

**"Whe' She Go Do":
Women's Participation in Trinidad Calypso**

Paper Prospectus

This paper is concerned with women's participation in Trinidad Calypso, which is part of my broader interest in gender and expressive culture in the Caribbean. This is primarily a socio-historical study, which analyzes the role of women in Trinidadian Calypso, focusing on female Calypsonians and their work. Attention will also be given to the portrayal of women as subjects of "traditional" Calypso songs.

This study is "periodized" into three categories, which correspond to different stages in the development of Calypso. Specifically, it examines the relative presence or absence of women in these stages. The stages delineated are:

—**the 19th Century "Jamet" Era**, also referred to as the "cariso" phase of Calypso, during which women as "chantwels" were quite active;

—**the Victorian Era**, associated with the alleged disappearance of women from the form;

—**the Contemporary Era**, a period subdivided into 1930s-1950s, 1960s-1980s, and present -day women in Calypso.

Specific attention is given to changes in the socioeconomic status of Caribbean women during these different periods, which may have bearing not only on the perceived image of women as participants in Calypso, but on the content of their songs. The 1960s-1980s period, for example, saw international Women's Movements, the U.N.'s Decade for Women, the Black Power Movement, and other social movements in the Caribbean and abroad. Their influence brought about, among many other things, a new awareness of women's issues. Consequently, during this period, more women began to participate in Calypso, and there emerged a definite female "voice" in the form. Of added importance is the fact that in the contemporary female Calypso arena, this "voice" now comes from diverse cultural, class and ethnic backgrounds in Trinidadian society, indicating the proliferation of female presence in the form.

The general aim of my research is to illuminate the larger role of women in Calypso, and specifically explore how women use what may be the most important form of social commentary in Trinidad. Particular points to be discussed are women's issues as evidenced in calypsos *by* women, a comparative analysis of their work with that of their male counterpart, and the question of authorship, with respect to a "female voice" in the form.

My study argues against the often-held assumption that women, at any particular point "disappeared" from Calypso; it asserts that despite the predominance of male Calypsonians, women have remained active participants in Calypso in some capacity throughout all the eras examined. Women's historic participation and contribution to the form has been generally neglected by researchers.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based largely on the work of Caribbean feminist social science researchers, whose efforts culminated in the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP), an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the realities of women's lives in the Caribbean region. Among the findings of the WICP are many theoretical perspectives highly relevant and applicable to both the role of women as calypso singers and the images of women in calypso songs. These perspectives range from women and family structure, to women and work, to male/female relations. This latter subject is of particular interest to my research, as it attempts to understand the ways in which women Calypsonians respond to the overwhelming sexual nature of the traditional themes in calypso, and the fact that women have been, in a most disparaging manner, the traditional calypso subject.

This study is based on research conducted in Trinidad in 1992, which involved archival work (through the West Indian Collection at the University of the West Indies) as well as personal interviews with women Calypsonians in Trinidad, and interviews with scholars and others involved in Calypso.

CALYPSO THEMES

Scholarship on the form has identified many different Calypso "subjects", ranging from local politics and personalities to foreign events. Characteristically humorous and satirical, Calypsos function as tributes to famous people, as blackmail (to the extent that there are accounts of people paying Calypsonians not to sing about them)¹, and as political electioneering, with Calypso as a forum for opposition politics. Often referred to as "the living newspaper" and "the mouthpiece of popular feeling", calypso functions as a principal vehicle to transmit meaning of particular events or situations to its society, and is therefore one of the most important forms of social commentary in Trinidad.

Calypso song content may be strictly political, or purely imaginative. It may comment on a true event or personality, or voice a personal grievance. When inquired as to the meaning of the form, all Calypsonians interviewed in this study stated that its principal function is to give a message. However, to understand the ways in which women, in particular, use this form of message-giving, and what their specific messages are, it is important to address the thematic foundation of calypso, in general. To better understand the import of women's calypsos, they must be measured against their male counterpart. What women are responding to through their art can only be understood in terms of what (or who) there is to respond to, thus an understanding of calypso "themes" provides a necessary framework from which to work.

Scholarship on Calypso has concentrated on different calypso "themes", ranging from the strictly political, to Africa as a theme (Boyce-Davies)², to race and social confrontation calypsos (Rohlehr)³. Yet by far the most common Calypso subject, or "theme" is women and sexual exploit, real or imagined. Traditional (male-composed) calypsos are generally disparaging in their portrayal of women. Images of women in calypso range from physical characteristics of dirtiness and ugliness, to woman's unfaithfulness, her being overly sexual, or not sexual enough, to her manipulateness and her greedy nature. Prominent throughout these images is the advocacy of the need for violence to control her. ("Black up dey eye, bruise up dey knee, And they will

¹Daniel Crowley. "Toward a Definition of Calypso" *Ethnomusicology* Vol.3 #2 1959: "Occasionally a prominent local person is approached with a calypso describing some pecadillo of his, real or imaginary, which is to be sung that night in the tent...The asking price for suppression of the song is usually \$300, but it is not known how many Trinidadians value their reputations to this extent."

²Carole Boyce-Davies. "The Africa Theme in Trinidad Calypso". *Caribbean Quarterly* 84-86

³Gordon Rohlehr. "Man Talking to Man. Calypso and Social Confrontation in Trinidad 1970 to 1984. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 84-86

love you eternally" urges one song). As many researchers attest, when dealing with the male/female theme, a large category of calypsos are devoted to the denigration and degradation of the female (Warner, Rohlehr, Hodge, Senior), in which women are "castigated as being ugly, dirty, stupid, vile, predatory, smelly, evil, etc"⁴ Mighty Sparrow's "Jean Marabunta": "so she ugly so she stupid...this disgraceful female/smells like saltfish tail", Mighty Spoiler's "Vincentian Doreen" : "Everybody know you bound to fraid water/But if you bathe you bound to smell better" or Lord Melody's "Antigua Girls": "I used to put a cloth bag over she neck/And then ah bathe she with disinfect/Is only there and only then/Never me again" are some examples. These images find much public favor, according to novelist and educator Merle Hodge, who states, "the embarrassment of woman is part of the national ethos...In Trinidad the calypsonian, the folk poet, is assured of heartfelt, howling approval when he devotes his talent to the degradation of woman" ⁵

Even studies which attempt to address other themes in calypso, readily admit that most calypso material falls under this sexual/hostility theme. Patrick Hylton's study "The Politics of Caribbean Music", focuses partly on the work of Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco). In identifying political commentary in his calypsos of the 1960s, he admits, "so great is his leaning towards sex that, as we get to the years 1965-1967, we find not one single socio-political song among his repertoire of over twenty songs."⁶ Although this was not the tendency for *all* male Calypsonians of the time (as evidenced in the many political and social commentaries one finds), it is important that this was true for Sparrow, who was perhaps the most famous. Hylton's study examines over 100 song recordings by Sparrow since 1960, "but those bearing a political message can be counted on the fingers." ⁷ Hylton later states: "One cannot help but wonder about what was happening in the society since there is no reflection of any public discontent in the songs of the leading Calypsonians..." ⁸ Furthermore, as suggested by Carole Boyce-Davies in her comparative examination of the image of women in three genres of Caribbean oral literature - the proverb, the folktale and the calypso - hostility, aggression toward women and "overt misogyny" are more pronounced in Calypsos

⁴ Olive Senior. Working Miracles. Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean. page 168

⁵Merle Hodge, "In the Shadow of the Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean" in Is Massay Day Dead? Orde Coombs, editor.

⁶ Patrick Hylton. "The Politics of Caribbean Music". *The Black Scholar*. September, 1975. Page 25

⁷ These are: "Federation", "Slave", "Solomon Affair", "A Model Nation", "Dan is the Man" and "Sedition", (according to Hylton).

⁸Hylton, page 25.

than in perhaps any other oral literature.⁹ Similarly, scholar Gordon Rohlehr has stated that the calypso is of prime sociological importance to anyone who seeks to study some of the attitudes of the West Indian male towards women. (Rohlehr, 1970).

MALE /FEMALE THEMES

Conflict is a key issue in calypso, as many researchers has observed, particularly the conflict between men and women. But are the negative images of women promoted in calypso, stemming from this "conflict", an accurate reflection of popular perceptions of women? Henry and Wilson (1975) reviewed the status of women in Caribbean societies and observed: "Role relationships between men and women are ambiguous, unclear and consumed by strategies or 'games-playing'. Similarly, men view women as both good, pure and 'pillars of Society' and at the same time as treacherous and manipulative."¹⁰ This seems consistent with the image of women in many male-composed calypsos, in which woman as trickster is a common theme. As Olive Senior observes, "matched against the calypsonian's bravado and contempt is his fear of the female, whom he perceives as scheming and untrustworthy, and who, when all else fails, will resort to trickery including obeah and black magic to bind him." (Senior 1991:168).

Senior offers four different "categories" of calypsos within the context of male/female themes: the "uneasy" relationship between the sexes, which is characterized by mutual suspicion and exploitation, marked by the males' "pursuit, conquest and desertion", (Rohlehr, 1970) ; " male ego-inflation" calypsos (Warner, 1982); "pejorative accounts of female acts" (women demanding money for sex, cuckolding the male, trying to ensnare him with witchcraft, etc.) and the highly used themes of "denigration and degradation" of the female, in which women are castigated as being ugly, dirty, stupid, vile, predatory, smelly, evil, etc. Throughout these themes, the woman as victim of male condemnation is also subjected to threats of violence. Perhaps the only female image in calypso who escapes this treatment is the mother figure, as evidenced in the many "Mother's love " songs. (Mighty Destroyer's "You can have diamonds, rubies and pearls. But a mother is the greatest thing in the world", or Kitchener's " for I can always get another wife/ But I can never get another mother in

⁹ Carole Boyce Davies. "Woman is a Nation..Women in Caribbean Oral Literature". *Out of the Kumbia*. Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido, editors."...While folktales and proverbs are biased against women, endorse female subordination or malign women, the calypso is much more explicit and direct in its hostility to women" (page 175).

¹⁰ Frances Henry and Pamela Wilson. "The Status of Women in Caribbean Societies: An Overview of Their Social, Economic and Sexual Roles" *Social and Economic Studies*, volume 24, No. 2, page 165

my life", for example). However, even within the context of "mother" calypsos, it should be noted that not all were favorable, as seen in Striker's "Mother's Day Song": ("M is for the million things she gave me/O means that she is only getting old/But all my mother used to give me heaven knows/is to kneel down on grater with plenty blows.") Furthermore, as Rohlehr relates, "most of the calypsonian who so elevated the idea of motherhood and wifeness and by extension the bourgeois ideal of the nuclear family, also sang a far greater number of calypsos about the glories of bachelorhood, the burden of marriage, the inevitable infidelity of wives and indeed women in general, and their own remarkable powers of seduction." (Rohlehr, 1991:226). In particular, women's fidelity is questioned at the level of her children. Mighty Terror's "Chinese children calling me Daddy", for example, or Sparrow's "Child father" ("Child father will they mamaguy me") or his "Dear Sparrow" ("...the baby born...the child resemble your uncle Joe"). A woman's relationship with several men, by whom she produces several children is viewed with disdain in many calypsos, but is seen by some researchers as a "coping strategy" (Rohlehr) by which she finds support for herself and family.

