THE POLITICS OF THE VISUAL AND THE VOCAL
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As an academic project we aim to document as well as architecture. 

As an academic project we aim to document and confront the historical material circumstances and ideological paradigms within which rich artistic expressions have emerged often through struggle. Many such expressions are threatened or stifled, thus, even as we recognize the potential of these artistic forms and practices, we attempt to unveil and transgress persistent dogged frameworks. In concerning ourselves with the potential of the arts to stimulate social change, we aim to propose theoretical and practical alternatives toward socio-cultural and politico-economic advancement through the arts. To this end Caribbean InTransit engages in inquiry into the economic and political context of the arts, technological dimensions of the culture industry, the design and implementation of sustainable cultural programming and the development of Caribbean Cultural policy and Cultural diplomacy.

It is through an exploration of ourselves that we desire to discover and celebrate our worth and forge onward but without neglecting our contextual positioning in a globalized world. Our methodological approach enables this internalization and externalization, mirroring what esteemed Caribbean artiste and scholar Rex Nettleford described as “Inward Stretch, Outward Reach”. We thus incorporate, artistic practices and beliefs external to the Caribbean for consideration in order to provide a stage for comparisons and lend insight and breadth to our project. Our focus is the development of the Caribbean Arts and Culture industry via strategic partnerships in the Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone and Dutch Caribbean. We recognize Caribbean as global with a distinctive character of mobility and this informs our endeavor to establish links with universities and arts organizations worldwide. We invite and welcome such affiliations.

Caribbean InTransit is the second stage in a movement begun in 2005. The first forum, Caribbean Arts Village Ltd. (based in Trinidad and Tobago) was a social enterprise featuring a physical establishment, The Centre for the Arts, and a website which attracted over 40,000 hits in less than two years. The company aimed to facilitate, promote and network artists and artists from around the Caribbean by becoming a community focal point, facilitating the showcase and development of Caribbean talent by offering youth training and programming. The Centre staged a Summer Visual Arts camp, a regular Visual Arts events and Concert-Exhibitions of young artists, Artist’s Lymes and Fashion and Dessert evenings. The Centre hosted a fringe festival for Carifesta 2006, two CD launches: Ray of hope by well-known local vocalist Raymond Edwards, and the Ruiz Brothers Project by the Ruiz Brothers. The Centre was privileged to feature well known Trinidadian artists such as Isaac Blackman and The Love Circle, Sheldon Blackman, Ron Reid, Chantal Esdelle and Moyenne, The Alternative Quartet and Talk is Cheap, and young classical vocalists such as Renee Solomon, Janine DeBique and Rahel Moore.

Caribbean InTransit is the only open access academic journal to focus specifically on the Caribbean arts as its object of critique. We understand the arts to encompass literary, performing, visual and culinary arts as well as architecture. 

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The boundaries of the Caribbean are not geographic ones. The Caribbean is constantly expanding—incorporating a Diaspora where echoes of Caribbean culture are heard in cities and villages far from the region. Because of its relative youth—new world history of 500 years, its openness—societies settled by many language and ethnic groups, all of whom introduced a cross fertilization of culture, and its pattern of settlement through forced or coerced migration of labor, the Caribbean and its Diaspora are perhaps more consumed with defining selfhood and identity than if it simply took its existence for granted. It is as if its peoples, both those within and those who live in the constantly expanding Diaspora, are persistently engaged in the creation of a blueprint and baseline for a recognizable Caribbean culture. Culture is not only a commodity for establishing belonging as Stuart Hall reminded us, but also a profoundly political bargaining tool for claiming belonging status, inside and outside of the Caribbean. For to be Caribbean, whether a fourth or fifth generation Caribbean, is to have a legitimacy to speak for, perhaps more consumed with defining selfhood and identity than if it simply took its existence for granted. Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s essay “Hold Still or Fixing Diaspora in Dionne Brand’s No Language is Neutral” troubles the unquestioned use of the term Diaspora. She examines two poems from Dionne Brand’s collection No Language is Neutral and asserts that scholars have been using Diaspora to connect black experiences of modernity, which may not be consistent with the intellectual and activist use of the term.

