacy, misogyny, uncouthness, and lacking in education (Sampath 1993: 239). However, I should also point out that this negative stereotype is not exclusive to Indo-Trinidadians as revealed by Afro-Trinidadians' divided response to Gypsy's calypso *Little Black Boy* (1997). Gypsy's calypso was controversial because, on the one hand, the song

was interpreted as a plea to black youths to make something of themselves whilst, on the other, it was seen to be a betrayal of black men. The lyrics drew particular attention to the lives of those black youths who dropped out of school, committed acts of violence, used or sold drugs, and had no other personal ambitions beyond material possessions. Gypsy's message was seen to be a sell out by some Afro-Trinidadians who felt that he had only singled out little black boys for criticism. Self-denigration on the part of Afro-Trinidadians was not new since there are other examples cited by Rohlehr (1990) in his study of calypso, which reveal an ambivalence and paradox in black Trinidadians' self perceptions. Growing racial self-esteem coexisted alongside a lingering self-contempt as revealed in Fighter's *Back to Africa* (1958) which contained the line 'not because I black and ugly'. In a similar vein Terror's *Negro know thyself* (1951) was an attempt to rally the black population around a common vision, but his *Life in London* (1954) contained the line 'in a few months a nice blue-eyed baby will be calling Terror daddy'.

Other calypsoes such as Melody's *Discrimination* (1958) and Kitchener's *If You're Brown* (1959) are examples of calypsoes that display a consciousness of the discrimination suffered by black people particularly in America. This growing black consciousness produced a desire to remove the ambiguity around mixed identities – those who were mixed became black. Two historical moments that stand out are the immediate post-World War One period and the Black Power Movement of the 1970s. In the case of the former, Trinidadian service men returned home discontented by the humiliating treatment they had received whilst serving King and country abroad; they had been confined to separate regiments,



given lower rates of pay, inferior living quarters and medical treatment, and forced to perform the most menial tasks. In addition, Marcus Garvey's writings and the ideology of race pride were becoming influential because of the challenge they posed to ideas of white superiority. But the impact of the Black Power Movement of the 1970s provided the greatest challenge to discourses of European superiority and altered the meaning of blackness (Reddock 1999; Miller 1994). The Official Census covering the period between 1960 and 1970 indicates a marked increase in Trinidadians who identified themselves as Africans along with a corresponding decline in the mixed category (Abdulah 1988; Miller 1994). For example, Rudi a young man in his early twenties told me: 'Yuh know I'm mixed up with Indian an' Spanish, African, White da's about it', but he also indicated that he would describe himself as African or black. Red-man who was named after his 'fair' complexion explained that a 'Red' person is 'an African mixed with the white race – French, British, Spanish, the white people of Europe'. He had lived his life with white people referring to him as black, and black people referring to him as white. Red-man's discussion of his identity reveals a dichotomy between how others perceive him and how he sees himself. On the one hand, his *'liming partners'* referred to him as the 'white boy' because of his 'red' complexion whilst, on the other, he felt more African:

When *liming* with friends in Trinidad, and there would be the element of 'fatigue' (teasing) and I would be referred to as "he's the white boy", or within my league as a drummer, musician the world over there's jealousy and envy right around and I have made some head way in drumming because of skill as well as discipline and trust so I work for a lot of people in Trinidad. I have travelled a lot within my time as a drummer and as a pan man, because of this there would be a little talk amongst drummers – who is going to this one ok it's Redman "all yuh know he's the white boy in the bunch... Da is de white boy so he would get the preference" or stuff like

that. Even amongst the white people, silences nothing is really said you're around them and it's yuh feel that you are not welcome because of actions, attitudes and mannerism and stuff... I could deal more with the black saying "well he's the white boy" which I've more or less grown accustomed to that and I know in that respect people need to realize that it's who you are that makes you... I see myself as a Trinidadian first because Trinidadians have been blended into something that is special...

Clearly, Red-man sees himself as positioned in the middle - in a sort of no mans land:

I stand in the middle and it's a bit difficult at that point sometimes because it's a pulling and a tugging and you don't know which side to lean to. From what I have found I have created my own fashion within where I am. I don't want to go here and I don't want to go there. I am who I am here. But I am more conscious of the African side of me.

Out of forty interviewees only one person, Ola, objected to the term black as a form of self-description:

...everybody else are something else... the Chinese we don't call yellows or Indians browns or even black... whites call themselves a whole lot of other names: Irish, French, Italians... the only time white comes up is in opposition to black. These are colour designations that I reject categorically. As a matter of fact that is part of the colonial regime stripping away, stripping Africans of their identity; coloured to nigger to Negro to all of these offensive terms rather than what you are - an African.. I'm an African, we have Africans in Trinidad and Tobago, we have Africans in the Caribbean, just as much as we have Chinese from China Indians from India...you see there's consistency there in terms of the description... [...] it's a process of liberation.

On the whole there was no clear consensus with regard to the usages of black or African. Trinidadians seemed to use both and Negro featured occasionally:

I'm a Black man of Trinidad, where we have a lot of ethnic groups, where... Trinidad is like aye its Chinese, its Syrian, its Indian it's all mixed; it's a callaloo community. But I come from black stock, and ahm, that's it. I wouldn't put myself in another bag - I'm Trinidadian.

I'm Trinidadian... well okay my parents are of African descent. My mom and dad, they both Trinidadians...although they had me in London. My dad still lives here [England] and my mom lives in Trinidad. I went to Trinidad when I was 3 months

old and left when I was twenty and given that I have spent most of my time in Trinidad...[laughing] the only thing is my navel string wasn't buried there, but I am African-Caribbean. Trini!

...[I]n Trinidad, you have Indian, you have Chinese and you have Negro, that's it. I fall under Negro.

Thus for Afro-Trinidadians colour appears to be one of the main determinants of racial identity whereas culture is perceived to be important in the case of Indian identity. Colour as a sign of ancestry operates according to a different logic because it registers a different form of subordination in which the founding ancestral race's, those of Africa and Europe, are located along a continuum of colour which represents them as physiological opposites and produces the possibility of mixing. Thus:

...[T]he idiom of 'colour' affirmed the 'natural' differences of these kinds, even while expressing their shared 'localness'. There was however, no shared term indicating the localness of 'East Indians'...the 'African' or 'black' was also identified as a 'Negro'. This 'kind' was located neither in a land of origin nor in the colonial order, but in scientific typology – that is, in a system of difference represented as an objective fact of nature (Segal, 1993: 100-101).

The term black still retains its natural, biological and even genetic associations, despite what we know about the inherent ambiguity of colour. In the same way that there are no racially specific types, there are no racially specific phenotypical traits. However, the term black is also recognized as a politically and culturally constructed category produced as part of a strategy that allows a variety of subject positions, experiences and identities to come together in such a way that Indo-Trinidadians such as Ouditt (mentioned earlier) can identify as black in political

terms whilst staying in England. In the words of Harley, a New York based Trinidadian, the meaning of 'black' changes depending upon the context:

Black is interchangeable with Afro-Trinidadian for me, as long as I'm in Trinidad, that is, but certain things happen that make you think you're just a black person in America, so even the latest Diallo case, where this immigrant is shot forty-one times... I think those kind of events, those episodes, always remind you you're just a black person - or if you confront a cop, at least for me, I become very aware I'm just a black man, so its often in context, how might this person see me? I mean, of course in a room full of black Americans, who maybe went to black colleges like Howard and doing the sorority thing, I mean I have a profound sense that I am a Trinidadian. When I was in college, West Indians on a whole would hang out on one side of the lounge and black Americans hang out on one side. In that case it wasn't even just Trini but it was West Indians, you know it was like 'these are the West Indians' and most of us were on the soccer team and by maybe the third year in school, I was actually dating this black American woman and the social life began to change, to a large extent, considerably due to music. The popularity of dancehall, that dancehall-hip-hop mix meant that suddenly West Indians and black Americans could party together and I think that was kind of an important change in the early 90's...

Conservative nationalist discourses, whether African or Indian, have much in common in that not only do they strive to maintain racial separateness, but they are also both threatened by the racially ambiguous. For example Puri (1997) notes a discursive overlap between the Maha Sabha and the African Association, in that the former subscribes to the view that Douglarization represents racial 'dilution' and the latter sees it as a form of African self-contempt. This overlap may be seen in the following response given by Ola:

Africans need to know their history in Trinidad; Indians need to know their history in Trinidad. Europeans need to know their history – their role in the enslavement of Africans in Trinidad. That's clear: we can't change that. We also have to know each other's history the whole point about it to live in the place we all have to find ways to get along. I don't want anybody talking to me about 'melting pot' I reject melting pot theories or strategies.... I don't want to force people into denying their ethnic heritages that is the worse thing that you can do. I look in the mirror I see something...you talk about those of mixed race if you are mixed with African and Indian...you hear what I said teach the history of Africans teach the history of

Indians, we must come to some understanding. Some have Africans in their families and vice versa. It does not change the history.... I would tend to think there is hope to move to some common ground of understanding with the group but the biggest mistake they are making in Trinidad particularly with Africans is denying the history of Africans in Trinidad...

In a similar vein, as Puri points out, the *Maha Sabha* is able to rally to its cause a number of unlikely supporters: not only Hinduism but also Garvism and the African Association's black nationalism, plus Eric Williams' and V. S. Naipaul's observations about black self-esteem and dependency, and even the words of the national anthem: 'In fact, the diversity of its discursive strategies and supporters belie its message of racial purity and distinctiveness' (Puri 1997: 131). In a published statement denouncing Douglarization, Maraj on behalf of the Maha Sabha stated that:

Indians in T&T will not accept any use of subtle strategies to promote a culture of disrespect for women, a promotion of single parent households and irresponsible parenting. Beauty is unity with diversity.

The values of Hindu Trinidad must be preserved from amoral forces of destruction clothed in the slogans of Douglarization.

Indians find it insulting that a process of race mixing should take such priority when illiteracy, crime, depravity and unemployment are destroying the people in the urban areas. We believe in love and respect for each human being in whatever form. Indians must not be told to tolerate abuse as a call for Douglarization. Here ever creed and race must have an equal place (quoted in Puri 1997: 131-132).

As Puri points out, the use of 'urban areas' is a coded reference to 'Africans' and the references to crime, depravity and unemployment invoke the colonial stereotype of the lazy, sexually promiscuous, criminal African. Other code words in the text are: 'pluralism' and 'diversity' which mean separatism and racial purity: 'disrespect for women' refers to African disrespect for Indian women and includes an implication of interracial sex. Ultimately, Puri argues, these constructions of the

Douglas also assist in mobilizing particular constructions of Indian womanhood in the service of a racial logic. Similarly, Ola's afterthought of moving to a 'common ground and understanding' is full of good intentions except that he is also disturbed by the dilution of African identity and so rules out the possibility of finding a common ground by rejecting what he calls 'melting pot strategies and theories'. 'Common ground' really means each on their separate turf - equal but at the same time separate. Ola seems to be under the illusion that Trinidadians are unaware of their histories as separate races, which is surprising given the social prominence given to matters of race.

### **Mixed Identity**

Historically, mixed was restricted largely to African-European mixtures. From the beginning of its existence the 'coloured' population occupied the ambiguous space between the white upper-class and black working-class. Characteristically, they were seen to valorize everything that was European whilst denigrating and distancing themselves from everything that was African. Positioned in middle stratum of the colour/class hierarchy, the white community rejected the mixed/coloured population who in turn looked down upon lower-class 'pure' blacks. Ironically, whilst they could claim their African ancestry, they did not have the same right of entitlement to their European heritage. This denial produced a desire to 'achieve' whiteness, and if this could not be achieved through 'lightening up' the family then it could be done through the achievement of respectability (Segal 1993:). Light-skinned Creoles, particularly women, were therefore seen by blacks to be particularly treacherous since they were always suspected to be

consciously seeking to produce light-skinned children as a mechanism of social mobility within the class-colour hierarchy (Reddock 1999: 187-188). This suspicion was captured by the calypsonian Chalkdust in his calypso *They Ent African At All* (1984) (Regis 1999: 97-98) which heaped ridicule on anyone who celebrated everything else but their blackness and contained the following lines:

I see black women running from their race...  
Their own black children they can't see  
They don't know their roots  
As a glorious bloom  
Blessed be the fruit of their womb  
They does be as though they shame of their history  
They does be proud of other people own  
They does be glad to disclose their baby's ancestry  
Putting their children up on a false throne  
Not their own  
An' hear them boast to their friends and dey neighbour  
My baby nose from his Spanish grandfather  
My grandmother married a Chinese named Lau  
That is why the eyes so pretty  
And he have such thick eyebrow

Chorus:

He dimple come from me husband side  
Who great grandfather was Irish  
An' that is how he eye pretty and wide  
Cause the mother mixed with British  
An' look at me I am Carib and Portuguese  
So meh chile hair curly  
But the baby black down to the eyeball they ent see Africa at all  
Ah say the baby black like a voodoo doll but they can't see Africa at all

In the absence of prior local connections, East Indians never became Creoles and had no place on the Creole colour-scale; they were emphatically 'East' and not 'West Indians' (Segal 1990: 97). This raises the question of whether 'dougularization' is part of the process of creolization. There were occasions when creolization and douglarization were seen to be synonymous. Ouditt, however,

does not see any parallel between douglarization and creolization because: ‘a

Dougla is a Creole, but a Creole is not a Dougla’. Moreover, he adds:

...Douglarization still seems to privilege the African. For me growing up I always felt that there seemed to be an African entitlement to Trinidad. Africans felt they were entitled to Trinidad and everything in Trinidad and that came to a head in the public debate with the government of Basdeo Panday - when like a fool Peter Blood would write in the papers that Indians are now finding their voice - as though before Basdeo Panday and the Indian government, Indian people had no voice; they were voiceless... But I believe Dougla privileges the African. It's a kind of term which wants to believe that there is national unity as an African initiative and I disagree with that completely (Interview, Trinidad, St Joseph 2001).

Until the 1980s the mixing between Africans and Indians was not spoken about

(Reddock 1999: 190). Reddock suggests a number of reasons for this silence. First,

Indian notions of identity did not allow for being ‘mixed’ whilst retaining an

Indian identity so any such were assigned to other categories. The result was that

Dougla children faced rejection by the Indian side of the family. In Macky's words:

I discovered in life the reason ah didn't really know my grandmother and grandfather on that [Indian] side, although ah couldn't remember my grandfather cause he had died I think before I was born... My grandmother on my father's side I never knew her because she died before I was born too. But on the East Indian side ah didn't really get to know much because ah realize that late on in life the reason why was that, like my mother's family never really accepted that she married outside...an non-East Indian person. So I realized and I saw a certain little animosity there towards my father when we go there. Now is not that way cause everybody is man and woman... my sister she teaches, I'm an entertainer so they have a lil more respect for us. And over the years going there from like when we were all twelve-thirteen, when we started to go there they started to develop a thing for my father. And I know that my uncle have a lot of other African friends. So is nothing now but back then it was something. And back then I'm probably speaking about the 1970s. Remember I was born in the late 70s.... Before that ... when they were courting and had my sister it would have been much more difficult. So is only until into the 1980s...we went there.

Second, ‘Dougla’ was regarded as a derogatory term with the result that many

Douglas rejected it as a term of self-description. This feeling is strongly expressed



by Lolo:

I don't use that word; I spell it out d-o-u-g-l-a. My friends don't use it. I call myself 'mixed'. My definition [of Dougla] is a person of African descent and a person of East Indian descent... this is what I understand it to mean... it means bastard... To arrive at a Dougla it would mean an East Indian woman or man, but it was predominantly East Indian women who used to get a lot of flak for it running off with a nigger man, for the want of a better word, and that is shameful because of Hindu tradition and in terms of race... religion and race yuh could not ah been married so you were born out of wedlock, and in that era it was shameful. That is a bastard so I don't call myself that. I don't refer to it. If ever it were to be legitimized I would be the first to stand up against it. I saw when Selwyn Ryan (Professor of Political Science at UWI and political columnist of the Express) did his poll recently he did have a special group called Dougla, and I am very much against that. I am not a bastard. It is the same way people used Mulatto that means mule. It is a derogatory term and racist. Those are racist terms.

Third, the term was also rejected because of the association of Indians with rural backwardness and un-sophistication. In addition, in contrast to the high regard held for European things that became interchangeable with 'Western culture', Indian culture was a devalued one; therefore one would seek to distance oneself from it by identifying with more Western cultural forms.

For other Indian mixes there were other reasons for the silence. For example, in the case of Indian-white mixes there was no lexical marker for their descendants. Rene, for example describes her background in the following terms:

Mummy's dad is Guyanese, her mother is British, so she was born in England but she grew up in Guyana, so she's not fair, I'm very fair but she's very red and Daddy's half Indian, but he's real brown, half-Indian and Portuguese, so he's like a dark Indian, so I doh know where I fit in between there, but kinda mix-up I guess.

Later on Rene describes her maternal grand father as 'red' by which she means, 'fair, half-white mixed with dark, some kinda Negro, cause my grandfather ha' dada head... he's red, he's not fair, he's not black, he's just in-between, a kinda golden colour'. Red was not a term Rene ascribed to herself but she said that in

Trinidad people would call out to her “hey reds wha’ going on?” Since arriving in England a year ago, Rene herself is frequently ‘misrecognized’ as ‘white’ by both black and white Britons. In Trinidad Rene would never be identified as a Dougla, since the term did not apply to white and Indian mixes.

The presence of mixed people threatens the continued existence of ‘pure’ categories so they have to be located in a separate racial category such as Coloured, Mixed or Dougla. Consider again Eric’s use of the terms ‘mix-up’ and *callaloo* to describe himself:

I’m a mix up, a *callaloo* if yuh want to call it. My father was from China – straight from China, my mother she had a mixture of Spanish, French...I guess some Creole, because on her father’s mother’s side there was some Negro...way down the line but her father was half Chinese and her mother was Spanish right so that is how the French and Spanish. Her grandfather was French because their name was Superville... her grandmother, her maiden name was something like ...something which was Spanish, she couldn’t even speak English so that’s what I’m saying so like on my mother’s side it was a mix up but on my father’s pure Chinese. So I am more than three-quarter...

Eric’s father is identified as being of pure race, which is emphasised by the reference to him having come ‘straight from China’ and so locates him as coming from outside of established creole society. Eric’s mother’s racial identity is accounted for in terms of her composition, which is an indication that she is not pure and therefore a member of creole society. While Eric’s mother is not of any single race she is accounted for in racial terms as being of Spanish, French, Creole and Chinese ancestry. From Eric’s statement it appears that while mixing combined races it did not alter them and all racial elements could be accounted for hence the tendency for Trinidadians to express ‘mixture’ genealogically or in fractionalised terms.

Some of the ambivalences surrounding Trinidadian identity may be understood by examining the notion of mixed. As I discussed in the previous chapter creolization and douglarization refer to processes that involve the disruption of 'pure' established categories of difference such as ethnicity/race or culture. Whereas creolization was the outcome of two historically racialized groups –Europeans and Africans – douglarization could be said to be a creole variant of the product of African and Indian unions. As I have already indicated the meaning of Creole in Trinidad can be very confusing and it is therefore a contested term. An academic in the University of the West Indies will use the term very differently from a person living in the South of Trinidad or up in Laventille. Lolo for example grew up thinking Creole meant somebody born in the West Indies:

The Europeans and whatever persons that were born of European parentage in the West Indies is considered Creole. I grew up with dat. I never heard the term otherwise. I always heard the term Creole food and Creole dishes and I thought dat to mean indigenous food, food that was created here, callaloo etc, but if you go to Chaguanas, Marabella and San Fernando or Caroni even, and you tell someone Creole, Creole would mean an African, black person. My girlfriend uses the term in that sense, right when she talks about Creole. "Dem Creole and dem" she means not somebody born in the West Indies or whatever she means a black person, and it's sometimes used in a derogatory sense as well, "dem Creole and dem lazy, and dem Creole and dem ain't no good" and dat type of ting... I know what it means depending on where I am in the country and Trinidad is small. I don't know about Tobago, but I know that if you go down anywhere that is predominantly East Indian descent you would see people using it in that sense. You go Arima, I don't think you would hear it like that unless yuh talking about Creole food. If somebody, you go into a place and yuh talk bout Creole food, you know is dasheen, rich stewed chicken, yuh know, callaloo, stew peas dat kind ting, dey would use it in dat sense.

Lolo identifies various meanings of Creole: first, there is the association between European ancestry and birth in the West Indies; second, the association with Trinidadian Africans or black persons; third, there is the derogatory association

with lower class black persons; and fourth, there is the association with the local style of cuisine. To understand which association is being invoked at any given time one has to attend to the context in which it is being used. For example, when Lolo's friend Valerie says, "dem Creole and dem lazy, and dem Creole and dem ain't no good" there is a very considerable slippage in the meaning since from the context we know that she is not referring to Indo-Trinidadians, nor is she referring to mixed persons. Ouditt indicates a different meaning of the term Creole:

A Creole to me is a psychology; is an identification with a psychology - a very complicated psychology which is at ease with the multiplying signifying systems and meanings that we could have in this country. Let me give you an example. If ah man go by a doubles man he could be of any colour. If he's a Trinidadian he could say, "gimme two wit slight". I think "two wit slight" is a Creole statement and if yuh say "two wit slight" anywhere else on the planet nobody would know what you mean. So Creole to me is in the language, in the movement specific to certain Caribbean places and each have their sort of creolism and it is not interchangeable, and we have problems with that because in Jamaica when a man say "bow", bow is not a thing a man like to do especially Rastaman and thing because "bow" means oral sex, and man nah bow yuh know. But here, now, I see an AD on TV for rum with a sort of Jamaican kind of voice over accent and the man say "take a bow for this new rum", dat cyah work in Jamaica, dey go buss if they try to say take a bow for this rum. When yuh go to dem Dancehall concert dem boy and dem - Beenie Man and dem say "all who know man who nah bow put up yuh han' an' and say yow". Which means allyuh fellas who doh bow – who doh eat pussy put up yuh hands and say yow and them fellas say boie! boie! boie! Because they don't eat pussy or so they say.

For Ouditt, then, 'two with slight' is a creole statement because language is transformed into 'one's own', that is into a vernacular which displaces the authority of the master form and allows new meanings to be created. Similarly, Young argues that pidgin and creolized languages constitute powerful models because they preserve the real historical forms of cultural contact (Young 1995: 5).

Miller (1994) found that mixing in general is far more prevalent than Government Censuses suggest. Douglas in particular are likely to be assimilated into the African category. Miller, like Abdulah (1988), stresses the problems created by the way in which data on ethnic origin is collected and interpreted. The enumerators are asked to decide the person's ethnicity on the basis of visual contact, and the respondents are only asked which ethnic group they belong to if an enumerator cannot decide. Also, the extent to which enumerators ask individual respondents in each household the ethnic origin of all the members of the household is not established (Abdulah 1988, cited in Reddock 1991: 214). Since the frequency with which enumerators have to ask is not known, we can say that the degree to which enumerators are able to make correct classifications is uncertain. Most importantly what a person looks like will vary between enumerators. This is confirmed by Miller's experiment in which he asked informants to give the ethnic description of persons in some advertising photographs. The informant's responses show a high level of inconsistency:

...even allowing for the deliberated policy of advertisers to select ambiguous models in order to broaden their marketing appeal. Individuals I took to be clear exemplifications of one ethnic category were strongly asserted to be something quite different. This was a far cry from the folk science of racial genealogy I had come to assume (Miller 1994: 52).

This inconsistency is described by Zipper whose ambiguous looks often resulted in others ascribing to him a number of different identities such as "Indian boy", "Douglaboy", or even "Chinee":

...identifying yuhself as African or Indian or Chinese I don't think is the best thing in the sense that... Trinidadian... my heritage then, I can't say I specifically from one heritage background, yuh understand because I all mix up I should just call

myself... sometimes I's accept it as some people might call mih aye "Indian boy" or "you Dougla boy" or "yuh Chinee", all kinda ting yuh know wha ah mean so I's accept wha ever yuh see me as I jus' say well alright if you say so, is like dat, da is how I accept it in the sense of things, but my personal thinking and ting... Dougla would work yuh understand...

## **Others**

The category of other usually consists of the white or near-white community and is made up of Euro-Creoles, Chinese, Syrians-Lebanese, and those who did not fall into any of the dominant categories. The white-creoles no longer seem to enjoy to the same degree the economic and social privileges they once commanded. There is even a perception that economic power now lies in the hands of the Indians and Syrians (Ryan, 1999). French Creoles, who are marginalized from the mainstream of Trinidadian society, have in a tongue in cheek fashion called for an 'Arrival Day' to commemorate the Spanish *Cedula* of 1783 which brought them to Trinidad. The Chinese community have also expressed their desire to be acknowledged as part of Creole society with a bigger role in public life commensurate with their achievements and contribution to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. Similarly, the Syrian-Lebanese community is perceived by Trinidadians to be an even more closely integrated and influential group than the Chinese.

Although Indians were perceived to be the dominant other they were by no means the only group to be treated as an 'out-group'. Rohlehr demonstrates that the treatment of all out-groups is more or less the same and involves caricature, the mockery of accents, and unflattering allusions to other cultural traits by calypsonians, who are mainly Afro-Trinidadians and regard themselves as the

'true' Trinidadians. Humour thus became the mechanism for dealing with difference and disguising the degree of fear it inspired. Laughter at the names of 'out-groups' such as those of the Chinese was not based on any serious sense of threat. The Chinese were nonetheless stereotyped negatively in which they represented a small parasitic commercial group who 'don't lend, don't give, don't spend' and kept themselves to themselves. One calypso about Chinese names is

Viking's Chinese Cricket Match (1947):

I had read in yesterday's papers  
A cricket match with some Chinese players  
I had read in yesterday's papers  
A cricket match with some Chinese players  
They say the Indian people names funny  
Nothing to beat the Chinese  
As though the Chinese does get their names  
By the beating of steel pan in Port of Spain

#### Chorus

For is Ling Ting, bowled and caught by Loong Tang  
And Ming Ting were clean bowled by Poon Pang  
And the whole of the Oval shout  
When Loon Lung get Wang-Pung-Ting-Pang-Toon out

The more the out-group was perceived as a threat the more often the mask of humour slipped to reveal the latent bitterness and fear of the other (Rohlehr 1990: 510). This also included West Indian migrants who were often viewed as particularly threatening competitors for jobs, houses and scarce resources. After Emancipation, the numbers of such migrants are thought to have rivaled those of East Indians. Ironically, Sparrow, who was born in Grenada and is of Grenadian parentage, composed the calypso *Barbadians* (1955) in which he joined in the ritual bashing of Barbadian migrants.

Barbadians, Barbadians too bad

Making trouble in Trinidad  
Some of them come here since they small  
They ain't decide to go back at all  
Instead of going back to their native country  
They telling you how they born in Laventille

#### Chorus

Why dem bajans  
Stick up in this land?  
I am begging the immigration to do the best they can

Believe me, I am feeling sad  
Ah never know them Bajans so bad  
They fighting policemen in this place  
I think their behaviour is a disg'race'  
And back to Barbados they wouldn't go  
What they do over there Sparrow don't kno  
But if a Bajan hungry dead  
Still he wouldn't eat a piece of Barbados bread

They so lazy, so to speak  
They don't intend to work more than one week  
Immigration always on the double  
Those Bajans giving too much trouble  
They come down selling coals and bonito  
Coconut, lime and green mango  
And believe me when they finish sell  
They hiding in the bush in Hilton Hotel.

Rohlehr quotes an explanation from Sparrow for his scapegoating:

Well I was always singing on Bajan. You see I had to take it out on somebody. Everybody singing on Grenadian. I can't sing on the Grenadian. I can't sing on the Grenadian. Most of my friends are Grenadians; quite a lot of my family are Grenadians. As a matter of fact, a Grenadian lady bought me up... I was born in a lil fishing village in called Gran Roy. So, how can I just let everybody sing on Grenadian and don't say nothing about it? (Rohlehr, 1990: 513).

In my interviews I did not encounter may respondents who defined their ethnicity in terms of the censuses categories that constitute 'Others' although some of my respondents did identify French-Creole, or Chinese as elements of their racial ancestry.



Tony aka Chinese Laundry, a popular DJ sound system in Trinidad described himself as third generation Chinese but insisted that he was also Trinidadian:

My parent are Chinese; my mother has a little Portuguese in her, but my father's parents are from China – Cantonese.

Tony explained that his family had no links with China other than that. And:

We're kinda disconnected and not from my generation, but even from my great grand parents...My grandparents would speak speak to my father and uncles in Chinese and they would answer them in Chinese...and they would understand each other very well.

There is still a lot of Chinese tradition in me in terms of the cuisine. At home, I grew up in a Chinese home in Trinidad so at home you have meals, but as soon as you open the door it is Trinidad. So it's a pretty interesting mix and I am proud to be a Trinidadian. I am proud to have all this rich culture.

Rene, a very fair-skin Trinidadian, is considered a local 'white', but Rene did not see herself as 'white'. She said that she was more likely to use the term mixed to describe herself. Outside of Trinidad Rene is also 'mistaken' for white, which is a constant source of irritation to her because she is aware that Trinidad is seen by outsiders as a 'black' country and white people do not have 'black identities'. This was also reinforced when Heidi Rostant, a local 'white' with a French-creole background, won the Miss Trinidad and Tobago 2000 title. Heidi's win also qualified her to represent Trinidad and Tobago in the international Miss Universe pageant. However, Heidi's poor performance, coming 73<sup>rd</sup> out of the 79 competitors, was attributed to the fact that she was not identifiably Trinbagonian and therefore she was unable to represent the country to the outside world (*Sunday Punch* 21<sup>st</sup> May 2000). Heidi did not have anywhere near the same support at home or abroad as Wendy Fitzwilliam, her 'black' predecessor, who won the Miss Universe title the previous year. During an interview Heidi said 'some people will

like me, some won't, you can't please everyone' and as a white Trini, 'I am proud to be white and blonde... I think my being fair skin and representing Trinidad is a wonderful thing because it shows how diverse our country is...' (*Express*, Sat, Feb 5, 2000).

Calypsonian Denyse Plummer, another local 'white', won the Calypso Monarch competition for 2001. Plummer is the daughter of a white father and black mother, but Plummer's hair and blue eyes marked her out as a 'white' person. Plummer recalls her 1986 debut when she was booed and pelted with toilet paper and bottles in Skinner Park. On that occasion a hostile audience went armed with toilet paper missiles and placards that read "white people don't sing calypso", and "Plummer stay home and fix the sink". Plummer explained 'because I'm white ...everybody knows that's why it happened... They came prepared to humiliate me. Those signs were well printed, and like they purchased the toilet paper by the bales... I did not see it coming, it was a complete shock...' Plummer refused to be defeated by the hostility shown to her and did not run: 'I am a Trinidadian and I come from here, just because my skin is white does not mean I cannot sing Calypso'. Plummer's tenacity was finally rewarded in 2001 when her song 'Nah Leaving' won her the Calypso Monarch title. Plummer described the song as a nation-building song and a reminder of the positive side of Trinidad and Tobago. The song is a blend of African and Indian rhythms and its appeal for many Trinidadians lay in its 'soft' nationalism.