THE BASIS FOR MALE/FEMALE CONFLICT IN CALYPSO

Several researchers have examined the male/female conflict in Calypso. The pioneer study by Elder (1968), focuses on various forms of hostility and male-to-female aggression in calypsos, presenting psycho-sociological reasons, surrounding the legacy of slavery, for the male's need to portray women in such unfavorable light. He points to the matrifocal family in Trinidad as the basis for the male calypsonian's struggle against maternal repression and frustration, asserting that "repressed anti-female hostility underlies the aggressive derisive songs the calypsonian sings about women, partly because she supplants his role in society, provokes his anger and threatens him." ¹¹ However, Roy Austin's later work "Understanding Calypso Content: A Critique and an Alternative Explanation" casts serious doubt on Elder's findings. He provides evidence which shows there was no matrifocal family system in Trinidad during the period of Elder's study, and that men's status was higher than women's throughout this period. Elsewhere, Gordon Rohlehr suggests that factors other than matrifocality may account for the ways male/female relationships are portrayed in calypsos, such as the guilt and conflict surrounding religious and moral ideals versus actual behavior within the male/female relationship. He points to the American military

¹¹J.D. Elder. "The Male/Female Conflict in Calypso" *Caribbean Quarterly*. vol. No. date?? page 37

presence during the 1940s as the time of a great increase in sex as a topic in calypsos.

In a more recent song content analysis, concentrating on the negative treatment of women in calypso, William Aho examined lyrics of 311 calypsos, during the period of 1969-1979. Though he found no clearcut trend, he found that overall one fourth of all the calypsos dealt with male /female relationship, and nearly all of these were negative to women. Keith Warner's examination of "male/female interplay" in calypso also documents the predominant theme of male aggression toward women in calypso, citing some of Mighty Sparrow's songs as examples. Warner examines various aspects of Gordon Rohlehr's notion of the "phallic calypso". Furthermore, he posits that the female calypsonian operates from a position of numerical and psychological weakness, compared to her male counterpart. Merle Hodge expands on Elder's earlier work, arguing that the violence, verbal abuse and humiliation of women advocated in calypso is the males' emulation and appropriation, hereditarily, of the hostility he learned within the plantation system. The influence or importance of the matrifocal family in Trinidad and its result as a basis for male resentment of the female (via the mother figure), is explored by Elder, Austin, Hodge, Lewin, and many others in the examination of the negative images of women in calypso. This study takes into account the debate over the matrifocal family argument as the basis for men's hostility in calypso. This will be examined more closely in this paper's discussion on women's role in the family, and the male/female relationship, with respect to the treatment of these issues in women's Calypsos.

The overwhelmingly negative portrayal of women ("in the crudest terms possible," according to Olive Senior) exposes a peculiar paradox of calypso and makes women's role in the form all the more important to examine. As many scholars have commented, in virtually every subject area, such as politics, unemployment, or social injustices, the (male) calypsonian seeks to tell the truth, to reflect the public sentiment. Curiously, it is only in the domain of female representation that woman has been chauvinistically distorted, fabricated, constructed and fictionalized in ways that do not reflect reality. The negative images of women promoted in traditional male-composed calypsos seem contradictory to the intrinsic nature of calypso itself - as a method to lay bare certain societal certain "truths". Indeed, this paradoxical nature of calypso places in direct question the often reiterated statement that the calypso "mirrors collective attitudes" (Hodge 1975), as the very notion of "collectivity" has been so far clearly

based on a male standpoint. With women's participation in calypso, this "collective attitude" itself seeks a redefinition as it must now include the female point of view.

Although it has been established that the overwhelming calypso subject is women and sexual exploit, several researchers have pointed out that this was not always the case. (Rohlehr, Hylton, Boyce-Davies). It has been suggested that before the 1940s, Calypso's commentary was primarily political, as it was associated with the lower classes around which Calypso developed.¹² It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that racy, truly sex-oriented Calypsos came into popularity. This period corresponds to the establishment of a U.S. naval base in Trinidad, with its resulting rise in prostitution, among other "kindred forms of perversion and immoralities" (Hylton). Calypsonian Lord Invader's "Rum and Coca Cola" is a famous comment on this : "They buy rum and Coca-Cola, Go down Point Cumana/Both mothers and daughters/Working for their Yankee dollar". One might point out , however, that the male Calypsonian, too, was very much "working for the Yankee dollar" in this period, as the financial benefit of staging calypso "shows" meant that the Calypso material must be understood and appreciated by this new foreign (American) audience, who understood nothing of local politics, but everything about what Hylton calls "the old universal sex motif". A number of calypsos by men during this period address the sense of general public resentment of the American presence, but more specifically, they seem to address the particular resentment of the Trinidadian male toward the situation of being sexually "displaced" by the American Marines. Commentary in calypsos of the time, though in the realm of the political (expressing anti-American sentiment), now depended very much on the on the sexual. Sparrow's famous "Jean and Dinah" : "...It's the glamour boys again/We are going to rule Port-of Spain/No more Yankees to spoil the fete..." is both a political *and* sexual commentary, asserting the need for the Trinidad male to reclaim his power over women, as evidenced in the last line : "But the Yankees gone, and Sparrow take over now".

It is possible that women who were prostitutes (the "Jeans" and "Dinahs" of Sparrow's calypso) were able to attain more economic independence as a result of the American presence. This, too, would be resented by the men of the day, not because women were prostitutes, but, as several songs suggest, because her services would cost more! As calypsonian Spoiler's "Pork Seller of Maravella" attests: "Why she even

¹²This is evidenced in the fact that this period saw many attempts to censure calypso songs, as they were seen to reflect the "aspirations and resentment of the subjugated masses in the colony" (Hylton) and were a perceived threat to the elite status quo).

stated to Spoiler/That the price of her pork was ten dollar/But before the Yankee man come round/The price was eighteen cents a pound." On a deeper level, perhaps the male is expressing his fear of women's independence and potential power, gained, albeit from selling herself.

Careful attention must be paid to the intertext of the calypso, as well as the implied audience. The multi-valent nature of calypso is such that the song offers many meanings at the same time. Thus, "Pork Seller" is a commentary on the rising prices of necessities such as food, but is also an overtly sexual commentary on the rising cost of buying sex ("pork" and "porkie" is the metaphor for the female genitalia, and would be known to any Trinidadian, but not necessarily to the foreign audience in the tents). Thus, the image of prostitution promoted in the calypso, while linked obviously to women's activities, through the market metaphor might also symbolize the "prostitution" of Trinidad itself during this time, since the complaint in this song is that both are costing the Trinidad male more. As the work of many scholars suggests, with the American presence in Trinidad, there was created a tension between the traditional social and political commentary calypso and the need to entertain for the sake of entertainment alone (Rohlehr, Boyce-Davies). The great number of men's songs, especially in the 1940s and 1950s (and into the 1960s), which concentrate on women and sexual exploit, most through images extremely negative to women, attests to this. Calypso, once termed "the poor man's newspaper" by the early Calypsonian Lord Iere, changed from its primary function of information and agitation to one of purely entertaining.

This is not to say that Calypsos were not sexual before this point, nor that political Calypsos ceased to be created, after this point. Calypso has always been a fluid art form, changing and returning to different repertoire through time. However, in Calypso development, there is a definite period corresponding to the U.S. Navy presence in Trinidad, which seems to have set in motion the commitment to this predominant sexual theme, above all others, in the form. What is important to note is that it was not simply sex as a topic in calypso which flourished during this period, but the *use* of the sexual theme specifically to degrade women. As Carole Boyce Davies suggests: "it is in his period that the 'female castigation' seems to have gained prominence as a theme in calypso."¹³ The successful examples of Mighty Bomber's "Unemployment" (1967):

¹³Carole Boyce Davies, "The Africa Theme in Trinidad Calypso". *Caribbean Quarterly* 84-86

"I had it really hard/ The unemployment situation in Trinidad/Thousands of people like me and you/So much responsibilities, but no work to do..."

or the rising discontent in Lord Valentino's "Barking Dogs"

"Hark,Hark, the dogs do bark/The beggars are coming to town/ The dogs, the dogs are barking too long/It is a sign that something is wrong"

attest to the revolutionary sentiment which was particularly strong in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, the predominant calypsos, and those which had the most success publicly, were those whose themes aimed at thoroughly degrading women. As Hylton's study attests: "A look at the Calypsonians of the 1960's will reveal that over sixty percent of them were dealing with these themes. Women in particular were singled out and greatly degraded, with emphasis being placed on their unfaithfulness, sex habits, and their hang-ups." ¹⁴ It is of particular interest to this study to understand, therefore, how women can participate in a form that is so disparaging, on the whole, to her own gender.

The 19th Century "Jamet" Era:

The early history of women's participation in Calypso is linked to one of the first "stages" of calypso development in Trinidad, referred to as the "Cariso " phase of the late nineteenth century (Elder, Hill) . Cariso songs have been described as lewd and erotic, and "accompanied by obscene dancing"¹⁵. Carisoes were sung during breaks between stickfights¹⁶ and were apparently sung exclusively by women. According to "statements of old veterans of the late nineteenth-century carnival... the 'cariso' was both a woman's song and dance performed in stickfighting yards as a sort of interlude between duels by men with the hardwood sticks."¹⁷ Documentation on calypso song development in the West Indies, from narrative sources of the 1840s mentions "the chanterelle, or the female singer upon whom devolves the task of composing their *Belairs* [songs of praise or derision] and of reciting them at their public dances."¹⁸. These singers, or "native improvisatori" were of central importance to the group

¹⁴ Hylton, page 25.

¹⁵ Errol Hill, The Trinidad Carnival, Mandate for a National Theatre, page 58

¹⁶ The term for this stickfighting activity , as well as for the song by which it is accompanied is kalenda, (also kalinda or Calenda), otherwise known as "bois" (meaning wooden stick); It is a type of choreographed martial art, sometimes violent, using hardwood sticks which are said to be "mounted" with magical powers. The form is related to similar African-derived practices such as *capoeira* in Brazil

¹⁷ Errol Hill, page 58.