“From markers of French history to memorials of Caribbean resistance: monuments to Louis Delgrès, Igance and Soltitude” Pascale De Souza examines the two competing narratives that are contained in the construction of these memorials—elicting the new meanings that emerge with the passage of time and historical deconstruction. Brian McLoughlin revisits the ongoing debate on Dewitt Peters “discovery” of Haitian intutive art, as exotic rather than intrinsically presenting a new aesthetic in painting. The resonance of this representation of Haitian art persisted in the New York art world’s reading of the work of Jean Michel Basquiat.

Andrae Green’s artwork, “In Looking, I See Nothing” and “How Horrid My Perception of You when I see Me through your eyes” is a reminder of the indefinable loss that people experience when they lose something of themselves, to another, through any kind of dependent or abusive relationship. In different though related vein, Jace McKinney says of his art in this issue that it is intended to open up a dialogue to contemplating the invisible forces that influence and move our world, the imagining of community that as Benedict Anderson write’s is the ambit of every displaced individual.

The production of art is always a statement of intent, political or otherwise—the artist has something to say in producing work. This is what Rita Valente examines in an essay “Escrita Na Pasagem: A Meditation on Arts Community and Capital”, which examines the Portuguese festival, Escrita Na Pasagem to investigate the political and economic agency of art. It is useful in a region specific journal to examine parallel type concerns that occur in other societies, if only to shed new light on the taken for granted around us and to demonstrate evidence of the universal rather than the particular within Caribbean cultural configurations.

Two essays focus on the southern Caribbean, on Trinidad and Tobago. Meagan Sylvester explores the genre classification of selected popular musics of this society arguing that there is a close fit between cultural production and identity, while Kumar Mahabir reminds us that there are sources of original material such as literary devices in East Indian folk songs of the Caribbean that have not entered the realm of popular knowledge and there is an urgency to collect and store these as they may already be disappearing.

The two last essays in this issue move us to film related media. Errol Brewster’s Flambeau discloses the frustrations and regrets of old age, examining expectations of the male in the Caribbean in relation to love and family and fidelity. Finally, Emiel Martens interviewes Carl Bradshaw and the Late Charles Hyatt, two of Jamaica’s foremost actors who became household names in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean for their memorable performances in local and international film productions.

The journal Caribbean In-Transit takes these multi-varied understandings and expressions of the Caribbean art and art forms as a point of departure “to provide a creative ‘meeting place’ for Caribbean artists to share their thought provoking ideas and works within a community of artists and entrepreneurs”. The provision of this space for dialogue is increasingly important for artists and writers who live and work within and outside of those territories touched by the Caribbean Sea. This first issue of Caribbean In-Transit, “The Politics of the Visual and Vocal” fosters that community of crossings—artists and scholars drawn from a range of disciplines and fields. What links all of the pieces together is their common concern with the cultural expressions of identity. These contributions are positioned as interlocutors of contemporary issues facing the Caribbean basin. Their interpretations of cultural phenomenon are deployed towards socio-political ends.

The first issue allows for language and cultural variation within the Caribbean to rear its head deliberately. Implicit in the form of the visual and the vocal is a multiplicity of voice and expression, the differences allow for a diffusion of power of the scribal text. The entries speak to the individual reader or viewer in ways which optimistically will resonate with self knowledge and experience, and thus far for each reader, towards the claiming of Caribbean identity with a necessary pride and confidence that these explorations should generate.
 ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR:

Patricia Mohammed is Professor, Gender and Cultural Studies and Campus Co-ordinator, School for Graduate Studies and Research at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad. She was formally educated at The University of the West Indies and The Institute of Social Studies in The Netherlands. From 1994-2002 she was first Head of the Mona Unit, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, Jamaica, and served as Acting Head of this Centre in St Augustine from 2006 to 2007. From 2004 she was Deputy Dean, Graduate Studies and Research of the Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI, St. Augustine. She has been a Visiting Professor at SUNY, Albany and is founder and current executive editor of the online open access journal Caribbean Review of Gender Studies. She has been involved in feminist activism and scholarship for over two decades and increasingly over the last decade in the field of Cultural Studies and film. Her main areas of interest are gender studies, history and art and film. She has made ten films including the documentary series entitled A Different Imagination. Her short film in this series, “Coolie Pink and Green” (2009) won the most popular local film award in the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival 2009 and was selected to open the First Pravasi Film Festival in New Delhi India in 2010. She has studied and worked in England, The Netherlands, Jamaica, Namibia and the United States and currently lives in Trinidad with artist husband, Rex Dixon.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs

Hold Still or Fixing Diaspora in Dionne Brand’s No Language is Neutral

Abstract:

Applying a critical gendered lens to the concept of Diaspora, through poetry of Afro-Trinidadian Dionne Brand, offers a new definition of Diaspora. Usually defined by its relationship to movement and forced or voluntary travel across space, this piece examines Diaspora as an economically compelled stillness, most visible in the labor, literary and otherwise, of Black women in the Diaspora. With readings of Dionne Brand’s “Blues for Mammy Prater” and “Return,” this piece offers a challenge to the mobility-centered understanding, and sometimes glamorization of Diaspora and calls for attention to the core issues of racism, sexism and economic injustice that shape the experiences of the lives of most of the people who can be described by the term “Black Diaspora.”

Our nostalgia was a lie and the passage on that six hour flight to ourselves is wide and like another world, and then another one inside and is so separate and fast to the skin but voiceless, never born, or born and stilled...hush.

Dionne Brand, No Language is Neutral

Framing (Introduction)

What if “Diaspora,” the term that we (scholars in the post-modern moment) have been using to describe the movement of black people (we) in the New World proved itself treacherous to our descriptive cause on the all-important levels of time and space? What if the experience described by Diaspora was one that refused to progress through time and (therefore) did not buy into the simultaneity of different space? Dionne Brand, in two of the poems from her collection No Language is Neutral, asserts that scholars have been using Diaspora to connect black experiences of modernity which may not signify in the ways that those of us who use the terms Black and African Diaspora as intellectual and activist tools of description assume.

As Brent Edwards points out in his essay “The Uses of Diaspora,” Paul Gilroy’s construction of transatlantic cultural commerce, in The Black Atlantic - which has become a foundational text for the transnational cultural studies that we make sexy and marketable with the term “Diaspora” - adopts a colonial model ostensibly for the sake of coherence.
Gilroy suggests that Black people in the United Kingdom have used the musical work of Black people in North America and the Caribbean as “raw material” for the production of a Black Atlantic culture. I want to suggest that Gilroy’s appropriation of the labor structure of colonial capitalism to describe what he would want to be a subversive black cultural movement reveals at least two of the related ways in which Diaspora is stuck.

First, we become less and less sure that time is actually moving forward if the models of coloniality are incessantly repeating themselves in new self-justifying forms. Second, this (same old) process of using spatial difference as a productive force depends on imposing different models of time on these “different” places. The backwardness discourse directed at the global south by the global north enables the “development” and “modernization” discourses of the neo-liberal south by the global north enables the “development” and “modernization” discourses of the neo-liberal.

In his classic work The Black Jacobins, CLR James explains that the enslaved population in Haiti for the most part could not reproduce itself because of the severity of the labor conditions and reminds us that the importation of slaves was an important factor in the politicization of the masses in Haiti, suggesting that the ideological reproduction of the social condition and the biological reproduction of the population were in some way related. What if we paused there and looked at the dynamics of the labor and value of reproduction at that moment when female slaves were being punished for refusing to have children according to archival records cited in Dionne Brand’s At the Full and Change of the Moon, for example? The idea of the Diaspora sits within a set of spatial and temporal frameworks which attempt to understand the relationship between colonialism, slavery and black modernity, but move too quickly over the issue of biological and social reproduction as labor and therefore operate based on quietly gendered terms.

As long as our uses of Diaspora reproduce the gendered conceptions of space and time that were used to justify the violence of colonization and transatlantic slavery to begin with, we will be unable to imagine a livable alternative that reveals the arbitrariness of the dehumanizing narratives to which we would respond, “Diasporically.”

Brand offers the traumatic temporality of the experience of dispersion by describing an encounter with a preserved image of an enslaved woman and a tableau of an economically stagnated Caribbean homestead through the trope of stillness. Thus she highlights exactly the experience that needs to be silenced for the prevailing neo-liberal logic to cohere, amplifying the contours of ideological and economic violence in a way that demands accountability.