In sum, the following points can be made: First, people as social agents racialize other people and populations who are then transformed into races with the

help of referents such as skin colour, culture, blood, descent, history, language and so forth and which connections eventually come to be taken as facts. This process of identifying and defining the other is what Goldberg (1999: 375) refers to as 'racial formation'. What changes is not 'race' itself but the way in which the phenomenon of 'race' is explained thus, racial theories may be seen to transform with time. This also suggests Bakhtin's idea of the multi-temporality of social existence where each act of communication emerges from a background of past dialogical and ideological encounters. Since the dialogues of the everyday contain traces of the past the past is by no means passive since it contains sources of dialogical constitution of meaning. Second, If we accept the view that race relations are not an outcome of divergent biological characteristics between groups of people but of the way individuals are positioned in a wider network of relations, then it is possible to see that these relations are based upon contestations of various kinds whether political, economic, social or cultural. Thus, as part of defining oneself as a member of a particular group, other differences are blurred so that for example, Hindus and Muslims become Indians or 'coloureds' become 'Africans'. Since racial or ethnic identities are not essences but positionings Hall (1996: 114) argues that identity and difference are always in a constant state of flux – 'a permanent unsettlement lacking any final resolution'. Although the experiences of transportation, slavery/indentureship, and further migrations overcame and superseded the differences within and between black diasporic populations, they do not constitute a common 'origin'. What this suggests is that diasporic black populations share the experience of a profound discontinuity (Hall 1996: 113).

Whilst there are similarities there are also differences; cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as being (Hall 1996: 112). It is not something already in existence transcending place, time, history and culture but rather something constantly undergoing transformation. Because identities cannot be fixed even by recovering the past they become ‘the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’ (Ibid). Finally, creolization, Indianization and Douglarization are all aspects of a larger syncretic pattern, which appears to be reducing the significance of ethnic differences in relation to a wide range of social behaviour. The result is not only a blurring of ethnic boundaries but also a marked tendency towards homogenisation in matters such as age of marriage, sexual relationships, family sizes and form (Miller 1994: 281). Both of these developments have proved to be helpful in facilitating the emergence of a national identity.

## Notes

[1] Marrying under bamboo is a reference to Hindu wedding being held under bamboo tents. It was also a way of legitimising marriages when Hindu marriages were not recognized by the state.

## **Chapter Five: Narratives of Identity: National Identity**

The previous chapter looked at how Trinidadians construct their ethnic/racial identities. In this chapter I will look at how they construct their sense of national identity. On Independence in 1962 Carnival became the central spectacle of the newly forged Trinidadian identity. Thus, Carnival is the main theme of Chapters Six and Seven but for the moment I will concentrate on ‘formal’ and ‘banal’ everyday expressions of Trinidadian nationalism. At the core of Trinidadian national identity is the recognition that the society encompasses several different identities, that it is, in other words, inherently diverse and multi-racial. My exploration of national identity has two dimensions. The first is the formal dimension of nationalist discourse and the second is the ‘banal’, everyday dimension, which focuses upon the body. The ‘material culture’ approach used by anthropologists such as Palmer (1998) connects with the latter level in that it offers some useful insights in identifying the elements and symbols that promote a sense of national identity on a daily basis. These are aspects of the contemporary material world that help us to define ‘us’ and in doing so contribute to our individual and collective identities (Palmer 1998: 183). Such symbols Billig (1995: 6) refers to as ‘banal nationalism’ or ‘the ideological habits which enable ... nations ... to be reproduced’. Although banal nationalism is often unconscious, it provides a continuous reminder of nationhood through what Billig terms as ‘flagging’. Possible topics to explore as manifestations of a daily life typical for all Trinidadians include dance, speech, food, styles and so forth; it is through these ordinary experiences that individuals come to ‘experience’ themselves as a nation. The prominence of the body in the construction of ethnic/racial identity clearly

constitutes an important physical reality whether one is communing with family, friends and neighbours, or playing *Mas*. These forms of social interaction will also be picked up in greater detail in the carnival sections where I discuss *liming* and *wining* as the core activities of the national celebration.

### **Nationalist Discourse**

I have already indicated that the attempt to forge a national Trinidadian identity coincided with the move toward Independence. The heterogeneous and immigrant composition of Trinidadian society meant that there were no collectively shared myths of origin, national symbols, rituals or memories that represented a shared experience. If the creation of a single unified national identity occurs through the invention of an 'imagined community', how could all Trinidadians become part of a national family?

Williams, in his foreword to *The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* written on Independence Day, informs us that his purpose in writing the book is to provide the people of Trinidad and Tobago with a national history to accompany the national anthem, national coat of arms, national bird, national flower, and national flag. Williams intended his history as a 'manifesto', as well as a bequest to the nation whom he described as a 'subjugated people'. He was of the view that:

Division of the races was the policy of colonialism. Integration of the races must be the policy of independence. Only in this way can the colony of Trinidad be transformed into the nation of Trinidad and Tobago (William's Foreword 1993)

Williams also extended this conviction to the wider Caribbean Territories by suggesting that like the people of Trinidad and Tobago they too were handicapped

because they did not know their past histories, and if they did it would become clear that the separation and fragmentation of Caribbean Territories was the deliberate policy of colonialism and rival colonialisms. Thus, Williams saw wider Caribbean integration and association as part of the move towards achieving full independence.

Williams was only too aware that it would take more than a national boundary, a National anthem, Coat of Arms and Flag to make a nation. He wrote:

The task facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago after their independence is to create a nation out of the discordant elements and antagonistic principles and competing faiths and rival colours, which have produced the amalgam...that is today the people of Trinidad and Tobago (1993: 278).

One way in which Williams sought to 'connect' these 'discordant elements' was to say that:

The Negro, the Indian, French Spaniard, English and Portuguese, Syrian and Lebanese, Chinese and Jew, all have been messed out of the same pot, all are victims of the same subordination, all have been tarred with the same brush of political inferiority (ibid).

Clearly, Williams was searching for a shared experience or common link that would enable all Trinidadians to become members of an imagined community. I would argue that William's manifesto to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is a narrative that aims to locate the national 'origin' of the people of Trinidad and Tobago at the beginning of the post-independence period. The national motto *Together we aspire; together we achieve* was forged during this transitional period and indicates the centrality of *togetherness* in overall success of the multi-ethnic society while *we* represents the unity of the nation. Because 'national culture' functions as a structure of cultural power (Hall et al 1992: 297), it requires the



suppression of difference. It is around this point that various academics have argued that Trinidadian identity was essentially Afro-creole exercising cultural hegemony over all other identities. Thus following Hall, national cultures are best seen as discursive devices that present difference as unity or identity.

The unifying potential of Carnival had become apparent during its historical development, which also included various attempts to suppress it by the British colonial rulers. Its survival and subsequent development is a testament to its wide appeal. As a national festival all the Creole elements of society, whites, coloureds and blacks could be united under the banner of Trinidadian. Similarly, the appeal of the steel bands rapidly extended beyond their working class origins to draw in the middle-classes as Trey's statement indicates:

My father was not from that class but he enjoyed playing pan. My grandfather was the principal of Bossia RC School, which is in Maraval, so my father had a very respectable background - they all went to Fatima and St Mary's college. And, it became a problem for these two boys, my father and his brother playing pan in this band called Invaders, and Invaders had most of the ruff-necks. I remember once there was a man called Emmanuel 'Cobo-Jack' Riley who used to play for Invaders, he stabbed someone to death in the pan-yard and he was charged for murder... there were other instances of steel-band clashes you know, that these same guys were involved in, but Invaders is really a Woodbrook band, when some of the guys who went to Fatima formed this band but they not knowing how to sink a pan or how to really tune the notes on a pan - these guys from behind the bridge, which I would call east Port of Spain or south-east Port of Spain from where Desperadoes, Carib Tokyo, Renegades and so on are situated, some of them came down to show these guys how to sink a pan and how to play the pan and its with that association that Invaders became a force and they went on to be the best Jouvert band for many years... As I was growing up I would always go with my mother and my grandmother and we would stand at the side on Tragarete road and watch the band pass, and my father would be in the band. ...My father played the pan for Invaders, this was in the 1950's into the 60's...those were the days when steel-band men, when two bands clashed... I remember one day, I was told, they had to come off the road by 6 o'clock and my father and they continued beating pan till around seven in the evening and police came and took the pans and took them, and they spent the night in jail (Trey)

From 1957 the valuable role that Carnival played in maintaining social harmony received official recognition through the creation of the Carnival Development Committee (later the National Carnival Commission) to oversee the organization of the celebrations. After Independence in 1962, Carnival took on added significance as the new nationalist government embraced it as a symbol of national unity and identity. One reason for this was the belief on the part of Trinidadian intellectuals that Carnival was an established dynamic cultural form capable of providing a point of cultural definition for a population that was ethnically and socially heterogeneous. It was not only a creolized cultural form for a creolized people but it also provided an 'indigenous' alternative to colonial culture. Carnival allowed Trinidadians to be different in a way that was distinct from the popular perceptions of the 'cold' English or 'materialistic' Americans (Lewis 1968: 223).

The extent to which Carnival was or is indeed unifying, let alone national, is something that is constantly debated amongst Trinidadians themselves particularly since the non-participation of the majority of Indians from carnival festivities meant that they were initially excluded from the spectacle of Creole unity. Various writers take the view that that the rise in Creole nationalism also corresponded with the political dominance of the middle-class who came to dominate Carnival in the post-war period. Whilst most poor blacks were unable to indulge in the extravagant wasteful excesses of Carnival, the majority of Indians also steered clear of it since many saw it as 'black' culture masquerading as national culture. Nonetheless, particularly since the 1980s there has been a marked increase in the number of Indians who participate in Carnival and there are reasonable grounds for

believing that Carnival has evolved into a national festival. McCree's (1997; 1999) study of ethnicity in cultural festivals in Trinidad and Tobago adds weight to the argument that the high level of involvement in Carnival across ethnic groups indicates that Carnival has become a festival with a national character, along with calypso/soca music. By contrast, Mc Cree found that other festivals, usually Indian derived ones, such as *Divali*, *Pagwa*, *Hosay* and *Eid* have remained sub-national affairs although they were granted national status in the 1960s. Of all the festivals, Christmas attracts the widest degree of involvement and McCree suggests that this reflects the historical dominance of Christianity and other European derived cultural forms (McCree 1999: 137). Miller suggests that the inward-facing nature of Christmas celebrations 'draws its curtain round, and merely seeks to repeat itself' (1995: 108) unlike Carnival that invites attention whose orientation is the street, performance and display. Miller also points out that whilst there is a substantial literature on Carnival, Christmas has been largely ignored because Carnival is always interpreted against this wide literature, which identify certain common elements such as it being a pre-Lenten celebration sanctioned by religion, a temporary inversion of opposites as well as feasting, processions and dancing.

The concept of national unity as formalized in the dominant carnival discourse, and embodied in the proto carnival myth 'all o' we is one', constructs carnival as a symbol of cultural tolerance. However, we also need to examine how this is translated in 'real' experience terms and how the realm of the ordinary becomes magnified so that carnival reveals the complex realities that are played out in everyday non-festive life.

Although *Mas* is part of a special national occasion, as a metaphor it is commonplace in every day life for example someone who may be inappropriately dressed may be described as ‘looking like *mas*’ or the term ‘robber talk’ may be employed to describe a particular form of aggressive and intimidating style of speech by politicians: the former Prime Minister Panday was frequently berated for his ‘robber talk’ [1]. Similarly, the Trinidadian term ‘bacchanal’ [2] is used in the Carnival context as well as the context of the everyday. Thus while it refers to a rowdy type of behaviour it may also refer to a party. In addition, it is commonly applied to any situation where there is an excess of confusion. Whereas during Carnival bacchanal refers to a heightened level of excitement and disorder which may take the form of an expressive sexuality, on other occasions it conveys a sense of scandal or confusion as exemplified by political corruption, a public figure’s sexual indiscretions, and neighbourhood ‘cuss outs’. Even everyday objects undergo transformation within the festive space such as the biscuit tins, dustbin lids and kettledrums that were the precursors to the steel drums, which were themselves originally discarded oil drums. The appropriation and transformation of everyday objects plays an important part in the carnivalesque as Bakhtin has pointed out because it occupies the same logic of ‘wrong side out’ and ‘bottoms up’. He writes:

We find a similar logic in the choice and use of carnival objects. They are so to speak, turned inside out, utilized in the wrong way, contrary to their common use. Household objects are turned into arms, kitchen utensils and dishes become musical instruments. Useless and worn out items are produced, such as a pierced bucket and a barrel with its bottom knocked out (Bakhtin 1984: 411).

This suggests to me that there is a constant overlapping between Carnival and the everyday where one will inevitably encounter the other. In sum, I have chosen to focus upon Carnival as a symbol of national identity, although there is a strong case to be made for Christmas, because of Carnival's association by Trinidadians with 'freedom', which distinguishes it from the sentiments associated with Christmas.

### **The Body and Experiencing Identity**

For the most part I will use the term 'body' to convey the fact that we largely experience the world as embodied beings. Thus, 'sociality is inconceivable without bodies-in-relation (that is, intercorporeality). The body is the living site of sociality; it actively places us in the world of other people and things' (Jung 1998: 98). This means that the body is not simply an object amongst other objects but an active subject, and inhabiting the world by way of the body we have access to the 'performative magic of the social' (Bourdieu 1990; Jung 1998: 97). Taking this a step further, the body may become the symbolic representation of the culture and identity of the society it is attached to (Palmer 1998: 184). In Trinidad the national discourse of ethnic pluralism encourages a view amongst many Trinidadians that a 'true true Trini' is someone who is mixed because to be mixed means to be representative or even symbolic of the multi-racial composition of the society. This means that Trinidad is seen to be a place where people from different ancestral backgrounds and cultures co-exist and mix to produce the sort of bodily diversity spoken of in the following extracts:

I see myself as a Trinidadian first because Trinidadians have been blended into something that is special (Red-man).

Well our family is mixed up with everything.... so alright well my mum's side of the family is Indian, so they're pure Indians and my dad's side of the family they're a mixture of Spanish and Chinese. The reason I say I'm Trini first is because I'm so mixed up! (HJ).

I consider myself a true Trini because I'm mixed I have everything in me, and I love that. I'm very proud of that..... (Mari)

There is, however, a danger in this celebration of mixedness in that, for example, the 'browns' are privileged over 'pure' and particularly 'black' types. For example, Brazilian nationalists under Vargas forged a national identity based upon racial unity but at the same time avoided associating blacks and blackness with Brazilian national identity (Davis 1999: 2). The Mulata who in the days of slavery was seen to be an erotic ideal and was therefore symbolic of mixing is also the symbol of Carnival where she emerges during Carnival as the symbolic representation of Brazil and the unitary embodiment of the trinity – African, Indian and European (Parker, 1991: 152). Even Gilberto Freyre, valorized the Mulattos at the expense of the blacks. However, whilst the body is intimately connected to race the concern here is with the practical and symbolic uses of the body although the 'reality' of ethnicity makes it difficult to keep this issue in focus.

Consider the following statements:

Trini's born with this thing eh. We born with this rhythm. We've got the rhythm there's no doubt about it. A Trini could start a fete fight here, with a bottle and spoon... it doh take much for a Trini to have a fete yuh know, we could fete anywhere. Trinidadians have ...uniqueness; I think we have music in our blood from our forefathers. We used to have the tambu bamboo and... and then the pan came and the steelband. Then it was not even how we have it now eh. It was an old dustbin tin they take up and they beating, and the ideas come to them, and after who knows what it will turn in too. [...] A Trini is unique in such a way that you've got to understand them eh... because they like to give you a joke... (Tanty).

Yuh hear somebody across the room and yuh know da's a Trini. Yuh hear how the person talk, the rhythm of the speech, the accent and yuh know automatically is a Trini... yuh could see dem and yuh could hear dem. Yuh must know a Trini face. Yuh jes' know a Trini face.... (Macky)

These respondents by their statements have produced some indications of what they think a Trinidadian is. They pick up upon the Trinidadian's sense of 'natural' rhythm, which comes from Trinidadian music and is transferred to other areas such as the distinctive rhythmic way they speak and dance. For example, the body in the *wining* motion is an indication of Trinidadian-ness. This sense of rhythm is inscribed in Carnival, which provides the space and music to *wine* to every year; the speech forms with its double entendres and *picong* (piss-taking) that informs the calypso, and in the inventiveness that produces the extravagant costumes that is *Mas*.

Moving on to discuss some examples of the ordinary experience of Trinidadian-ness, I will look at food with its obvious location at the centre of everyday life and a form of communication called *sooting*. Food, according to Bell and Valentine 1997, may be seen to summarise the history of the nation as it contains traces of colonial encounters, migration, fads and fancies and penetration by multi-nationals such as Kentucky and Mac Donalds. One would also expect the Creole nature of Trinidadian society to be expressed in the local style of cuisine. Creole dishes *pelau* and *callaloo* are often used a metaphor to describe the population. For example:

I'm a mix up, a *callaloo* if yuh want to call it (Eric).

'I mix up yuh know I's a *callaloo* yuh know, a *pelau* mix up yuh understand? I consider myself as a Trinidadian ah should say yuh know wha' ah mean da is the whole definition of a Trinidadian, a mix up person (Zipper).

I'm Trini but... my mother's background is Chinese, Spanish, Scottish, English. My father's ancestors are Africans-Indians... so; I'm what they call a *pelau*... a mixture of everything (Sean).

My mudder make a ting called curry stew. Stewed chicken is what 'African' people normally put down, and curry chicken is what Indian people does put down. But she does it together – curry stew – call dat a Dougla... (Macky).

The various immigrant settlers in Trinidad brought with them a wide range of cuisines that have each been adapted to suit the local taste and circumstances.

Given the large Indian presence in Trinidad, Indian cuisine has significantly defined the national cuisine - hence the importance of curry, *roti* and *doubles*, along with Afro-creole dishes such as *callaloo* and *pelau*. Trinidadians on the whole look upon these as Trini foods. In the words of Macky, 'I love meh curry rice and sada, meh roti, ah love meh macaroni pie, callaloo, meh stewed chicken....' More specifically, Miller (1994) has shown how certain foods are symbolic of a typical 'Trini Christmas'. The table includes everyday fare plus specially prepared items such as a leg of ham, pastilles and black cake with the addition of Chinese, Indian and Spanish dishes. Other items include drinks such as sorrel, ginger beer and punch a crème plus apples and grapes.

Eating choices allow individuals to express or reaffirm their sense of identity. Mari-Ann, a Trinidadian who now lives in London identified the consumption of certain foods as one of the things she looks forward too when she makes her annual visit to Trinidad:

...friends and family that is a big part [of going home], and things like, yuh miss all the food that yuh mom cook. Like, whenever I go home [Trinidad] I know that they will cook curry crab and dumpling for me, 'cause they know I love it. My cousin makes the best cassava dumplings and curried crab... I look forward to



mommy's pelau instead of the one I cook all the time, some chicken foot souse, the phulorie around the Savannah, coconut water, Guinness ice-cream.... yuh just miss all those things.

These were things that Mari-Ann identified with 'home' and to consume them revived in her that sense of being home again and therefore her sense of Trinidadian-ness.

Bell and Valentine (1997: 168) argue that food also articulates notions of inclusion and exclusion 'national pride and xenophobia'. It becomes symbolic of a national identity which may also be seen in the way in which stereotypes and nicknames of other nations are often based upon their eating habits for example the French are frogs, the Germans krauts and the Italians are spaghetti-eaters (Palmer 1998:190). Lolo who lived in a neighbourhood in Trinidad which she describes the people as being predominantly of African descent was often called 'pie girl' which is a reference to her looking East Indian since Indo-Trinidadians are the main makers and sellers of *aloo* pies which are a favourite national snack. While Lolo was growing up she remembers 'going around Indian people and feeling funny' although she herself was Indian mixed:

In those days at school Indian children would hide to eat their sada roti and now everybody would buy sada roti. I would sit down comfortably and eat my sada roti at work, but in those days you would have your sada roti in a brown paper bag and the other children would have sandwiches wrapped in foil or wax paper, and I think you always felt that they didn't identify with yuh.

This illustrates the way in which food practices relating to food consumption – the sada roti in a brown paper bag – defined and maintained boundaries of identity of one group from that of the dominant core identity of the nation.

Between 1943 and 1945 there were a number of calypsoes, which had Indo-Trinidadian as their main theme. In these calypsoes Indo-Trinidadians were marked as different not only by their customs and language but also by their food as well. Food references were particularly prevalent because they symbolised both difference and unity.

These calypsoes not only revealed what Afro-Trinidadians thought about Indo-Trinidadians but also exposed the fragility of Afro-Trinidadian identity. An example of this fragility from the late 1940s is Killer's *Indian Dinner* in which the protagonist imposes himself uninvited on an Indian dinner just to taste the *roti* and refuses to leave even though he is 'grossly insulted'. Killer sings:

One night in June the date I can't remember  
 But I find myself into an Indian dinner  
 One night in June the date I can't remember  
 But I find myself into an Indian dinner  
 No one invited me in their place  
 But as roti was sharing, I wanted a taste  
 I was insult so grossly ah almost dead  
 When they say, 'fall back, nigger man! More Indians to be fed'.

Chorus: and then ah hear singing:  
 Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah  
 Ritam de bell say  
 Embehohyea / Makamahama / Tarlarahahai

Well as man, ah determine that ah bound to eat the roti  
 So that insult was nothing to me  
 So ah dress myself in a kurta and kapra  
 And went into the feast like a black rajah  
 And invite myself so boldfacedly  
 And introduce myself to them like Ram Babaji

Chorus: Then I start singing  
 Mama maljo, papa maljo  
 Pickini go to hell  
 Mama maljo, papa maljo

Pickini go to hell  
La la lie lie lie  
La la lie lie lie

Similarly, Eisenhower's *Creolized Indians* (1955) noted the creolization of Indians and registered it as an intrusion into Afro-Creole space. These sentiments were conveyed in the perceived changes in eating habits of Indians:

It's no more pumpkin talkarie  
Bargie or mango chutney  
They now eating stewed beef, pork and salad  
With chicken macaroni  
(quoted in Rolehr 1990: 500).

In sum, food not only conveys a sense of nation-ness but also reproduces as well as fuses, differences, and as such may be seen as part of the dialogic process engaged in establishing a sense of group or national identity.

Another way in which national identity may be 'flagged' is in the form of communication known as *sooting*. Whilst I am not suggesting that *sooting* is an obvious symbol of national identity, I propose to treat it as a particular form of Trinidadian male 'speech', and my inclusion of it here is an attempt to show how a Trinidadian masculine identity is communicated at the level of the everyday. In the Bakhtinian sense *sooting* may be seen as a form speech genre because it involves a particular theme and constructions. As a form of everyday or commonplace speech it carries certain contextual features such as a Trinidadian male encountering a female on the street. The style of communication is what has been developed within the context of the encounter and therefore encodes particular social purposes shaped by factors such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age.

*Sooting* is the means by which young men attempt to assert their dominance in the street by commenting on or hailing women in a familiar manner. I asked Macky to demonstrate a *soot*, which he did by making a long drawn out kissing sound. Then he explained:

Yuh see somebody nice and yuh want to get their attention...yuh see ah sweet ting *soot* them... I see man driving dey car going down the road and sticking out dey head and looking back to see a woman and dey driving forward to [soot sound] and pull back just in time so yuh know.... they jes' want to get their attention. Make sure the person see who *sooting* them... Yuh jes' letting a lady know well aye yuh look good... A *soot* is a compliment. But some women doh really like dat. Dey doh take on dat. They find 'yuh calling a dog or what'...I doh really *soot* yuh see. Ah hear people tell other people dat. Like [sooting sound] man sooting gyul and gyul go 'wha happen yuh feel I's a dog or what?' in the most dread bland tone... (Macky).

Often the *soot* or *peups peups* sound is accompanied by calls of "fama-lee", "fren" "reds", "Dougla", "Spanish" "sister" and so forth. For Trinidadian women *sooting* is a way of life, inescapable and unavoidable; men *liming* on the streets *soot* and men driving past in cars and maxi-taxis will hang out to *soot* a female walking by. Whilst it is generally 'young' men who *soot*, it seems that such behaviour is not exclusive to young males. Myra told me that an older neighbour often *sooted* her:

...I have a neighbour who could be my grandfather and he 'Pssst', please! Yuh see the stupid young ladies these days, how they dress, they look and all that crap, sooting is a form of self-esteem for them. So they would feel very hurt if they walk the street and a man did not *soot* them. There are big women who walk the street and if a man did not soot, pass some sort of comment, or give a look she feels insecure...

My own experience of *sooting* initially led me to think initially that it was automaton-like behaviour. It seemed to me that only on the rare occasion was it genuinely intended as a compliment; there was the sense of being sized up,

evaluated and given marks out of ten. Myra thought that men were particularly interested in body shape and therefore looked at that:

I think men are very attracted...to physical shape. They still believe his friend must say 'oh God, where yuh find that gyul she real good-looking' that's what he wants. Whereas a female I don't think she really looking for the face; she looking for the inside. She want to know what type of person he is and all that. So females tend to look at the inside. Nothing wrong with looking at the outside yuh know, outside is fine but we tend to look inside. The men tend to look for a physical thing. But these days the way Trinidad is going men looking now for someone who is employed. They forget what face looks like; employment so yuh know we can work together get a house or home. They looking for that. So that makes people like me now a little bit more accessible (laughs) before we were tossed aside thrown in the back 'oh she working, where she working'....

I asked some of the women how they felt about *sooting*. As indicated in the following extracts some found it objectionable whilst others did not. Those who found it deplorable explained it in the following terms:

[*Sooting*] is a form of assertion they [Trini men] love to assert themselves. Let women know that they are here "here I am – a man, a macho". So they *soot* you right.... if you belittle a man in the in the company of his friends ... then he uses his mouth to now degrade you and say all sorts of nasty things. And, of course the other men not one in the lot will say boy behave yuhself leave the woman alone they will join in... (Myra)

I am very serious when I walk the streets; I just ignore it... I am wearing white hair, well what they call platinum hair and I had to stop in Tacarigua, and it was like a whole big thing with this platinum hair: like a man told me "woman, you look very young to have grey hair"! you know, that kind of thing. Probably they don't know the style, and figure it's for an older woman. I ignore him, you know. Some will say "ooh woman, you look good"! Everybody have a different comment! They always have to comment, I don't know why, they are just like that 'cuz I find in America, you walk the streets in anything and nobody doh take you on. But here! they have to! they have to! Nothing good comes out dey mouth! (Debbie).

Well it's not always a compliment – it's 'don't you know how nice you look?' Or how fat you are...Or how funny your shoes are (affects accent) 'Gyul where yuh get dem funny shoe'... (Val).

I don't like it. I find it belittling and especially when they make comments like you know if you ignore them and they would get mad and say stuff 'I wasn't *sooting* you I was calling my cat or my dog' and that's what they're doing, they are treating you very much like an animal.... I would much prefer if someone came up to me and said 'hello, can I speak to you' and then I have the choice of saying yes or no. You whistling at me in a manner of calling me - I don't find that very attractive at all. I think they do it because nobody makes a fuss about it...I think and some women feel very flattered by it...I also think it has a lot to do with your level of education or social standards... (Indra).

Oh God I hate that. I find it is total disrespect. I am not a dog. As far as I'm concerned yuh call yuh dog 'psst psst'. Yuh call yuh dog like that! There are some girls who do respond to it and I think women degrade themselves to a certain extent... Like yuh could do it to one girl so yuh could do it every body. So... we kinda lower standards every time we degrade ourselves (Asha).

I don't like it either. That's like the normal thing now for fellas to call girls like that. Yuh know cause they doh know yuh name but I doh like it (Sheba).

I find it is a kind of disrespect. So is like if yuh really want to talk to me, yuh know it have ways to do it. I doh like it (Mari).

I think it is a pack thing eh, when fellas are together by the corner, and it starts from in school because I went to a co-ed secondary school and I knew that even when I was in form five there were certain parts I would not pass, and my girlfriends and I would know that when we were passing a group of men who sitting down by the corner, yuh would actually bow yuh head not to make eye contact with them...we try and walk as swiftly as possible because they gonna make some comment about how your ass moving and... yuh always under pressure... Sometimes yuh make a whole block jus' to avoid passing in a certain area ful' ah men to harass you. When the guy's alone he might *soot* you and you could ignore him but I realize now, I open my mouth and say "who yuh calling? You don't talk to me like that", and they keep very quiet. If they together with their friends they get the support from their friends and they would keep on "Oh god w'happen family, yuh feel yuh so nice or wha? Yuh feel ah bound tuh call yuh, all ah do is tell yuh hello or ah tell yuh good morning, and yuh ain't answer w'happen, yuh ain't ha' no manners or what yuh family ain't train yuh" (Lolo)

The women who did not find *sooting* offensive explained their tolerant acceptance of it in the following way:

I know most people think that yuh know...its gross or whatever, so yuh know these fellas sit and they just *sooting* yuh and they bad. I doh feel bad I feel good ...cuz yuh know the truth about it any woman sit down and they think about it, if you walk down a street and men sitting down from the top to the bottom and

nobody *soots* you would be like well ok what going on what's wrong with me, yuh know...is meh pant they doh like....and I think, well I've probably grown accustomed to it, and now...I don't think anything wrong with it (Cheryl-Ann).

You like to know that... I mean, I dress for myself, I dress to feel comfortable and leave the house and feel I looking good - but you like to know that somebody agreeing wit yuh! (Yvonne).

Any female would feel good! (Toya).

They would *soot*, and they like "Psst psst"! "Oh God, darling, ting ting ting...I send a kiss, if you ain't want it, send it back", and you know these kind of lyrics and stuff...(Milla).

Men and women looked upon *sooting* differently naturally since women were on the receiving end of it they were more likely to view it more negatively though there was no consensus of opinion. Men were more likely to perceive it a harmless fun and there were also those who even disapproved of it, such as Stanley who said:

I guess it's an exhibition of machismo in some kind of complicated way. I think also they believe or they've bought into the thing that women are objects and they could talk to them however... I never *soot* a gyul in my life, none ah my pardners doh do dat. We doh grab we stones by de corner and say "familee leh mih hol' da bag for yuh nah": I think that's idiotic...

Harley who had just turned thirty indicated that *sooting* is a performance. He explained:

H: Well, I never make a comment for the woman to hear, I don't like that, but I would make comments to the people that I am around, yeah, if she don't look good, she don't look good, you turn to somebody and say "man, that horrible"! Or if she look real good, like "lord - reasons why a black man can't get married"! you know, you always, always have a comment.

[I]t's a good game. When men say things to women when other men are around, it's often for the other men as much as for the woman. Again, to me, its another element of how creative could you be, what you could come up to say, what effect could I have because I think rarely, a man expect... its not really a pick-up line, I think rarely is it a pick-up line, I think it's often for humorous effect with other male friends. I can't even think what they expect that to do, maybe because for me now it would never work, if I have something to say to you, I'll go up and say

something to yuh. Maybe I never thought I was pretty enough to like go ‘psst’ and a woman would turn around and think it reason to stop and I always felt one of the ways I could get anybody interested in me was by talking to them. I was never that sure.

This sense of *sooting* fits in with Abrahams’ (1983) study of ‘men-of-words’ in the English speaking Caribbean. Abrahams distinguishes between two types of talkers and the different situations they operate in: there are good talkers who use ‘fancy talk’ a more formal style of speech used at weddings, funerals and other formal occasions, and good arguers who use colloquial speech and invectives and is capable of turning any conversation into a show. The street environment is the theatre for witty verbal performances of the latter kind since such speech is excluded from the home and other places dominated by the values of respectability. Moreover, it is a way in which men-of-words are able to establish and maintain their reputations (Abrahams 1983: 54).

Generally, men tended to *soot* less the older they got. Jerry who is in his early thirties said that he used to *soot*, ‘but it ain’t make much sense - a girl almost a mile away and you *soot* her just to make horrors; you have something to say, just go up and talk... you do that a lot when you’re younger - that was the big thing; you *soot* a girl ‘psst’ and she give you a wave - that make your day’! Boy who is eighteen and still at school told me he *sooted* girls:

I think that’s [*sooting* girls] so much fun and as far as I’m concerned. Maybe it might kinda degrade girls by saying this, but somehow they..yuh know it puts up their self-esteem. It makes them feel ‘yeah I’m looking good’ even though on the inside they might be thinking what I wear today it doesn’t look good and then one guy might say ‘pssst family yuh look nice’.