¹⁸ Errol Hill, page 58.

structure, and some were stickfighters, as well. Calypsos survive which refer to these female underground characters, well-known for their brawling, drinking, and especially singing and dancing: Piti Belle Lily, Alice Sugar, Ocean Lizzie, Mossie Millie, and perhaps the most famous, Bodicea, are among the women referred to in Calypso scholarship as "Calypso legends"¹⁹. This group formed the "jamet" class²⁰, the early female Calypsonians who both sang and were sung about. Men were also part of the jamet class. Interestingly, however, the term "jamet" in Trinidad today has come to mean "prostitute", or a "loose woman", indicating that the surviving negative connotation of the jamet reputation has been ascribed to women. According to documentation of nineteenth century Calypsonians, Bodicea sang impromptu in a graveyard during a brawl over the disinterred and mutilated stickfight hero, Hannibal. She accuses:

"Congo Jack vole tet-la Hannibal/U vole la mo, gade bakanal" ("Congo Jack steal Hannibal's head/You steal from the dead, look, bacchanal.")

Her calypso "appealed to the crowd and they began to gyrate in the cemetery. Bodicea's shrill voice whipped them into an unrestrained hilarity. The police came in, Bodicea tore off her dress and waved it as a banner, still singing the captivating ditty..."²¹ Bodicea was arrested along with others in the group. Cedric le Blanc later recounts this incident in his calypso:

"It was shocking, it was shameful to see/Carnival in the cemetery...Bodicea the jamette we all know/Is a real disgrace to we Cariso/.... Roaming all about the vicinity/Cat and dog passing they mouth on she/Is better she die or lock up in jail/She disgrace every woman in Port-of -Spain."

It is interesting that Bodicea both sang about those in her jamet culture and was in turn, sung about (a common tradition in contemporary calypso). However, the derision with which the calypsonian presents Bodicea, and presumably, other women of her jamet status, indicates Le Blanc's attachment to the prevailing attitudes of women and the concern with "moral" behavior of the time. His calypso indicates that even *within* the early calypso culture, there is the suggestion by male Calypsonians that women should not participate (or they risk being a "disgrace"). Through creating and perpetuating in their own calypsos, negative stereotypes of women who *were* in

¹⁹ Andrew Pearse. "Mitto Sampson on Calypso Legends of the Nineteenth Century". *Caribbean Quarterly*, volume #3 &4, March-June 1956

²⁰ "Jamet", or "Jamette", from the French, "diametre"; meaning underworld or other half (as in a circle), hence, below the level of social respectability.

²¹ Andrew Pearse. "Mitto Sampson on Calypso Legends of the Nineteenth Century". *Caribbean Quarterly*, volume #3 &4, March-June 1956, pp. 260-270.

calypso, male Calypsonians joined society at large, in discouraging women's participation .

Women's cariso singing during Carnival was threatening enough to merit The Port of Spain Gazette's warning, in 1884: "...the obscenities, the bawdy language and the gestures of the women in the street have been pushed to a degree of wantonness which cannot be surpassed and which must not be tolerated...The growing generation of young girls will become the curse of the country if these yearly saturnalia are allowed to continue" ²² As suggested in a later (1935) calypso by Atilla, commenting on this period:

"Carnival of long ago was real terrible/And the orgies reprehensible/In those days women sang calypso/Like Soki, Mattaloney and Maribo/They used to walk 'bout with boule de fe/I mean in the days of Camboulay/But today you can hear Trinidad Calypso/ on the American Radio."

The calypso documents the Jamet activity at the time, but more importantly, it is a testimony to women's participation. Again, this participation is associated with being "real terrible". The last lines ("..But today..") indicate that calypso has since changed for the better because it is accepted ("on the American Radio") but its acceptance involves the castigation of women from the form. Clearly the images of these female jamets presented both in the press at the time and in subsequent calypsos by men suggest this. Thus, even if calypso documentation gives Bodicea and her female contemporaries "legend" status, it is not necessarily a positive status. To address this, it is of importance to measure such images against the social reality of the female jamet of this time.

According to a study of women and crime in the last three decades of nineteenth century Trinidad, deemed the "golden age of the jamettes", these lower class Creole (Black) women "played active as well as supportive roles in all the violent activities in Trinidad society."²³ Reports of women inciting men to riot include "chantwells who sang fighting songs to intoxicate male stickfighters as they prepared to do battle on Carnival and other days."²⁴ Many female gangs existed, whose rivalry and fighting was comparable to the male stickfight gangs of the day. Because many of these gang members were often arrested, records exist which shed light on their activities. In 1864, a band of women, the "Mourcelines", fought against another group, the "Don't

²² Cited in Rohlehr, 1990, page 31

²³ David Trotman. "Women and Crime in Nineteenth Century Trinidad." *Caribbean Quarterly*, volume 30, #3 &4, 1984.

²⁴David Trotman page 68

care a damns". Both groups were armed with stones, knives and razors. They fought each other, "with their frocks tucked up" in a battle which led to the arrest of twenty women, "being unlawfully assembled and arrayed in a warlike manner."²⁵ Members of these female gangs took on men, as well, as evidenced in the famous incident of Bodicea's beating up stickfighter Cutaway Rimbeau. Unlike men, most women who were arrested were not, however, detained in the prisons of Port-of-Spain, but were more often made to pay a fine. It is important to note, however, that these bands of women were not randomly organized groups given only to senseless violence, as described in various reports by the Chief of Police and others at the time, but were sororities that served as friendship and support networks in the often difficult, alienating urban environment of the time (Brereton). The judgement against them in the press and elsewhere was hence, a biased reflection of the Victorian morality of a growing middle class.

The possible reasons for violence among women, so distasteful to the ruling elite during this period, who frequently commented on their behavior, has not been fully explored; being generally considered as a female appropriation of male "macho" combative behavior. Women's socioeconomic status in the colonial plantation economy at the time must be considered. Like their male counterparts, women were subjected to changing economic conditions, such as the legislation regulating plantation and non-plantation laborers surrounding the sugar crisis in the late nineteenth century. Women who tried to escape the plantations were held fast by the Masters and Servants Ordinance, as well as many other ordinances which controlled marketing activities in urban areas. Women's violence may be viewed as a form of protest to their being victims of certain laws enforced as a mechanism of labor and economic control. It has also been asserted that this violence stemmed from the brutal conditions of slavery. During the slave era, women "responded to the violence of slavery with as much violence as physique and their social position allowed".²⁶

Patterns of violence remained in the post-emancipation era, during which time women were highly visible, from 1838 to 1869, "in the forefront of the affrays and riots that so typified that period of transition."²⁷ Working class women were subject to charges ranging from indecent behavior, riotous and disorderly conduct, to obscene and profane language. The language charge is viewed by some researchers as a

²⁵David Trotman, page 68, quoting from Police Report Record at the time.

²⁶David Trotman page 68

²⁷David Trotman page 68

reflection of the cultural gap between the elite and working class, as the elite attempted to impose standard English on a multi-ethnic society. Similarly, historian Bridget Brereton comments on the power of the language of lower classes. She considers patois, which was the mother tongue of most lower-class blacks throughout the nineteenth century, as both a "defensive and an offensive weapon" as it was "not understood by most policeman, magistrates and officials..."²⁸ Brereton posits that for this very reason, calypso remained primarily in patois until the end of the century. Furthermore, commenting on the historic subtle use of language in calypso, Gordon Rohlehr describes the early calypsonians' verbal delight in being able to subvert the system through their art. He suggests that calypsonians employed a coded language to bypass certain moral structures imposed by the upper classes.²⁹ The manipulation of language in calypso to convey hidden meanings is still a primary characteristic of the form.

The obscenity charge is viewed by Brereton as a reflection of "the far more casual approach to sex which characterized the masses as compared to the 'respectable' classes."³⁰ Although historians have pointed out that many of those women who were part of the jamet bands, generally were prostitutes³¹, the study by Trotman suggests that many women of the lower classes were forced to register (falsely) as prostitutes, as they were subject to the "Contagious Disease Ordinance". Any woman accused of prostitution, or even found with prostitutes (especially if frequenting the stick yards where the chantwells sang) was forced to register as such, and was subject to periodic medical examinations, as well. It is apparent that these Jamet women as a group, though small, formed a significant portion of those in nineteenth century Trinidad society who were continually before the courts or in the prison. They were "isolated, labelled criminal, and continually harassed by the law."³² The history of jamet women during this era is important to consider in gauging the images of such women, as presented in the press and in calypsos, with the social reality in which they found themselves.

²⁸Bridget Brereton, Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, page 174.

²⁹Personal interview with Gordon Rohlehr, June 1992.

³⁰Bridget Brereton, page 174.

³¹"The women would generally be prostitutes, active or retired, dressed in the traditional Martinique costume, always masked. At some times, and in some places, they exposed their breasts." Bridget Brereton, page 170

³²David Trotman, page 71

The few surviving songs of these first female Calypsonians make a strong case for the argument that women used calypso very early on to address women's issues. Decried were such themes as physical abuse, abandonment, and the plight of prostitution - topics not generally treated by male Calypsonians of the same period. The "Mattaloney" to whom Atilla refers, for example, was Sophie Mattaloney (also Lady Mattaloney), who sang on being pregnant and abandoned (1906):

"...Deux mois loye a sous tete-ou/Pas sa trouver papa ish-ou/Estomac-li bas, bas, bas" /Pas sa trouver pap ishe-la (...Two months' rent you have to pay/And you can't find your child's father/ Her belly drop low, low, low./And she can't find her child's father..").

An earlier woman's calypso (documented as pre-1890s) by an unknown (female) composer is a woman's testimonial on prostitution :

"A year ago I was a girl/A young girl in my mother's house/This year I am a woman/Fighting to make a living for myself/Aie Aie/Shake your body and I will give you/Naughty girl/ Shake your body and I will give you..A hefty mister."

A social conflict of moralities came about between the elite "establishment" morality, and that of the streets. Accordingly, stickfights and carisoes were officially banned in 1884. This resulted in the kalinda stickfighting form being driven underground in order to survive; where men then began to appropriate the women's songs, substituting the physical violence of kalinda with a verbal violence in song, thereby altering the cariso form from its origin - as a woman's song.

Since the 18th century, Carnival in Trinidad had been the elegant affair of upper -class Creole whites. After Emancipation in 1833, however, the ex-slaves and lower classes began participating in great numbers, transforming a rather sedate religious holiday into a lively festival. Accordingly, the upper classes withdrew from Carnival, as it became "taken over almost entirely by the jamets of the urban slums." ³³ While these groups or bands centered much of their activity around Carnival time, it is important to note that they existed the whole year round, as many early newspaper accounts have attested. The kalinda, or yard stickfighting was the earliest important context for female participation, as yard or band *chantwells*. The jamet Carnival, with its kalinda, camboulay ³⁴ and other public scenes, outraged "respectable" Trinidad. As Bridget Brereton suggests, in her exhaustive study of nineteenth century Trinidad, jamet

³³Bridget Brereton, page 169.