Hold Still

In her poem “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater”, Brand suggests the possibility of a trans-temporal agency that interrupts a mobility-drunk modernist narrative of Diaspora and perverts the possibilities of reproduction. Brand as narrator, dedicates this poem to a photographic reproduction of a 115 year old enslaved woman called Mammy Prater. She suggests that her encounter with this photograph is the result of an uncanny reproductive act on the part of Mammy Prater herself. Brand recasts Prater, the objectified subject of the photograph, as the artist, declaring the literal photographer superfluous by calling the product a “self portrait” (15). Though Brand narrates the poem, she subordinates her own gaze to the fixing, moving gaze of the photographed. Repeating the phrases “those eyes” and “her eyes” in alternation seven times throughout the poem, the narrator reveals that Mammy Prater is the one absorbing, revealing and reframing her own would-be audience.

In the logic of this poem, Mammy Prater projects herself into the future, not through the biologically reproductive act that diaspora refers to etymologically, but through an act of migration, but rather through a radical habitation and representation of her own stillness. Brand illustrates the truly characteristic result of labor-motivated bodily relocation (alienated paralysis) in her depiction of the stillness of slavery. Slavey becomes a pose, an unnatural crystallization that transforms the body, site of all possibility, into an object. Brand metaphorizes the 115 year death sentence that Mammy Prater lives, with the image of a lifetime of waiting for the moment of the photograph. The refrain of the poem explains that “she waited” in an active, productive (for someone else) inability to move, for a chance to reproduce her stillness in a recognizable form through this photograph. Brand imagines that “by the time she sat” for this photograph, “her feet had turned to marble, her heart burned red” (15). The repetition that Brand employs for this “blues spiritual” testifies to the trauma that she imagines Mammy Prater would have endured during 115 years in a position making her vulnerable to rape at any moment, and ensuring that any children she might have would be claimed as property before being subjected to unspeakable abuses and frozen in the posture of perpetual labor. This insistence on stillness reveals the stakes of our deployment of Diaspora. Brand insists that we acknowledge and emphasize the deadly petrification worked on the life-possibilities of black people through the process of Diaspora, putting the “die” back in Diaspora. I suggest that this is a call to press pause on the “Keep on Moving” Soul II Soul soundtrack that Paul Gilroy invokes for our understanding of Diaspora (if the record is not skipping already), and to listen closely to the paralysis that we are perpetuating when we use Diaspora in a way that reproduces a gendered valorization of mobility.

In the structure of this poem, Brand suggests that instead of celebrating Diaspora as the site of black modernity, and black participation in a process of globalization based on Enlightenment fueled ideas of progressive time and differential space, we acknowledge the absolutely arresting reality of the trauma of objectification in a way that reveals that time has not moved and that mobility is not necessarily liberating.

Indeed those of us hoping to theorize and organize on terms that are progressive and recognizable in modern normalcy reconform how stuck we are in the logics that made colonialism possible every time we claim that we have moved past this ongoing trauma. In this poem, Brand demonstrates one possible response, a mode of trans-temporal interaction that perverts preservation, and which allows us to see our connection to space, time and other people in a way that does not reproduce a system of thought that narrates our deaths even as we speak.

Fixing Diaspora

If Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater suggests an alternate subjectivity through the construct of the still image, “Return”, the poem that introduces the collection, re-images place, specifically this place, the Caribbean, through the trope of stillness. From the moment of the title Brand allows us to see that (once again) despite etymological references to sperm, and common uses of Diaspora to chart a move from Africa into the New World Diaspora has never been about the journey forward. Diaspora has been instead the language...
through which to imagine or describe the possibility of a return. Whether imagining an impossible return to a pre-colonial African homeland, arguing for the persistence of a cultural heritage that refers back to an African sensibility, or as is the case here, returning from foreign to a Caribbean home, Diaspora, though dependent on a narrative of progressive time, is actually only equipped to move backwards. Furthermore, the homeland itself, in this case a certain street in Trinidad, is fixed in time due to the oppressive economic regimes that paralyze its residents. Brand begins, “So the street is still there” (7). She describes her would-be home in terms that directly challenge a Negritude vision of authentic African-ness through closeness to the earth. Unlike Cesaire’s Notebook of a Return to My Native Land, which forges mythical hope out of the negritude-posted natural relationship between black people and the Earth, Brand’s Return finds no glamour in the fact that the people in the place that she will not call her native land except through her implied allusion to Cesaire, are literally dirt poor. She laments the state of “everything made indistinguishable from dirt by age and custom,” reminding us that this is not a natural state, but rather a historically grounded man-made “custom” of oppression (7).