He explained the practice as something he saw done by older males that became familiar to him as a young boy:



Well it all depends on who yuh around. If yuh around yuh big brother or cousin or something they will be like pssst, and yuh will be like hmmm, that's something good... So if yuh going down the road in a car they would like, *soot* this girl, *soot* this girl she nice, she nice. They end up doing that. It just become part of their nature... to me *sooting* is like the head and it branches off into different things so it could mean anything. It's all what the person thinks. Cuz they could think *sooting* a girl...yuh know, she might come across and speak to them, they could meet her then, or they could think by actually *sooting* a girl could mean she looking nice so its just a branch off into different things.

At the same time Boy's comments also indicate some change in that *sooting* is no longer seen as simply innocent play but as marked by gender inequity and therefore as a strategy for controlling women in the public sphere.

... to me some girls feel proud of themselves, it makes their day, but then again others they don't really like it because...especially with what's going on in society...[if] they meet the guy they could either get rape or something... So that becomes a kinda degrading aspect for the males. Now, yuh will find ladies not responding to it because of what their parents told them yuh know: "yuh name is not pssst, yuh name is Lesha". It's kinda degrading now but while I was growing up to me it was a big thing, it used to make me feel good to see a girl turn around and smile; but not anymore. It hard to *soot* at a girl and she wouldn't smile. Normally they will just ignore you, or they will just give you the eye.

Similarly, Redman thought:

Women will tell you that they doh like it. But in one respect, secretly, I think they like it cuz of the fact they are being called and recognized. And, too, as I said they may hear it but then there's the thought probably is somebody ah know, or if they feel that inquisitive 'let me see who calling me' and they look and even though yuh doh show that yuh like it or whatever the case may be and yuh say I don't want that it means that you've looked. So I think women like it and doh like it. But I think it's more deep in the sense that a lot of them like it.

Did women *soot* men? Myra thought that women had started to *soot* back not as a form of revenge but as part of a newly acquired assertiveness:

So whereas you have the man as the predator before, or he was the one that was pursuing, I think that women are now pursuing. You would have groups of females, I mean it's not that prevalent, may not *soot* but you see them "hmmm yuh looking good" and yuh look at him of course the first place yuh looking is the crutch. And yuh wonder what's in there...

However, men reacted to being *sooted* very differently:

(Psssst). And when yuh look around she sending a *peups* and sometime a group of girls together do it and when yuh look no-one says anything so yuh doh know who did it, but someone has done it... (Redman).

Well if I feel to answer yuh I go answer yuh. If I feel to turn around ah go turn around. Sometimes yuh doh take it on 'cause the amount ah dat yuh does hear going through Port of Spain, sometimes it mightn't be a girl calling sometimes it mightn't be you de person calling so you might hear psst, psst and you turn around and yuh looking bad because is not you dey calling. So da is why yuh doesn't turn around and da is why I feel some girls doesn't turn around too to know is not them yuh calling and they turn around and is "sorry not you" (Rudi)

Yuh doesn't want to get embarrassed walking down Frederick St and yuh hear psst, psst and yuh turn around and is not you and yuh have tuh turn around and walk with yuh head down. If I walking down a street and is me and somebody else alone and ah hear psst I will turn around, but I go take it hard to turn around, for a fella I go take it hard to turn around because more fellas is do that, so if you turn around and yuh see a fella behind yuh and *soot* yuh go feel bad (Zipper)

Around carnival time...especially like if I am in uniform you hear them "psst, psst, officer"! They just teasing, it don't really mean anything - just having fun, because they know that you cannot just come and jump up with anything, so ... this year one girl called and said "Come and *lime* nah! Come leh we go nah"! I say "Nah" she know I really couldn't anyhow - just teasing as she pass in a band *playing mas*. It's just fun. Around carnival time a lot of things you does normally get away with you wouldn't get away with at all after carnival (Jerry).

Zipper and Rudi are two young men in their early twenties who are singers in a band. Zipper thought *sooting* is 'a part ah we culture... in the sense dat "psst psst psst" da is wha' yuh get in Trinidad. I went to New York and dey doh call girls "psst psst psst" dey is call "yo girl, yo bitch come here" and they answer...' For Zipper it was the fastest way he knew to call a girl. Both young men often used *sooting* as a way to approach a girl they liked the look of, a sort of first move:

I say tuh get a girl name and ting I say "Fama-lee hear wha happening eh" I ask her and she ain't wanta tell mih ah say "well the only reason ah ask yuh yuh name is dat when ah see yuh in the street ah ain't wanna disrespect yuh and say psst psst ah ha' tuh call yuh by yuh name yuh know"... (Rudi).

I wondered how they would feel if their girlfriends were *sooted* since they had indicated earlier an ambivalence or discomfort about being *sooted* themselves. For one thing men did not know how to take the *soot* since they could not be certain that they were the object of the *soot*, objects of desire, or objects of fun. Both Zipper and Rudi looked upon their girlfriends being *sooted* by other guys as having some kind of ‘cultural capital’, which reflected positively upon their masculine competitiveness since they were in possession, and ‘control’ of what the on-looking males wanted and desired. Although there is a tendency to see *sooting* as playful and harmless activity, I think there are parallels to be drawn with Yelvington’s (1995: 175) observations of flirting in the factory in the sense that there is an argument to be made that *sooting* may also be conceived a form of symbolic violence where it is also an idiom for the expression of power relations. While it may be a form of ‘reputative’ and sexual play used by men it can also take on other meanings that reflect power relations. These power relations are not just configured between men, women and men but ethnic groups as well. This is exemplified by Stanley’s story:

Me and my girlfriend walking down the road in St James de odder day and a big strong black man came to us he say, “boy yuh have a real nice gyul dey yuh know, and ah bet yuh cyah fuck she right”. She say “doh tell him nutten” so we carry on walking and he come up and say “yuh have a nice gyul dey and ah bet yuh cyah fuck she”. Ah mean...I said nothing. Ah friend a mine now who knows him come up and start to talk and ting and then he sure dat I know somebody he know, and then when we was leaving, he extended his hand, yuh know, tuh shake my hand and another young fella who I know knew him and said to him “aye, da’s a good brother boy leave him, wha’ yuh doing the people”, and he run down de man...

The key to understanding this exchange is that Stanley has the appearance of what would be understood as East Indian and his girlfriend is mixed with East Indian.

This raises the wider question of masculinity in Trinidad where definitions of masculinity tend to be based upon stereotypical views of ethnicity and therefore competitive. The Indian male is constructed as less masculine than his Afro-creole counterparts which also includes having less sexual prowess. As Lolo puts it:

The Indian man is seen as having no sex. Now I am mixed, my boyfriend is Indian and when we walk down the road people would make comments “leave dat Indian man alone”, “Indian men weak in bed they have no stamina”. Yuh know – dey sorf (soft). The African man has all the prowess, and.... He’s de one who could do you good and this and dat and the other.... So walking down the road men of African descent feel they have a claim to me because mixed-race women seem, somewhere along the line...more sexier, or they have these insatiable sexual appetites that only an African can satisfy.

The sexual universe of Trinidadians reflects the complex social life of Trinidadian society and requires further investigation. I have only dealt with a small part of it in order to illustrate the way in which the body and its relationship to sexuality and gender can communicate a sense of identity and configuration of power relations in terms of gender and ethnic discord. But more importantly, it indicates some of the ordinary things that one could call upon to illustrate the type of things that may give a place and social encounters a distinct feel.

In this chapter I tried to show that an ‘imagined community’ is not only constituted by national spectacles and events but also by the way everyday life is lived. It is at the level of the everyday that that the abstract ideas of nationalism, identity and nation may be translated into a sense of ‘us’. Given that bodies are differentiated along the lines of gender, ethnicity, and class, the construction of a formal identity will always be a contested and on-going process. Thus, any

Trinidadian sense of 'us' is more likely to be expressed at the level of everyday experiences and interaction where one may get better sense of what people have in common which otherwise tends to be overridden by issues of ethnicity. This conclusion is supported by Miller's (1994: 10) survey of material culture based around 160 households which revealed that the contents of living rooms were more related to class than ethnicity with respect to room design, objects, and furnishings. These findings along with others suggested to Miller that the widely held belief that ethnicity is always a dominant fact should be called into question.

**Notes:**

[1] Robbers are traditional carnival characters that accost spectators using a kind of double talk that may be boastful and threatening.

[2] Miller gives a useful description of bacchanal, which he argues is central to Trinidadian conception of self. The term bacchanal has a specific meaning in Trinidad, which is often used to describe the atmosphere of Carnival – 'Carnival time is bacchanal time' – where it refers to the general level of disorder, excitement including the overt expression of sexuality. In Miller's words, 'its more specifically Trinidadian meaning is brought out by what many people take as the core ritual of Carnival which is *J'ouvert* morning (the opening ritual of carnival). That is, the emergence into light of things which normally inhabit the dark.'

## **Chapter Six: Carnival**

In the previous chapter I looked at the role of formal and banal nationalist discourses in the invention of a national identity and briefly mentioned the role that Carnival plays in sustaining that sense of identity. It is the latter point that I will now develop. I will begin with an account of the historical development of Carnival before discussing the way in which 'national identity' is symbolized by and performed through the 'national' celebration that Carnival has become. Previous studies of Carnival have tended to focus on its evolution since the eighteenth century (Pearse 1956; Hill 1972; Powrie 1956). Burton (1997) offers an 'interpretive' analysis which incorporates both an 'idealist' interpretation' and a 'realist' critique. He argues that Carnival both challenges and reinforces the status quo, 'it is more or less simultaneously a vehicle for social protest and the method for disciplining that protest'. Moreover, following Scheper-Hughes (1992: 482), he sees Carnival as less a ritual of subversion than one of 'ritual intensification' in which the forces that govern 'ordinary' life are expressed with a particular salience, clarity and eloquence (Burton 1997: 157). Miller (1991) focuses upon *wining*, which he sees as a stylised expression of gender relations. He also juxtaposes the two festivals of Christmas and Carnival:

If the home becomes the central idiom through which the values associated with Christmas are expressed, then sexuality seems to inhabit a place of equal prominence in carnival, it is through sexuality that transience, freedom and disorder are marked and experienced (Miller 1994: 126).

Thus for Miller 'freedom' is integral to carnival. But how are we to interpret this idea of freedom? I explore this question in more detail in the next chapter but for now I will simply say that there is a strong experiential dimension to how

Trinidadians define freedom and it is largely connected with a momentary forgetting of the present.

After I have given an account of the development of Carnival I will provide a brief account of some of the theoretical approaches to carnival that explain the structural or symbol role of Carnival in society. In order to identify some of the elements that make Carnival a national cultural event I propose to examine Carnival on two levels: first, on a theoretical level using the concept of collective effervescence embodied in the popular Trinidadian expression ‘all o’ we is one’; and second, on an experiential level as manifested in the body and its related activities of *liming*, *wining* and masquerade.

What is known as Carnival today starts on Boxing Day and ends on Ash Wednesday. The basic components are Mas, Calypso and Steel Pan. However, there are a number of associated activities and events such as the Calypso Tents, Panorama Competition – the Steelband competition final; the Calypso, Soca and Chutney Monarch finals, and the King and Queen of the Mas Bands finals, which take place at the *Dimanche Gras* show on Carnival Sunday. There are also Fetes (large parties with live music playing Soca) that usher the carnival season and sustains it until *J’ouvert*: the early morning ‘ritual’ opening of the street celebrations with its hordes of chaotic, grotesque and unruly *dirty mas* bands. The Carnival finally climaxes on Carnival Tuesday with the parade of the bands, which is dominated by big, *pretty mas* bands thousands strong, and competing for the title of best band as they cross the Savannah stage.



## **The Historical Development of the Trinidad Carnival**

The history of Carnival mirrors the social and political history of the island.

Williams described this history as one during which one colonial power reigned but another often governed: thus, in 1797 Spain reigned but France governed and by 1941 although Britain long reigned instead of Spain America governed. From the literature it is clear that the development of Carnival was not the result of one continuous evolving Carnival but rather of two parallel celebrations that gradually became one: one had European and the other had African roots. These two parallel traditions represent opposing dialogues concerning the ownership and authenticity of the festival. Each created its own regime of carnival truth. But their interdependent dialogic relationship meant that there was always a process of communication and creation of meaning involved. Thus, Carnival was not simply a continuation of European culture, nor did it involve a simple mimicking on the part of the African slaves, but rather it was part of a dynamic process of creolization that absorbed and transformed operating influences into a local product.

The white population in Trinidad during the pre-emancipation period (1783 – 1838) was not a homogenous group. There were Spanish, French and English settlers whose carnival activities took different forms. Similarly, the heterogeneous coloured population was split into French, English and Spanish-speaking groups, some of whom constituted a parallel white elite. Likewise, the Africans were also a heterogeneous group, internally differentiated as free or un-free, local or foreign born, as well as by language, religion and culture. One of the striking features of Trinidadian society in this early period was its hybrid appearance. Charles Day, an

English visitor to Trinidad between 1847 to 1849 noted the hybrid appearance of Port-of-Spain:

Port-of-Spain has every foreign air, feluccas, canoes, and other odd-looking craft skim about; whilst Spanish and Negroes, from all sorts of places, speaking all sorts of tongues, are good material for making one feel far afield .... (taken from 'Five Years' Residence in the West Indies, I, 171, Day, (1852) cited by Hill, 1972: 9).

An un-named governor is quoted as saying:

In the year 1840, this colony was Spanish, French and English for it was governed by the laws of Spain, the general feeling and languages were French, and now trial by jury, the Criminal and greater part of the Civil Code is English, and the language is fast spreading. In short every nerve has been strained to reverse the order of nations as shown above and to render this an English colony, not only in name but in reality (Cuffie (1963), cited in Rohlehr 1990: 51).

Thus the English made systematic attempts to anglicize the island particularly since they greatly mistrusted the Franco-Catholic element in Trinidad. It was essentially the French and to a lesser degree Spanish Catholics who played a crucial part in establishing Shrovetide in Trinidad. Their shared faith made them natural allies against the Protestant English whose main festival was Christmas (Pearse 1988:12). Pearse points to certain contrasts and similarities between Christmas and Carnival in the pre-emancipation period, which includes: First, Christmas saw the declaration of martial law, which disrupted the normal rhythm of social life. All free men including the free-coloureds were compelled to participate in military duties with the exception that the free-coloureds were denied commissions; this served to reinforce the superior status of whites. Carnival, by contrast allowed the whole non-slave population to adopt fictitious roles and engage in masking in the street with the result that the free-coloureds could once

again transgress the social boundaries represented by colour. Second, Christmas was intimately connected to church attendance whereas Carnival was not, although Lent was observed by certain sections of the population. Third, the slaves were excluded from Carnival, but given licence at Christmas time for dancing, feasting, and some freedom of movement. The historical importance of Christmas is stressed by Miller (1994: 131) who notes an overlap between the two. The festive season thus began with one and continued into the other and both were marked by special foods, liberal drinking and feasting. Essentially, it was a period of bacchanal and masquerade; the imagining of egalitarian relations between slaves and masters, and consequently slave revolts.

Various historians have insisted on the predominance of French culture in shaping the social, economic and cultural life of the island in the pre-emancipation period (Borde 1883, Pearse 1956; 1958, Brereton 1989). Carnival played an important part in the social lives of the French-speaking, Catholic population although they celebrated within the confines of their own social world separated on the basis of class and colour. Carnival lasted from Christmas to Ash Wednesday and, as part of the festivities, the celebrants engaged in house-to-house visiting, elegant masked balls, and street promenading in carriages or on foot. The white and coloured elite are said to have established at least two of the perennial features of Carnival, namely the splendour and elegance of the masquerade and the spirit of abandonment (Pearse 1956; Hill 1972). The Spanish settlers also participated in the festivities and introduced other elements such as the serenading of lovers, friends and family with guitars, *cuatros*, *shac-shacs*, and singing special *aguinaldos*

(carols). The English celebrated by holding balls, tournaments, parades and other forms of revelry that involved masquerade.

The white population engaged in two different types of masking. In the first type the costuming was 'genteel' and reproduced 'homely' fantasy images of themselves as aristocrats, damsels, grooms, priests or friars. Perhaps most significantly, these events took place *inside* the grand houses that were symbolically the boundaries of civilization. In the second type, there was some form of inversion of social distinctions that characterized everyday life, and there is some evidence to show that the white elite performed a version of *Canboulay* (Hill 1972; Crowley 1998). The ladies wore the costume of the Mulatress while the gentlemen dressed as *Negue Jardin* (field slaves) and danced around to the sound of the African drum in *outside* public spaces – in other words outside of the civilized world. This would indicate a measure of status reversal for the white participants. If the whites feared and looked down upon the blacks, they were also envious of their apparent light-heartedness that conferred on them a natural 'freedom', which indicated they were not burdened by the weight of civilization. The spaces created by carnival festivities were not only places for transgression but also spaces where collective regeneration and renewal of self and cultural identity could occur along with the celebration of everyday practices.

The free-coloureds celebrated Carnival in keeping with the traditions of their respective nationalities. Whilst they were excluded from the celebrations of the whites, they contrived to make their balls more elegant. They wore disguises, danced, feasted, made house-to-house visits, and kept their celebrations separate

from the Africans. After the British took control of the island in 1797, strict measures to control their dancing festivities were imposed which meant that as free-coloureds they had to obtain a special permit to hold dances, entertainments or wakes after 8.00 pm. One such measure, mentioned by Crowley (1998: 15) was the 'Fandango licence', which required free-coloured proprietors wishing to hold a dance to obtain permission from the Commandant of the quarter. Also, from 1807 their balls and assemblies were subject to a tax of \$16 dollars and there was a fine of \$25 dollars if any slave was admitted to a party.

In so far as they 'participated', the slaves were spectators although there were occasions when as a special favour, they were requested to take part. Other than that they were not permitted to actively participate in the celebrations; rather they formed an unseen audience (Alonso 1990: 95). The enslaved Africans had their own festivities that featured songs and dances such as the *Calinda*, *Jhouba* and *Belair* (Rohlehr 1990: 21).

Whilst the meanings given to the festive performances of the Europeans and Africans were not the same, this suggests that there nonetheless existed an interdependence in that neither the pre-emancipation European Carnivals nor post-emancipation African Carnivals would have taken on their symbolic meanings had they not been positioned within a network of social, economic and political relations vis-à-vis one another. One distinctive feature that marked the pre-emancipation period was the attachment of the *Canboulay* [1] ritual to Carnival celebrations where it was aligned with the plantation work cycle, and probably originated in feasts that marked the end of the harvest (Crowley 1998: 20). The

nineteenth century historian, Fraser, noted that whites not only danced the *Bamboula*, the *Jhouba* and the *Calinda* but they also pretended to be *Negre Jardin*, and with torches and drums re-enacted *Canboulay* for their own amusement. (Pearse 1988: 17-18).

Carnivals after Emancipation (1834) were celebrated with a re-enactment of *Canboulay*, only this time by former slaves for whom it became a ‘deeply meaningful anniversary of deliverance from the most hated form of human bondage’ (Hill 1972: 21). This point is commonly seen to mark the beginning of the transformation of the ‘European’ style Carnival into the ‘Afro-Creole’ Carnival. From then on, whites increasingly retreated from the public festive space because it was thought to have degenerated with the invasion of the former slaves. The elegant carnival balls of the white elite and free-coloured classes withdrew to the ‘inside’ of the grand houses whilst the Carnival of the African blacks claimed the streets – the ‘outside’. The white elite now formed the ‘covert audience’ of carnival (Alonso 1990: 99) whilst the free-coloureds who still participated had ambivalent feelings about the rowdiness, obscenity and potential for violence that became characteristic of the new carnival. A different type of *masquing* emerged which became known as *Devil Mas* and, along with the *Canboulay* symbolized freedom for the formerly enslaved. The symbol of the devil came to represent not just freedom but served as a reminder of past evils. In the pre-emancipation period whites dressed as blacks and now blacks dressed as whites. Gangs of blacks covered their bodies in black varnish and took to the streets whilst performing hellish scenes reminiscent of slavery. One explanation for the application of black

varnish on dark skin is that it may have been a double imitation: a parody of the white masters mimicking the black slaves (Hill 1972: 24).

Kim Johnson in his 1988 introduction to *Trinidad Carnival* alludes to the fantasy lives of whites and blacks suggested by the common practice of cross-dressing. Both whites and blacks had ambivalent feelings toward the other and the freedoms they fantasized about were very different. First, the whites displayed a fascination with their ontological opposite since in their fantasy blacks were childish, sensuous and hedonistic. Thus they disguised themselves as *Negre Jardin* in order to shed temporarily their burdens of responsibility, seriousness and civilization. White women dressed as Mulatresses because the Mulatress represented an untamed sexuality that white men readily succumbed to. In adopting the appearance and manner of the other, the whites could act out their fantasies about blackness and its correlation – sexuality. Thus, by assuming the identities of those they oppressed, the whites were able to create a liminal space that gave them a measure of freedom. Second, the ex-slaves must have held different ideas of freedom which included an end to plantation slavery and oppression, as well as the opportunity to insist on their humanity, their right to equality and their right to create new social identities for themselves. Blacks frequently parodied white culture and civilization and sometimes wore white masks as part of their disguise. Charles Day's condescending description of Carnival during this period suggests both mockery and emulation on the part of blacks, since they would also have been fascinated by the culture of the white elite. There must have been blacks who believed in the superiority of Europeans and

their civilization since this was the dominant discourse. One way blacks could prove that they were capable of entering civilization was through emulating the manners and dress of Europeans. Mrs Carmichael the author of *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833) commented that their ‘attachment to respectable dress... is always proof of civilization; and some Negroes are the most ridiculous dandies’ (Carmichael, *Domestic Manners* V.1, 84, (1833), Alonso, 1990: 107).

By the 1860s Carnival ceased to be ‘respectable’ it had become identified with the ‘*Jamette* underworld’, in other words a section of the black lower class who lived ‘below the diameter’ of respectability (Pearse 1988: 31). In the eyes of the respectable classes and the ruling authority, Carnival had become a festival of degeneracy. Even so, respectable blacks and free-coloureds did not necessarily agree with the authorities desire to ban it, as is indicated by the supportive attitude expressed in the black owned, French-Creole leaning newspaper, the *Trinidad Sentinel*, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1859 (Crowley 1998: 57). The *Jamette* bands were regarded as the antithesis of ‘civilisation’ by the elite classes because of their vulgar spectacles and predilection for violence especially the throwing of stones, broken bottles and other missiles. The conflicts appeared to be confined to ‘the streets to the East of the town’- the French streets, or French shores (Crowley 1998: 73). The *Chronicle* in 1874 contained the following description:

This wild revel, which grows coarser by degrees and scandalously low and too often bruted, has taken possession of the streets as usual for those two days. Broken heads and torn finery are more frequent than ever. As for the number of girls masked and in men’s clothing, we cannot say how many hundred are flaunting their want of shame. As many men, also generally of the lowest order,



are in like manner strutting about in female dress, dashing out their gowns as they go (Ibid).

This description distinguishes the key elements of the *Jamette* Carnival as: an increasingly wild, noisy and violent affair; lewdness in costume, gesture and song lyrics; transvestism in masquing by both females and males; confrontations between stickfighting bands which involved the dismantling (or tearing) of the stylised finery of opponents costume as well as blows to their heads. The bands were led by prominent stick-fighters one of whom would be elected as king. They marched through the streets carrying *flambeaux* (torches) and singing battle songs accompanied by drums and other instruments. The bands posed a threat to public order because of the frequency with which violent confrontations with the police and military took place. Crowley (1998: 60) mentions that linguistic and religious differences split the black population loosely into what could be regarded as rival French and English segments and that this may have been at the heart of the violence between bands. Port-of-Spain, for example, could be divided into what were regarded as the French streets and the English streets. However, occasionally, issues of class and race were set aside when it came to resisting an assault upon local customs by the British authorities [2]. In addition, Crowley points out that female band membership should not be taken as indicating that the women involved were disreputable since the bands were based upon associations that were also neighbourhood dancing organizations. Thus participation in Carnival reflected linguistic and religious affiliations as well as identifications with particular streets, areas or communities.

Another explanation for the conflict between bands may have been the destruction of community that was one of the ironic consequences of emancipation and freedom. Lee (1991: 422-3) suggests that the barrack yards of Port-of-Spain may have been an attempt by the former slaves to re-create some sense of community, which is why the bands were territorial-based. Also, since Carnival was a time when any existing antagonisms were intensified, stick-fights provided an opportunity to settle old scores. In addition, their willingness to engage in fights may also be seen as an attempt to dramatise their newly won freedom.

*Kaiso*, which evolved into calypso, emerged from the African tradition of criticizing one's leaders through song and story (Rohlehr 1990: 2). Its development in Trinidad resulted from a complex relationship between song and dance, social conflict and censorship. The typical characteristics of these songs included: a call-and-response structure; a concern to praise, blame, or ridicule (*picong*); improvisation; and a focus on women and love-intrigue (ibid). The older *carisos* were sung by women who performed them during intervals at stick-fighting contests accompanied by obscene dancing (Elder 1966, Rohlehr 1990). Elder claims that male singers, who were known as *chantwells*, appropriated and indeed took over the *cariso* form around 1884 when stick-fighting was banned and the songs became a substitute weapon. The songs were sung in French patois until the end of the nineteenth century when a 'new' type of singer emerged from the 'white' middle-classes. These singers sang in English and became known as 'jacket men', causing a split between them and the old style *chantwells* who sang in French patois.

The Carnival of 1880 saw a measure of success for the confrontational approach adopted by the police, under the guidance of a Captain Baker, in order to pacify and tame Carnival. This approach involved the confiscation of the participants' *flambeaux*, drums and sticks. Crowley (1998: 83-84) cites evidence of a *Hosay* procession in Carnival which suggests that the British policy of keeping the East Indian apart from the Creole population was not wholly maintained. In 1879 for example, the *Chronicle* reported that the Carnival *Hosay* featured 'dresses, shrine and paraphernalia' that were 'strictly or very nearly correct' as it had been 'chiefly made by coolies' (Crowley, *Ibid*). During the 1881 Carnival Baker employed the same tactics he used the previous year, but this time he was met with organized resistance that resulted in a bloody conflict that became known as the *Canboulay* Riots. Baker's attempt to suppress Carnival did not receive unchallenged support since, for example, members of the French-Creole community saw it as an attempt to 'anglicise' the population. Likewise, the merchants who profited from Carnival also viewed his actions with mistrust. The ruling elite appeared to be split into the anti-Carnival lobby, the pro-Carnival lobby and those who favoured Governor Freeling's pragmatic approach which involved allowing the festivities to continue without interference provided that a relationship of mutual consent was established between the carnival supporters and the upholders of the law (Pearse 1956: 33; Crowley 1998: 90). A decade later Carnival was brought under official control and socially upgraded. Some of the measures to control Carnival consisted of: the forbidding street parading before 6 a.m. on the Monday morning; bands consisting of more than ten men carrying sticks were also

forbidden; *Pierrots* had to obtain police licences; and the *Pisse-en-Lit* bands, transvestism, obscene words and gestures were prohibited (Pearse 1956: 34). As a result, the 'respectable' sections of society, who had withdrawn from active participation in Carnival returned and the stick-bands declined as the fancy costume bands increased. Thus, 'by 1896, all the elements were in place representing the first phase of incorporating Carnival into the mainstream of Trinidadian society' (Crowley 1998: 132). Crowley reasons that a spirit of compromise between the *Jamette* and the elite 'smoothed the path of transition' so that, 'a mutual admiration developed between all sectors of society, the reasons for which are not easily distinguished. Carnival, hitherto despised by many in the hierarchy, suddenly became the ground on which it was possible to share values' (Crowley 1998: 133).

With restrictions placed on drumming in the streets to accompany dancing bamboo beating known as *tambo-bambo*, was adopted as a substitute (Crowley 1998: 132). String bands as accompaniments for dancing increased in popularity at the licensed drum dances. *The Gazette* in the year 1902 remarked that one of the principal causes of the marked improvement in the Carnival celebrations was the appearance of a number of string bands that raised the tone of the event. The drum was the instrument of the 'savage' whereas stringed instruments signified the 'civilized' world.

The precursor to the Carnival tent was the bamboo hut that emerged after emancipation as meeting places for the masquerade bands as well as practice spaces for dancers, musicians, stick-fighters singers and actors, and entertainments

such as drum dances. Naturally, these were often regarded by the white population as dens of immorality and vice. The tents were constructed in the communal yard by the dwellers under the direction of a 'yard captain' and activities would be organized around them. Both the yard and tent continue to be important sites for carnival activities (Lee 1991: 421). The tents emerged at the turn of the Twentieth century as the physical structure that housed the activities of carnival bands, which included musical performances and dance, as well as the songs that became calypso. Burton (1997: 190) points out that the move from street singing that accompanied masquerading to tent with the calypsonian as an entertainer was contemporaneous with the shift from French-patois to English between 1880 and 1920. By then, the use of the Creole patois had become an object of derision. Some bands received some form of sponsorship otherwise members were required to make a contribution that went towards the cost of costumes and other activities. According to Burton, Carnival stabilized during this period around a cast of relatively harmless conventional characters such as *Indians*, *Bats*, *Moko Jumbies*, *Jab-Jabs*, *Sailors* and *Midnight Robbers*. An element of competition between 'fancy bands' was encouraged with the presentation of a trophy to the winning band. Carnivals outside of Port-of-Spain held competitions that had two or more categories, which included best costumes and singing. Violent clashes between rival stick bands continued into the early part of the twentieth century but the police successfully contained these. Thus the competitions may well have had the effect of reducing aggression whilst maintaining a sense of rivalry between bands.

The immediate post-World War One Carnivals signaled a number of changes such as the introduction of more formal competitions, the separation of singers from the masquerade bands, and the emergence of a market for recordings of local music. Although people from all social classes took part in Carnival celebrations they maintained their separate colour-class identities. It is not clear when or how the 'uptown' and 'downtown' carnival split emerged, but Burton (1997) suggests that after the Victory Carnivals of 1919 there were signs of a growing division in Carnival celebrations between the 'uptown' version that centred on the Queens Park Savannah and was the circuit of the white sections of the population, and the 'downtown' version that was the traditional location of the popular Carnival.

If the *Jamette* class dominated the carnivals of the nineteenth century, the coloured middle-class came to dominate carnival in the twentieth century. Powrie describes middle-class participation as 'a colourful free for all' where both men and women 'jumped up' for *J'Ouvert* which was a time when they could enjoy a large measure of anonymity under the veil of darkness. On the day of the parade of the bands the women in costumes, and occasionally men, paraded on trucks along with the musicians that circled the Savannah (Powrie 1988: 99-100). From Powrie's account as well as those given by others, it seems that in addition to the African/European dichotomy Carnival also developed along two separate strands that mirrored class positions. The revived carnival of the upper-class mirrored the genteel local expression of aristocratic European tradition of Schumann's *Karneval* (Lewis 1968: 33), and was characterized by lavish dances or shows and great

ostentation in costuming. By contrast, the popular carnival was a synthesis of 'African' and Creole cultural forms that still retained some of its violent, mocking and crude characteristics. Between these two poles, the middle-class carnival developed in a context, which contributed to its cultural ambiguity.