³⁴Kalinda, or kalenda, is both the name for the song and the stickfighting ritual such song accompanies. Camboulay is from "Cannes Brulees" - a torchlight precession, associated with Carnival

carnival was "a reversal of all the judgements and values of respectable society".³⁵ But its function was clearly more important than to simply disgust and outrage the upper classes. For the lower class, uneducated, unemployed and discriminated members who formed the jamet bands, Carnival was their outlet, not simply for dance and celebration, or keeping alive African -derived traditions such as the kalinda, for example, but for expressing protest and struggle against dominant social powers. Carnival was the primary focus of the Afro-Creole sub-culture in Trinidad, representing an important means of expression for the lower class black people who participated. As Brereton suggests, perhaps Carnival's most vital function was that "the festival became an arena in which class antagonisms were worked out".³⁶ This arena was most certainly the only one available in the early colonial period of Trinidad which would have allowed the lower classes their "voice". The calypso tradition is thus an urban phenomenon, stemming from the historical period discussed above. Although its form, like the Carnival with which it is associated, may have changed over time, its function still embodies this public "voicing".

WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF VICTORIAN MORALITY

The preoccupation with "respectability" surrounding Carnival in the nineteenth century (beginning with Emancipation in 1833) and the early twentieth century, created social pressures which discouraged women from involving themselves in Calypso. Victorian ideals of the period created a heightened sensibility of Calypso (and Carnival), associating it with lower class morals and behavior. Especially during the period of 1870 to 1920, education played a central role in reinforcing this Victorian moral structure. As primary education spread through the urban areas, the Church was able to exert influence through church schools. As Gordon Rohlehr suggests, the disappearance of jamet culture and the coming of Victorian morality was a function of education, and education was a function of religion. The jamet morality thus became in direct confrontation with "straight" society morality.³⁷ For women, ideas of "respectability" imported with the colonial order stressed getting married, staying at home and raising children. That this was not, in reality, possible for the majority of women in Trinidad society of the time, did not diminish its highly esteemed state. Erna Brodber, in her study documenting stereotypes of Caribbean women through time, suggests that the jamet woman may have been well aware of this Victorian ideal, and

³⁵Bridget Brereton, page 169.

³⁶ Bridget Brereton, page 169.

³⁷ Personal conversation with Gordon Rohlehr, June 1992.

that her behavior, which so shocked her society, was a reaction to her acute awareness of her inaccessibility to this ideal: "The Trinidadian woman was perceived as a being who operated within the home and family. This was indeed the reality throughout time for all except the very visible group of immigrants and dislocated blacks who crowded into the cities. It was possible that even here the norm was known and accepted and that the counter activity of such economically depressed women as the 'Jamette' sprang from frustration at their inability to realize the norm." ³⁸ Although the 1890s and 1900s saw many movements to make Calypso more acceptable to the ruling elite, it was not until the 1930s that women as a group would be publicly recognized in the calypso arena as singers.

Because of the lack of public support or recognition of women in calypso, this era is generally associated in Calypso scholarship with women's "disappearance" from the form. However, it is the intention of this study to emphasize that the suppression of Jamette Carnival did not necessarily mean that women disappeared entirely from the calypso arena. If it is accepted by historians, and scholars of calypso that the dance and music forms practiced by both male and female jamets were driven underground, it must be postulated that at least some women of the jamet class remained active in their roles. The numerous articles in Trinidad newspapers commenting on their "indecent behavior" which appear throughout the late 19th and early 20th century strongly suggest that despite the Victorian ideal of womanhood (the reason usually given as to why women "disappeared"), these female jamets remained very much present, much to the dismay of elite society who frequently commented on their behavior. The fact that no songs by women during this time have survived does not mean that women were necessarily absent from the form. It must be emphasized that the elites sought to discourage *all* jamet activity, through the relentless banning of musical events and arresting of any offenders. (In fact, when the Kalenda was officially banned in 1884, it was the women who openly protested the ban "with open obscenity of word and gesture... They were anything but silent; they sang their songs even more fiercely than usual." (Rohlehr 1990:54). Thus, it seems questionable that these forceful, independent women would somehow fade away, even if the men, deprived of their martial activity (the kalinda), *did* appropriate the women's music, as so many researchers have pointed out. Men were just as likely to be discouraged from practicing musical traditions as women, and it does not follow that men continued but the women suddenly disappeared. On the contrary, it seems more probable that

³⁸Erna Brodber. Perceptions of Caribbean Women, Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP). Volume 4, page 51.

women of the lower classes remained in the lower classes than that they somehow elevated their status. What is of concern of course, is whether they sang. This seems probable, since the men with whom they allied themselves continued calypso and other song traditions. Moreover, Gordon Rohlehr has plainly stated that these "legendary women...*did not disappear* after the suppression of 'Jamette Carnival' in the 1880's. Their ranks were *forever* being replenished from neighboring islands" (my emphasis). This suggests that there was a definite continuum in female jamaican culture, due to the many women migrating from other islands to Trinidad. If it is true that jamaican women did not disappear, then they most likely participated in whatever singing, music or dance traditions were being practiced at the time, including calypso.

Aside from women as singers, there is an additional area, largely undocumented in calypso scholarship, in which women (of the middle class in particular), were involved in the calypso arena on an economic level and had an important role in maintaining the tradition. With the advent of calypso performances in "tents" (which first started in 1903), middle-class shopkeepers and cinema proprietors provided both capital and a place to perform. Interestingly, many of these early financiers of calypso were Trinidadians of East Indian descent, (also Chinese) and apparently, among these were women. According to newspaper reports, among the examples of the East Indian support of Calypso was one Margaret Samaroo, pictured and listed as "cinema owner"; also mentioned is "Mrs. Lucky, owner of a Fyzebad cinema", as well as "the manageress of Ideal Cinema, an Indian woman"³⁹ When the ruling class withdrew its support of Calypso, it was the Indian community which provided significant sponsorship of Calypso. The San Fernando area became a principal center of Calypso activity, where staged shows were conducted year-round. It is important to note that during this period, a large concentration of the population in San Fernando and the surrounding villages was East Indian. Over half the audience in the Calypso shows were presumed to be Indian ⁴⁰ and it is probable that women as the establishment owners or overseers were part of this audience. If so, they may also have had some influence on the Calypsos of this time. Further research on the role of East Indian Women in Calypso development would have important implications for understanding particular ethnic and gender dimensions in both calypso performance and popularization. Though this is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that these women as Calypso "benefactors" had an important role in preserving the Calypso

³⁹ The Roaring Lion (Rafael de Leon). "The Great Indian Help to Calypso", newspaper article in *Sunday Guardian*, March 27, 1988

⁴⁰ The Roaring Lion "...60 percent of the audience in such calypso shows was Indian."

tradition, and their presence during the early twentieth century merits their inclusion in female participation in Calypso.

The 1930s -1960s. WOMEN AS TENT PERFORMERS

Along with more middle class participation in and support of Calypso and Carnival, this period marks the public recognition of women's "re-emergence" as Calypso singers. Among them, four "pioneers" stand out: Lady Trinidad, Lady Iere, Lady Baldwin and Lady Macdonald.

Lady Trinidad (Thelma Lane) had a career in the mid -1930s and is acknowledged as the first woman to sing on stage in 1937. She began with "Yankee bands" singing American pop music. She did not write her own material, and she never recorded any calypsos. "Old Man's Darling" and "Advice to Every Young Woman" were her popular calypsos at the time. It is important to note that during this period, women did not sing on the turmoil which was part of Trinidad's political landscape at the time, and which by contrast, her male counterpart strongly vocalized, in Calypsos on hunger, the strike, the federation , etc. For example, in the 1940s, themes about the "Mother country" and the "Allied Forces" were popularized by male Calypsonians. Although a critical look at local politics began to be taken by male Calypsonians, there seems to be no corresponding comment from the women Calypsonians of the time. Grass-root women's organizations were also active during this time, and yet there is no surviving women's calypso commenting on this. Lady Trinidad sang during the apogee of the labor movement in the 1930s, yet there is no documentation to support that she ever sang on the subject. However, the argument can be made for the fact that Calypso (by men or women) did not have to be political to be listened to, and in the early stages of women's "re-emergence" as Calypsonians, their importance was perhaps more by their example than their lyrics.

For a time, Lady Trinidad remained the only female calypsonian until Lady Iere came into the calypso arena. Of additional importance is the fact that neither Lady Trinidad nor Lady Iere wrote her own material, which suggests that at this time, men still had control over the content of women's songs. As has been reported in a recent panel discussion on women's role in calypso by the University of the West Indies women's

group, even in the 1920s "...women Calypsonians, like Lady Trinidad and Lady Iere were essentially added attractions to the tents and not artistes in their own right".⁴¹

Lady Iere (Edna Thomas nee Pierre) began singing with her husband, Randolph Thomas, Lord Iere⁴². Theirs was the first husband & wife calypso duet in Trinidad. Her songs have been characterized as having "that motherly, loving touch and good wife image"⁴³ However, her first Calypso "A Warning to Mothers", which is often given as an example of this "motherly loving touch" seems to be much more a commentary on the unchecked (accepted) behavior of boys, and the need for girls to be protected against their advances :

"Better keep your eyes on your daughters/ from the age of seven now,
they are wise/And the immorality they try to equalize/Don't let them out of
you sight/These force-ripe men they are too bright"

It has been suggested that Lady Iere came on the calypso scene only after her husband, Lord Iere, was unsuccessful; as a last resort to save his own reputation, he included his wife, who then became popular on her own: "It was Iere's failure in the big tent ..that forced him to bring in his wife and later team up as a duet...The public, according to Iere, had acclaimed Lady Iere as the better singer, so they stopped the duet. She it was who sang 'Sit Down Strike' - claiming that a female strike is worse than a male strike"(Liverpool). The reported subject matter of this calypso indicates a change in song content from Lady Trinidad's era, and the marks the start of a growing trend of female-perspective calypsos. In "Love Me or Leave Me" (1952), she asserts that men's infidelity should not be tolerated:

"The men in town /Ah finding
it dey blooming eyes is too long.. You got to love me or leave me/or live
with Miss Dorothy/The time is too hard/for me to mind a man that is bad."

The term "mind", meaning support (financially) is important here, as the song is also a commentary on the sexual dimension of the economic position in male /female relationships (the man's dependence on the woman is acceptable as long as he remains faithful). This song has been deemed one of the earliest voices of female protest, and "was very much a slogan for the oppressed women of the Caribbean as a

⁴¹ As reported in the coverage of the panel by the Trinidad Guardian's article "Women should get more involved", November 1985.

⁴²"Iere" is the Arawak (Amerindian) word for "hummingbird" and is the indigenous name for Trinidad, which is known as "Land of the Hummingbird".

⁴³Hollis Liverpool, Kaisonianians to Remember. Juba Publishing, Diego Martin, Trinidad 1987

whole and of Trinidad in particular."⁴⁴ In addition to infidelity, male aggression is lamented in another calypso from the 1950s:

"You cook dey food/And you wash dey clothes/When dey come home
vex/dey does give you blows".

Another female calypsonian from the period of the Second World War was Lady Thelma, who resided in New York, and produced a best-selling calypso, "You Gotta Have Power", a commentary on the nightly blackouts approved by President Roosevelt. Although the 1950s saw more women's involvement in calypso, progress was slow. In 1956, the first Calypso Queen competition was won by Lady Iere, but she had only one challenger, Pearl White, of whom nearly nothing is known.

In summarizing this first "stage" of female calypsonian re-emergence as tent performers, it seems that women were not perceived as Calypsonians in their own right, and functioned more as "added attractions" on the calypso stage.⁴⁵ Most sang with men, often their husbands, and did not write their own material. Despite this probability, it is essential to note that in examining their calypsos, the subjects these women "sang" on invariably took the women's side of the issue, as evidenced in their calypsos.

1960-1980. THE PRO-WOMAN CALYPSO ERA

The decade of the 1970s signified a new era in Trinidad. Discontent was brewing over high oil prices, the Black Power movement of the U.S. was appropriated by a new youth culture, which expressed itself against continued colonial domination. There was an influence of American slang in calypso. Calypsonian Shorty experimented and introduced "Soca", (from "soul of calypso"), a dance/party music style, which sparked debate by some in the calypso arena (Raphael de Leon, calypsonian "Roaring Lion", for example, who was the Public Relations officer of the Calypso Association) who argued Soca was not Calypso. The "Yankee craze" of disco was prevalent. In addition, especially in the 1970s, there occurred great social changes affecting the status of women, which may have important links to the great turnout of women in calypso during this period.

⁴⁴Keith Warner, *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso*, page 105.

⁴⁵According to novelist Merle Hodge, who was a lecture panelist in the Calypso Research Project, organized by the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of the West Indies, November, 1985.

The U.N.'s Declaration of International Decade of Women, from 1975-1985, the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, and the International Year of the Woman in 1975 brought about an interest in women's issues. New efforts were made in the Caribbean region to recognize the role of women in society. Groups such as the Business and Professional Women's Group, the University of the West Indies Women's Group, the National Committee on the status of Women, and the Housewives Association of Trinidad & Tobago were formed. In Jamaica, the Sistren Women's Theatre Collective emerged in 1977, the first of the autonomous feminist women's groups comprising primarily working class women. Sistren's highly acclaimed work, which makes use of women's life histories through drama for consciousness-raising and entertainment is one of the first important examples in the region of women in the arts. In addition, in Trinidad, the National Women's Action Committee (NWAC) was formed, speaking out on the need for women's "freedom", (but continued, however, in their literature, to view men as the heads of family). The NWAC organized Calypso Queen competitions in order to encourage women to participate in Calypso. In the 1986 contest for example, Lady Hotspot (Eastlyn Orr) urged more women to come together in the calypso arena and to specifically compose songs on men. Her calypso advised women, "If they sing about Mary, we could sing 'bout Harry and say he sorfie, sorfie, sorfie, sorfie"⁴⁶ Thus, calypso was becoming recognized and encouraged as a viable way for women to challenge and even change certain social patterns and power structures, particularly surrounding gender, in this case through reversing the stereotyped images of men (and thereby, women) in attacking the male's most glorified calypso subject, his sexuality. This decade also saw the advent of Soca Parang and Indian Soca, examples of indigenous cross-cultural experiments in Calypso. The involvement (and success) of female Calypsonians Drupatee and Denyse Plummer bridged the ethnic/class/cultural gap for the first time, between French Creole and Indo-Trinidadian cultures in the form.

The true ascent of women in Calypso begins with Calypso Rose (McArtha Lewis), who actually began singing calypsos in the 1950s, when the only other female calypsonian was Lady Iere. Calypso Rose is profiled in this chronological section because it is during this period that she was most successful, setting the precedent for all other women to participate. Of added importance is the fact that Rose composes her own material. Other female Calypsonians of great importance during this time were Singing Francine (Francine Edwards), and Calypso Princess (Veronica de Labastide). In the

⁴⁶Sorfie, also sof, or sof man, means effeminate, spineless, or sexually impotent.

late 1960s through the 1970s, these three women were the dominant female voices in Calypso. Rose and Francine sang independently, while Calypso Princess was encouraged by her husband, Calypsonian Lord Blakie. Princess, belly dancer-turned calypsonian, sang in the chorus in the same tent where Rose made her debut in 1969. (Original Young Brigade, which was Sparrow's tent). Princess debuted in her husband's Victory Tent. "The Private"(1972), "Sweet Man Blakie" (1973) and "Any Man is My Man" (1978) are some of her songs, written primarily by her husband.

The success of female Calypsonians often depended on the support of men who dominated the tent atmosphere. Sparrow, in particular, gave many female "newcomers" their start. Not surprisingly, the most successful women Calypsonians patterned themselves after men, in stage performance and singing style.⁴⁷ Rose and Francine, although independent, were regarded as female versions of Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener, the two great male Calypsonians of the day. This seems consistent with the previous "linking" of women to the image of their husbands, exemplified by Princess and Lord Blakie, (and earlier, by Lord and Lady Iere).

Although the 1970s marks the emergence of Pro-Women calypsos, it is important to examine the different ways this ideal is played out by the female Calypsonians.

Calypso Rose presents many strong-woman images, most of a sexual nature, but it is, for the first time in Calypso, a *woman's* viewpoint of that sexual nature, a commentary on her own sexuality. "Carlyle", for example, boasts of female sexual prowess, in a "conversation" form; the man avers:

"When you hungry and you want meat to buy you does look for me"

[To which the woman challenges]:

"And if you're a real strong man/Hold the leg in your hand/ And eat like Santa Claus/Carlyle! The whole hog is yours! "

"Brown Sugar" is another assertion of female sexuality:

(chorus):

"Come any hour/For your sweet brown sugar/You would not regret/With the sugar you going to get/Put your hands around my waist/And you going to get the taste/Don't doubt what ah say/I have plenty sugar down dey."

This theme is also evidenced in Calypso Princess' "I want a Good Husband" (1969):

⁴⁷Carole Boyce Davies comments on Calypso Rose, who, "for years had a distinctly androgynous appearance; her stage performance was similar to some male calypsonians like the Mighty Sparrow, including dancing and projecting the microphone as phallus.." in "Woman is a Nation..Women in Caribbean Oral Literature". Out of the Kumbia. Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido, editors. Page 183.

"Ah making an application/To get a good husband/Friends ah tried so hard/To get ah good man in Trinidad/But ah so unlucky/All who ah tried done dead out already/So all you men you just listen to me/If you fit you have Princess already....So you see my position/Ah trying hard to get a good husband/from town to south, if you see me sweat/up to now I ain't get a good man yet/If you think you too big for me well you lost/You don't see ah built like a circus horse".

(chorus):

"Ah know in that crowd they ah go get one tonight/Ah don't care about anybody/Like ah feeling him already/Don't get in a rage/As ah finish sing you meet me back stage."

Although most likely composed by her husband, this calypso is an affirmation of woman's sexual desire, and potential sexual insatiability, a theme much-embraced in the reverse "traditional" form (on male sexual insatiability) in Calypsos by men. This calypso compares with Sparrow's "Mr. Rake-and-Scrape":

"I'm a busy man with no time to lose/Ah don't pass my hand, ah don't pick and choose/so any kind'o woman, one foot or one hand/Dey cannot escape from me Mr. Rake-and-Scrape."

Furthermore, his "Village Ram" boasts:

"..Not a woman ever complain yet wid me/Ah ain't boasting but ah got durability/ And if a woman ever tell you that I/leave she dissatisfy/She lie, she lie/I say she lie".

Rose has been referred to as the "chief purveyor of smut"⁴⁸ for her sexually charged calypsos, and yet male Calypsonians, whose material of this time were equally if not more racy, are rarely held in an unfavorable light for producing it. One researcher has commented on the unfavorable reception Calypso Rose has received in her role as a calypsonian. She was often criticized and "had to survive through rumours of lesbianism"⁴⁹. Rose articulated female desire, and was therefore labelled somehow "deviant" in her society. Yet Rose was wildly popular for her racy calypsos, the same calypsos for which she was seen unfavorably. This irony points to the double standard of male/female success and accepted behavior both in the calypso arena, as well as in the larger social setting. Other calypsos by Rose present more than a recognition of female sexuality, asserting the need for respect and equality for the female partner:

"..I could understand why a woman must have a outside man/A man does want to run like rat/And have his wife to abide by that/And every night he is having a ball/And when he reach home he ain't kissing the wife at all..."

⁴⁸ Neshia Haniff. *Blaze a Fire - Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women*. Sister Vision Press 1988. "Women in the Arts" chapter, page 67.

⁴⁹Carole Boyce Davies, page 183.

In addition, there is a recognition of the physical obligation in marriage:

"Every woman dey want/An usin we at dey convenience/den dey turn an' say/Dey can't trust a woman today/A Man does leave his wife alone/Three days he ent see his home/At de end dey does have to bawl/dey ent know a woman never bawl at all" ("Whe She Go Do").

Fulfillment of physical desires of the women is addressed in a similar manner in "Mister Goodridge", to whom she claims she'll remain faithful despite his infidelity as long as he "brings back the sugarcane home". Many of Rose's songs address the issue of women's denied sexuality, and reverse, in an ironic twist, the inherent stereotype of the sexually assertive man, in that, although the woman may now act on her desires, she is nevertheless, unfulfilled. Calypso Princess' "Any Man is My Man", and "Application for a Good Husband" ("..Friends ah try so hard/to get a good man in Trinidad/...All who ah tried done dead already") as well as Lady Excellence's "Master Johnny" ("... But for one thing I had to leave him/I did love him bad/But at bedtime I does feel sad/I didn't know what was wrong/That man will sleep from night until dawn") also promote this image of the male who can't satisfy. ⁵⁰

It is important to note that not all of Rose's calypsos lean on the sexual theme. Some songs present commentaries which are purely political, such as "'Don't Blame the Doctor", for example (1975), in support of the then- Prime Minister Eric Williams, or her "Me En't Goin", a political stand on the freedom of speech. In her song, "No Madame", Rose took on the plight of the working class Domestic servants in Trinidad, thereby also addressing a "woman's issue", as Domestics are invariably female.