The 1930s marked the beginning of a period of self-discovery and self-confidence on the part of Trinidadian intellectuals. The black middle-class now demanded self-government and latterly full independence. Within the context of the emerging nationalist discourse, Carnival had the potential to develop into a national festival in which all the Creole elements of society – whites, coloureds and blacks could be united. Lewis (1968) identifies two major post-war influences on the cultural lives of Trinbagonians. First, after 1956 the People's National Movement granted Carnival 'official' recognition as a national cultural form. Second, the 'Americanisation' of the 'carnival-calypso complex' in both structure and theme. The latter introduced a style that depended on lavish financial backing and resulted in what some consider to be over-organized 'grand productions'. 'The sea of carnival magnificence' Lewis argues 'has thus become increasingly, a showplace for the history, ancient and modern, of every country except Trinidad itself (Lewis 1968: 34). The calypsonian was now transformed into a performer with money prizes and trips abroad as well as a Hollywood 'star personality', and the steel-band leader became a symbol of the new national pride (Lewis 1968: 34-35).

Another major influence on the development of Carnival after the Second World War was the changing position of women, which Powrie (1956; 1988) sees

as a by-product of the war. The transmission of American culture via the movies had considerable impact on the lives of ordinary Trinidadians, particularly women, who began to enjoy greater social freedoms particularly in employment (Powrie 1988: 103). Economic independence meant that women used their disposable income in new ways which included expenditure on carnival costumes for parading in the streets. Other significant changes to Carnival, which Powrie identifies, are the increased numbers of organized contests including a well-organized children's carnival with its own contests and the introduction of the Carnival Queen contest. The latter subscribed to a physical ideal type that was light brown in skin tone with 'European' physical traits, which meant that the winners were almost invariably brown-skin-girls. Consensus on the winning candidate was arbitrary since depending on the spectator, she could be readily perceived as too 'light' or too 'dark'. It is not clear to what extent contact with Americans between 1939 and 1945 may have dented the myth of white superiority and reconfigured local conceptions of physical beauty.

The *tamboor-bamboor* bands in the late 1930s gave way to biscuit-tin and dustbin 'orchestras' and in 1945 as part of the VE Day celebrations recycled oil drums made a memorable public appearance. Like the stick bands of the nineteenth century, a culture of violence grew up around the steelbands as loyal supporters engaged in violent battle with rival steelbands and the police. The players consisted mainly of working-class black men from the most deprived areas of Port-of-Spain. As with the stick bands, each steel band came from a particular area bringing supporters together from the same community that were poor,



unemployed or destitute. Unsurprisingly, the authorities and respectable classes denounced the steel bands as yet another undesirable element to enter the carnival celebrations and the *pan* men were treated as pariahs and social outcasts. One of my respondents told me that as a young man he played pan and, when the band came out on to the streets in his neighbourhood in Tunapuna, he would hand over his *pan sticks* to someone else to stand-in for him until the band passed in front of his house after which he resumed playing. Although efforts were made to curb the growth of the latest addition to carnival, by the 1950s *pan* had already gained popular support amongst the masses, particularly the youths. By the 1960s there was a Panorama Competition held in the Queens Park Savannah and steelbands began to emerge in well-to-do parts of Port-of-Spain.

Between 1973 and 1983, the oil boom period, Trinidad enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and this coincided with Carnival celebrations becoming less contentious in their representations. *Pretty Mas* with its fantasy themes now seemed to be the future of Carnival and by the mid 1980s carnival increasingly came under the control and creation of powerful designers and market forces. Writers such as J.O. Stewart (1986) argue that under the guidance of the PNM, and amid increasing concerns about national revenue, Carnival has 'evolved into a grand spectator event'. Similarly, Burton argues:

As carnival mutates from a popular national festivity into an international post-modern extravaganza, the active masquerader of old is giving way to passive spectator-consumer of today. Carnival has been exoticized and commodified for foreign consumption, and Trinidadians allegedly confront it as tourists in their own land, estranged from the very festivity that is supposed to embody the quintessence of what it is to be Trinidadian or even what it is to be West Indian or Black (Burton 1997: 208).

Whilst there may be a reduction in the number of local Trinidadians who actively participate in Carnival, the number of women participating has dramatically increased. In addition, the big bands increasingly depend upon foreign-based Trinidadians again mainly women, to purchase costumes.

The post-war period saw many changes to Carnival and its cultural and social-structural infrastructure which include the following: First the prominence of what may loosely be termed the 'African' elements have steadily declined over the years. In addition, increased numbers of women *playing mas* has led some writers to view the phenomenon as a 'feminisation' of carnival resulting in Carnival losing its authenticity as the old masques characters, once played by men, are replaced by women in *bikini-style mas*. Second, the old social organization of carnival hardly exists so that whereas in the past the Masquerader was part of a collective that worked to bring out the band giving time and labour freely, and assisting with the making of his/her costume, these days carnival bands are simply business organizations from which *mas players* purchase their costumes. Because bands are businesses that employ huge production staffs, the costs of costumes have risen beyond the affordability of the average Trinidadian. Although in the past it was customary for the less well off to save up and make sacrifices in order to *play mas*, now people are less inclined to act in this way. Recently banks have begun to offer loans specifically for purchasing carnival costumes which on average cost \$1000 TT (120 pounds) a considerable sum, bearing in mind that middle-income earners take home between \$3,000TT-\$6,000TT per month. Third,

Trinidadians commonly view Carnival as having long ceased to be a vehicle for social protest and self-assertion: its non-political *raison d'être* being to look good, have a good time and 'free up'. Finally, the Trinidadian diaspora have become an integral and essential part of the Carnival celebrations because of the revenue they bring. Another recent and exclusionary development has been the increase in the number of 'all inclusive fetes' in the period leading up to Carnival that appear to be purposely priced beyond the reaches of people from low-income groups.

The evolution of carnival is intimately connected with the social context which produces it with the result that the decline of certain carnival forms is an expression of changes occurring in the wider society. Thus, if Afro-Trinidadians and African-derived cultural forms have been increasingly 'marginalized', it is not surprising that Indo-Trinidadian participation in Carnival has increased and Indian cultural forms now play a significant role in the on-going process of shaping *the* 'national' event.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Carnival**

A number of theories that attempt to explain the role of carnival in society may be identified. Although some of these theories have been developed on the basis of studies of specific festivals, all carnivals seem to share similar characteristics in that they are all characterized by a series of performances or routinized events. More specifically, they most often include costuming, oral performances, burlesques and farces, aggressive but controlled threats, drunken revelry, licentious and provocative promenading, quasi-violent street theatre, and transvestism. David Gilmore's book *Carnival and Culture* (1998) provides a useful summary of four

distinguishable but overlapping approaches to the study of ritual and social action. First, the Structural-Functionalist approach derived from Durkheim and elaborated upon by Radcliffe-Brown (1952) wherein carnival is viewed as a 'safety valve for 'letting off steam' by the masses and therefore as necessary for maintaining social solidarity. Second, the Dynamic Equilibrium or 'rituals of rebellion' approach associated with theorists such as Gluckman (1963) and Turner (1969) which is based on a modification of the safety valve thesis according to which such rituals of rebellion are seen as expressions of conflict between the various segments of the society that nonetheless have the effect of enhancing social cohesion. Third, the Culture of Resistance or Marxist approach which takes the view that popular festivities such as carnival may be seen as sources of class unity through the ritualised re-enactment of resistance to the ruling class (Ladurie 1979; Cohen 1993). Fourth, the Interpretive-Symbolic approaches whose exponents are Geertz (1980) and Bauman (1975) and where ritual is seen as a symbolic text requiring interpretation within this category one may include the semiotic approaches of writers such as Bakhtin (1984) and post-structuralist theorists such as Eco (1984). Bakhtin used the term carnival to apply to the varied popular-festive life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The popular nature of such celebrations was in sharp contrast to the serious official forms of culture. For Bakhtin: carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of all time, the feast of

becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed (Bakhtin 1984: 10).

Carnival also created a special type of communication, which included special idioms and symbols such as laughter, particular forms of speech, and the 'grotesque' body. At the core of Bakhtin's approach to carnival is the inversion of such oppositions as high/low, praise/abuse, beautiful/grotesque, and official/popular. Carnival is therefore seen as a liberatory experience in which people enter forms of social relations that are not accessible outside of carnival time. As such carnival provides a second life for people, which revives and renews them and their social relations.

Bakhtin's utopian approach to carnival is criticized by Eco (1984) who reject the idea of carnival as liberation, although Eco himself accepts that Bakhtin was right to see medieval carnivals as subversive. For Eco, 'Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognized and respected... without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible' (Eco 1994: 6). Thus:

Carnival can only exist as authorized transgression (which in fact represents a blatant case of *contradictio in adjecto* or of happy double-binding – capable of curing instead of producing neurosis)...[therefore], comedy and carnival are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule (Ibid).

Eco sees 'humour' as a form of 'social criticism' but not carnival, and he explains this by saying 'repressive dictatorships have always censured parodies and satires but not clowneries; why humour is suspect but circuses innocent; why today's mass media, undoubtedly instruments of social control.... are based mainly upon

the funny, the ludicrous, that is upon a carnivalization of life' (Eco 1984: 3).

Similarly, Terry Eagleton (1981: 148) argues that carnival is a licensed affair, a permissible rupture in hegemony and ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art.

Hwa Yol Jung (1998) criticizes both Eco and Eagleton for not recognizing that:

*l'esprit de corps* of carnival lies in a beckoning of non-violent resistance for choosing the median between reticent submission and violent killing. It is committed to practice the politics of restraint based on the sacrament of heteronomy or the uneliminable other, which is the 'compassionate' soul of dialogue' (Jung 1998: 106).

Stallybrass and White (1986: 14) take the view that carnival may be a stable cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects, but also acknowledge that in a state of heightened political antagonism it may act as a catalyst for struggle. Bakhtin, however, also anticipated the development of symbolic anthropology through his exploration of the relational nature of festivity, its inversion of official culture, and its ambivalent dependence upon official culture (Stallybrass and White 1986: 16).

Whilst theoretical approaches to carnival differ they are not necessarily in contradiction. All suggest the ambivalent nature of carnival in that it may both subvert and reinforce existing boundaries, hierarchies and moralities. In addition, all agree that carnival may contribute to social unity. As Gilmore says:

[T]his unity can extend to the whole society or to conflictive subsets - be they social classes, the oppressed, or women - within society. Rituals of rebellion, like carnival, can therefore paradoxically enhance the existing social order; or to the contrary, they can subvert the existing order by promoting horizontal solidarity among oppressed groups. What seems to matter is the context in which the inversive ritual takes place (Gilmore 1998: 35-36).

This point is developed in Ana Maria Alonso's (1990) critique of the Turner model when it is applied to the post-emancipation carnival celebrations in Trinidad. First, she points out that his assumption that the moral order was a shared one, unquestioned and free of contradictions seems highly unlikely given that the population of Trinidad was highly differentiated not just in terms of hierarchy but also ethnicity and colour. By way of resistance, the slaves adopted a number of forms of protest such as suicide, sabotage and rebellion. Second, she argues that Turner's argument that rituals of inversion such as Carnival reaffirm the social structure and moral order does not fit since after Emancipation what had been a celebration of the French white elite and free-coloureds was taken over by the ex-slaves as a celebration of their freedom, and was regarded by the elite as an occasion for disorder since carnival became the scene of mass protest and confrontations with the police: thus, 'inversion transforms - it does not merely reproduce and consequently reaffirm - structure in the cultural sense' (Alonso 1990: 79-80). Third, she insists that carnival is best looked at as play whereas Turner's model treats it as ritual. Although both have much in common, ritual is sanctified and imbued with moral worth whilst play is 'make believe' and communicates the arbitrariness of ordinary experience.

For Alonso, Bakhtin's argument that carnival discourse and official discourse are antithetically related is an indication that carnival counters rather than reinforces the existing order of things. A final important point that Alonso makes is that carnival contains its own forms and symbols that are distinct from those of everyday life. These forms and symbols are not predefined but improvised

by the revellers. These, in turn, create another world, a play universe subject only to 'the laws of its own freedom'.

Otherness within the carnival domain provides the basis for inversion since inversion marks a boundary between people, domains or existential states. '[T]his boundary is not only a defining against, but a fragmenting, a separating off. The passage from the domain of the everyday life into the carnival world effects in its participants both a cognitive and an existential transformation' (Alonso 1990: 83).

Carnival becomes more than an insulting discourse since it creates a utopian domain where people can act out their fantasies.

### **Chronotopes and Carnival**

One may examine the development of carnival along a linear trajectory, as is the case with most conventional histories. This has the advantage of providing an image of time as evolving – beginning at some point and having no pre-determined end point. Another way to conceive of time is to treat it as consisting of a number of interrelated temporalities. This is the conception of time that informs Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. For Sandywell (1998: 196, 208), Bakhtin's writing provides us with the beginning of a theory of multiple temporalities in which 'forms of time, alterity, and meaning merge together to constitute the imaginary matrix of social experience'. Moreover, '[i]nstead of the idea of a single time or "history", we have to consider the reality of an intersecting series of "space-times" (histories)' (Ibid).

Rituals such as carnival construct spatial and temporal environments based upon mythico-ritual oppositions such as the sacred and the profane. Durkheim



(1995) used this opposition in relation to religious beliefs: '[t]he division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane – such is the distinctive trait of religious thought' (Durkheim 1995: 34). He also informs us that this opposition, like others such as good and evil, are 'part of the same genus, namely morals' (Durkheim 1995: 36). However, '[t]his is not to say that a being can never pass from one of these worlds to the other. But when this passage occurs, the manner in which it occurs demonstrates the fundamental duality of the two realms, for it implies a true metamorphosis' (Durkheim 1995: 36-37). The sacred/profane opposition is manifested in rites of initiation and rites of passage. Turner (1974) in his study of the Ndembu society saw liminality as occurring in the middle phase of the rites of passage which marks changes in a group's or individual's social status. Such rites begin with a symbolic death to indicate separation from secular relations and conclude with a symbolic birth, which is a reincorporation into society, and the intervening *liminal* period (in sacred time and space) which is located between ordinary life and its other.

Carnival disrupts organized time and space. Social time is divided into carnival and non-carnival time creating a radical discontinuity between the sacred world of carnival time and the profane world of non-carnival time. Ritual time tends to be cyclical as opposed to linear and to be based on the temporality of the ritual as in the case of the rites associated with harvests, New Year celebrations and seasonal transitions. Often ritual performances take place in a symbolic centre which is understood to be the meeting place of heaven, earth and hell and therefore distinguishable from profane spaces:

Though the paradox of rite, every consecrated space coincides with the centre of the world, just as the time of any ritual coincides with mythical time of the 'beginning'. Through repetition of the cosmogonic act, concrete time, in which the construction takes place, is projected into mythical time, in illo tempore when the foundation of the world occurred. Thus the reality and enduringness of construction are assured not only by the transformation of profane space into transcendent space (the centre) but also by the transformation of concrete time into mythical time (Eliade 1984: 20-21).

In Trinidad the Queen's Park Savannah fulfils the role of the sacred centre of the Carnival ritual since all the bands pass through the Savannah to cross the fifty yards long stage sandwiched between the Grand Stand and the North Stand.

Originally, the Savannah was a plantation that was bequeathed to the colony in 1820 on condition that it was maintained for the enjoyment of the people (Mason 1998: 35). In ordinary time the edges around it are illuminated by the lights of vendor's stalls but the interior is unlit which makes it a threatening environment or site for illegal activities.

Eliade (1989) provides a comprehensive discussion of the 'mythological' conceptions of time that characterize 'primitive' societies and 'historical' time that characterizes 'modern' societies. What is of particular relevance in his writing is the idea of different conceptions of time that connect sacred space and social regeneration through repetition. Carnival time is part of the temporality of Lent. The beginning of Lent marks the symbolic end of the time that passed before. As a pre-Lenten celebration Carnival carries a sense of 'out with the old' and is marked by an overturning of dominant values and a more general licence. The new beginning is followed by a symbolic cleansing marked by church going, abstinence, and the general austerity of Lent. The mythic time that is invoked is in

*illo tempore* or *ab origine* when the ritual was performed for the first time (Eliade 1984: 21). Thus every ritual has a divine archetype in which ‘man’ simply repeats the act of creation (Eliade 1984: 21). The observation of Lent was copied from the Roman Feast of Mothers celebrated during the Kalends of March and was forbidden to men. Roman women observed a period of chastity and fasting until the festival of Ceres in April. The purpose of this festival was to encourage fertility and by extension a bountiful crop (Walker 1995: 535).

In Trinidad, Carnival is recognised as existing in its own time frame; as my respondent Macky explained: ‘as Carnival is over people does term it as last year’. Ordinary time is temporarily suspended for its duration. The ritual temporarily structures a space-time through a series of movements whilst marking the transition by invoking oppositions such as sacred and profane. Early humanity’s conception of time was connected to ‘biocosmic rhythms’ or the cycles of natural and biological life. This cyclical conception was eventually superseded by a linear conception of time in which modern humanity consciously and voluntarily creates history. The linear conception of historical time is based on the idea that events only happen once and are therefore not subject to repetition, whereas cyclical versions of time periodically abolishes linear time through the repetition of cosmogony and periodic regeneration. For Eliade, modern societies still retain a sense of time that is ‘mythic’ and Carnival celebrations or even New Year ones construct a ceremonial framework that facilitates the repetition of the original act of creation.

Eliade thus allows us to conceive of the way in which mythic time enters modern time as part of Bakhtin's conceptualisation of intersecting series of space-times histories. Carnival may be seen as a repetition of the creation paradigm in that its associated themes of regeneration and renewal are related to the continuity of the life of the community as well as to Durkheim's notion of living a collective life. One can readily see, then, why the creation paradigm has a particular resonance with the event of Independence and why the adoption of Carnival as a national symbol of Trinidad and Tobago bears a symbolic appropriateness. Thus, once carnival became a national cultural symbol, its annual re-enactment of the 'birth' of the nation therefore involved entry into 'mythical' time: 'it was indigenous, it cut across race, class, colour and creed. Importantly, it was still a festival with which the urban masses strongly identified. More than any other festival, it could express the distinctive Trinidadian style' (Lee 1991: 429).

The chronotope of carnival may be seen as consisting of multiple temporalities and their accompanying narratives. Although the modern Carnival is driven by fantasy, commercialism and profit, this does not necessarily mean that the old themes such as social renewal and continuity are no longer present. More specifically, the continued existence of *J'ouvert* and its association with devils and *dirty mas* is a symbolic reminder of emancipation from slavery. Harris (1998: 111) comments that in the post-emancipation carnivals the layers of mimesis in the devil performances are richly suggestive since initially the whites as part of their carnival masquerade imitated the black slaves, and after emancipation the blacks were imitating the whites imitating slavery. The playing of double roles suggests a

kinship between the two. Black skin and chains are suggestive of the traditional Christian iconography of demons and the devil as well as reminiscent of slavery, and a symbolic reminder that the African's humanity was demonised in order to justify slavery. Moreover, carnival became central to the national culture at a time when the Creole middle-class was redefining their identity. Powrie (1956; 1988: 106) observes, 'the middle-class are at last inclined to take pride in something which is Trinidadian. In doing so they are developing a sense of nationality, or rather expressing the emergence of this sense'. Middle-class domination of carnival could not happen until carnival had been purged of its worst excesses and obscenity frequently associated with the lower-classes. The middle-class whose way of life leant towards virtues such as respectability imitated American cultural forms and European ones to a lesser extent, and carnival underwent an important change in which 'American' style showed in the organization and content of the carnival spectacle (Koningsbruggen 1997: 90). These new elements indicate the prominence of a new cultural force – namely American – that helped to shape the Carnival and change the forms of *masquing*. This process of change is not dissimilar to the way Bakhtin conceives of the relations of the grotesque to time in which grotesque imagery changed in time according to perception and experience.

### **The 'Carnival' Body**

The emergence of the body as a focus of sociological interest has resulted undoubtedly in a corresponding increase in interest in ritual:

'Ritualization produces this ritualised body through the interaction of the body with a structured and structuring environment' (Bell, 1992: 96):

Through a series of physical movements ritual practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according to schemes of privileged opposition. The construction of this environment and the activities within it simultaneously work to impress these schemes upon the bodies of participants' (Bell 1992: 98).

This means that through physical movement the body may cross from one side of an opposing state to the other - sacred/profane for example - and so redefine its space/time location within the context of 'a loose sense of totality and systematicity' (Bell 1992: 104). Thus carnival time is produced through bodies interacting within the timeframe of the ritual itself.

In Bakhtin's theorising the body is a key site of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin specifically speaks of the grotesque body that is, 'a body in the state of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body' (1984: 317). For Bakhtin, the body is connected to everything we do, including thinking, which makes it a living site of sociality in that since bodies are active they are interconnected in a 'bodies-in-relation' network. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin indicates that the body depicted in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is not an autonomous, biological individual but rather a representation of a collective body – the 'body of the human race as a whole' – which, moreover, is continuous with the natural world and its processes. One body's motion has meaning only in relation to another's since they engage in a dialogue. Thus, bodies are at the core of dialogism in the sense that meaning is the result of the relation between two bodies simultaneously occupying a space whilst positioned differently within it. Holquist (1990) points out that Bakhtin's use of the idea of two bodies engaged in dialogue is an attempt to get around the traditional

limitations associated with our understanding of the subject. The advantage of conceiving being dialogically is that it leads us to see that reality is always experienced rather than simply perceived. More importantly, it is experienced from a particular position, and for Bakhtin, this position is an 'event', the event of being a self (Holquist 1990: 21).

The carnivalesque is further understood as the most radical expression of difference in that Carnival's transformative powers generate an inter-subjective dialogue between opposites such as high-class/low-class, rich/poor, men/women, official culture/popular culture, the classical body/the grotesque body, inside/outside, and so on. As such the carnivalesque should be seen as a celebration of dialogue and community. It does not seek to dissolve differences but to celebrate them and the communal possibilities they imply. The grotesque body of the carnivalesque is one that is 'unfinished', oozing, consuming, eliminating, and interconnected. Social relations are also relations between bodies, intercorporeal in the same way novels are inter-textual. Thus it is no coincidence that *wining* emphasises the lower part of the body which Bakhtin associated with the life of the belly, the reproductive organs, defecation, copulation, pregnancy, and birth (Bakhtin 1984: 21). These very attributes celebrated by Rabelais connect humanity with the world and it becomes clear from Bakhtin's writing that the grotesque body is a positive symbolic force:

In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. We repeat:

the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable' (Bakhtin 1984:19).

For Bakhtin, then, the material body and its correlate the grotesque body contradict the completeness, individuality and isolation of the body as conceived by the Renaissance.

In this chapter I will examine two bodily aspects of carnival, namely *masquing* and *wining*. Before I do this it is necessary to say little about what Bakhtin (1984: 21) refers to as the topographical connotations used by grotesque realism such as upwards and downwards. Upwards point to heaven and in terms of body topography refers to the face or head, whereas downwards points to the earth, belly and genitals:

Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). Such is the meaning of "upward" and "downward" in their cosmic aspect while in their purely bodily aspect, which is not clearly distinct from the cosmic, the upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks (Bakhtin 1984: 21).

These symbolic topographical oppositions play an important part in grotesque realism where to degrade means to bring down to earth and:

[T]o concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect but also a regenerating one' (Ibid).

Stallybrass and White (1986) take the opposition of high/low further in order to examine how it becomes inscribed in cultural categories so that it not only relates



to the physical body, geographical space and social formation, but also functions as a system of ordering. In order to avoid some of the limitations they perceive to be inherent in Bakhtin's work, Stallybrass and White (1986: 19) treat carnival as 'one instance of a generalized economy of transgression and of the recoding of high/low relations across the whole social structure'. And they add that: 'the symbolic categories of grotesque realism which Bakhtin located can be rediscovered as a governing dynamic of the body, the household, the city, the nation-state – indeed a vast range of interconnected domains' (Ibid). The underlying structural features of carnival may therefore be seen to operate beyond the confines of popular festivity and to be intrinsic to the dialectics of social classification (Stallybrass and White 1986: 26). The result is:

The 'carnavalesque' mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such. In this process discourses about the body have a privileged role, for transcodings between different levels and sectors of social and psychic reality are effected through the intensifying grid of the body. It is no accident, then, that transgression and the attempt to control them obsessively return to somatic symbols, for these are ultimate elements of social classification itself (Stallybrass and White 1986: 26).

The inscription of binary oppositions such as high/low, classical/grotesque, polite/vulgar on the social formation and the body simultaneously produces a distinction between social purity and hybridisation. Thus what they term the bourgeois subject is understood to have defined and redefined itself continuously through the negation of what it perceived to be low – dirty, contaminating, noisy and repulsive. However, this low other returns as an 'object of nostalgia, longing and fascination' (Stallybrass and White 1986, 191) and is therefore the symbolic site of a conflicting desire, repugnance and desire being part of the same structure.

In sum, as part of the ritual process, the body becomes an object of creation through its dressing up and the intensity of the occasion arises through behaving excessively by eating, drinking, singing, dancing and tomfoolery.

### **Masquing**

The masque for Bakhtin is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation and therefore related to transition, metamorphoses and the violation of natural boundaries: 'it contains the playful element of life; it is based upon a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles' (Bakhtin 1984: 39-40). The transformation of the human body through *masquing* is known in the Trinidadian vernacular as *playing mas* - a derivation of masque and masquerade. Masques not only transform the body but also the personality of the masquerader, as one who played Lucifer in a Trinidadian devil band informs us:

When the moment comes for me to take up that mask, and I take the mask and put it on, I become a different being entirely. I never feel as if I am human at all I see in front of me is devil! Real! (Dorson 1982).

In Trinidad *masquing* has always been central to the festivities. As I have already mentioned the Carnival of the Creole-elite involved two different kinds of *masquing*, one that did not entail symbolic inversion and another that did. J.

Crowley (1956: 43) suggests that the most ancient of traditional masques is that of the *negre jardin* the *masque* of the *Canboulay*, which was essentially the masquerade of the local aristocrats but was later adopted by the stickmen. The ex-slaves also parodied their former white masters and mocked the white elite's

symbols of civilization and social status particularly in the *Dame Lorine* character that embodied the Bakhtinian principle of 'grotesque realism' and the material body. Typically, the grotesque is manifested in 'that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or the out side world' (Bakhtin 1984: 316-317). In *Dame Lorine* performances the high were made low and brought down to earth in performances that were essentially parodies of the mannerisms of elite society, which took place in private yards.

Originally there was a very elegant grand march of people dressed in the costumes of the French aristocracy of the eighteenth century. A haughty butler announced the mouth-filling names of each couple as they entered the stage. A stately dance was performed, and a slave was seen peeping in the window, looking on in amazement (Crowley, D. 1956; 1988: 45).

The act that followed parodied the above but the setting became a schoolroom and the butler was replaced by a maitre or school master who calls the class register marking names down in an oversized book:

The maitre wears a frock coat and carries a long whip, and his pupils wear ill-assorted clothes, mock crinolines, rags upon rags, and show the exaggerated physical characteristic suggested by such Rabelaisian names as Misie Gwo Koko, Ma Gwo Bunda, Misie Gwo Lolo, Ma Chen Mun, Gwo Patat, Koka, Bude, Toti, or Misie Mashwe Tune (Ibid).

In Hill's (1972: 41) description, the performers were all masked and inversion of the sexes was common. In addition, each student had a prominent physical protuberance, which matched his or her name such as M'sieur Gros Coco, M'sieur Gros Boudin, Mme. Gros Tete and Mlle. Jolle Fougé. Another example of masking in the grotesque realist tradition was that of the *Pissenlit* (wet-the-bed)

and sometimes translated as 'stinker' first recorded in 1858 and referred to as the most objectionable feature of the Carnival. For Bakhtin (1984: 318) the grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body such as: blood, bowels and other organs. D. Crowley (1956) describes this masque as one played exclusively by men:

They wore long nightgowns, often transparent, and decorated with ribbons and lace. Others wore very little except menstruation cloths liberally stained with 'blood'. They danced an early version of 'winin', the rapid shifting of the pelvis from side to side, and sang songs which the Port-of-Spain Gazette in 1884 described as 'obscenity of gesture and language'. One of their number collected money from the bystanders. The dancing was accompanied sexual horseplay including the use of a poui stick protruding between the legs, or a skirt gathered together in front in the manner of the Chiffone dance of the Carriacou' (Crowley, D. 1956; 1988: 46-47).

D. Crowley also mentions the *jamette* bands as another source of obscenity. The female members' costuming included large hats decorated with flowers or feathers, layered petticoats, beautiful overdresses partly hitched up to their belts, and 'their most startling characteristics, at least in some epochs and then only in certain streets was their habit of throwing open their bodices and exposing their breasts' (Crowley. D. 1988: 47-48). The *jamette* male wore flannel trousers low on the hips and held up by two leather belts or pieces of rope from which various coloured silk kerchiefs were hung. On top they wore brightly coloured silk shirts unbuttoned to show off their gold neckchains, and Panama hats decorated with feathers (Crowley, D 1956; 1988: 48).

The *Jamettes* as I have already indicated took their name from the French word *diametre*, which meant the underworld or 'otherhalf', (Crowley, D. 1956;

1988: 47). Many of the females were working or retired prostitutes and the men pimps, gamblers and petty criminals. These terms marked the low-other from whom the respectable classes distanced themselves. Because of the excessive way that they adorned their bodies and behaved the *Jamettes* were considered an affront to respectable society as they symbolized a reversal of the values of respectability. Discursively they were impure, vulgar, contaminating and they had to be kept away from respectable mothers, wives and sisters.

The grotesques type *Mas* such as the *Dame Lorine* and the *Pissenlit* have virtually disappeared from the contemporary Carnival. The body was represented in such types of *mas* as a form of corpulent excess: impure, oversized, protuberant and mocking. The exaggeration of bulging body parts and orifices as well as the buttocks and genitals evoked the lower bodily stratum, the opposite of the classical body. Thus:

The grotesque body is emphasised as a mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange; and it is never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context. The classical body on the other hand keeps its distance. In a sense it is disembodied, for it appears indifferent to a body, which is beautiful, but taken for granted (Stallybrass and White 1986: 22).

In addition the classical body embodied the high discourses of official culture and therefore symbolized the bourgeois individualist conception of the body. In the case of *Dame Lorine* performances, Alonso argues that there was an inherent ambivalence in that there was both caricature and emulation. Thus:

Although blacks wore white masks and white fashions to mock the elite, dressing like a *grandeee bukra* also signified the fascination of the dominated with the culture of the dominant – a phenomenon characteristic of many, if not all, colonial situations (Alonso 1990: 107).

Alonso's observation suggests the 'doubleness' that links the symbolic hierarchy of high and low. If the high is dependent on the low-other then the reverse must also be the case and the relationship between them is saturated with ambivalence. Stallybrass and White (1986: 4) argue that 'the primary site of contradiction, the site of conflicting desires and mutually incompatible representation, is undoubtedly the 'low''. I would add that the mocking performed by the low is ambivalent since it involves praise and abuse, revulsion and desire, in that even the *Dame Lorine* performances not only challenge the dominant order but also reinforces it. As Gilmore (1998: 36) argues, 'carnival seems less like a celebration not so much of anti-establishment feeling per se, in some undiluted form, but rather of ambivalence itself, of dualism, contradiction, and mixed feelings'.

*Devil Mas* continues to be a potent symbol in contemporary Carnival.

Bakhtin (1984: 347) identifies medieval mysteries along with *diablerie* as one source of the grotesque in which the devil took on grotesque bodily characteristics and performed obscene gestures. According to Bakhtin, the devil usually appears in the mysteries as a carnivalesque character, and is an ambivalent figure like the fool and the clown, representing the destructive and creative forces of the lower stratum although '[t]here is nothing terrifying or alien in him' (Ibid: 41). Harris, an observer of today's Trinidad Carnival gives this account of a contemporary *Devil*

*Mas* performance:

Daubed from head to toe (clothes included) in blue mud and dressed in as little as shorts or as much as coveralls and gum boots, they emerged at the last moment into the school yard where the parade assemble, avoiding the familiarity with the

spectators and genial posing for photographs that the other masquers suffered or enjoyed before the parade began. The devils blew whistles or emitted high-pitched, rhythmic cries. Their eyes had the gazed looks of zombies or of men in trances, and they chewed a fruit whose juice and pulp, when mixed with saliva, produced an ample supply of red drool that flowed over their chins and chests in a graphic display of their victim's "blood". Those known as Beasts or Dragons were restrained at the end of long chains or ropes by Imps. The beasts pulled forward or fell into contortions and writhed on the ground while the Imps goaded them. Some of the Devils wore masks or goggles, sprouted dark wings from their backs, carried pitchforks, or blew flames from paraffin torches. At times, the Devils lunged fiercely at the crowds, a single index finger jabbing the air to denote the dollar demanded. Unlike many of the other masquers, the Devils stayed in character throughout, never breaking the illusion of possession to remove a mask or to pause for casual conversation' (Harris 1998: 108).

Whilst I am not suggesting that the Medieval Mysteries are a direct source of *Devil Mas*, I am suggesting that in Trinidad devil performance is still part of the grotesque and connected to Bakhtin's concept of the material body and its themes of destruction and renewal. Pearse, Hill and D. Crowley have connected the early *Jab Molassi* devils with the representation of plantation slavery. The almost naked bodies of the devil masqueraders smeared in 'black varnish' and their grotesque behaviour created an overall effect that induced repugnance and strongly critical reactions from the respectable sections of society. In addition, the view that the symbol of the devil may have had a different meanings for the ex-slaves is supported by Taussig's (1980: 43) argument that whereas Europeans tended to equate slave folklore, religion, and African identity with the devil, for the Africans themselves a devil was not only a vengeful spirit of evil but also a figure of mirth and a powerful trickster. Thus the slaves and ex-slaves did not readily attribute evil to the devil and where they did it may have symbolized their hostility to the new social order. In the devil the ex-slaves found hope for the future because the devil

was a source of power that could destroy or heal. In carnival it was the destructive power of the devil that was emphasised as an 'outside' power:

The devil, and the destructive power procured from him, is expressive of the alienation experienced by lower-class blacks in a society from which they were excluded from access to legitimate authority and prestige (Alonso 1990: 111).

Moreover even the blackening of the face and body may have symbolised freedom since the molasses used was a product of the sugar cane whose cultivation was dependent upon slavery.

In contemporary society *Devil Mas* is no longer about emancipation from plantation slavery. Nevertheless, this meaning still figures in today's performance of it in that emancipation remains the dominant theme but it usually relates to new forms of domination and abuse. The split between *Ole Mas* and *Pretty Mas* has meant that the former, which *Devil Mas* is part of, has become increasingly marginalized due to over a century of prettification and commercialisation. It is within the *J'ouvert* ritual that *Devil Mas* along with other traditional *mas* has survived, but for some observers they have been 'emptied of their force and threat'. The dominant *Pretty Mas* form, which includes the genre of historical and fantasy *mas* is more extravagant and formally structured.

[T]he historical masquer plays rich and powerful for two days. He may be King Pharoah, a Viking in a long red wig, a Sultan of Delhi, a medieval English King, a Trojan Warrior, in metal breastplate and greave, Nero complete with lute and train, a Knight of the Garter with authentic heraldic devices, an aristocrat in a powdered wig, or any other real or fanciful personage who captures his interest (Crowley, D. 1956; 1988: 84)



A distinctive characteristic of this type of *mas* is that it features an extensive hierarchy of Kings, Queens, Sun Gods, Generals, Knights, as well as soldiers and slave girls known as 'floor members'. These bands require large numbers of masqueraders and are more tightly organized as a result. This suggests that carnival is no longer about turning the world upside down and mocking official culture but instead about constructing and maintaining hierarchies. As a consequence the grotesque body of the *Jamette* Carnival has been overturned in favour of the glamorous, showy and adorned body of the modern national carnival.

Attempts to suppress Carnival in the late nineteenth century were unsuccessful and this meant that the only way to control it was to tame and prettify it through commercial and state sponsorship and the offering of prizes for those aspects the authorities wanted to encourage. These measures resulted in the eventual 'bourgeoisification' of Carnival, which in turn brought about changes in the way the body was presented in *Mas*. Bakhtin points out that even in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when the classical canon came to dominate art and literature there was a gradual narrowing down of the ritual, spectacle and carnival forms of folk culture:

On the one hand the state encroached upon festive life and turned it into a parade; on the other hand these festivities were brought into the home and became part of the family's private life... The carnival spirit with its freedom, its utopian character oriented towards the future, was gradually transformed into a mere holiday mood. The feast ceased almost entirely to be the people's second life... We have stressed the word almost because the popular festive carnival principle is indestructible. Though narrowed and weakened, it still continues to fertilize various areas of life and culture (Bakhtin 1984: 33-34).

The same transformation may be seen to have occurred in the case of Trinidad's Carnival, which under the dominance of the Creole-middle classes was 'narrowed down' and prettified. Yet Carnival could not be purged of all its excesses and some of its subversive content has been preserved in a truncated form. Lee (1991: 428) argues that Carnival provided an important safety valve for the Creole-middle-classes. Having rejected the black masses and been rejected themselves by the whites they found themselves isolated (Nurse 1999: 92). After Emancipation they distanced themselves from the lower-class carnival by withdrawing their celebration indoors. Once they returned to the streets they marked their respectability by remaining separate and aloof from the masses:

The armour of respectability, like the masks they wore, really protected them from seeing who they really were – colonials, powerless, non-white, people who had created very little. The veneer of respectability and the 'periodic safety-valve' were their only real property. The coloured middle-class would eventually unmask and reveal itself in carnival but it would be a carnival that embraced all the rejected traditions of the masses (Lee 1991: 428).

The contemporary *Pretty Mas* style may have had its roots in the aristocratic carnival of the white elite but it has survived as the preferred style of the Creole middle-class. From the 1970s onwards the preference for fantasy themes became well established which resulted in masques becoming more spectacular and theatrical and signalled the triumph of the Trinidadian bourgeois concept of the individualized, narcissistic, brown-skinned and glamourized body over the uncontainable, and grotesque body. The prettier the costumes became the less inclined men were to play. However, women began to play in ever increasing

numbers. Women wanted to look good and appear as goddesses. Tanty told me how different it was in the 1960s:

[Back then] our costumes was all covered up, you know, maybe you might have a cold shoulder but your skin was not outside... it was history, your vessel virgin and all these things or the copper plate like the Romans; Imperial Rome we played and all these kind of things. History, we used to play, so we were all covered... We didn't used to have all these health places where they do gymnastics and all of that. I mean, look at these girls now, I mean I admire them, I have nothing against them, I find they have beautiful skin and their bodies are well shaped - these girls are fantastic you know, sometimes you see them playing mas and its 'oh my god!' they have this nice skin, nice body and they go to the gym - everybody's going to the gym.

Mike Featherstone (1991) has shown how Hollywood helped to create new standards of appearance and bodily presentation to a worldwide audience. The cosmetics, fashion and advertising industries agencies were also part of this body moulding machinery that defined 'looking good'. Paradoxically, 'body maintenance' in preparation for carnival has become the one of the means by which the temptations of the flesh are released. Thus:

Discipline and hedonism are no longer seen as compatible; indeed the subjugation of the body through body maintenance routines is presented with consumer culture as a precondition for the achievement of an acceptable appearance and the release of the body's expressive capacity (Featherstone 1991: 171).

The body is no longer *masqued* but given greater exposure, minimally covered in skimpy 'beach wear' decorated with sequins, rhinestones, feathers and beads. This new look displayed the body and radically altered the appearance of *Mas* since the female body became the central focus. The costumes are designed to celebrate the 'natural' human form but at the same time they transform individuality into uniformity imposing a sense of anonymity amongst the masqueraders. Thus, Mason (1998: 114) argues that the sheer scale of the large bands with their faceless

masqueraders sparkling and shimmering is capable of making a greater visual impact than any performance of individual mimicry. Miller (1994: 111) argues that some forms of masking such as *Midnight Robbers* were highly individualized masques but this form of individualism has been replaced by an individualism created by anonymity, as the individual forms part of the larger band wearing identical costumes that creates the space for one to *play mas* with an abandon which otherwise would not be sanctioned: 'The crowd then becomes itself a kind of mask, within which the individual may be encouraged to emerge, as by the common expression "play yuhself". This respondent's attitude is typical of many female masqueraders:

I wouldn't want to play in anything that's heavy or hot or uncomfortable and stuff and you want something that's really glittery and pretty and stuff... we spend so much time trying to figure out how I'm gonna do my nails: what colour? What am I going to do with my face to match my costume or my hair, that kind of thing. Most people go to like the stores and get matching nail polish and glitter and make-up and lipsticks, that kind of stuff (Indra).

The body remains the focus of carnival but it is an individualized body that is worked on and shaped by contemporary standards of beauty and ideas about feminine desirability. *bikini mas* is the graphic term used to refer to the evolving *pretty mas*. Because this style of *mas* is not only popular with women but also profitable for the bandleaders there is a tendency for all the big bands to look alike whatever the themes may be, which causes many Trinidadians to feel that, 'there are only so many ideas that you can have, there are only so many capes and epaulets and tassels that you can add on to a bikini... So it becomes kind of monotonous'. The profitability of this type of *mas* in the context of a consumer

culture produces the body as a vehicle of pleasure, as something desirable and desiring, and the closer the body is to the idealized images the higher the cultural capital. Thus the body becomes a form of cultural capital for the purposes of reinvestment – marriage and employment being part of this investment with the job and spouse becoming a further form of capital (Frank 1991: 68).

The development of large *mas* bands after World War Two brought about significant changes in the way bands were organized. Making *mas* quickly came under the control of professional designers and *Mas Camps* became production lines with hired rather than volunteer workforces. The relationship between Carnival and commerce is not a recent phenomenon since as far back as 1860 the local press canvassed merchants for their views on the continuation of Carnival and found them very much in favour because of the business it generated. The complex relationships between capitalism, art and culture, bandleaders, and masqueraders that characterise today's carnival are well brought out in the following conversation I had with Steve Ouditt:

Let me put mihsself in the view of a *mas* man, ah leader of a band. If I get into carnival right now, if I had the money and the power and I could swing it, I go let man and woman play bareback in sneakers and a g-string and ting on dey head. Da's it. I doh want nutten else ever... I appreciate the making of the costumes. I appreciate the craft and the art and so on and so on, but I also understand the critical influence of the body. The critical articulation of the body and that is what I think carnival is really all about. If I was a *mas* man now da is what I would ah do. Mih ain't going an tell no man to wear no big set ah ting on dey head, and dey back and dey foot.... Nah! So I think, yeah, some of them are quite stunning in terms of the art, in terms of the craft and so on. But then you cannot dissociate that from capital, yuh know...but is still a band about capitalism...I think that [*bikini mas*] is what people want. It looks good, yuh know...it's stupid and it's senseless, it's not about critique it's not about aesthetics...

[What's it about then?]

Well... the bikini's only there because dancing in the road naked is against the law, so the bikini is only there to give you the minimal coverage. Da's it as far as I can say...

[Do you think people want to dance around the road naked?]

Of course they want to dance around the road naked. If you give dem a chance they go do it. Once it is socially understood that, at the time you could do it, because you not going and dance in the road naked tonight just so by yourself. People go say you mad! but if I know me and twenty people could go and dance down in the road naked; and drink some rum and ting; and have a strong man in the band, who go kick out, deem set ah no teeth black man and ting and tell them "You cyan' come in here" right "and interfere with me" I would go and dance in the road naked...

Ouditt's thoughts suggest a couple of interesting issues concerning the critical articulation of the body and the idea that people want to dance around in the road naked.

The two are obviously connected but the point is how to interpret such a desire. In *Eroticism* Bataille writes that:

The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they live their normal lives. Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence...a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling for obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality (Bataille 1987: 17).

Nakedness is suggestive of becoming both one with the natural world and other people in that in the absence of clothes we look more alike since social distinctions disappear except for gender and other phenotypical differences which have little meaning in themselves. Bataille's idea that nakedness simultaneously reminds us of the destruction of the self-contained character and the need to achieve a state of

continuity appears to work well with the idea of the social or collective body communing together. If we treat erotic activity as a form of communication, dialogue becomes a metaphor for the physical unity between self and other which establishes a relation between the two. Coitus also offers us the possibility of recovering lost continuity. For Bakhtin it is the relation that is the most important because it gives meaning and ensures that existence is not a lonely event but part of a larger whole. The highest form of play is erotic activity because it is the very anti-thesis of work and because it was fundamentally opposed to reproduction it was for Bataille an example of pure expenditure (Richardson 1998: 95). It is widely acknowledged that there is a sexual energy to *Mas*. Semi-naked bodies, close physical contact and gyrations from the waist down are suggestive of sexual intercourse, which D. Crowley described as ‘a vertical expression of horizontal desire’ (Mason 1998: 107).

The festival for Bataille (1989: 54) is the fusion of human life in which distinctions melt in the intense heat of intimate life. This is something that is often obscured because of the tendency to fetishise carnival and to make it a thing, when in fact it is the interaction between humans that produce the effects which becomes the carnival. However, the intimacy that comes with *communitas* is not always perceived as such. Lolo indicates her disapproval of what she perceives to be hypocrisy in the mainstream society. Lolo felt that there was one standard for the upper and middle-classes whom she refers to as ‘de doctor’s daughter’, ‘de bank gyul’ and ‘de red gyul’, and another for the poor usually dark skin girl of African descent:

From Carnival Monday and Tuesday these women are parading up and down, de doctor's daughters, cause I have a real grievance with...I have a real problem with de bank gyul, de red gyul and dem who could parade up and down in Barbarossa band in dey bra and dey bikini...dey could *wine* down low, *wine* right side, left, high up, nobody goes and locks them up... I have grown up and I live in an area as I told you that is predominantly of African descent, and the girls inside dat area dey ain't so smart and people does call dem skettel when dey put on dey tight pants, right. But when yuh go in Long Circular Mall and West Mall, whe' dem lil' white gyul and dem put on all dey short, short pants and all dey ass outside, nobody calls them skettel, because they have the money and they have the economic backing for it – they have the colour for it...

This lends support to the view that carnival is a form of release for the middle-classes who need collective excitement because of the narrow confines of their competitive lives (Powrie 1956; 1988: 95).

Bourdieu's (2000) concept of cultural capital has a particular relevance in this context because it raises the issue of status groups who confer cultural legitimacy which is in turn grounded in the protection and maintenance of particular interests. Cultural capital consists of:

Differential, and stratified, socialization practices, in combination with the system of education, function to discriminate positively in favour of those members of society who by virtue of their location within the class system are the 'natural' inheritors of cultural capital (Jenks 1993: 130).

This means that these status groups determine who may do what, when and where because they possess the power to do so. This seems to be Lolo's understanding also:

Yuh mighten have colour, and yuh mighten have the body shape and yuh might not be *liming* in the kind of parties that dey does *lime* in. Yuh mighten belong to Island People and do Ads and all these kind of things. So they could actually tell you that dey ain't have no more room – no more space and somebody else five minutes later, with a very slim, light brown complexion, who does go to the popular gym in West Mall, could come and they would get a costume because they know the



demand is there for what they have so they could turn you away because they want their brand to look a certain way in terms of colour, in terms of race, in terms of everything...

This statement also suggests that Bourdieu's related concepts of habitus and taste may have some use for understanding such distinctions. The key concept in class reproduction is what Bourdieu calls habitus whereby individuals internalize and develop a taste for what s/he has grown up with, and by displaying these tastes continues to mark herself/himself as a member of that class (Frank 1991: 67).

Within higher class habitus taste that is 'cultivated' is presented as natural a sign of breeding. Thus classes reproduce themselves by their member's internalisation and display of certain tastes. These tastes are inscribed on the body and made apparent by features such as body size, speech, gesture, demeanour, ways of eating and drinking, walking and sitting and so forth. On the one hand, simply defined habitus is a metaphor for the membership of a community grounded in intellectual or aesthetic considerations, and on the other habitus may be seen as 'style' (Jenks 1993: 132). In the case of the latter, Jenks uses Bernstein's 'restricted' code as a way of illustrating the way in which it stands in disjunction with the habitus of the dominant group 'the latter being the vehicle for self-structuring "sense of good", "appropriate style", "expressiveness" etc... the possessors of the dominant group habitus are the inheritors of cultural capital...' (Ibid). Ultimately, habitus refers to the hierarchical ordering of different modes of perception and interest as well as group styles which enables/forces individuals to find their proper location in

society. Thus certain big *mas* bands have a tendency to favour certain individuals who are judged to be of appropriate colour, social connections and body shape.

The result of what many Trinidadians perceive to be the ‘feminization’ of *Mas* has put women in the spotlight at Carnival time. Interestingly, this feminization has coincided with cultural developments such as new articulations of the body with the related discourses of consumerism, sexuality, fashion and celebrity. Mason (1998: 135) remarks that women-centred *mas* is ‘less about the creation of obscure rituals and characters, more about having a good time’. As a form of release it is about women taking the opportunity to be or ‘play’ themselves. The problem with this argument is that it implicitly contains the idea that as part of being themselves women naturally want to be pretty, glamorous, bodily spectacles. It also suggests that outside of Carnival time women are not ‘themselves’ because they are employees, wives, mothers and so on. How do the women play themselves? In attempting to answer this question, theories of gender as a ‘masquerade’ seem to offer some useful insights in that on this basis it is possible to argue that what is being worn in Carnival is a double *masque* since there is the carnival masquerade that lies behind that of the feminine masquerade. The French psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in her essay *Womanliness as a Masquerade* (1929) initially formulated the concept of femininity as a masquerade, which was later adopted by the feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane:

[I]t is understandable that that women want would want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position. What is not understandable within the given terms is why a woman might flaunt her femininity produce herself as an excess of femininity, in other words foreground the masquerade. Masquerade is not recoupable as transvestism precisely because it constitutes an

acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask – as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity (Doane 1992: 234)

The female masqueraders do not simply put on their costumes on Carnival Day but are preparing for the occasion months in advance working out in the gyms, visiting the beauty parlour, getting their hair done, and choosing matching accessories. All of this indicates that the rituals involved in preparing for the carnival simply extend those involved in preparing for the everyday feminine masquerade. The fact that the women appear as an excess of femininity indicates that they are in effect producing themselves as in terms of a coded femininity, which as Doane points out conceals the non-identity of the feminine position. The masquerade creates a distance between the woman and the image which emphasises the point that femininity is not an essence but a location.

As women came out to *play mas* men withdrew. However, men still play a prominent role in terms of organizing the festive components of Carnival, creating the aesthetics and producing the music. Whilst women are keen to show off their bodies in skimpy costumes men are less so inclined. From Boy's statement there seem to be two main male concerns; the unmanliness of the costumes and the cost:

Most men don't *play mas* because of the type of costumes. Most men think if they go *Mas Camp* and they see a picture of the costume, they see men in underwear, or a tights. So they would think why would I let myself be seen in that type of thing: is only people who have a stigma attached to them in society does wear them kinda a clothing. Yuh know men who are gay. I go to the *Mas Camp* and not that I wouldn't play mas in a tights, I would wear the tights under a pants. I would make a pant for myself. So that's how I got most of my male friends to *play mas*. I told them I don't wear tights I wear a pants so that kinda helped them understand that ... they don't have to wear tights... they could wear it but they could wear a pants over it which is the same colour of the costume. And then too most men don't play because the price of the costumes is too high, they not going to spend over \$900tt

just for trunks, a belt around yuh waist, a head piece, two arm bands and a flag in yuh hand.

Jerry also gives the high cost of the costumes as a deterrent to *playing mas*:

[T]he prices of costumes; the average man would not pay that amount. The women would save for it because they like to come out in their little...pieces of clothing and show off their bodies and *play mas* and have a good time. But the men prefer to hang out probably *lime* on the street corner and have a drink.

Males in general tend to be less keen on exposing their bodies since it is culturally perceived to be a female activity. The female body presented as a spectacle is one of the main themes of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1992) that detailed the way in which the cinematic apparatus placed the woman as the object of the desiring male gaze. The influence of this work led other writers to consider the representation of masculinity in visual images. When the male body is presented as a visual spectacle it makes a difference in terms of the 'look' that is generated. When men become the object of the gaze 'this does a violence to the code of who looks and who is looked at' (Dyer 1992: 267) because it is normally men who look and women who are looked at.

Jerry, commenting on his lack of physique, used this as a reason not to *play mas*:

[*Mas*] change up nuh... the costume also, the way they designing now - if you don't have a good physique, well, I have a big belly - I wouldn't come out in no short pants and bare back I ain't showing off that ridiculous shape! And, most of the big bands the type of costumes they use exposes skin a lot and also it's like skimpy stuff and men doh go for that.

Jerry mentions the idea of possessing 'a good physique' which would mostly likely involve some muscular definition or a body shape that is 'manly'. Muscularity is

seen to be natural, biologically given and the means by which men may indicate their dominance over women as well as other men – it therefore involves a naturalization of male power and domination:

Developed muscularity – muscles that show – is not in truth natural at all, but is rather achieved. The muscle man is the end product of his own activity of muscle-building. As always, the comparison with the female body beautiful is revealing. Rationally, we know that the beauty queen has dieted, exercised, used cleansing creams, solariums and cosmetics – but none of this really shows in her appearance, and is anyway generally construed as something that has been done to the woman. Conversely, a man's muscles constantly bespeak his achievement of his beauty/power (Dyer 1992: 274)

Tasker (1993: 119) notes an ambivalence located around the masculinity of the male bodybuilder whose bodily excess renders it an object for pleasure and display. The muscle men employed by the big *mas bands* are there to guard the masqueraders but their over developed bodies also make a visual spectacle of muscular masculinity. Finally, the fact that such bodies have to be worked suggests both a 'feminisation' of men's approach to their bodies and an acknowledged narcissism that many men find it hard to accept let alone display to others.

## **Wining**

*Wining* is a manifestation of the kinda energy that the music provides. People interpret it and re-present it. It not something that's premeditated. Yuh doh say ah going to *wine* this way or that way. The music hits you: the context is right; the setting is appropriate - yuh *wine*. Depending on how much yuh have in yuh head or not; yuh know yuh may *wine* to a greater or less degree. It is certainly my belief that when little children *wine* they certainly not informed by a sense of lewdness or sensuality. When we are horrified by it we are horrified by our own thoughts and then... where do they get it from? It's imitative isn't it so may be what we reacting to in a horrified manner is ourselves that reflection of ourselves. And I always say if we look at the carnival and certain aspects of it horrify you its because that's an aspect of the society that yuh really not prepared to embrace and or come to terms with because the carnival is just a sort of hyper representation of who we are at least where our imaginations lie its more that fractured kaleidoscopic collage of

our psyche. So the people out there expressing... the nether regions is because that's a real aspect of our imagination that lies dormant for 363 days and it expresses itself for two days. So in those two days it's going to express itself with a vengeance' (Wendel Manwarren of rapso band 3Canal).

[When you are *wining*, what are you thinking about?] ('She covers her face when she's *wining*!') Aaah! I'm very into the music and its how I express myself, I think my face shows that I am having a good time'(Indra).

*Wining* is the other means by which the body 'speaks' at Carnival time. The best exploration of the subject of *wining* is that by Miller (1991; 1994) who focuses mainly on women *wining*. Although Carnival and *wining* are intimately connected, *wining* is not exclusive to Carnival. The 'feminization' of Carnival has meant that women become the objects of criticism with respect to what is perceived to be their lewd and unrestrained behaviour. However, accusations of obscenity in Carnival are not new if we cast our minds back to the *pissenlit* and the *Jamette* women. According to Miller (1991: 335), the women he interviewed affirmed his views that the dance uses the idiom of sexuality rather than being about sexuality and that the experience is one of release from pressure particularly amongst low-income women. Middle-class women also experience the two days of bacchanal as some form of release and look forward to it (Powrie 1956; 1988: 94). This is also confirmed by the sight of big *mas* bands that contain a high proportion of middle and upper income women who are not normally associated with the values of the 'outside' and ordinary time 'bacchanal', caught in the motions of unrestrained *wining* on television or in the newspapers. This may indicate a form of inversion of values, but whether or not Carnival represents some kind of symbolic inversion

may depend upon the social group under consideration. For example, those who lean towards the values of 'respectability' for the rest of the year, usually women or the middle-classes, may well regard it as a form of licence, whilst those whose orientation is towards 'reputation' may simply see it as the high point of their usual concerns – when the rest of the island falls in line with them. As Lolo puts it:

[I]s only ah set ah brown skin and red skin gyul....I don't think they behave badly. I just think that some people because of their colour and the money they have could do it and nobody calls them loose and immoral, yuh know... but somebody else doing it and dey could call it dat. But, I personally doh consider it behaving badly, yuh know...I jes' feel that certain people are allowed to do it – get the chance to do it.

The discourse of gender relations and its complementary dual value system of reputation and respectability are simultaneously threatened and confirmed by the behaviour of many women during Carnival time, since oppositions between categories of people become exposed and magnified. According to Miller (1994) women *wining* in Carnival may be indicative of recent shifts in the wider context of sexuality and gender relations. Antagonism in cross-gender relations has meant that such relations tend to be kept to a minimum [3]. Miller, explains for those whose orientation is towards the 'outside' sexual activity is more than a mere expression of sexuality but also a paradigmatic 'act of exchange' through which the possibility of cross-gender sociality is established. Because cross-gender relations have been reduced to a few acts of exchange in which sexual relations are prominent, *wining* may be understood as the repudiation of sexuality as an act of exchange. Thus:

Autosexuality transcends questions of sexuality and becomes tantamount to a rejection of sociality, or a momentary escape from that act of exchange which binds one to a world and its relationships, and in particular, to what women may increasingly regard as oppressive relationships (Miller 1991: 332).

An additional point made by Miller is that:

It may be that sexuality has become so associated with the values associated with Bacchanal that its very existence within the respectable domestic family has become paradoxical. The deputy [5] rather than the wife has become the appropriate object of sexual attention as the concept of female partner is split by the projection and introjection of cultural dualism (Ibid).

The domination of Carnival by *wining* women in their pretty costumes may indicate a shift in Carnival where the fantasy themes and meaning of the dance shifts from political emancipation to gender emancipation. Since Trinidadian women have few social outlets unlike men who *lime*, women look upon Carnival as an occasion to 'free up' themselves.

Miller observed that men and women *wined* on each other, or women *wined* alone, and it is common to see women *wining* on each other, however it is less common to see a man *wining* on a man. A common interpretation made by men when they see women *wining* on women is that it is indicative of rampant lesbianism. Also, it is not unusual for males and females who are not acquainted to *wine* together without any further relationship developing, and for family members to *wine* one each other. The *winers* often describe themselves as surrendering to the rhythm of soca music: 'Rhythm acts here not to express the relationship between the members of the group but to provide a level of abstraction at which each individual



may become attached without involving any such relations and through which finally they may transcend themselves' (Miller 1994: 125).

In what follows I will expand on Miller's observations by approaching *wining* as a form of 'bodily communication', which means that my intention is to explore what Trinidadians communicate to each other when they *wine*. I noticed that whenever I asked people to talk about *wining* they invariably laughed or smiled in acknowledgement that the movements engage the lower stratum of the body and are therefore associated with sex:

(laughs) alright, basically it's not so much a step, it's body moves, you're trying to move your hips in a suggestive manner - it's like having sex with your clothes on' (HJ)

Or again:

Generally I see it [*wining*] as dance, as a form of dancing and like many form of dancing it can communicate...(Tinny).

But what is being communicated? In order to help me answer this question I will now focus on the physical movements, and the relation between the experience of *wining* and music. Many *soca* songs have been termed 'command' songs because they instruct the audience to 'jump and wave', 'put yuh hand in the air' or '*wine* down' and the audience willingly obliges. Balliger (1999: 62) argues that in the case of *soca* the 'unthinking' body which is gendered female is evoked; unlike calypso which engages the mind, critical reason and is gendered male. In addition, 'the gendering of *Mas*... performance and audience participation in *soca* music as female during the carnival season is commonly asserted in the phrase 'carnival is woman' (Balliger 1999: 61). The skimpy revealing costumes not only emphasise

sexuality but also facilitate *wining* which in turn requires the production of an adequate stock of tunes each season. The decline of Calypso and the rise of soca is seen by some commentators to be simultaneous with the arrival of women dominated *Mas* to which women have brought a more uninhibited, some might say more frivolous, outlook to *Mas*, which appears to be reflected in the music they dance to (Mason 1998: 135).

The roots of the word '*wining*' have never been traced but my guess would be that it comes from '*winding*' which means to move in a sinuous, spiralling or circular way. As some of my respondents put it:

...the gyrating, oscillating, levitating of the pelvic area. That is basically *wining*... Yuh don't just *wine* for *wining* sake *wining* has a feeling. You have to move in time with the music, you have to feel the music (Myra).

There a swaying kind of *wine*, the hip swaying *wine* - it feels like a snake. There's also gyration which means more like you'll be turning up, kind of spiralling up and down right and you can sense that difference but in certain songs; you know that. So if its a song like Machel's last year, French and Zouk songs, have this kind of swaying motion there'll be more lateral movement rather than the gyration (sings, demonstrating) 'All day the gal bawling, stop mocking meh'. Also, you know the way you would dance to a dancehall song: more gyration - it would look more like a grind it would be a speeded up version of a grind - you know, something that has more thrust in it, more forward-backward (Harley).

The basic movement involves a gyration of the pelvic area or a rotation of the hips. A number of moves add variation to *wining* such as swinging from side to side, spiralling up and down, and a fast *grind* which has more thrust (*jook*). The fact that *wining* engages the lower body evokes both Stallybrass and White's (1986) discussion of the high/low dichotomy and, wonderfully precisely, Bakhtin's (1984: 371) comment that 'the grotesque swing... brings together heaven and

earth...the accent is not placed on the upward movement but on the descent'. One thing that Myra and Harley stressed was the importance of the music accompanying the *wine*. In Harley's case:

One of the things you actually want is a woman who could sense changes in the music, and know that is the time to change the way you *wine*, so if you listen to a song you might hear the bass line change or the drumming change, or it might go from verse to chorus and you would suddenly alright, well that doesn't call for a *wine* that does be swinging of the hips, right, it suddenly calls for a *wine* that is more a gyration.

Similarly, Myra explained that the sensuality was produced by the combining of the movement and music together:

If yuh feel the music yuh move with it and then *wining* takes on a new different level of sensuality... is if yuh have yuh eye on something: a male, or in case of a male a female... So boy sees girl boy *wines*. Boy comes to *wine* on girl. He's going to start to *wine*. He's going to be suggestive that's just for you to pick up on what he's doing. Yuh can't pretend yuh didn't see him yuh could pretend but yuh know yuh saw him and he will know that yuh saw him and he's going to *wine*. The closer he gets, the more secure he gets in his feeling and he either slows down or gets a lil' bit what yuh call rude... So he's going to let you feel his manhood if yuh want to call it that. And then once he gets his hands any where on you, the first thing he's going to look for is a waistline, waist or hips and he pulls you. Then he's going to let you have everything. Then's he's going to croon what Baron calls crooning. Right. So he's going to croon not with his voice but he going to croon with his pelvic area. Then he's going to know girl hookline and sinker.