"Matrimony" is a statement of her enjoyed economic independence, an independence gained through her success as a calypsonian:

"I am working for a good salary/Eating and drinking like anybody/People advising me to stop singing calypso/Settle down and get married."

The message articulated, of a woman's freedom through earning her own living, counters the perception of marriage as being necessary to provide security. In

⁵⁰Research concerning male attitudes toward sexuality suggests why the insult in this type of calypso, though playing on a universal male sexual stereotype, is particularly stinging to the West Indian male. For example, a study carried out in Barbados revealed that the West Indian notion of masculinity has a built-in concept of satisfying the woman: "A man's reputation is not based on 'conquest' of the 'inaccessible' woman, but on his success in sexual performance" and that males' "preoccupation with sexual activity is unlike machismo, very profemale". Constance Sutton and Susan Makiesky-Barrow. "Social Inequality and Sexual Status in Barbados", in The Black Woman Cross-Culturally, Filomena Steady, editor. Page 492.

addition, it is a call for legitimizing women's calypso singing as a viable means for that security.

In her work, Calypso Rose's challenge to male feelings of superiority may be viewed as a return of the "Jamette" figure of the 19th century. Her calypsos represent a female rebellion against social ideas which have historically denied women anything but a passive role. That she represents the woman's viewpoint is perhaps best understood by her own comment:

"Many of my calypsos were written from stories that women themselves told me. I try to write about the sufferings of women as much as I can. When I first started out it was the women who criticized me most. Now look how time change eh. Women's clubs and so invite me to speak. When my calypsos don't make a hit it is as if I am lettin them down." ⁵¹

Rose's calypsos are important because she sings against expected patterns of behavior. Although many of her calypsos may be viewed as a female reiteration of male sexual aggressiveness, and do not address the oppression women faced *outside* of the sexual relationship, they are nevertheless an important assertion of feminine power and independence.

With the subsequent progression of female participation in Calypso, one notes an emerging feminine articulation of independence and equality which is no longer bound to the sexual realm. The work of Singing Francine (Francine Edwards) is an example. Many of Francine's calypsos are important commentaries on both being a woman and being a woman calypsonian. "Woman's World" (1976) is a call to the male calypsonian for equal treatment as a performing artist:

"We are equal on the scale. You the male, I the female/So think reasonably. You can't dominate me./If I could sing like you and dance like you/To prove I have the nerve/I don't know what again I have to do/To get the prize I deserve".

The "prize" refers to woman winning the calypso contest over the man, yet it is interesting that still her success is through an emulation of the male performance ("sing like you and dance like you") rather than a recognition of woman's performance on her own terms (which is more the case in the contemporary arena). Also

⁵¹ Nesha Haniff, page 67.

suggested is the notion that for a woman to appropriate such male behavior takes "nerve". Other songs by Francine presenting strong social commentary include "Black and White" (1975), which addressed the racial tensions prevalent at the time; and Francine, like Calypso Rose, sung about the injustice of the working-class domestics in "Save our Domestics", which compares the situation of domestics to slavery.

calypso (women as trickster, as ugly, as dirty, as unfaithful, etc.). However, of all the anti-feminine themes in songs, that of men's violence or brutality toward women seems the one most often responded to by female calypsonians. Many women's songs address the issue of male aggression, so prevalent in men's calypsos, urging women not to accept men's violence. Francine's "Run Away" is an important example, which both chronicles the abusive situation and urges the woman to take action. It is important to note the structure of this composition. The verses address the abusive man, while the chorus (which the audience, through repetition, remembers and by which most calypsos are known) speaks to the woman:

"You went and put gold ring on she hand/You boasting in town that you is she man/She say that you love she bursting with joy/She give you a baby boy/ Little did she know you wanted a maid/Your next lady friend couldn't make the grade/ Now she sitting down and wondering what to do/How to get away, how to get away from you."

(chorus): "Child does run away/Fowl does run away/Woman, cat does run away when you treating them bad/Cow does run away "Dog does run away/ What happen to you woman, you could run away too"

(verse): "You went and you put gold teeth in she mouth/As all yuh vex you cuffing it out/You making she shame all over the place/Man you is a dam disgrace/Not even to church now she cannot go/She beg for little love you telling she no/She frighten like hell to make up a plan/How to get away, how to get away/How to get away from you"

(chorus): Child does run away/Woman, cat does run away/When man treating them bad/Fowl does run away/What happen to you woman, You could run away too...Don't sit down and steam/Woman put two wings on your heels.....

In the last verse, the "message "speaks to both parties, ending in the important last line:

"If she bring she friends to visit the house/you insulting she you calling them louse/If she talk to Creeg you say she is with he/Like she is a slut puppy/Morning noon and night you blowing she mind/You bringing she old long before she time/Seven years you living in misery/Woman run away, run away from he."

Singing Dianne's "Ah Done Wid Dat" relays a similar message of protest:

"Leave me, don't touch me/..If ah don't leave now, is licks in de morning/In de evening, Ah can't take it, ah telling you flat/Ah done wid dat."

Such is the female response to calypsos such as Atila the Hun's (Raymond Quevedo) earlier calypso "Treat 'Em Rough", advocating the need for violence to control women:

"I've discovered a new philosophy/How to live with women happily/
... Every now and then turn them down.
They'll love you long and they'll love you strong.
You must be robust, you must be tough
Don't throw no punches but treat 'em rough."

And Mighty Sparrow warns, "girl you looking for blows", in his version of a similar calypso (attributed originally to Atila), which he revived in the 1970s, (the apogee of pro-woman calypsos by women!) advising men:

"Every now and then cuff them down/They'll love you long and they'll love you strong/
Black up they eye/Bruise up they knee/And they will love you eternally."

Sparrow changed the last line after the chorus repeats three times to "Then they'll leave you eternally", but as Gordon Rohlehr points out " by that point the calypso has already registered its sadistic message." (Rohlehr, 1990:264)

The message articulated in women's calypsos of this time urges an active position against male abuse, and marks a significant departure from some earlier women's calypsos which simply reiterated the abusive situation (as was seen for example, in Lady Iere's lines, "You cook dey food/And you wash dey clothes/When dey come home vex/dey does give you blows").

Carnival, a common theme in many calypsos, is often perceived as a time when Trinidadians "free up they self" as the expression goes. In general, the relaxed code of behavior associated with Carnival is regarded as a temporary aberration from societal "norms". Calypsonian Princess' "We Jammin" (1977) reaffirms Carnival time as the only time women can break free, "...If no man can't touch your body/Stay home and watch man on T.V./ But not me.." Francine's "Ah Feel Allright" attests to the feeling of being in Carnival "bands" (parades): "I feel to jump, I feel to dance/I feel to ramp, I feel to prance/ I feel allright/ I feel to wine, I feel to grind/I feel to fete, I feeling wet..." Indeed, many male-composed calypsos underscore the cultural expectation that women who participate in Carnival should become sexually freer. Lord Kitchener tells his "Flag Woman: " Wave it baby, get them groovy, Yes honey, do your duty, wave it sexy, send them crazy, Woman , woman move you hand". Calypsonian Shadow's "Roll The Bumbulum" features a "mad man from the Asylum", who instructs the his "Emely" during Carnival time : "...Ah tell you to roll the bumbulum/You don't want to roll the bumbulum/Ah don't want to beat you Emeline/But you playing smart with the bumsie/Roll that bum bum roll that Bumbum/Get in the mood and make me feel good..." The consequence of her compliance, as she "start moving", is that "suddenly

he grab she" (alluding to being sexually taken), but this is chalked up to "bacchanal that was real carnival" and in the end, she is to blame not the man, but her own body, as the last line attests: "Poor Emely wish she never had a bumsie". However, many female calypsonians have pointed to the paradox inherent in standards of Carnival behavior with respect to women. Francine's "Carnival Fever", for example, discusses the joy and freedom of dancing and celebrating, "...Ah go wine like a ice cream can.." ⁵² but states "...Ah only hope they ain't say ah vulgar when ah catch the carnival Fever". There is the idea that a woman may be encouraged to abandon middle class morals at Carnival time, but afterwards, she is stigmatized.

Singing Francine has been hailed "the darling of the middle class woman" by one newspaper reporter, as she "represents their values, decency, sound morals, social order and discipline." ⁵³ In the public eye, Francine seems to represent a departure from calypsonians Rose and Princess, both of whom were associated with obscene language, and "loose" morals. She is considered the calypsonian who changed the image of the female singer. In a 1975 interview, Francine has commented: "personally I do not like obscenity, and I have never sung any calypsos like that. I hate to call names but so far the women in calypso have not done much about changing the image that has come out of calypso...And, of course, in the tents itself you have women lapping up the vulgarity about themselves which the men sing." ⁵⁴ This important comment on positive response by female audiences to women-degrading calypsos has been noted elsewhere in the press, even several years later, such as in a 1981 article "Reconstruction through the Creative Arts - Calypsonians must tell the truth about our women": "...Now while these smut, or to use the contemporary 'jam and wine' tunes are strictly male compositions, make no mistake about it, in spite of the vulgarity they contain, many women applaud them." ⁵⁵ However, Keith Warner has noted the positive response of female audiences in the tents to female "protest songs" such as "Love Me or Leave Me" and "Run Away": The tent reaction to both calypsoes was the same-numerous encores as the females showed their unrestrained appreciation of both songs" ⁵⁶ The gender dimensions of audience response are an integral part of understanding Calypso performance, and will be discussed further in the examination of tent performance patterns.

⁵²"Wine" from wind, as in "wind the waist" is "to rotate the waist and hips in a suggestive manner" (Cote Ce Cote La - Trinidad & Tobago Dictionary, John Mendes 1986)

⁵³ Comment by Eric Roach, *Trinidad Guardian*, 1/30/74

⁵⁴"Talking with Singing Francine". Interview by Therese Mills, *Trinidad Guardian*, 5/16/75

⁵⁵Article by Ronald John, *Trinidad Guardian*, 1/28/91. It is of interest that this appears as a front-page, headlining article, suggesting that the issue of women's image in calypso is beginning to be taken seriously, by the press as well as by calypsonians.

⁵⁶Keith Warner, page 106.