Basic *wining* requires moving in time to the music. But how do Trinidadians acquire this cultural knowledge? Harley said that he has been *wining* since he was six or seven years old:

I think learning to *wine* is something you see parents encouraging children from young. You know, there is this kind of 'come and *wine* for 10 cents' kind of tradition in Trinidad: 'come and dance! Let me see yuh *wine*!' And the reinforcement comes, you know if you could *wine* well your parents would bring you out when other adults are visiting 'come and see them *wine*! Carnival!' and you take a little *wine*. I think that is the way of all other cultural practices and

values. That is when you learn them in really informal ways and *wining* is something like, you see people doing it at home. When you do it well they tell you, when you don't do it well they tell you. I mean you know by age eleven, twelve if yuh could *wine* or not and you would know when you go out if you going and *wine* or you ain't going and *wine*...

In the case of who *wines* the first thing that struck me was that *wining* was seen to be uniquely Trinidadian. The views expressed by two of my respondents are typical:

Any Trinidadian no matter where yuh from it doesn't matter who or where you are from, yuh could be someone of high class, low class, yuh must have some kind of motion in yuh waist...' (Boy).

'...yuh know in Trinidad ever since yuh small, yuh know is *wine*! Tha' yuh culture. I think, to move yuh waist, how yuh move yuh waist; da's like a gift Trinidadians have...' (Mari)

*Wining* can therefore be considered as a mode of expressing Trinidadian identity despite the fact that similar dance movements may be found in Latin America and other Caribbean islands. A useful comparison is with the Samba as described by Richard Parker:

The waist becomes a kind of equatorial line separating the upper body (and especially the head, where the reason and repression that must be overcome by the ecstasy of the carnival are located) from the lower body (the torso of pelvis, where sin, of course, no longer exists, and the feet, that feel the madness of the music and rhythm)...Rising up from the feet and filling the entire body with life, the movement of the samba opens out, like the outstretched arms that are among the most characteristic gestures of Carnival, to *abracar* (embrace) the world...[T]he samba dancer descends to the ground and rises up again, stopping abruptly, but momentarily, only to begin again, demonstrating control and balance while at the same time offering up an impression of complete abandon' (Parker 1991: 151).

For Trinidadians though, the 'Trini *wine*' is thought to be distinctive. One can always identify a Trini by the *wine*:

Other West Indians do [*wine*] but not like Trinidadians. We do things different. A Trinidadian would say we have a rude way of wining, Americans have a different way of dancing to us - they don't *wine*. But Trinidadians, I think that's our culture... (Yvonne).

If I dance I *wine*. *Wining* has come from Africa... The Trini *wine* has taken on its own personality and everything, and I mean there's something in you that the minute yuh start to dance to Calypso the sweetness takes yuh. Yuh *wine* and yuh jook... I have found that nobody in the world could *wine* like a Trini- any Trini... (Redman).

The islands *wine* but they're not all the same for instance Jamaicans *wine* what we call the *slow wine* and they sometimes *wine* on their head, yeh, they go up on their head and they *wine*, its a sight to see, you have to see it and they have a *slow wine* where they *wine* very slow going down its almost like screwing a screw - when you see a screw going down its like a drill but then Trinidadians *wine* really fast and really full of gyration and the Bajans kind of *wuk up* with their legs kind of moving their legs and shaking their behind - there's different ways of doing it but they're all *wining* (RG).

As aspects of a mode dialogue between bodies, different *wining* movements communicate different things as Tinny revealed in the following conversation:

*Wining* is just sharing what you know with everyone else - sharing a sensation, a feeling. Yuh know. Is like a form of communication... it could go anyhow...

[What is being communicated?]

It could be sex... it depends on the type of *wine*... It depends totally upon the touch like for example, if someone, lets say a man is wining on you and starts to *wine* slow and starts just *wining* on that specific area; gyrating, grinding and on a specific spot; or just *wining* slow an' pulling the person, it depends on all the body motions and all kinda ting... eye contact... ah think da's like yeah! Sometimes it's just light and chippy just *wine* down the road, just having a good time and then there are others that say, "I could real flex", like boastful *wines* and ting like dat; do all kinda ting with dey waist to make yuh feel shame (Tinny).

Similarly:

...[I]t depends on the kind of things you're trying to do by a *wine*, a good loose kind of reckless style... if you are trying to communicate some kind of tackle, you know, making a pass at somebody... you can *wine* for all kinds of different reasons, to communicate different things by *wining* (Harly)

Harly told me that if he had girlfriends who were not from Trinidad one of the things they had to do learn was the distinction between a harmful *wine* and a hornful *wine*:

They must be able to tell...how I am *wining* with somebody and what it means....plenty times they don't, so dey stretch up dey mouth whole night and wrenching (laughs).

*Wining* may also communicate an individual's class position or sense of propriety, the state of cross-gender relationships between men and women, or even say something about the state of intimate relationships between individual women and men. Myra spoke of how *wining* could be used to degrade a person or in a flirty way to indicate, "here I am": like a boy telling a girl of his presence. *Wining* is also a means for gaining the attention of someone one may be attracted to as indicated by these two female speakers:

A lot of the times, yuh *wining* and yuh watching like some guy in the back and yuh give him the kind of eye... It's calling that person... You beckon them with your body... (Milla).

If I'm feeling for close contact and feeling for bodily warmth, I would *wine* to invite a man to come and dance with me, so my eyes will slant, I'll stick out my butt a little more, but if I just want to enjoy the music for myself, you know, you surround yourself in a circle of 'leave me alone', your face will have that 'stand off' look... (Toya).

From the point of view of Rudi *wining* was indicative of a woman's sexual performance: '...yuh could tell how a woman could sex real good, and yuh tell how she sex by her *wine*'. Women seem happy enough to admit that on occasion they

flirted when *wining* but seldom admitted that they were sexually aroused. Men, however, were much more willing to admit to physical arousal:

The thing is da's [getting hard] a natural 'cause you *wining* on my boy and my boy is a sensitive thing and the slightest touch he does wake up, so if you coming down the road gyrating on him whole day he go want to know wha' it is *jooking* me all the time so...wha' it is going on... (Zipper).

However, another male speaker said such arousal was not a frequent event with him since 'it's something you decide - it don't really just happen'.

In the case of a *wine* intended to degrade or humiliate this appears to typically take the form of violent thrusting movements:

[I]t's like a *jooking* (thrusting) type like thing, and, especially if somebody is not a willing participant right. I mean a man could put you down on the ground, [or] put you on his waistline or something and once you are not a participant he just breaks you down morally. Sometimes it becomes even more humiliating if [there's] more than one and they just there on you... (Myra).

From Myra's comment a *wine* may be transformed into something else through lack of 'consent' and the use of the idiom of sexuality to express their dominance.

This recalls Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence which Yelvington (1995: 175) specifies as 'transposed violence'. Myra distinguishes such situations from that of the tourist who gets *wined* upon by a group of men in the street:

That is different to a tourist that yuh find men who decide to *wine* on a tourist who probably "oh my god" she now getting used to what is this. That is different to seeing somebody, some man and some woman had an argument and he's just there and he just wants to belittle her, and he doesn't have to say a word. He just has to *wine*. And it's really bad. And then because we are who we are we could pick up on it. Pick up on a wine that is "oh I'm having a ball", a *wine* that says "hello - here I am", or a *wine* that is "oh god look what he doing to she". You could pick up on it [and] not a word is said.

Unsurprisingly, the connection between *wining* and the excessive display of sexuality is blamed for the Carnival baby phenomenon [4] AIDS, and an increase in sex-related crimes. For Lolo Carnival, *wining* and alcohol make-up a potent cocktail which has contributed to an increase in sexual activity:

I have seen people perform and dance up to Carnival, and how dey go on and dey *wine* on one another and a man in front and a man behind and de gyul in the middle *wining, wining, wining, wining, wining...* It's a prelude to sex as far as I see it. Because yuh know afterwards with the kind of alcohol and all that happen people could end up having sex. Yuh know and da's why yuh have the carnival babies in October, nine months later because of the alcohol and the sexy bodies and the gyrating and all these kinds of things.

Trinidadians draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable *wining* with the result that the closer the *wine* is to a performance of copulation the more it is regarded as obscene. Trinidadians have coined the ironic term *social wine* to describe a particular variation of *wining* performed by the 'respectable' classes who insist on maintaining some sense of decorum even in a festival dedicated to 'freeing up'. This type of *wining* is considered very restrained (non-sexually provocative) and occurs mainly at the expensive 'All Inclusive' (really all exclusive) fetes. The Trinidadian meaning of 'social' suggests events, occasions, and forms of behaviour that do not permit 'freeing up' or 'joining in' and where people engage in half-hearted *wining*, and men refuse to take a drink.

The more sexual the *wining* the less 'respectable' and more 'low-class' and vulgar it is deemed to be. As Toya puts it: 'yuh would see two people, two bodies in a fete and they look as if they are having sex. Personally, I wouldn't want to



look like that'. Aysha too distinguished between a decent and indecent wine but also confessed that she did both:

“Indecent” *wine* is okay. It have two *wines*: yuh could *wine* with yuh back facing to the fella or yuh in front of him. And some women would look to put they legs up on the fella, and yuh know that is indecent *wining*... I could say I have *wined* indecently. To me I just enjoying myself I just don't perceive it so, they saying it's vulgar and stuff, but I don't perceive it like that. I just say yuh know is a *wine*... So yuh know, I just yeah, probably, to them it may be vulgar but is just me – I'm enjoying myself.

Where Trinidadians draw the line between 'decency' and 'vulgarity' in *wining* seems to be quite arbitrary but in part of course this is because the line between decency and vulgarity is also arbitrary. This suggests that the ultimate control over the body is societal. This is captured well in Lolo's feelings about *wining*:

Ah wish ah could *wine*...because I find...I look at the girls who could *wine* down to the ground, *wine* back up and I feel they brave and I can't ... I mean, I's try to *wine* home, yuh know. Yuh drink two rum and coke and yuh *wining* and yuh jumping up in the living room and I will not do what I do in the living room – as some of my friends would say “outside”, because I 'fraid how ah looking and people might see mih and dey go say “look she *wining* and she's ah Catholic teacher and she *wining* down the place” and all dem kind a ting.

Both Miller's study and as my own data indicate that even intimate contact through *wining* in most cases did not necessarily lead to the development of a sexual relationship: 'you would dance as rude as you want with a strange woman in the street and when the dance is finished she'll go her way and you go yours...'

However, there are women like Indra who attempt to maintain some sense 'propriety' by not dancing with strangers:

Some people can definitely be very vulgar [when *wining*] ... we were dancing with some friends, and I think, like we all agreed, we would not dance with someone that we don't know...even if we were to *wine* with them a little, we don't dance for

like an entire song it's like a thirty seconds or one minute wine, you know you don't stand there and start grinding for like five songs or whatever because that is definitely sexual. Its like a fun-thing, you just go and you *wine* for a minute, part of the song even, and you're done, so that kind of physical contact isn't established for very long.....

Indra also said that even if the guy she was *wining* with was her boyfriend she would not 'stand in a corner or in the streets and be *wining* for half an hour or something' because that was not how she behaved. Because of the sexual nature of the dance movements, women are very conscious of the signals they could transit or the danger they could unleash if their *wining* was misinterpreted as an invitation to intimacy:

just letting the music take control of what you do...could get you in trouble...sometime you have to control yourself depending on the crowd, because not everybody is going to be able to deal with that blatant sexuality... (Milla)

I personally would not be dragging my bottom along Fredrick Street in a way that would suggest anything that could be harmful to me, and in certain places you wouldn't move in a certain way if you're around a rough-looking people and people that you're not feeling safe with. I guess basically it depends on how safe I feel (Yvonne).

...*wining* is a very sexual thing, in a way – it's not yuh saying 'let us have sex' but it's a very sexual thing, I mean its an expression of yourself in a way that you wouldn't be in a normal party or a dinner or whatever you are accustomed to going to. It's like... that wild abandon, where you just don't care, and I think it has to do with, not really the music but the beat; the rhythm. What it does to you. It rises up that sort of ... I wouldn't call it a frenzy, but its just wild abandon, its, you don't care at that point about what people think (Toya).

Such an awareness indicates that women will only 'get on bad' and 'free up' in spaces and with people that they feel comfortable.

During Carnival time, according to Miller (1994), music is the mediating form between the structured ritual and the 'atomistic individualism' of the participants:

I have a kind of reputation for being this kinda rubber waist person... once I hear the music I just have to move... start to *wine* and dance and go down on the ground... I don't think I get on bad as some people because I don't do all the sex movements on the ground as I call them... but I do like to gyrate and just *wine*. I just close my eyes and I'm lost to it all. I just love to *wine* and dance, just the music the beat and rhythm and everything... (Mari-Ann).

The pleasure one often sees on the faces of women *wining* is akin to a look of rapture: 'Yuh look at someone face and yuh see where they start to lose it. You know the sweetness, the sexuality setting in... I would consider that to be something personal and yuh doh expose yuhself to that extent'. Redman told me of a photograph he once saw published in a newspaper where he felt the woman had gone too far:

There was a picture in the paper of a girl at a carnival party once and she was probably enjoying that *wine* so much that she raised her top there was no bra, and the cameraman took the picture of her breasts openly exposed and yuh look at her face and yuh could see she in what they call dreamland. And I don't think we as men should allow women to reach to that stage, or women as well should allow themselves to get to that stage. So this is where I draw the line cuz we have to keep that sanity.

Whilst sexuality plays a key role in *Mas*, sex is not necessarily the ultimate goal. Miller suggests that the 'look' on the women's faces when *wining* may be compared with two other expressions of rapture: that associated with orgasm and that associated with religious mysticism which signifies a moment of transcendence that leads beyond the ordinary world to a mystical union or enlightenment. Bataille (1994) also discusses such states of rapture in relation to

St. Teresa's 'transverberation' captured in Bernini's (1645-52) sculpture depicting 'The Ecstasy of St. Teresa'. Bataille recognizes the kinship between mystical or spiritual exaltation and eroticism and suggests that what separates the two is the idea of 'obscenity'. Further in common is that they both lead to a loss of total control: the paradox is that both use the body to express their impulses. Whereas as the mystic experience confines the physical sensations to the domain of inner awareness, eroticism depends upon the intervention of the body accompanied by intentional physical and sexual act. Nonetheless, Bataille argues 'a mystical impulse of thought may always set off involuntarily the same reflex that an erotic image would. If this is so the converse must be true...[...] it seems therefore that communication is always possible between sensuality and mysticism, obedient as they are to the same motive force' (1987: 247-248). *Wining*, then, may be seen to involve both erotic and 'spiritual' dimensions. In the first sense *wining* is seen as a fantasy of sexual fulfilment based upon the nature of sexuality itself. In the second, by contrast, it is not dependent upon even a fantasy person for fulfilment but results in a state of rapture such as 'a spontaneous surge of life which bursts forth in freedom' (Bataille 1987: 247), which in Miller's case a desire for 'absolute freedom', and means a 'form of negation by which, whether in the form of a philosophical movement such as Stoicism, or a religious movement of transcendence, a cosmology or culture gives rise to some expressive form in which every thing that binds the individual to the world is denied' (Miller, 1991: 334). *Wining* therefore may be seen to induce a certain 'sweetness' of mind and bodily experience:

I can't go in a party and not hear Calypso and Soca and go crazy and *wine* down the place and jes' totally lose muh senses, on the ground laughing... is jes' something about Soca music... (Rene)

For me, its just letting go, you know, all the standards and... it's just releasing your spirit then and just freeing up yourself and I can't describe it, its not something I can put my finger on and say, when I hear this, I feel to *wine* or when I see that, I feel to *wine*, its just that vibe, that mood... you just to rotate... (Toya).

In sum, in this chapter I have shown how the elements that form the carnival celebrations, with particular reference to the body brings together performance, masquerade and movement in a complex web of relations. Through participation one is also involved in processes of cultural self-invention, collective regeneration and the renewal of self and cultural identity. The elements that make up carnival therefore become performances of social and national identity.

## Notes

[1] *Canboulay* is sometimes written as *cannes brulee*. This term comes from the French for 'buring cane'. Cane was burnt before harvest to control pests. It also refers to occasions when fires broke out on the plantations and the slaves from the neighbouring plantations were gathered together to help put the fires out. As described by Crowley (1998: 21) 'at the time of a plantation fire, bandes from different estates, each with its whip-carrying slave driver, were assembled, by the blare of horns, to deal with the emergency. The *negre jardins* (or field slaves), who comprised the bandes, carried torches (for night time illumination) and drums (for rhythmic accompaniment to their work songs).

[2] The actions of the police in 1881 on the night of the *Canboulay* riots produced a united opposition across different social groups against the 'foreign' officials who were British. A similar unity of opposition was produced in 1858 when the British authorities attempted to impose a ban on street masking. The official view was one in which the carnivalists would be allowed to have their Carnival but it would be regulated and purged of its undesirable elements.

[3] Miller's assertion is based upon the notion of the centrality of sexuality to sociality amongst the lower-class black population in Trinidad, and identified by Freilich (1960) in his notion of the 'sex-fame game', which involves 'sweet-talking' a woman with the intention of securing a sexual conquest, the greater the number of conquests the higher, the acclaim. Yelvington (1995) interpreted flirting in the factory as symbolic violence and a strategy of dominance in which reputable behaviour is a form of cultural capital for males. For women the acquisition of cultural capital comes mainly through respectability. Leiber's (1981) observation of street life in Port of Spain led him to the conclusion that most of the men encountered regarded women simply as sex objects. Miller (1994: 172) argues from such accounts what is quite clear is the extent to which cross-gender relations are dominated by sexual relations. Also, there is the widespread belief amongst Trinidadians that sexuality is at the basis of most everyday social interaction. *Sooting* would be a good example since it exemplifies the general nature of cross-gender encounters is a feature of daily life.

[4] It is widely believed in Trinidad that the birth rate increases every year nine months after Carnival. Miller (1991: 334) found that demographic statistics showed a slight increase while the anecdotes suggest a much larger one.

[5] 'Deputy' also sometimes referred to as 'outside woman' may be defined as mistress.

**Chapter Seven:  
Collective Effervescence And Freedom**

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1995: 213) tells us that the category of phenomena referred to as social or collective effervescence includes not only exceptional moments such as revolutionary or creative outbursts but also moments when we are affected by some rush of energy reaching us from outside ourselves: that is, ‘in all kinds of acts that express the understanding, esteem and affection of his neighbour, there is a lift that the man who does his duty feels, usually without being aware of it’. Certain rituals such as Carnival or, as in the British case, the funeral of a popular member of the royal family or the queen’s Jubilees, may have the effect of binding members of a community or sections within a community together in an expression of solidarity. This said my intention is to examine the celebration of Carnival through Durkheim’s concept of ‘social effervescence’ because the distinctive feature of collective gatherings is effervescence. The body provides the link between the outside world and one’s inner experience in which the effects of collective experience mediated through the body produces a ‘transformation’ in individuals.

From Durkheim’s description of social effervescence a number of critical features emerge. First, the force of the collectivity is not entirely external since in the end societies can exist only in and by means of individual minds, thus the force of the collectivity must enter into us and become organized within us. As part of this process, rites play an important role during moments of collective effervescence. Individuals feel themselves transformed and are transformed through ritual performances. The transforming force is the very act of assembling and temporarily living a collective life. Second, effervescence may become so



intense that it leads to outlandish behaviour in which ordinary morality is temporarily suspended so that normal rules may be violated without impunity. Such an intense social life inflicts a sort of violence on the individual's mind and body so that it disrupts their normal functioning, which is why it may only last for a limited time. Also, the settings for performing certain ritual such as darkness or firelight may intensify the excitement of those participating. Third, for individual minds to commune they need to shift outside of themselves and this is achieved through movement. Thus, it is the homogeneity of such movements that makes the group aware of itself and produces a sense of its being. Once this homogeneity has been established and the movements have taken a definite form and even been stereotyped, they serve to symbolize the corresponding ideas (Durkheim 1995: 232). Finally, symbolic reminders are important in extending the effects of the effervescence after the assembly has broken up, and since the symbols on their own cannot prevent forgetfulness, the rites are cyclically and repetitively performed.

The repetition of the phrase 'all o' we is one' and the informal institution of the *lime* will now be examined as verbal and behavioural occasions of the 'reality' or the 'felt experience' of effervescence in everyday life.

### **'All O' We Is One'**

'You hear rhythm, Miss Olive? You hear song? Carnival!' she would cry out. "Bacchanal! Trinidad! All o' we one' (Earl Lovelace from *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 1979)

The character that utters these words in Earl Lovelace's novel is known as Miss Cleothilda, a Mulatto woman in her prime. She is vain, proud of her gentility and

struts around full of her own self-importance. Miss Cleothilda owns a little parlour, which she opens and closes as it pleases her. All year long she maintains a hostile, superior attitude towards the other residents of the neighbourhood known as the Hill, particularly Philo, the black calypsonian, who lives across the street whom she dismisses with a scathing haughtiness except that is around Carnival time.

...now that it was the Carnival season, Miss Cleothilda was getting friendly with everybody. In the same swirling spasm of energy that fuelled her earlier pose, she had become a saint almost, giving away sweets to the children, questioning them about their lessons, advising them against the perils of the Hill in a voice loud enough so that adults could hear.... She had already made her journey to the steelband tent, a few streets farther up the Hill, to view the sketches of the *Masquerade* costume she would appear in for Carnival, and had given her decision: she would portray the queen – queen of the band – though the Hill was by now certain that she would never appear in any other costume; for the Hill knew that it was not only habit – she had been playing queen for the last eleven years – nor that she could afford it; the Hill knew what she knew: that to her being queen was not really a *Masquerade* at all, but the annual affirming of a genuine queenship that she accepted as hers by virtue of her poise and beauty, something even acknowledged by her enemies, something that was not identical with her mulattohood, but certainly impossible without it. ...Assuming the mantle of her queenship, she would be all laughter and excitement... she would call out to Miss Olive the stout slow watchful woman who lived downstairs... to listen to the latest calypso coming over the radio whose volume she (Cleothilda) turned up to a booming pitch the better to advertise her generosity; and, as if to add conviction to this gesture of concern, of friendliness, to show how fully she had become one of the yard in this season, she would throw her hands in the air, step off a pace or two and do a dance, shaking her waist and twisting her body to the music in that delightful flourish of middle-aged sexiness that she knew would draw a pleasing laughter from people in the yard below (Lovelace 1979: 9-14).

Lovelace's description of Miss Cleothilda is evocative of an individual's transformation during the Carnival season. We see Miss Cleothilda abandon her separate, hostile and superior self to become 'one of the yard'. Miss Cleothilda's superior airs and presumed status is the result of her beauty and therefore to some degree dependent upon her 'mulattohood' and brown skin; she is described by

Caroline, another neighbour, as a 'yellow red-nigger'. It is only Miss Olive, the black woman who lives downstairs, who can see the fragility in Miss Cleothilda, whose position of neither black nor white is a source of vulnerability, which she masks throughout the year. The saying 'all o' we is one' has a particular resonance within the Carnival context for it is not only the deluded Miss Cleothilda who utters it, but also the black fool Philo, who adores Miss Cleothilda, even though she publicly spurns him. He waits patiently for Carnival to come around so that he can join the band, put his hand around her waist and shout 'all o' we is one'. The repetition of the words therefore carries great emotional significance in that they conjure up a sense that people are willing to 'believe', despite what happens because of *difference* the rest of the year, that they are all of 'one body', that is 'Trinidadian'. Lovelace captures the sentiments of this national myth well through his characters and his lyrical prose. The atmosphere of the Carnival season seduces Trinidadians into believing that all differences particularly ethnic and social ones are transcended as people from all walks of life come out into the streets to celebrate. A self-fulfilling prophecy is at work here, for uttering the phrase 'all o' we is one' acts as a switch in which individuals not only feel better but everyone else seems to be friendlier, happier and more considerate for the two days.

Obviously, whilst not all Trinidadians subscribe to the 'all o' we is one' view, it is nonetheless the dominant view and this encourages the state to turn a blind eye to the more bacchanalian aspects of the festivities while it acts as one of the main sponsors of the festival. Containment is at the core of state support, which means 'organizing Carnival's disorder' (Parker 1991). University of the West

Indies, political scientist and *Express* columnist, Selwyn Ryan defended the carnival celebrations against criticisms made by a member of the public called Cheddie, who argued that Carnival is not a national cultural affair because ‘the majority of locals either have no involvement at all, or merely participate as spectators’, by saying:

There’s a “feel good” atmosphere that is tangible. People look out for each other and are generally friendlier towards the “other”, regardless of ethnicity and class. In fact it is one of those few times in the year when we behave as a “people”. Further, Carnival may even help to absorb some of the “civil war” potential which is latent in the society in that it provides us with the emotional tools to laugh at ourselves, our political elites and all those who make fools of themselves throughout the year. While this “Carnival mentality” has its downside, on balance I would adjudge it to be a boon rather than the socially sinful event that the Cheddies of our island world consider it to be’ (*Sunday Express*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2001).

Cheddie took the view that, ‘if Carnival is our culture, it is really a primitive culture indeed. The lyrical genius behind Soca music reveals an utter lack of creativity and backwardness as a people’. Ryan responded by saying that Carnival may be a bawdy, vulgar affair but it is also a time when Trinidad is at its best.

What was once plebeian culture has been upgraded and validated as national and *authentic* culture as in the case of *Mas*, Pan and Calypso, which constitute autochthonous Caribbean art forms. Ryan adds, other cultural forms, namely Indo-Trinidadian ones, such as *Pichakaree* and *Chutney* are slowly entering the Creole mainstream and will in time redefine, enlarge and enrich the core repertoire of Creole culture.

Ryan cites the ‘feel good factor’, people becoming friendlier, Trinidadians behaving as a ‘people’, and the celebration of ‘national’ art forms as characteristic of Carnival time. The fact that the three indigenous art forms come together at this

time produces a symbolic performance that produces a Durkheimian ‘rush of energy’ that renews many people's sense of national identity. The effect of this rush is the creation of a ‘moral harmony’ with one’s neighbours and this is what helps to renew the social bonds. The ‘transformations’ involved are not just visible to the individuals involved but also in the general experience and perception of the external world with the result that there is a widespread sense that carnival time is no ‘ordinary’ time. Hence, ‘the place transforms for Carnival, actually changes into something totally different from what you see every day’ (Tinny). Tinny explains that one reason he loves Carnival is because of the changes it induces in people:

Why I love carnival is that the people they just change...one minute they in a suit and they vex they walk down the road like they vex with the whole world...Carnival day yuh see the same person smiling and laughing and having a good time...drinking more rum than me...is just beautiful to see that so much different cultural aspects of people’s lives just come together as one in just tha’ lil’ space a time - that three days on the road.

In order to appreciate the significance of this sense of ‘togetherness’ one must understand that it is felt to be seldom in present in ordinary life:

We have ...well, Trinidad developed into a society where yuh first class and second class, and they all come together on the same street...and da’s good to see. Ah wish they come together the rest of the year... (Tinny).

[B]eing dirty and being nasty and seeing everybody who does play social and ting coming down de road nasty and dirty and yuh could wine on them Ash Wednesday after yuh cyah wine on dem yuh know yuh *wine* on dem fuh carnival so cool yuh self, is be a real nice experience... (Zipper).

If the act of assembly and the idea of unity are central to Carnival discourse so is the idea of freedom. In a place such as Trinidad and Tobago with its heterogeneous population cultural festivals such as Carnival bear the conscious burden of uniting the disparate elements of the society. The assistant Secretary General for Human

and Social Development of the Caricom Secretariat, Edward Green, commented that as part of an effort to combat racism and intolerance, Trinidad and Tobago is fortunate to have an abundance of religious and cultural festivals that brings people together (*Trinidad Guardian* April 21<sup>st</sup> 2001). However, the idea of freedom sits uneasily with the idea of social renewal and raises the question of how to understand the social consequences of effervescence: as merely a mechanism of social control or as something that genuinely generates and revives the social so that the group becomes conscious of itself as a group. At first glance, Durkheim's use of the term 'conscience collective' appears to be antithesis of 'freedom' because it is assumed to posit a unitary conscience that is antithetical to change. However, if we see Durkheim's 'conscience collective' as several consciences we can say that the collective belief system and definitions of reality involve a synthesis of relations and representations, which makes a shared reality and 'this requires the theory of the communication of consciences' (Steadman-Jones 2001: 85). Further, 'the individual, the conscience collective and the communication of consciences lie at the heart of Durkheim's whole theory of solidarity and being: solidarity is an expression of social need and mutual dependence, but both communication and solidarity are possible through conscience – for relation is the first law of conscience' (Steadman-Jones, 2001: 85-86). The important points here are that the tension between the individual and sociality is understood to be less than is often supposed if we understand their relationship in the context of a plurality of individual consciences which produce a conception of shared reality in the course of their interaction.

Whilst many Trinidadians love Carnival, there are also many who oppose it either on religious or moral grounds, or because they see it as a wasteful excess - 'If I get TT\$900 (100 pounds) and somebody tell me go and buy a costume, I go do something else with it. I will not take the money and go and do it and I think now, really honestly only people who have money and who have colour, does play *mas*' (Lolo). The idea of wasteful expenditure raises the question of the nature of the relation between sacrifice and consumption. In attempting to answer this question, Bataille's concept of sacrifice may be combined with Miller's (1994: 132) understanding of Carnival as an instance of transience - 'a celebration of an ephemeral present'- and 'sacrifice is concerned only with the moment' (Bataille 1994: 49). As Miller argues, if sexuality is the central idiom of carnival (in the same way that the home operates as the central idiom of Christmas), then it is through sexuality that transience and freedom are expressed (Miller 1994: 126). However, the erotic does not mean that sexuality is concerned with the creation of meaningful relationships or reproduction, but with the excessive expenditure of sexuality that leads to exhaustion, 'the little death', as the primary act of consumption and therefore 'intimacy'. This opens up the way for bodies to liberate themselves through excessive consumption (Miller 1998: 86). Sacrifice involves the negation or the destruction of the usefulness that objects have been invested with in ordinary life. The detachment of objects from their everyday meaning or the *real* order restores them to the *divine* order and such a sacred communication between individuals and objects leads to interior freedom:

The meaning of this profound freedom is given in destruction, whose essence is *profitlessly* whatever might remain in the progression of useful works. Sacrifice

enjoys that which it consecrates. It does not have to destroy as fire does; only the tie that connected the offering to the world of profitable activity is severed, but this separation has the sense of a definitive consumption: the consecrated cannot be restored to the real order. (Bataille 1995: 58).

In Lolo's case her money is seen to be best spent on something that might enhance her life or have some tangible value. From Lolo's attitude it is clear that she perceives carnival to be wasteful expenditure but she also raises another important point which is that 'only people who have money and who have colour, does *play mas*'. This raises the question that if it is *only* people who can afford to *play mas* do so then there seems to be no sacrifice - profitless expenditure - in the pure Bataille sense. Miller (1998) in his study of shopping examines the relationship between sacrifice and consumption. Following Bataille he argues that sacrifice is always an act of consumption, a form of expenditure through which something or someone is consumed. However, Miller questions Bataille's argument of profligacy because of its repudiation of utility:

...[I]n traditional sacrifice, just as in most shopping the dominant concern is to achieve a specific purposes – which are often pragmatic and practical. Most sacrifice, like most shopping, was at one level a way of spending things to gain other things. But neither shopping nor sacrifice are simply pragmatic acts of expenditure for profit. What is crucial to their definition is what they achieve their practical logic only passing by through sacred rites which ensure that before the practical aims can be achieved they are first used to sanctify and sustain objects of devotion (Miller 1998: 98-99)

Then, to what extent could the purchase of a carnival costume be analogous to sacrifice and destructive consumption? Miller identifies three stages in sacrifice: first, is the destruction of the object of the sacrifice through consumption; second, is the splitting of the object of sacrifice between the offering to the gods and that



retained for human consumption; and the third, which marks a return to profane society and its social order. For Miller it is in the second stage that shopping as a ritual is separated from shopping as mundane activity. Miller found that 'thrift' or saving was the very negation of expenditure thus an act that started out as one of intended expenditure was often transformed into one of money saved (1998: 100-101). Thrift is also a form of deferment which contains the idea that money saved now could be spent later, and there is also a sense in which thriftiness becomes the means by which gifts may be bestowed upon descendants (children and grandchildren). As such Miller argues:

Thrift is instrumental in creating the general sense that there is some more important goal than immediate gratification, that there is some transcendent force or future purpose that justifies the present deferment. In the absence of any belief in a deity, thrift transcends particular relationships and rises to a higher level that evokes something above and beyond their immediacy (1998:104).