The late 1970s witnessed more women coming into the calypso arena. Most began their calypsonian careers through the NWAC's Queen competitions. There is very little documentation on the work of most of these women, probably because they did not achieve the fame of Rose or Francine, and were therefore not covered in the press, nor in the various "Calypso Carnival booklets" published annually. Nonetheless, they must be mentioned here, however briefly, as a main goal of this study is to provide as complete a picture as possible of women in calypso, and not to repeat the mistake of previous scholarship which has, by and large, ignored women's contribution to the form. The following is a brief list of recent female calypsonians, some of whom will be profiled in the next section:

Duchess (Magnola Cancho), sang "Woman's Liberation"(1974); **Gene Miles**, "who sang on the gas station racket and its repercussions"(Trinidad Guardian, 1/5/70) began in calypsonian Kitchener's tent in the 1970s; **Kaiso Girl** (Lillian de Vignes) lived and performed in Venezuela and Trinidad, recording songs in Spanish and English. She sang in Sparrow's tent, Original Young Brigade, singing "Don't Blame the Doctor"(about the then-Prime Minister Dr.Eric Williams). In 1972 and 1975 she appeared at the Calypso Theatre. Her songs include: "Drunking Woman", "Washy Congo", "Trinidad Keskidee", "Mas Kissin Mas"and others; **Singing Dianne** did vocals for many steel bands. She debuted in 1974 with "Carifta Queen" and sang many female-perspective songs: "Work of a Woman"(1975) "Give Away"(1981) and "Take Yuh Clothes and Go"(1984), the song for which she won the Calypso Queen title. **Twiggy** (Ann Marie Parks) made attempts to address women's issues, in songs like "Beauty Contest"(1976), "Don't Put Yuh Hand"(1986)and "Recession Fighter", on the benefits of having a male provider.

The Soca explosion brought to the scene more female singers. **Calypso Girlie** (Sheila Gomez) began a a chorus singer with a Parang roup, also performed with Sparrow and Chalkie, ran a "roving calypso tent", The People's Calypso Brigade. Songs: "Why dey Digging" and "Play it fuh We"; **Kele Zanda** of South African origin. Came to Trinidad in 1972 and was the wife of a musician, Clide Zanda; **Lady B** (Beulah Bobb) sang at the Tobago Carnival Development Committee's tent for eleven years. She stands apart from most of her female contemporaries for the significant fact that she writes her own calypsos and often sings political commentaries which are successful . Her songs include "20 Years in Revue" (19483), "Sanctions" (1988) and the strongly political "Move the Cameras" (1990). She also wrote plays for Best

Village Contests in Tobago and was actively involved in theater. **Lady Gypsy** (Lynette Steel), debuted with wandering Roving Brigade Tent of San Fernando in 1978. Sang Parang and pop music. She is the sister of calypsonian Gypsie; **Lady Wonder** (Diane Hendrickson), the daughter of calypsonian Allrounder, she won school calypso competitions, and was a backup singer for many years before going solo; **Marvelous Marva** (Marva Joseph), debuted in 1981 when she tied for second place as Calypso Queen. "A Hall of Fame", "Trinbago Culture", and "The Single Woman" are some of her early songs; **Singing B.** (Bernadette McFarlane) debuted in 1987. She was a performer in the Best Village contest (calypso and other song performance competitions, represented by all the different villages or districts of Trinidad); **Drupatee Ramgoonai** began singing religious songs in school choirs. She represented Charlo Village Council at the Best Village competition. She won the Indian Cultural Pageant in 1983 and 1984, singing a Chutney style (musical genre of East Indian population in Trinidad and became known for her special type of "Chutney Soca". She began singing calypsos in Hindi, later changing her verses to English. Her real success came with "Mr. Bissessar"(19487). Other popular songs : "Hotter than a Chula"(1990), a commentary on the beauty of "mixing" Indian and African rhythms: ("Rhythm from Africa and India/From the hills/Way up in Laventille/Pan-man skills/must spill into Caroni..."). She incorporated in Calypso the use of Indian tassa drumming (although Sparrow had sometimes used it before); **Eastlyn Orr**, a Tobagonian, debuted as "Lady Hot Spot" and won many calypso contests. Some of her songs:'Leave Woman Alone" and "I Don't Know". She was the first female to sing at the "Spectakula Forum" (a calypso tent featuring many singers from other "tents"). She treats a number of "female" issues in her songs. "Woman is Rising" is a current example; **Kai Maloney**, a band singer-turned calypsonian; **Lady Venus** (Marilyn Jeminez) sang party tunes, and often sang other people's songs; **Lovey** (Denise Moore) with singer Marilyn Williams formed "The Love Twins". "Don't Treat Woman So"and "Leggo Mih Hand" were sung at the Calypso Revue Tent in 1988; **Marcia Marinda**, from Tobago, she won calypso competitions in school and is a BWIA hostess (British West Indian Airlines). The airline sponsored a calypso competition which she won in 1976, with "Fly Girl Horrors". She sang in a nightclub owned by her father; **Queen Isis** (Bernadette Paul) sang "Abortion" (1988) and "Take A Walk, Brother Man"; **Tigress** (Joanne Rowley) was a member of La Brea Folk Performers. She entered and won the competition in Skinner's Park in 1987 with "African Roots". In addition to these women, there was a string of child (male and female) calypsonians, beginning in 1979, but the trend seems to be that more girls are entering into calypso than boys. **Abbi** (Debra Blackman) was one of the first child

calypsonians. She is the daughter of calypsonian Lord Shorty. She sang "I'm Young and Moving On", probably composed by her father, which won her the Queen title at age 14. **Princess B.** also the daughter of a well-known calypsonian, the Mighty Bomber, she sang remakes of his songs; **Princess Natasha**, one of the child calypsonians in the second half of the 1980s. Sparrow managed her career. All her material was written by a man. Her song, "One Day" about unrequited love, caused a public stir, being considered too "mature" for a 12 year old; **Sharleen Boodram** is an East Indian girl who played tenor pan (with steeldrum bands). Her songs, written by her father and other professional song writers, include "Message to Mr. Robbie" (a political commentary about the then-Prime Minister, Robinson) and "Tassa Tempo" (1989).

1980s to the contemporary calypso arena

This period witnessed many class and race changes in the calypso arena. Whereas previously, calypsonians of both sexes were mainly Black and of the working class, in the late 1980s, calypsonians such as Denyse Plummer, of the French Creole (white) population and Drupatee Rangoonai, an East Indian Hindu woman, came onto the scene. The public reaction to these newcomers to calypso has been varied. Denyse Plummer began singing pop music, while Drupatee began singing religious songs. When Plummer performed for the first time as a calypsonian, the crowd threw old fruit and garbage at her ⁵⁷. Plummer was not viewed as embodying the calypsonian culture, which was, up to then, perceived as Black, and lower class, even though Carnival itself had for some time, been appropriated to a large extent by the middle classes, as part of a national post-independence movement to reclaim their Creole (read African) heritage, and the calypso competitions themselves were largely supported by middle class businesses, which commercialized the shows. Still, at the level of calypso singer, a white, middle class calypsonian, let alone a woman, was not at first accepted. Plummer persisted in singing calypso, however, and is now considered one of the most important singing artists in Trinidad. (She was crowned Calypso Queen in 1990). In an interview, though she encouraged more women to join calypso, she asserted that there remains a relative lack of support for new women calypsonians, when compared with men : "There is a notable reluctance on the part of

⁵⁷"Plummer had the misfortune of being pelted with rolls of toilet paper and orange skins while performing before a traditionally unruly crowd in San Fernando during the semi-finals of the Calypso Monarch Competition...She was a white woman venturing into what is virtually a black man's territory, and she did not fit". Keith Warner, "Ethnicity and the Contemporary Calypso" Trinidad Ethnicity, Kevin Yelvington, editor.

tent organisers to engage unknown female singers. Understandable, but how else to get known? There are dozens awaiting the opportunity...It doesn't seem to happen to aspiring men!" 58

By contrast, Drupatee Rangoonai had a favorable response from calypso audiences, but was lambasted by her own Hindu community as "a thorn among Indian women" (newspaper). She was viewed as a double disgrace - both to Indian women, and to the Hindu religion, for becoming a calypsonian. She first sang calypsos in Hindi, later changing her verses to English. It is interesting to note that the following year, (1989) two male East Indians debuted on the calypso stage (Ricky Jai and Sundar Poop), apparently with no criticism at all, which suggests that the (East Indian) public concern about who becomes a calypsonian was at this time centered more around the issue of gender than ethnicity. It is important to note that Drupatee addressed both issues in her songs; she "released a calypso that went a long way toward breaking down racial and gender barriers." 59 In her song, she tells "Mr. Bissessar" to "roll up the tassa" (the East Indian drum prominently featured in her songs). This calypso captured the growing interpenetration of black/creole and Indian music. More importantly, through her calypso, Drupatee promotes her own Indian culture, as "she made no attempt to disguise her Indianness, even playing to the stereotype of the Indian female who cannot dance('wine') like the other Trini women."60 With the success of Drupatee and Denyse Plummer, for the first time the ethnic/cultural/ racial bridge is gapped in the calypso arena; that this has been achieved by women in particular is a strong testimony to the influential role of women in calypso.

THE UNITED SISTERS

"As a woman, it's much more work. You have to keep your head up high, saying that I'm a woman, I'm not just makin' a 'wine and jam' calypso, you know, I'm going out there to educate the children of the Caribbean and all over the world, I should say." (Marva Joseph, calypsonian "Marvelous Marva")

Another important example of women in the contemporary form is The United Sisters: Lady B.(Beulah Bobb), Singing Sandra (Sandra de Vignes), Marvelous Marva (Marva Joseph), and Tigress (Joanne Rowley). Each calypsonians in their own right, The

⁵⁸Interview with Denyse Plummer in the Trinidad Guardian,("Female of the Species")4/20/87

⁵⁹Keith Warner, "Ethnicity and the Contemporary Calypso" Trinidad Ethnicity, page 288

⁶⁰Keith Warner, page 288.