For Miller this is where Bataille goes wrong for 'What Bataille never seems to have envisaged is that it could be such a mundane economizing that is most effective at repudiating mere utilitarianism, rather than some massive gesture of destruction' (Miller 1998: 104). Thrift as a form of deferment does not appear to operate in the purchase of a costume since the purpose of buying the costume is immediate gratification however in the final stage of consumption forms of hierarchy and difference are ritually re-established. By purchasing a costume to play *mas* one is indicating one's colour or class identity; where one belongs or where one aspires to be – a sort of branding.

When I went into town the first time with her [Valerie], as an adult, she was jumping in Barbarossa [1] band an' she jump out ah de ban' an stan' up next tuh mih. She wasn't going in Tico Skinner, she ain't going in no other band, she was

going in de white people or red people band. Da's de band she was going in, because she wants to identify with a certain type that has money... (Lolo). In sum, consumption is transformed into cultural capital and sacrifice becomes the means by which social relations are re-established. Such expenditure could be seen as a 'treat' – a form of excessive expenditure – that is usually contained within specific boundaries which may be determined by a special occasion, person or event. According to Miller the setting of excessive expenditure within such frames reduces it as an experience of excess.

The 'imagined' nature of national identity means that as an ideological construct it is continuously contested by competing, dissenting, and co-existing 'marginal' identities that are always threatening to disrupt the idea of single nationality identity:

I think there's a myth of this kind of carnival being national unity thing and I think what is under theorized about it is the role of people's cultural responses to music and the euphoria brought on by... because I feel a lot of alcohol sells for carnival, a lot of alcohol is consumed for carnival. We know through all kinds of studies, biological studies, the effects of alcohol on you, so the alcohol plus the music, plus the fact that you are normally really quite conservative, all of those thing combined, would make it appear as though this is a "one love" kind of rainbow bullshit thing. I think that's crap. I think carnival is about rum...it have nutten to do with national unity. Da's shit and is a lie... (Stanley).

Stanley's rejection of the idea that Carnival is about national unity is in stark contrast to Tinny's view that people 'all come together on the same street' because it ultimately rejects the idea that a nation is a single community that shares the same basic understanding of what constitutes the nation. In fact Stanley goes so far as to say that it is simply an alcohol induced fantasy. Given that the nation is an 'imagined community' where most members of the community will never have contact with their fellow citizens, then national identity is 'a communion

experienced through immediate contact with family, friends, and neighbours' rather than association with the entire nation (Palmer 1998: 179). Tinny participates in the carnival festivities whereas Stanley does not which may well have a direct influence on how they each produced the meaning of the festival.

Lolo also subverts the national unity idea by raising the factor of social class.

I ... believe that this Carnival... belong to people who have money and could skin up dey face and skin up dey bottom in the road and say dat's Trinidad culture... because somebody in Caroni or the woman ketching she ass in Laventille cyah really do that. She might go down de road yes, and jump up in the band but the amount ah money enjoying carnival, in the way people want to tell yuh about, enjoying carnival costs a lot of money.... (Lolo).

Lolo made it clear to me that she is not especially fond of carnival nor does she participate in carnival activities except on the very rare occasion she might attend some fete or event. Lolo makes her point in two ways. First, the cost of carnival puts enjoyment of the national festival out of reach for most low income

Trinidadians (I would argue that this is only true in relation to playing big band *mas*, the national spectacles such as *Dimanche Gras* and the more exclusive fetes).

Second, she is also indicating that the people who 'skin up dey face and dey bottom in the road' – the middle classes – are the only ones who can enjoy the license of carnival. Lolo went to Panorama (the national steel band competition held every year as part of the carnival celebrations) for the first time in 1997:

When my girlfriend took me to Panorama for the first time...I went to Panorama for the first time in 1997, she's a brown-skinned girl like me, she tell me, we went there early in the day. People doh go to panorama...some people doh go panorama until it dark. We went from in the morning. She tell mih, "look de white dey, de red dey and de brown, we *liming* down in the brown section, and look the black and dem over dey, yuh ain't going over dey". She knows what she was talking about because it's stratified and we didn't want to go dong in the black section. When it was 5 o'clock we left. The reason we left is because all de black people

come dat time. Dey come in when it getting dark, they claiming the North Stand at that point in time, we gone.

The separation she observed in the North Stand [2] simply confirmed her belief that carnival was not about national unity since carnival simply reproduced the social structures of non-carnival time. Although there are no physical barriers in the North Stand Lolo's observations I would argue are largely correct. The big Panorama *lime* is the *prelims* which happens a week before Carnival when people bring coolers with food and drink and some bring 'iron' [3] to beat, and create their own rhythm section. The *prelims* seems less about pan and more about the *lime*.

Lolo told me she preferred to spend Carnival *liming* by the beach:

I go to the beach and I always tell people that I'm not a Christian, 'cause most Christians, dey pack up and dey go to de beach for a retreat, and I'm not a Christian. I go to Toco and we rent a beach house and we *lime*, we buy rum and beers, we *lime* and drink, play cards. We go down to the beach Carnival Monday and Tuesday...we play calypso and have a good time, right... (Lolo).

Apart from not liking the crowds and not having the money she makes a crucial point concerning the importance of having the *lime*:

I doh like crowds, da's the next ting ah, doh like crowds...so ah doh think even if ah had de money, an' de *lime* and de people around me an' ah was in all the parties before and *liming* in all de happening places to be in the posse, cause yuh jus doh get up in the morning and say yuh goin' an play *mas*. Yuh's had to have friends and people, and yuh know is a whole troop - is a big ting... De young men, to me, some of them play on Carnival Monday and Tuesday but Carnival is not Monday and Tuesday, Carnival starts two months before...dey get a batch together all the fellas dey turn out...and dey get together, dey dress up and dey buy dey ticket and dey in the *fete*. That's what dey go to, and dey look for gyul to *wine* on or to *lime* with and dat kinda ting. Is a whole group of them cause I have seen them in action. Yuh know how much gyul dey pull and how much gyul dey go *wine* on, how much dey drink (Lolo).

Bakhtin, like Durkheim, regards the community as of crucial importance in his thinking and therefore 'dialogism is among other things an exercise in social theory (Holquist 1990: 37). Bakhtin's ideas on carnival reveal that whilst it is a celebration of the collective body it is also a celebration of dialogue and because of this carnival is ultimately a ritual full of paradoxes and ambiguities, 'a face-to-face encounter with the strange oneness of triumph and tragedy, a sudden awareness of the disturbing linkage of dependency and autonomy' (Gilmore 1998: 207). In short 'carnival embraces all extremes: revolutionary, reactionary, profane and sacred, male and female all at once' (Gilmore 1998: 208). Although carnival may not always unite the entire society, it at least creates an image of moral unity which people are free to embrace or reject as they wish. Thus, the contradictory and ambivalent nature of carnival may both enhance the existing social order and promote a horizontal solidarity among oppressed groups (Gilmore 1998: 35-36). Clearly, for Lolo the ordinary world is simply reproduced within the Carnival world:

[N]obody could ever tell me Carnival is one love, is one unity is all dat kinda stupid rubbish. Because is about colour, is about money, is about whe' yuh come from, who living in Petit Valley and who living Mayaro and who living in Valencia... Because the experience of somebody who living in Sangre Grande is different to the person living in Glencoe right. What dey could do what dey cyah do, who know dem, who doh know dem. I have seen it and I feel because I'm brown and I'm female and alright looking, that I could go in. I could meander and I could be with the Sabeeney's in the North Stand whole day, de red-skin people and dem and ah feel ah could still go Spectrum and look on yuh know, depending on how I want people to perceive me or where I feel I want to happen (Lolo).

While Carnival may cause a large section of the population to behave in the same way at the same time it is clear that they do not come together as an undifferentiated whole. People tend to play *mas* and fete with people who are of

similar backgrounds, ethnicity or colour as themselves although this is not exclusively the case:

[A] group of young women working in de the bank, a group of young women teaching in Fyzabad, who want to play *Mas*, will play wit dey friends and dey might play in ahmm, if dey is Indian they might play with Raoul Carib, or if dey is African dey might play with Irvin McWilliams or Stephen Derek, and if dey is white dey will go an' play with Barbarosa or Poison (Stanley).

The fact that they participate at all in the national spectacle albeit in their separate social groups is 'proof' to many Trinidadians that come Carnival time Trinidadians unite as one. Trinidadians are well aware of the social and cultural forms of differentiation operating in the aesthetics of *mas*. Certain *mas* bands and fetes carry certain amounts of 'cultural capital'. This could signify a number of things about individuals such as their class position, the area they live in, the people they know, where they *lime*, and their cultural tastes.

I think some people know... what's going on with Carnival... which is the 'red' people band, they would tell yuh which is ahm, nice body 'black' people band they will tell yuh is Legends, Poison. Harts is 'white' people and those who have money, business people... the beautiful people in dis band. Tico Skinner out ah Barataria I believe, yuh know is a kind of town but not middle-class kinda... I don't know how to describe it. And Minshall is the who's who; who like Ella Andall ...and all dem you know, a lot of gay people too yuh mighten see people being open... You could tell people know who does jump in dem band and I think people want to buy bourgeois too eh, dey want to buy bourgeois. So people decide... which band they going to play with, because the moment yuh play with them you can boast all year "I play with this band" and it signifies yuh politics, yuh culture, yuh every thing. People know who you are, who you are about... (Lolo).

Residential location is often taken to be an indicator of wealth, status and colour in the same way that it indicates ethnicity. Trinidadians tend to use such indicators to make quick assessments of individuals they meet, so for example, the *mas* band Harts is synonymous with a particular section of society and those who aspire to those particular values and life-style:

Harts in particular used to be the upper-class, fairer people you know what ah mean... West Mooring, and you know those people, but now, it's not as diverse as Trinidad is as yet – everybody don't play in Harts yet, but it getting there... (Yvonne).

### **Bourdieu and Carnival: the aesthetization of Carnival**

In the Bakhtinian sense carnival is the festival of the people that marks the temporary suspension if not reversal of the social hierarchies of every day life, and their replacement by a temporary topsy-turvydom. What was once a vulgar and coarse event when dominated by urban blacks and the *Jamettes* was gradually brought under control. Once the more offensive elements such as the *pissenlit* were removed the respectable classes began to participate once more gradually transforming the excessive forms into 'genteel' ones. From the 1950s on with Carnival elevated to the status of national symbol it underwent a cultural consecration 'akin to a transubstantiation' (Bourdieu 2000: 6) marked by the appearance of the grand showy spectacles of the big 'historical' bands. By the 1980s, *Mas* was becoming increasingly commodified and Carnival became an object of consumption which meant that a new set of relations entered the festive framework. Bourdieu (2000) writing on culture in the 'anthropological sense' (material culture) and how it connects with conceptions of 'taste', provides a useful frame work and repertoire of concepts. For example taste is not something that emanates from the individual as natural appreciation but the result of a cultural competence at decoding the meaning given to objects of culture. Consumption of objects then becomes 'a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code' (Bourdieu 2000: 2). That is to say, individuals need to possess the cultural

competence to decode the meaning of objects. Ordinary everyday objects such as food, clothes, and decorative items may therefore be 'aestheticized' since principles of 'pure' aesthetics become attached to choices between them. In addition, economic and social positionings create different relations to such objects so that 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier':

Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (Bourdieu 2000: 6).

Once Carnival was consecrated by the Creole middle-classes it underwent a process of transformation where it was purged of its lower-class excesses.

*Masqueraders* now make 'choices' about which band they will play *mas* in on the basis of judgements they make about social and cultural capital: that is, on the basis of where they see themselves positioned or would like to be in the social hierarchy, and on the basis of aesthetic judgements about 'high' culture or 'art'.

This has led Burton (1997: 157) to argue that Carnival is less about a subversion of high by low than an attempt by the low to raise and aestheticize themselves to the level of the high, which indicates a subversion of the Bakhtinian ideal of the high becoming low. Even between the competing big bands there is an aesthetic sense of distinction operating which Stanley explains:

[People] they understand the positioning and the marketing, and de branding... It ain't no fool fool ting. They understand it very well, how dey goin' to brand deyself at that point in time. De ahmm...de claim dat was made by Minshall [4] about taking over the streets and equanimity and all of dat ... many of the people who play there and support that are... there's great snob value in it... a middle-class kinda black, or a black who have sort of elevated common craft – craft of the steel band and so on... 'cause he is the art-*Mas* man and da is license to art, da is legitimate culture, yuh have more cultural capital... so there's a certain kind of



built in notion of superiority in that band as well, and all of that is circumnavigated and circumscribed in their dialectics and so on, and their politics and so on... This is not a 'dis' to anybody, it's jus' an additional response from my point of view, that ahmm, it is really a kinda contest for social and cultural capital, in some thing that used to be a national festival right (Stanley).

The increasing cost of playing *mas* had not put women off because, according to an article in the *Sunday Guardian* (7/01/01), women are prepared to make the sacrifice for the sake of having their moment on the Savannah stage. Marissa Wharton, a twenty-six year old woman who paid TT\$1,375 (140 pounds) for her Legends costume, is quoted as saying 'that two days (of Carnival) is a different feeling. You feel that it's you alone on that stage. For me it's worth the price. You are forgetting your worries'. Putting a rather different view, the leader of a small band called De Boss thought that it was not that Carnival was some form of psychological therapy for the individual, nor was it anything to do with the quality of the costumes, but had everything to do with 'who you play with'. People play with bands such as Legends not only so that they can say to their friends 'I am playing with Legends', but also because they believed they would meet the nation's upper-class and tourists. Bands increase the cost of costumes to attract high-income groups and keep low-income groups out. As a result some small band leaders feel that certain big band leaders are turning the grass roots activity of *playing mas* in to an elite activity. Richard Afong, Chairman of the National Carnival Bands Association (NCDA) responded to such criticism by denying that the big bands are creating a class system in Carnival and that playing *mas* was instead just an expression of 'the will to socialize'. Some people criticize band leaders and designers for exploiting women *masqueraders* but putting them in

skimpy costumes that simply intend to put the female body on display rather than transform it in the tradition of the carnivalesque. Afong takes the view that times have changed and so have styles with the result that not only do younger women prefer to wear less but they do not object to the high prices.

*Mas* bands have become spaces that define a particular preference in costume style, and conceptions of aesthetics. Roach's (1996: 249) study of Mardi Gras in New Orleans also reveals the coded relationships between exclusivity and cultural capital:

[E]verything depends on where one participates, with whom, and at which occasion, public and private, and thus on the minutely detailed laws, written and unwritten, of inclusion and exclusion by which one is socially located and judged (Roach 1996: 245).

Roach argues that in New Orleans both carnival and the law continue to provide antagonistic sites for the playing-out of the cultural politics of social identity and difference where they operate as agents of cultural transmission, particularly in preserving the exclusionary hierarchies of the social elite whilst also serving as instruments of contestation and change (Roach 1996: 243). The laws relating to carnival expose a contradictory attitude towards carnival because, on the one hand, the law provides a space where transgressions are overlooked, but, on the other, carnival becomes law in the sense that the carnivalesque practices that were unpunished illegalities are now legalized – transgressive activities become dignified and legally protected practices (Roach 1996: 243-245).

The organization of the New Orleans *krewe*s reinforces social hierarchy and enforces social discipline on the families of the elite (New Orleans society is still rigidly stratified) in that they comprise a rank-ordered array of status groups

(Guillotte 1990: 39). Roach argues that, not knowing this the outsider is likely to fail to pick up on the subtleties contained within the spectacle and what they tell us about the relationships between people outside of the event (Roach 1996: 249).

Thus, 'carnival tradition asserts and enforces historic claims of entitlement, priority, and exclusivity' (Roach 1996: 245).

Roach points out that the pairing of the terms Carnival and Law may seem a perverse shackling of opposites perhaps not too dissimilar to my shackling of collective effervescence and freedom, but the point to stress is that the pairing of such opposites simply affirms the ambivalent nature of Carnival.

Whilst Carnival exhibits a number of paradoxes, it still remains a remarkable social ritual in which the various classes and ethnic groups meet but without either becoming a unity or splitting into two separate carnivals - that is it is inherently dialogic: 'the modern carnival contains the different elements united to form a differentiated whole, with each of its constituent elements in symbiosis or conflict with the other' (Johnson 1983: 189). Thus the growing trend in 'All Inclusive' fetes is symbolic of the changes in Carnival which mirrors the multiplying and increasing social divisions in contemporary Trinidadian society. I shall now turn to another common social institution known as the *lime*.

### **The *Lime***

Around Carnival time the *lime* becomes the organizing core of carnival activities.

Some carnival *fetes* are specifically 'cooler fetes' where people bring their own coolers full of drinks and organize their *liming* crew. Cheryl-ann who is in her early twenties told me:

Everybody, all the friends move together, just hang around cuz I'm a person I like a lot of attention...and I just enjoy my friends calling me "Let's go here" yuh know....I think I enjoy the preparations for Carnival than Carnival itself, all the parties: Anchorage; Pier One; Mobs. Everybody just, yuh know "come let's go Anchorage". ...

Konigsbruggen (1997: 187) has noted that the appropriation of the term *liming* by the Creole middle-class has transformed it into a national pastime so that quite ordinary activities such as a beach picnic; or having some drinks on a friend's verandah becomes a uniquely Trinidadian experience.

Michael Lieber's (1975: 326) ethnographic account of *liming* focuses upon male street life in an urban setting namely Port of Spain. *Liming* basically consists of 'just hanging around' but 'hanging around with eyes and ears keenly tuned to the flow of the action and the recognition of advantage'. By associating *liming* with the street lives of males particularly proletarian males, Lieber initially inscribed the gendered dualisms of inside/outside and reputation/respectability on what has become an important feature of Trinidadian social life. Miller (1994) points out that the older sense of the term is used to refer to men hanging around on specific street corners where they smoke, show off their clothes, and *soot* or *psst* (heckle) passing women, exchange news and hope for some action that they can participate in. Lieber (1976: 326) found that *liming* spots or 'zones' are pivotal points in the 'action topography' of the city because such points are strategically located in spots where the *limers* are able to access visually the available or potential action. Macky who lives in Arima, the eastern end of the East-West

corridor, cited the 'corner' or the 'block' as the favoured *liming* spot for himself and his 'pardners':

I does leave the corner where we does *lime*, smoke, play cards, wha'ever *lime*. we call it de corner or de block. I'll leave the corner and every year I leave and go further places; passport filling up. I see dem fellas and dem still sitting down dey – dey never go Tobago. Dey not looking for no wuk. If dey geh a wuk is small wuk dey geh-ing. Dey more sit down and hustle...some who hustling weed. The corner remains the same... (Macky).

*Liming* has expanded to mean any gathering of people for the purposes of relaxation or entertainment. Car ownership greatly expands *liming* possibilities.

This London-based Trinidadian describes the *liming* scene in Trinidad as different to that in London:

It's not so cold over here [Trinidad], people are more friendly, we don't get hassles like you do in London for example. You can go to Smokey & Bunty's buy a few beers and *lime* in the streets practically all evening from nine o'clock until six o'clock a.m. and the residents and police do not come hassle you. In London you can't do that; two hours in an area, with music playing too loud police will come and residents will start to complain... (HJ).

Miller's (1994: 38) observations of people's homes indicated that male *limes* were organized around the downstairs sections of houses built on pillars, or even the veranda. This is borne out by HJ's comment:

Trini's are professional *limers*; they really know how to *lime*. A couple of years ago I went to see some house and most of the houses I went to see had a bar and a *liming* area. And even now when I go round to look at places now the first thing that's talked about is we have to have a barbecue and then a *liming* spot.

In the expanded meaning *limes* may consist of single sexed groups such as 'man *limes*' or girl *limes* or mixed *limes*. The most basic characteristic of *liming* is coming together to spend time. It is for this reason that the *lime* is at the organizing

core of carnival socializing. This interviewee describes some of the preparation involved for Carnival fete-ing:

You have to co-ordinate fetes too 'cause you have a group of friends and another group of friends and yuh have to make sure everybody end up in the same fete. Yuh have to go and buy tickets for everybody, and make sure everybody going; and who's picking up who and who's getting a lift back home. So it's a co-ordinated effort (Mari-Ann).

Whether one plays *Mas* or not often depends on if one's friend's are willing to play too because there's no fun in playing alone. As this male respondent says lack of company is the main reason he never played *mas*:

...my parents never really allow me [to play *Mas*], and then I was never really interested, you know, because most of my friends and cousins like Sherwin and them - they never really play *Mas*, so... I was always lacking the company nuh... Sherwin moms, she play *Mas* right through until probably about two years ago she stop and then my sister, she plays *Mas* also, last year she played and about four years straight before that, its just this year she didn't play... (Jerry)

Similarly, this female respondent said:

Since I started secondary school I stopped playing Kiddies Carnival and I've never played like adult *Mas* like with Poison (one of the large *Mas* band) or stuff, but next year for sure. [Why was that?]... it was because no-body wasn't really interested in it in form one, yuh just want to come in town and *lime*. But now is like ah want to play. Well last year all my friend they just didn't want to play but everybody say they playing next year so we all playing... (Cheryl-ann).

The band that one plays in is determined by who one's friends play with and as I have already indicated may depend upon a range of other factors such as ethnicity, colour, class, social aspirations and cultural capital. It becomes clear that individuals tend to *lime* with people of similar social background, ethnic group or values. Indra, a school teacher, who is not of the social background normally associated with the band Harts and Poison to some extent explained:

I play with 'Poison' and I play with 'Harts'... the first year I played... well a lot of my friends were playing in Poison for one thing, so, you want to play with a big group of people because you're out for such a long period of time, and its much more fun partying with a big group of friends than just a couple of you... (Indra). *J'ouvert*, which opens the start of carnival, is not dominated by *pretty mas* which means that anyone can play. One of the main differences is that *J'ouvert* is more of an inclusive form of the carnival celebrations. People do not go to Port of Spain to see *J'ouvert* in the same way they go to see *Mas*, but are more inclined to play *Jouvert*. It is far more local, chaotic, communal, anonymous, abandoned, ecstatic, and 'dirty' – in a word it is bacchanal.

[*J'ouvert*] well, first of all, it's generally costless. So there's that element. There's the hour of the morning ... nothing competing for your time except sleep, right there ain't have no party or nothing. I want to suggest something about the act in itself and nothing trite about mud and the disappearance of distinctions and everybody become one in mud and... that is not true, people does even choose to play in their friend mud band, please! Nothing like that but in fact maybe it is related... while I know that the distinctions do not disappear, people pretend they do - everybody try to act like nothing matters (Harley).

The 3Canal song *Blue* (1997) speaks of 'turning the world upside down' which is in contrast to the 'Hollywood' extravaganza of Carnival Tuesday which reiterates hierarchy with its symbolic Kings and Queens and has become an over-organized production. The anonymity of *J'ouvert* then gives way to the shimmering semi-naked bodily spectacle in which the conventions that are mimicked are not those of a mythical tradition but those of an equally mythical modernity. The carnival season is the social season where being seen in the 'right' band and part of the *lime* is what counts above all else. The competitive element of the modern carnival represents the ideology of the market place in which all have 'equal opportunity' and the best always wins (Alonso 1990: 119). Thus, in this context the

egalitarianism that is characteristic of carnival is not the generic bond of a *communitas*, but takes the peculiarly modern form of ‘equality of opportunity’ – ‘an equality perhaps more opportunistic than is equal’ (Alonso 1990: 119).

### **Freedom: Emancipation - *J'ouvert***

From midnight Carnival Sunday the Emancipation celebrations began. In effect, Jouvay became Emancipation. Some where along the way the name Emancipation was withdrawn; but the celebration continued with, poetically, a more appropriate name, one confirming not only the dawn of Carnival Monday morning, but asserting the dawn of a new day for those previously enslaved on the island. Jour ouvert, *J'Ouvert*, Jouvay! (Earl Lovelace)

Historically Emancipation and Carnival celebrations merged and the result was a further creolization of carnival celebrations. With this change *Devil mas* became a form of masquing associated with *J'ouvert*. The symbol of the devil represented not just the horrors of the past but a freedom from bondage. In this way, then, the narratives of slavery and freedom came to be inscribed into the structure and meaning of Carnival.

If the symbolic re-enactment of *Canboulay* by the ex-slaves was a celebration of freedom from bondage, and an assertion of black humanity in ordinary everyday terms, what did freedom mean to the ex-slaves and what part do these ideas play in today's Carnival? I will begin by saying a little about some of the complexities inherent in the concept of ‘freedom’ and then explore the link between Emancipation and *J'ouvert*, before ending with a discussion of what Trinidadians mean by ‘freedom’ today.

The meaning of freedom is taken up by various writers in a book edited by Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher (1992), of the same title. In this general collection of writings the various contributors examine what freedom meant to the



masters and the slaves. Although, in principle at least, all men were equal there existed a paradox in terms of the social position of Europeans and Africans in Post-emancipation societies. Two basic frames of reference may be distinguished when it come to interpreting the meaning of freedom. The first understands freedom within the context of economic development and the world market. The second sees it within the context of the class struggle. Bolland (1992: 113) exemplifies the latter when he suggests that:

Labour was central in the emancipation process, but the meaning of freedom for the former slaves was not limited to their gaining control over their own labour. Emancipation, for them, promised something even more, namely the possibility of taking control of their own lives.

Since the differences between Europeans and Africans were constructed within discourses of 'race' and so understood as transmitted through 'blood', the granting of freedom did not immediately alter perceptions of European superiority. Hence, emancipation is best examined as a prolonged process (Bolland 1992: 114) because the former slaves found themselves still struggling against existing power structures and market forces as they tried to create a place for themselves in the new society. Emancipation did not automatically create a set of conditions that was conducive to the betterment of the former slaves and was in reality but a series of on-going adjustments for the purposes of sustaining the economic and political positions of those who depended on labour and those who supplied it; the relationship between master and slave was now one of capitalist and wage labourer (Bolland 1992: 116). That is to say:

[W]e should view the nineteenth century as a period of transition from one system of domination to another, each involving distinct forms of labour control and patterns of labour resistance (Bolland 1992: 115).

The positionings of the former masters and slaves meant that they had different conceptions of freedom. The former was based on their right to hold and dispose of property, access to a pool of cheap labour and generally the freedom to conduct their public and private business without interference. The latter on the other hand held a notion of freedom based on personal autonomy, not only to move freely but also to establish a family, home life, religious life and to educate themselves. Slavery had severed kinship ties for the Africans, and part of transcending slavery was the recovery of such ties, with education as a means of transformation and route to becoming civilized. Freedom, which in reality meant that the ex-slaves were now 'free' labour, produced new social relations wherein one side comprised the owners of the means of the production and the other comprised of wage-labourers. New forms of exploitation emerged and freedom to a large extent meant control over varying degrees of exploitation. If the former slaves looked to create 'a new way of being' which was not that of plantation slaves what would this new way of being consist of? One suggestion put forward by Alonso (1990: 89) is that the ex-slaves sought to transform their 'social identities' through their disengagement with field labour on the plantations. Instead they preferred to engage in trades, domestic service, crafts, or other more prestigious occupations. However these attempts to create new social identities to some extent perpetuated the cultural categories of the plantation system. The ex-slaves marked their freedom by adopting the categories and signs of status and prestige associated with

the whites or the free-coloureds (Alonso 1990: 90) For example, another means of being free was the conspicuous consumption of imported luxuries. Those who continued to work on the land did so on a part-time basis and now had a measure of control over their labour. However, the struggles between the planters and labourers continued.

Lovelace's essay *The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan* (1998) is partly an exploration of freedom through what he calls the 'Emancipation-Jouvay' tradition, which illustrates the complexities around the issue of freedom. He argues that because the Emancipation-Jouvay tradition was never really consolidated or built upon it has become an appendage to the Carnival celebrations where it is divorced from its political and social roots, tamed, and presented as a neutral aesthetic. When Emancipation celebrations were tacked on to Carnival, the spirit of emancipation gradually permeated even the new official carnival and transformed it into to a cornucopia of dance, speech, sound and movement. A wealth of *J'ouvert* characters (such as Devils, *Jab Molassies* and Midnight Robbers) became symbols of rebellion and resistance. The symbol of the devil in particular came to represent not just freedom but also served as a reminder of past horrors, but in time they became formalized into rituals no longer having any particular relevance.

For Lovelace, the emancipation-*J'ouvert* spirit was revived after World War One when the Steelband was born. The *Badjohns* (feared hooligans connected to urban working-class communities and Steelbands who used violence to defend their territory, dignity and honour) gave the Steelbands an air of disreputableness,

excitement and danger. It was essentially a working-class phenomenon born out of the experiences and daily struggles of ordinary 'black' Trinidadians for self-affirmation and control over their lives. It was therefore out of the exigencies of nation building that the steelband movement was co-opted as a national symbol.

As Lovelace points out:

When we woke up to the realization that we were independent and that independence meant having a culture that we could call our own, we discovered that all we had that might be termed indigenous or native was what had been created or reassembled and maintained here by those at the bottom of the economic ladder (Lovelace 1998: 56).

Thus, the steelband movement like the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Carnivals had to be purged of the violence that had become part of its defiant energy and re-defined as something else more palatable to the middle-class such as nationhood. This meant subjecting Steelbands to regulations in which the Savannah stage replaced the street as the central performance space, along with the construction of more barricades and security to keep out the very people whose communities inspired its very inception. As Carnival mutates its symbolic connection with Emancipation becomes more tenuous as it becomes redefined in the popular imagination as a good time – a *lime*:

What Carnival does is bring the rest of the world in line with me, because I could have the same mood and approach to a social life, 365. Generally I find most of my close friends in New York...come like Friday we used to go out on a little *lime* and that would be like a party that would go on through till seven in the morning...and when we party we party hard. So it's like your shirt could come off, you could drink or not drink: it's extreme partying. What Carnival does is bring the rest of the suddenly on my wave length and realizing that the most important thing here is to *lime*, and generally, the most important thing is to *lime* eh (Harley)

Nevertheless, the memory of *Canboulay* and the link to emancipation through re-enactment and the continued existence of traditional characters still makes Carnival a surrogate performance of what has long been forgotten:

Its letting go and letting your spirit be controlled by the beat of the drum, the music, the melody and the pan in a lot of ways, it's freeing up but it's celebration as well. The tradition of carnival grew out of celebration, out of slavery, out of getting away from master's whip, by singing songs, mimicry, its out of that tradition: a celebration. The carnival season really encapsulates your entire year, the situation, the mood of the country, topics that were important to John Public - in the music they talk about it and make jokes about it – *Kaiso*, *picong* and then we dance and we sing (Tony aka Chinese Laundry).

Another, dimension of freedom is one that I have already mentioned in relation to ecstatic states which for Miller (1991; 1994) takes the form of an 'autosexuality' evoked mainly by women through the dance movements of *wining*. Miller makes a connection between the Hegelian notion of 'absolute freedom' and sexuality, which becomes the idiomatic expression of such freedom. Amidst denunciatory cries of lesbianism and gross immorality, Miller argues that the performance of the women is:

...essentially a sexuality which does not require men; it is not lesbianism but auto-sexuality. The women in Carnival as they become involved in the dance, are not tremendously interested in who or what they are *wining* upon, they will *wine* on each other, most often no-one at all, but the object of *wining* is in most cases really themselves. It is an expression of a free sexuality which has no object but itself, and most especially it is a sexuality not dependent upon men' (Miller 1991: 333).