United Sisters are one of the most important examples of women in Calypso, as they represent the only female Calypsonians in Trinidad who have come together as a group. In addition, they have done much to promote a women's agenda in the form. "Pong for Pong", sung by Tigress, is a challenge to male superiority, while Sandra's "Sexy Employer" is a call for women to speak out against sexual harassment: "...But if you value yourself as a woman/You will demand respect from the vagabonds/Stand up to them and let them know the truth/Is work you want, You ent no blinkin prostitute") Lady B. is one of the only female calypsonians who sing political commentaries. "No Business Like Show Business", (better known as "Move the Camera ") is an example: "No business like show business/I'm in it now so I know/No business like show business/Is Parliament a pappy show?/ Move the Camera, Mr..."..Lady B. explains the song is a commentary on the the government's introduction of cameras in Parliament, to bring the public closer to the events at hand. "But, as in theater, people tend to act up, once they find themselves in the light..I saw it as happening in Parliament, so I sang about it." In addition to being a calypsonian, Lady B. has also written plays and was involved in theater much of her life. She has commented on the differences in male and female performance: "Largely, women have not been into the topics of the 'wine and jam' type - they sing party songs, but they are not dancing when they get on the stage and wine and wine..I think it's because a woman will be a woman, try to hold something back ..that little bit of 'Lady'"⁶¹ The more recent "A Woman Should Win (the Road March)" addresses the need to recognize women's participation in Calypso, particularly when faced with competition from men. Tigress recently took on the theme of nation building, with songs such as "What Is" which asks: "what is Independence?/ What is Emancipation?/What is being a Republic Nation, which is also internationalized?/" and "I Wonder When" ("I wonder when we'll have peace"), and "One Road" following recent elections, asking which "road" Trinidad will choose. Marva asserts that calypso's most important function is to educate, particularly the younger generations. Many of her songs stress this message of education to women specifically, in songs addressed to both mothers and single women. All four "sisters" make reference to the strong image of the "Ambatalia woman", as the ideal of feminine strength, a strength necessary to women in calypso. ("Ambatalia Woman" is the name of their recently -released album). The coming together of The United Sisters originated from the idea of forming a network of women performers, who could be of support to each other, "a sort of women in the arts union", according to Marva, involving not just calypsonians but also dancers, models and other women with performance-oriented interests. As no other

⁶¹Personal interview with Beulah Bobb, June 1992

women seemed appear at the meetings, the four who consistently did stuck together and formed The United Sisters. Audience response to the group has been extremely favorable. In fact, the United Sisters are in greater demand as a performing group in the tents than each calypsonian on her own. It is furthermore interesting to note that more than one "sister" argued that the contemporary calypso arena is not male-dominated; that the many women who participate are simply not at the forefront.

PERFORMANCE PATTERNS

The importance of the function of Calypso for women must be understood not only in terms of song content analysis, but in song delivery. Calypso is truly a living, public art. Thus, body gestures, audience response and other aspects of presentation are the "framing" elements, integral components of the way a performance is "structured." In considering these structures, one may then study calypso performance as text.

The role of story-teller as performer and the importance of the performer-audience relationship has been examined by many scholars of African-American and Afro-Caribbean traditions (Abrahams, 1964, Crowley, 1966). In particular, Roger Abrahams' important work The Man- of- Words in the West Indies concentrates on the role of performer/audience in various expressive traditions in St. Vincent, Nevis and Tobago, focusing on different speech contexts, both formalized, such as wakes and thanksgivings, and in informal game or challenge-settings, such as signifying (like the dozens in the U.S.). Abrahams specifically looks at the boundaries of language in different speech contexts and the reputation-determining aspects of the ability to perform. In his examination, he notes the centrality of the riddler or story-teller and the importance of the performer/audience relationship. With its emphasis on double entendre, satire, "picong", and "mepris" in its verbal content, and its call-and-reponse pattern and word improvisation to fit the melodic line in its musicality, calypso represents a musical context for Abraham's verbal speech paradigm.

"Performance" is to be defined as calypso tent competitions, which are staged events, with a mainly Trinidadian audience. For the most part, tent competitions have changed very little from the earlier period. Other than advances in sound systems and stage lighting, and higher prices being charged to spectators, the emphasis is still on the song being sung; the judgement is still determined by song content. There are significant gender dimensions of performance strategies in the contemporary calypso arena which may affect performance judgement. One of the most striking is the rather

recent "winer girl" phenomenon. ("wining" is from "winding the waist") literally making wide pelvic circles using the hips in a strongly sexual gesture)⁶² Often, the male calypsonian has two women dancers next to him, on the stage, one on either side of him. These would be the "winer girls", who gyrate around the stage while the calypsonian delivers his songs. Sometimes these are backup singers, as well, but their main function is to "dance" for the audience, mostly performing a variation of pelvic thrusts.

The presence of the winer girl creates, on one hand, an overt sexual tone in the performance, (even when the songs may not be on sexual topics), obviously geared toward the male audience, while on the other hand, winer girls may be considered human stage "props", promoting the notion of the strong successful male, flanked by attractive women, an ideal which is, after all, at the heart of most male calypsonian's boasting songs of sexual exploit. In this way, winer girls support the image of popularity the male singer hopes to create, and might affect his success with an audience, even if this image is achieved through a false (or staged) popularity. Women who perform in the tents do not use winer girls, (and winer men do not exist yet!) In women's calypso performance, if there is wining, the woman does it herself. The Winer girl phenomenon suggests that perhaps the value system of audience aesthetic is changing. It may be asserted that song content alone is no longer enough in the tents; that an audience needs to be entertained visually as well. Even though tent audience is both male and female, it seems that men are the primary target of this entertainment.

Part of the Calypso tradition is the use of sobriquets. Throughout calypso development, male singers have used grandiose, self-inflating show names, such as the Mighty Sparrow, Lord Invader, King Radio, etc. The history of this naming tradition stems from the era of Britain's involvement in the Boer War against "foreigners". Calypsonians felt a certain patriotism toward the "mother country" and adopted names of famous war heroes, such as Richard Coeur de Leon, the Duke of Wellington, or combative titles like Lord Executor. As Errol Hill explains, the sobriquet tradition is also linked to more widespread literacy and education among the middle class calypsonians, as "with the upgrading of Carnival in the 1890's, shantwells of the period were more literate than their predecessors. Several from middle class homes

⁶²To "wine" (also "wine and jam") should be considered a dance form done especially in Carnival "jump up" bands, but also in any dance fete, or party - "drop the waist and wine, wine" as a recent popular soca song urges). It is done individually or in a couple, where the man stands behind the woman, as they "wine" together.

had attended secondary school. They had studied European history and felt very patriotic toward the 'mother country'" ⁶³ It is interesting to note that female calypsonians seem to reject this naming tradition. Although Singing Francine, Calypso Rose, or Lady B. may be considered stage names, they do not compare with the show of grandeur so prevalent in their male counterpart. In addition, many more women than men use their real names in the contemporary form. This difference suggests that women may be consciously trying to avoid any type of characterization - becoming a calypso "character" through the self-projection of sobriquets. Women may be more interested in being taken seriously as artists in their work. The scores of women who use their real names in the contemporary calypso arena (and the fact that many who had sobriquets have now dropped them - such as Lady Hot Spot, who is Eastlyn Orr) might mean that the contemporary female calypsonian is attempting a conscious reconstruction of her own image, both as a calypsonian and as a woman.

CONCLUSION

A facet of this study has been to examine the portrayal of women in traditional calypsos, following up on the many earlier studies cited throughout this paper, which have all pointed to the overwhelming negative images of women in traditional, male-composed songs. It should be noted, however, that there have been recent strides by male calypsonians to stop degrading women in their songs. Merle Hodge has praised calypsonians Black Stalin and Mighty Chalkdust "for their political vision and for singing about the dignity of women."⁶⁴ Barbadian calypsonian Adonijah (Peter Allyne) is similarly strongly opposed to the way his fellow calypsonians portray women, claiming that in his songs he seeks to "to end the defamation of women in kaiso."⁶⁵ His popular Cropover calypso, "Woman", for which he was voted People's Choice (The Cropover Festival is a pan-Caribbean annual event) reportedly "lambasted calypsonians for the bad light in which they portray women." It is interesting to note that the positive response he received from women for this calypso actually helped foster his career, as the strength of his message prompted the Organization for Women and Development in his native Barbados to sponsor the recording of his calypso. His song expresses the concern that calypsos with negative images of women have a strong influence on younger generations, who may

⁶³Errol Hill. *The Trinidad Carnival. Mandate For A National Theatre*, pages 73-74

⁶⁴Reported in Trinidad Guardian's November 1985 article, covering the panel discussion of the UWI Women's Group.

⁶⁵Interview with Adonijah by Michelle Joseph in Trinidad Guardian, who comments:"Sadly, it is unusual for a West Indian man to think so sympathetically of the plight of women and the way they are portrayed in our music."

perpetuate such images ("...The songs you sing on the radio. Every word the little children know/If you sing bout woman jammin' in a fete/How could the youth ever learn respect"). Other calls have been made in the press and elsewhere for "kaisonians to create female images that tell the truth about our women". (Trinidad Guardian, 1/28/91)

In conclusion, women's calypsos can be said to promote a women's agenda, through the many messages in their songs of independence and liberation. In the 1960s and early 1970s, however, sexual freedom seems to have been the sum total of this liberation, as evidenced earlier in much of the work of Calypso Rose. Although female calypsonians sought to combat the negative representation of women in calypsos by men, they often played on the same stereotyped image of women in their own calypsos. In general, in the contemporary arena, women's calypsos still do not attempt the biting satire or political commentary of many of their male counterparts. A notable exception is the work of Lady B., who does attempt hardcore political commentary in her songs and in addition, writes her own material. However, in general, there is a relatively lower level of aggression in women's calypsos, and they do not display the same antagonism of many male-composed songs. Perhaps, however, women are addressing their own agenda via the calypso, one which is different from a man's. The focus in many women's songs is on self-preservation and endurance, as evidenced in the work of Singing Francine, Singing Diane, Singing Sandra, and many others. It is significant that the women calypsonians interviewed for this study all conceded that to simply be in the calypso world takes enormous inner strength. Many "messages" put forth to other women, via their calypsos, seem to encourage this female strength. Singing Sandra's "Sexy Employer", for example, (also known as "Die with my Dignity", a line from the song's chorus), is a commentary on standing up against sexual harassment. Sandra has commented on the influence of her song, asserting that through her calypso, she is giving women a voice with which to say "No" to abusive situations; a voice they may not otherwise have.⁶⁶ The message is clearly part of an ideal which is female, focusing on self-preservation, independence, and endurance of hardship.

In reviewing what women's particular "messages" are, it has been asserted by some researchers that women do not attempt to degrade men in their songs, nor do they project themselves as a group (Boyce-Davies, Warner). However, while the former

⁶⁶ "When I sang the song 'Dignity', it gave a lot of women inspiration to stand up...a lot of them would just feel it happen to them but they can't find that strength to come out and tell the man, well, 'No', so they just went along with it. But after hearing 'Dignity' and 'Dignity' was on everybody's lips, they were able to stand up and tell them 'I will die with my dignity' and that type of thing. A lot of men grabbed that song too." Personal interview, June 1992

statement is generally the case, the latter is finally no longer true. The continued success of women competing with men in the calypso arena, and particularly with women participating from different ethnic and/or class backgrounds indicates a proliferation of women's participation in the form. Based on the messages promoted in women's songs, it can be asserted that women are very much promoting themselves as a group. This is only possible because women as a group are once again, firmly planted in Calypso.

Through calypso performance, for both sexes, traditional structures can be challenged. For women in particular, this is becoming increasingly important, as calypso provides a venue through which women can challenge the hegemonic structures of a male-dominated society. Women use calypso not only to comment on social patterns as they exist, but their calypsos can also influence these same patterns. Through calypso, women have been able to explore how Trinidad "woman" is constructed, conceived and perceived in her society.