### **The Meaning of Freedom For Trinidadians**

When Trinidadians speak of 'free up' what do they mean? Is to free up the same as being free or as freedom? Freedom or the need to free up suggests the need to break free of restraint or constraints but is this a real or symbolic state? How do Trinidadians identify the restraints they require periodic release from? 'Free up'

for many Trinidadians, in the colloquial sense simply, means ‘to relax, hang out, drink some beers, talk and laugh’, but it is also used in the sense of ‘being free’ from the ordinary tensions and restraints of daily life. For example, a respondent who described her ethnic background as ‘mainly Indian’, saw Carnival time as presenting an opportunity to ‘subvert’ the ‘traditional’ image of an Indo-Trinidadian woman – a good wife, mother and daughter who would not ordinarily be dancing down the road half naked with a rum bottle in her hand:

Its a time when we could relax and be free...get away from the traditional image... not be criticised or anything... you know maybe that’s why some women take it to the extreme, and I do think that some women behave quite vulgar at carnival. Maybe that’s why they cross that line... (Indra)

Myra an ‘Afro’-Trinidadian respondent viewed Carnival as an opportunity to forget her large physical size, as well as an opportunity to take on a persona different from her everyday one:

It’s a total shedding of self. For me when yuh carry around all of this (refers to her large size). Yuh have people saying stuff to you on the streets sometimes very hurtful, but you shake it off because you on yuh own mission, whatever you have to do. And being overweight it’s not easy especially in Trinidad. Trinidadian men, they really vicious with their mouths, they say all sorts of things... So *J’ouvert* Morning now is the only time somebody my size... can put on the shortest shorts and a T-shirt... and go jump up in town and nobody says what you look like. The same men who was jus’ saying stuff bout you... is the same man *J’ouvert* Morning jumping up or looking to *wine* on you... *J’ouvert* morning. So *J’ouvert* morning is the only time you really shed...and even in terms of personality...yuh exchange it. Cuz I’m very quiet.... well I wouldn’t say quiet.... I’m not a partier, *limer*.... but that’s just was the way I was brought up... people never came over home by me for a big *lime* and all that, it just wasn’t that way. So *J’ouvert* Morning now I could become what I’ve never been...

My respondents’ discussion about freedom may be organized under two loose themes: ‘abandonment’ and ‘physicality’. Abandonment essentially deals with overturning standard forms of public behaviour and dress codes, dancing in the

street, cavorting with strangers, drunkenness and overturning the rules of the workday. Physicality include material matters such as space or the body.

Accompanying these sometimes intense feelings of freedom is also a sense of fear of what freedom unleashes and of the dangers that accompany such excesses.

Within many Trinidadian's idea of 'freeing up' is notion of Carnival as a 'de-stresser' this is similar to the anthropological models that view of Carnival in terms of a 'safety-valve'. Macky explains:

The people live for Carnival. The liberation part of their life for the year, that dey jes' leggo a heavy ting. Bills backed up. Real problems. Pressures. But yuh have two days to jes' free yuhself in the road to music. Liberation. And it almost rejuvenates you for the rest of the year to come. Yuh know what ah mean it's a de-stresser. As Carnival is over people does term it as last year.

But not everything is forgotten as another respondent pointed out because of the important part that Carnival plays in highlighting specific social conditions or criticizing and ridiculing those in power:

I think it's a moment of easing the pressure valve, but not really forgetting because a lot of the issues are still present in the music, the social commentaries and everything... (Tony).

The fact that many Trinidadians see Carnival as a temporary release from ordinary pressures as indicated by the statements below, lends support to the periodic safety-valve thesis in which societies seek to rescue themselves from their own structural contradictions through rituals such as Carnival:

It's so much about expressing oneself and being free...its a spirit that you feel really, or something in the air that says that you can relax and you can forget about the bills and you can forget about the studying and everything for just a short time and just entirely enjoy yourself - within limits of course! But it is a lot about just letting yourself go... (Indra).

For Turner:

[C]ommunitas seems to be an indispensable human social requirement. People have a real need, and “need” is not for me a “dirty word”, to doff the Masks, cloaks, apparel, and insignia of status from time to time even if only to don the liberating Masks of liminal Masquerade. But they do this freely (Turner 1974: 243).

The ‘need’ Turner speaks of is the need to divest oneself from the alienating stresses of normal life. Communitas is characteristic of relationships undergoing ritual transition and these bonds are inherently ‘anti-structural’ it is also necessarily a temporary condition if society is to continue to operate in an ordered way. But not all Trinidadians would agree with the ‘release’ theory:

I mean, how long yuh go *wine* on a gyul for – two days? An’ stand up in de hot sun and jump to the same song fifty-five times? That bores me. I don’t want to do that. I think that’s nonsense. There are people who claim that it’s a great release for them and so on but most of the people who claim that, they are constrained by many social mores they find themselves in... I was one of the first men here in that culture to pierce my two ears... And man used to say “well he’s a batty man”. When I turn out so wearing an eyeliner an’ ting, man used to say “wha’ he story”, and I would do that on the day of the opening of parliament. So I didn’t need carnival to say “Oh god ah going to get on, ah going an’ release myself”. No! I don’t need carnival for that... (Stanley).

Stanley rejects the idea that the modern carnival creates space for ‘release’ since he seems to be indicating that the sense of release that people enjoy around carnival time is not ‘real’ but trivial if not illusory. Similarly:

First of all its not just *J’ouvert*, it’s Carnival, alright, the whole thing about carnival and overturning... you know your favourite band 3Canal, always mouthing off that thing about ‘turn the whole world upside down, blah blah blah’ but it works for people who promote carnival and have been promoting carnival for the past sixty years. I mean when you think about the intellectual producers of the discourse - they have never really been with people at the bottom, so...you know its... self-serving, I think it at least works to create this sense of being more democratic, more egalitarian when they celebrate carnival as this place where status and ranks that retain for the rest of the year... get wash away with mud, the thing is, people believe it. The power of discourse has the ability to change practice



and belief so people act like it, they often act like it and I actually appreciate the kind of space it does open up to do whatever without people being concerned. Last year I went with my little garbage bag... So I like to take advantage of that space, without buying into the ideas about what Carnival does and what it is... (Harley).

For me this simply emphasises the ambivalent nature of carnival rituals which both challenge and support the dominant order whilst subverting and reinforcing existing boundaries, hierarchies and sexual moralities (Gilmore 1998: 35).

### **Abandonment**

Since Carnival time is often seen as a time of inversion when the world is turned upside down, I was interested in how Trinidadians experience this 'liberation' that often appears as a cliché. My sense of the freedom that many Trinidadians were attempting to describe was that it was largely symbolic. Myra who spoke of freedom in terms of a 'shedding of self' was perhaps not describing an inversion but a greater tolerance towards things that would ordinarily be objects of ridicule. Jerry who described Trinidadians 'having *jumbies* in them' as a way of describing the unusual behaviour of some people around Carnival time; that is, some people experience Carnival as something that enters their body and takes over:

[Carnival time] is the best time of the whole year. After Carnival I get so depressed. I'm like what am I going to do now.... I can't go to a fete an jes' stand up. I'm always like jumping all over the place and pelting myself and just being crazy, mad... I don't come home until like eight in the morning...that's my life style. I get up and I run. I go to work. Come from work I run. I go to the gym. Play hockey or whatever and I go straight to the *Mas Camp*... after that we all go with a big cooler to the pan yard and sit, drink and *lime*. I mean there's nothing sweeter than listening to steel pan (Rene).

The interlinked dualisms that are characteristic of Caribbean societies - outside/inside, reputation/respectable, and masculine/feminine - are often inverted

during Carnival. For instance, normally the 'outside' relates to the public domain and is therefore considered to be a space where reputations are made by men. Thus insofar as Carnival space has become a female space this suggests that social life is unconsciously responding to the fact that women are more constrained by the conventions of society than men these days and that they are therefore more in need of a release. When a woman enters public space, it is normally simply to pass through. As I have already indicated, a woman walking down the road fully expects to encounter *sooting* as she passes through male space. Carnival inverts this sexualization of space so that the streets lose their masculine character whilst they are filled by thousands of female masqueraders. Women not only claim the streets but also suspend their normally modest behaviour for the duration of carnival: '[I]t is their annual opportunity to do all that the church and society condemns and further it encourages them to participate with so much feeling and outward show of devotion in the yearly religious climax of Lent and Easter' (Powrie 1956: 97). Thus in words of two of my interviewees:

[Women]... have this extra energy about them... [they] want to just free up a little - I mean most women you talk to, at this time of the year, they more relaxed and they look forward to some of the fetes and you know, carnival activities... During the year you would see them in their work uniform - they're very stiff and upright and at carnival time, they're more approachable and they are at ease... they just, hey, they're being who they are, if I should say that. Come Ash Wednesday, some of them go back to being stiff... (Trey).

Well... there are a few ladies who would *wine* and they would move in a ... what you say, ordinary way - they would just *wine*. And there are others who like to cock-up they leg and bend over, you know raise they leg... especially in front the cameras. As a man I would enjoy it - at the same time you wouldn't want to see your wife doing that! Or your girlfriend, so I contradicting myself... A lot of them, I feel a lot of them does be high too, you know the alcohol and so on because Ash Wednesday when you look at them, you wonder if that was the same person 'getting on' on stage carnival Tuesday, when you see them in their work clothes

and so on - they look so quiet and decent and so... I suppose the whole carnival thing have a jumbie in it because it make people do things that they don't normally do. I see man go party and take down dey pants and party in their drawers already! Yeah! I see a policeman do that this year! And he was on duty... what! I does normally go party and take of my shirt... do a lot of things I don't normally do, that is why I say it have a *jumbie* in it; all good though (Jerry).

Jerry likens the transformation in people's behaviour as well as his own around carnival time to being possessed by some spirit or *jumbie* which invades the body. Because carnival is a manifestation of collective effervescence people act in ways they would not normally - they follow their impulses, flirt openly and behave in an overtly sexual manner. For the middle-classes it is an opportunity to temporarily abandon the values of respectability. Turner commenting on the relationship between structure and *communitas* writes:

It is often believed that the lowest castes and classes in stratified societies exhibit the greatest immediacy and involuntariness of behaviour. This may or may not be empirically true, but it is at any rate a persistent belief held perhaps most firmly by the occupants of positions in the middle-rungs of structure on whom structural pressures to conformity are greatest, and who secretly envy even while they openly reprobate the behaviour of those groups and classes less normatively inhibited, whether highest or lowest on the status ladder (Turner 1974: 243).

The creole middle-class as a group is perceived to exhibit the signs of schizophrenic personality. On one side their outward values and material culture is white whilst on the other side their sub-consciousness and spiritual culture is black:

The unhappy, ill-knit fusion of these cultures has produced the negative personality of the coloured people. Carnival is the one chance in the whole year when the socially embarrassing facts of inheritance can be used to advantage, freely and openly (Powrie 1956: 98).

This particular dualism is seen by other writers such as Koningbruggen (1997: 99) to have produced a prudish and obsessional form of respectability that is oppressive and neurotic in character:

You find the same people that parade in the streets, the next day at work they are doctors and lawyers. They are not the same people who were there on the [streets] everything changes, their attitude, everything. They'd probably tell you I wasn't there it was someone else, it wasn't me. Carnival turns you into a different person actually, it brings out the animal in you, the whatever in you, it brings it out for that two days then you go back to your normal self (RG).

The church and social conventions provide the bases for middle-class morality and sexual conduct particularly for middle-class women who are expected to be devoted and chaste. Middle-class men are less burdened by conformity and propriety and frequently have extra-marital affairs. In Trinidad the women involved in such affairs are known as the 'deputy' or the 'outside woman'. The frequency with which such relationships occur has led Miller (1994: 93) to refer to it as an 'institution' which in one common form consists of a husband with a sophisticated wife who is in effect a status symbol and her deputy who may either be working class or simply more domesticated and devoted than his wife. Such patterns of behaviour indicate the legacy of a Victorian morality observed by the middle-classes which denied women sexual pleasure or freedom but at the same time constructed lower-class women as possessing an active sexuality and looser morals.

As women come outside for Carnival men withdraw to more inner-oriented events and activities thus indicating the occurrence of a reversal of the male-outside and female-inside dichotomy. Some of my male respondents took the view that whilst men increasingly did not *play mas*, they still participated in the festivities:

Some of them [men] just watch on and they jump in the bands without costumes or they just walk around and take pictures and stuff. It's their choice. But mind you,

that is debatable about more women into carnival than men uh... because from what I see, a lot of men participate in carnival... to me, it's a 50-50 mix... Women in costumes and women playing themselves would sell a newspaper more than a man in a costume. People don't take into account that men are playing pan, wire bending, playing music in the brass bands... that is why I say its a mix, a 50-50 mix (Trey).

I don't feel that women participate more than men, but they actually buy costumes more than men. The men are not at home, I can tell you that! They're in the street you know, somebody should actually get the statistics of that! (Tony).

Rudi explained that young men like himself tended not to play *Mas* because they preferred to watch:

I don't know is just that fellas have a different focus these days that ahm dey rather go in town and look at ladies play *Mas*; look at ladies in dey bikinis and...well dey body. Dey bottom yuh know look tuh see who have a nice body who have a nice shape, who could dis, who could *wine* all dem kinda lil stupidness nah. Sometimes yuh go an take a lil chip in a band and *wine* and stuff like that...

The spectacle of the female body is a big draw which seems to confirm Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1992: 491) view that Carnival in Bom Jesus da Mata, Brazil is 'largely designed for the pleasure of men and boys. The female was liberated... but only for the purpose of titillating male fantasies of sexual abundance and erotic abandon'. Further, whilst the 'female' emerged as the unifying erotic image that was central to the festival, most women were peripheral to the festivities.

### **Physicality**

Physicality consists of two related dimensions. The first concerns the body and the second concerns the space in which the body moves. As I mentioned above carnival cannot be separated from the physical movements which temporally structure the time-space environment. *J'ouvert* produces a different sense of physicality and atmosphere from that of Carnival Tuesday's *pretty mas*. The

former is characterized by the grotesque, chaos, demons, disorganization, inversions of all kinds and a sense of an undifferentiated mass of bodies, whilst the latter is more akin to a highly ordered and organised grand production based upon 'exotic', historical or fantasy themes. It is perhaps *Jouvert* that comes closest to the visual imagery of the Bakhtinian carnival as the people's second life with its suspension of hierarchy, privileges and prohibitions. The *Jouvert* bands start out with a group of core members which gradually snowballs into hundreds and thousands of followers that take over the streets moving to the rhythmic sounds of Iron, Pan and *Soca*. The body has particular significance in Bakhtin's carnival in relation to its display of the grotesque since the essential principle is that of degradation:

[T]he lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity (Bakhtin 1984: 19-20).

As I have already mentioned for Bakhtin 'upward' and 'downward' take on a particular topographical significance in grotesque realism where upwards is symbolic of heaven whilst downwards is earth. In the Trinidad Carnival the prominence of the lower bodily aspect is best articulated in *wining*:

You emphasize more on the waistline; yeah, your waist, your body, the back, your entire body but mostly the waistline and below the waist... women are more extravagant, I don't know, they have to put on more I think to attract the men, that's what I think. When a woman *wining* good, it does attract a man, it get a man in the mood, you know... (Rudi)

The sexual connotations are evident from the descriptions people give of the movement:

There's [a] gyration which means more like you'll be turning up, kind of spiralling up and down right and you can sense that difference. But in certain songs... there'll be more lateral movement rather than the gyration... (Harley).

Music and *wining* go hand in hand with the result that as this respondent points out changes in the music have also resulted in changes in the movements:

...the beat is a faster beat, is a more intense beat, it more sensual, its more yuh know, it have a sex thing to it, is a erotic kinda thing man. You see some youths dancing and thing now and yuh know getting down on the ground, woman never do that, by they self. I want to know what the hell is going on. It's crazy but that is what it is. Especially to the youth who is more grounded. When I say grounded, I mean the youth outta the ghetto... Let's face the reality, the thing has changed (Pierre).

Pierre makes the connection between the more 'grounded' youth and the 'ghetto', which are spatial terms that may be recoded as references to class. It therefore comes as no surprise that the most 'vulgar' aspects of *wining* are associated with the working-class. One way class is inscribed on the body around Carnival time may be seen in terms of who does what with their body:

Yuh see during the year when yuh go out the road and somebody go say, "How she could come outside in dem clothes"...Carnival time everybody have licence to put on wha' ever they want; de doctor daughter, de gyul who working in the bank who does skin up dey face at yuh. Yuh could come outside in a thong, g-string, whatever, with all she ass outside, all she red ass outside and nobody care that she degrading herself. All during the year the African gyul and dem doing the same thing: dem ain't have no morals – dey loose they all how they dis they dat they de odder. That's how it is. And I'm against that and I am just a voice... (Lolo).

The spatial metaphors of 'inside' and 'outside' have had a special significance in the development of Trinidad's Carnival. The Grand Carnival balls in which a 'genteel' form of masquing was engaged in by the European elites took place *inside* the grand houses which marked the boundaries of civilization. Another type of masking practiced by the same group and involved some form of 'inversion' through the donning of the attire of the blacks took place *outside* in public spaces,

in other words outside of the civilized world. The carnival of the 'Africans' was from the beginning an 'outside' event on two counts: first, it took place in open spaces such as the street, and second, the Africans were socially and culturally positioned outside the boundaries of civilization. A similar dichotomy emerged between 'uptown' and 'downtown'. In the contemporary period both areas, uptown and downtown are integrated into the carnival circuit. However certain bands that have a high percentage of middle-class masqueraders will avoid certain parts of the downtown route as this respondent explains:

I know where to go and where not to go. There are certain parts of Trinidad that you do not go for Carnival. Like for example there is a stigma attached to a corner no band who know about that corner will stop their band there because they know that will break up the band. Because they know, we call them characters, a lot of characters hang out in that area. The band member might mash one of them...they just hang out there they are people from St. James and all those so-called *badjohns*... (Boy).

With freedom comes a sense of excitement and fear. As a symbolic site of 'freedom' the street is full of danger as well as possibilities, the unknown and the unexpected. As I have already indicated in Trinidad and the Caribbean generally social space is divided into inside/outside or private/public, which is synonymous with the dichotomy between home and the street. The home is representative of the values of respectability and the inside, whilst the street is associated with the values of reputation and the outside. Symbolically, it is the street that is transformed into 'sacred' space during carnival time. If daily life is seen as a mundane affair or struggle to survive then this linear trajectory of one's life is interrupted every year by the cyclical rhythm of carnival when social order, work and daily struggle give way to freedom, laughter, play, and bacchanal. Time, space



and bodies are inextricably linked because the 'ritualized' movements of bodies acting together generate the experience of collective effervescence and of transcending time and space producing a temporary restructuring. The thrill of taking over the streets and participating in the energetic flow of 'freedom' is an ambivalent experience: on the one hand, there is the thrill of freedom to dance on the streets with fellow Trinidadians; and on the other there is the sense of fear that freedom brings when ordinary rules are suspended. For many Trinidadians taking over the streets and therefore the outside, is often identified as the main factor conveying the psychological and physical experience of freedom:

What was nice about carnival for me was that you could really let go yourself and you could dance in the street! Whereas normally, you can't dance in the street - they does say you crazy, but you know its a kind of a letting go and dropping your guard, you know, so, you could *wine*, you could take a bottle of rum and put it on your head, nobody crying you down at that time because it all comes together with the *Mas*... So this is a time for letting go, all your stress. You get rid of it; that is carnival, we look forward to it (Tanty).

Is the feeling of freedom. Yuh know just being able to go anywhere, yuh on the road, yuh seeing everything on the road, everybody together yuh doh have to pay to come to carnival on the road tha' the difference... anybody could come and see even the vagrants seeing carnival. *J'ouvert* Morning yuh doh know if is a vagrant or not... (Cheryl-Ann).

This sense of freedom is underscored by the fact that freedom of movement is guaranteed in Port of Spain and police presence is minimal unlike Notting Hill Carnival for example where freedom of movement is rigorously restricted by specially installed road blocks and high levels of policing. Perhaps the experience is best described as a fear of the unknown accompanied by a sense that anything can happen, which is both simultaneously thrilling and frightening:

I like the whole concept of it [*J'ouvert*]...the freeness of it anybody could come and jump yuh know is not like the big bands where yuh have security and when yuh crossing the stage “get off get off“ yuh know, but the ‘jam’ I cya handle that...with all the people especially with downtown some streets where it small and everybody just pushing yuh and yuh just in the middle there. I cya enjoy that. Ah cya move, Ah cya breathe and I’m so short already... (Cheryl-Ann).

*J'ouvert* is one part of the culture that remain the same over the years not like *Mas* which has been changed around and stuff like that to make it more marketable... *J'ouvert* is like anybody everybody from anywhere coming out...and it may not be totally safe but yet still is freedom that yuh have on that day or night... There’s also this fear I have about *J'ouvert*, is probably from my father, mother telling me stories...is not safe to be going out there by yuhself in the night. Mostly, I move with Rudi and them, those guys, before ah used to move by myself...so there’s this fear anything could happen. Somebody could walk up behind yuh and stab yuh or ...the truck could run over yuh foot...da’s the only thing about *J'ouvert* that ah don’t like – the unexpected (Tinny).

Monday and Tuesday, you playing *mas*, you could do anything you want, but, *J'ouvert* you could really do anything you want... A vagrant could be *wining* up on you and you would not know, because everybody black, and stink and dutty. You kissing up and *wining* up on somebody you scorning two days ago. You wouldn’t look in their direction; but you don’t know who it is! (Toya).

For Indra the closeness of other semi-naked, writhing bodies smeared in paint, mud, or pitch oil in various states of drunken-ness and exuding sensuality an did not have any appeal:

I have a big problem with people I don’t know touching me and when we went around the Savannah, there were just so many people who weren’t playing in the band came in... it was so hard for me because there were all these people in the band that I didn’t like or I didn’t know, they were all dirty and stuff and I’m not into that dirty thing... cuz its not pretty! (laughs)... I don’t really like people touching me. People think I’m cold in that way - I walk through a crowd as if I’m trying hard not to touch anybody... (Indra).

Indra’s feelings highlight the two different sides of carnival one which is chaotic and dark in which the grotesque body rules, and the other where the body is presented as a pretty spectacle as part of a well organized extravaganza. Women are thought to favour the latter kind of *Mas* because it is an opportunity to escape

from the humdrum reality of ordinary life into the realm of fantasy. The increased exhibitionism in carnival is often seen to be the direct cause of increased female participation in if not domination of *Mas*. Trinidadian dramatist Sonya Moze is quoted as saying: 'Whenever you're given freedom, you sometimes abuse it – that's part of the transition' (quoted in Mason 1998: 136). The view amongst some Trinidadians such as Lolo is that more women *play mas* because we appear to be living in more body conscious times where physical appearance becomes inseparable from one's identity, but also because women could choose to 'brand' their bodies in a particular way by associating themselves with a particular band in much the same way people could choose to make statements about themselves by wearing Armani or Versace.

I'm telling you why a lot more women play, right... It has a lot to do...with this idea of youth, this idea of beautiful bodies...that you are a brand, that you could attract men, that you are beautiful woman. People are going to talk about how good looking you and a whole group of you are... That's why yuh have a lot of all female only sections, big strapping muscular guys at the side protecting these women who want to play by themselves, who want to come out and have a good time. Dey ain't really looking for no man, but in a sense are they're advertising for a man because somebody seeing yuh yuh looking good, yuh have a nice body, right. Yuh drawing attention tuh yuhself, is about egos, is about sex, is about looking good, looking nicer than the next gyul, seeing which man yuh could pull, if yuh go pull a white man, a Syrian with money... Is just about looking good, being beautiful and looking better dan other people ah right. These people are able to go into parties three months later and people go say "da's the red gyul wit de tattoo on she bellybutton, she was in front of the camera when dey was crossing the stage, flaunting herself". So everybody knows who she is right, so dey don't want to be anonymous, yuh could go in any crowd and people know yuh...yuh famous, yuh part of de happening crowd (Lolo).

## **Conclusion**

In the previous chapter I looked at some of the interpretations of carnival as an inversion of hierarchy (Bakthin 1984), a licensed affair (Eagleton, 1981), or a

mechanism of political transformation (Ladurie 1981). In this chapter I have examined what Carnival means to some Trinidadians and thereby outlined the discourses that shape how they view and experience it. My conclusion, then, is that those theoretical approaches that argue that Carnival is a time of licence and insight into the contradictions and paradoxes intrinsic to social life and renewal have much to offer. This is for three main reasons. First, for many Trinidadians Carnival is above all a liberatory experience:

Carnival time...there's a freedom of the people where the roads belong to the people there are no cars on the road, yuh can do what yuh want, drink as much as yuh want. There's total freedom...(Tinny).

Second, Carnival does indeed bring people closer together and so enhances feelings of national solidarity:

If is one time that every Trinidadian get together is Carnival. Everybody. Every race, every class, that all lines are cut, race lines, class lines. And yuh just enjoy yuh self. Every body as a Trinidadian does enjoy they self (Mari).

And third, my respondents brings out the various ways in which difference is inscribed and reproduced in the national festival.

## Notes

[1] Barbarosa is one of the largest bikini *Mas* bands popular with large numbers of *Masqueraders* from the middle and upper income sections of society and various public life figures.

[2] North stand is constructed every year in the Queens Park Savannah opposite the Grand Stand.

[3] 'Iron' consists of locally improvised instruments used to create a rhythm section

[4] Minshall is one of Trinidad's biggest *Mas* band and is associated with 'art' and 'high' culture.

## **Conclusion**

Using a combination of Durkheimian and Bakhtinian ideas, the thesis has examined the development of ethnic and national identity in Trinidad. Carnival was chosen as the focus for a study of the ambiguities that surround the issue of identity for the reason that it was appropriated by the state after Independence in 1962 as a symbol of national identity. Although, it is often perceived to be an 'Afro-creole' Trinidadian festival, Carnival has nevertheless become a genuinely popular event transcending ethnic and social differences. I began the thesis with a discussion of collective effervescence and dialogism as the main theoretical concepts. The concept of collective effervescence provides the theoretical link between national identity and Carnival, whilst dialogism provides a way to examine the embodiment of identity through narratives of 'experience': where bodies are engaged in a bodies-in-relation dialogue situated in concrete time and space. At first sight dialogism may seem incompatible with Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, but this need not be the case if we accept that for collective effervescence to occur bodies must come together in order to produce a homogeneity of movement that makes the group aware of itself and so brings it into existence. More specifically, it is through movement that the body crosses from one state to another with the result that carnival time is produced through bodies interacting within the time frame of the ritual itself. Thus the concept of social effervescence provides an explanation for understanding why people feel 'transformed', happier, more relaxed and willing to communicate with strangers around carnival time.

Dialogic interpretation has the advantage of allowing a much more complex understanding of cultural phenomena than other more established approaches because it insists on the co-existence of multiple dialogues within a community or process of historical development. Central to dialogism is the concept of *chronotope* which allows us to think of any particular time as a number of contingently related temporalities. Discourses of colonialism, for example, contained and produced spatial and temporal frameworks with the result that the relationship between the New World and the Old was one at least partially shaped by texts produced by Columbus, Vespucci and others. One result was that the New World Indians were fixed by Others in a particular time period where they came to symbolise the predominance of nature over culture, the primitive over the civilized, and backwardness over progress. Initially such texts deployed an Edenic metaphor according to which the Indians were defined by their innocence, beauty and nakedness. Later on, as the relationship between them and the Europeans became more conflictual, the imagery associated with them referred to savagery, cannibalism and perverse sexual practices. There is a sense, initially a European sense, in which their 'discovery' and re-naming represented the beginning of their history.

Dialogism also recognises the importance of the body as a site of sociality. For Bakhtin, the grotesque is manifested in that which protrudes from the body (for example as in the case of the masques of the grotesque realist tradition which often featured a big nose or a large arse) and so symbolically prolongs the body and connects it to the other bodies and to the world outside (Bakhtin, 1984: 316-317).



Dialogism, then, involves not simply the recognition of a multiplicity of voices but also of a wider plurality of relations, which makes it particularly useful for teasing out the complexities of creolisation, hybridisation and douglarization. The affinity between the approach and these phenomena arises because all of the latter empirically confirm the existence of the same sort of dynamic processes as the approach assumes. And the result is that the meaning of 'Trinidadian' has to be understood as contested because it involves the merging and dialogization of social, cultural and ethnic differences in conflict with each other. The hybridised body is therefore also to be understood as a grotesque body impure and constantly changing its features and so as destabilising all discourses of race. Moreover, the extension of the meaning of creolization beyond the body to include cultural practices means that culture more generally is understood as unfixed and so in a state of openness. The result is that ethnic or national 'identities' may be best understood not as essences but as positionings in a wider network of relations involving contestations of various kinds whether political, economic, social or cultural. Although in the popular imagination identities appear to transcend time, place, history and culture, they are in fact constituted through layers of invention and re-invention which means that they are constantly undergoing transformation as they interact with their environments. For Trinidad the challenge has been how to create one national Trinidadian body from many ethnically diverse bodies. In recognition of this Dr. Eric Williams wrote on Independence Day, 1962:

The task facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago after their Independence is to create a nation out of the discordant elements and antagonistic principles and competing faiths and rival colours which have produced the amalgam that is today the approximately 875,000 people of Trinidad and Tobago (Williams 1993: 278).

However, he also believed that there was a ‘fundamental underlying unity’ within the society. And it is the concrete form of this unity that I have attempted to describe in terms of Billig’s (1995) concept of ‘banal’ nationalism. At the core of Trinidadian identity, then, is the recognition that it is constituted by several different ethnic identities. However, this core is also constituted through the experience of the everyday: the experience of knowing as Ouditt stresses, the meaning of ‘gimme two with slight’; the experience of participating in a *lime*; knowing how to read a *wine*; and having the knowledge that enables you to understand the social meaning of *playing mas* in a particular band.

My exploration of the relationship between identity and Carnival followed two trajectories: one looked at the way Carnival was co-opted by the state as a symbol of national identity; and the second looked at what the re-enactment of such rituals tell us about the society and sociality. For the state, the benefits of Carnival may be seen as maintaining social cohesion, whilst for individuals they may be seen as creating a space of freedom. This experience of freedom is manifested as an annual psychological release from every day life and a bodily ‘free up’.

Stated in terms that relate my work to the pre-existing literature, my conclusions as regards Carnival are as follows. First, like Stallybrass and White (1986: 14), I think that carnival may be understood as a potentially transformative experience that is normally, however, ‘a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects’. Second, like Gilmore (1998: 35), I

think that its radical potential arises because it simultaneously involves ‘subvert[ing] the normal order while at the same time reinforcing normalcy’.

Third, like Bakhtin, I think that this contradictory effect may be best explained by the fact that Carnival is both a celebration of the collective body and a celebration of dialogue. Fourth, like Gilmore (1998: 36), I think that Carnival should ultimately be seen as a celebration of ambivalence itself. Finally, the thesis shows how Carnival almost literally embodies society’s inherent dualisms and paradoxes in the form of a series of interdependent dialogues between black/white, Indian/African, men/women, self/other, rich/poor, high/low, *pretty mas/dirty mas* and respectability/reputation. In so doing it breaks new ground both theoretically, by combining the ideas of Bakhtin and Durkheim, and substantively by showing for the first time how the study of identity and Carnival can illuminate one another.

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