Brand goes on to use the word “still” more than a dozen times in this 24-line poem, to place the present setting in the persistence of ongoing poverty. This word choice steals/stills the celebratory narrative of black mobility away from itself, insisting that despite migration, despite the awarding of scholarships, despite remittances sent home, the lives of the majority of black people in the Caribbean, through certainly transient (moving to the city looking for jobs, moving between islands to traffic goods and services of all kinds) are stagnated by extreme and continual economic oppression. Brand ends the poem with the lines “still the faces./ masked in sweat and sweetness, still the eyes/ watery, ancient, still the hard, distinct brittle smell of/ slavery” (7). “Still” remaining and repeating in this one form can, through your act of reading and through Brand’s acts of line breaking, inhabit at least three different parts of speech. On one level, “still” functions as an adverb, arresting every potential action in the poem by describing it as the continuation of a prior traumatic violation, or as Judith Herman explains, the point at which time stops, the moment of political terror that one does not, cannot, move past. At the same time, in the same instances, “still” functions as an adjective. The reader can set “still” apart from the phrases it precedes or follows and read it as a descriptive, monotonous refrain bearing down on the setting like a drumbeat or like the pulsing heat of the inescapable sun. In this case the word becomes as unchanging and as painful as the phenomenon it describes: punctuating and arresting the people who cannot afford to stop. It takes a heroic level of structure just to maintain this unacceptable status quo. Taken another way, “still” can also function as a command in most cases. The narrator could be demanding that each and every tendency of this scene halt. She could be trying to work a spell against this moment’s unceasing reproduction of itself. In any case, the term still functions here to problematize the idea of progress as the function of time, and to insist on the temporality of trauma in order to expose the subaltern everyday for what it is, ongoing political violence, and an ever-present death threat.

Brand’s reflection is, however, not necessarily hopeless. Although this devastating scene cannot save itself from its own beauty (nor the faces from their own “sweetness”) the structural logic that Brand employs here suggests a way that the Diasporic encounter might be usefully framed. If black people worldwide are, and have been, experiencing a racist economic global order as the traumatic renewal of everyday terror (now the carnage of the crusades, now decimation through colonial war and disease, now the kidnapping of the middle passage, now rape under a system of enslavement, now rape under a system of domestic servitude, now decimation from treatable infectious diseases now, now, now), then Brand’s moving inhabitation of stillness reveals that the experience of trauma does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of transformation. Instead, a traumatic temporality reveals that the logic making dehumanization routine and probable is neither natural, nor prevailing in the lived experiences of the mass of people. Stillness, or the recognition of the superficiality of what we have been calling movement, brings the oppressive structures with which we align in our pretense of “moving on” into a sharp focus interrupting the status quo in the name of accountability for the collective lived experience of the “Diaspora”, or those we connect ourselves to through death as though our lives depend on it.

**Bibliography**


**About the Author:**

Alexis Pauline Gumbs holds a PhD in English, Africana Studies and Women’s Studies from Duke University. She was named one of UTNE Readers 50 Visionaries Transforming the World in 2009 and has been featured by the International Museum of Women, Curve Magazine and American Book Review among others. Alexis is the founder of the Eternal Summer of the Black Feminist community school. (blackfeministmind.wordpress.com)
PASCALE DESOUZA

From markers of French history to memorials of Caribbean resistance: monuments to Louis Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude

Keywords: resistance, monuments, positivism, constructivism, Guadeloupe

Abstract:

In Silencing the Past Michel-Rolph Trouillot contrasts a positivist vision of history aimed at approximating the truth and a constructivist one which appear as another form of fiction. In Guadeloupe, the history of maroon slaves has elicited both discourses, as reflected in the statuary erected to mark an 1802 rebellion and its three main figures: Louis Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude. A chronological examination of monuments dedicated to them reveals an evolving representation from a rebel first interpreted as playing a part in French revolutionary history and later celebrated for his/her role in resisting French hegemony. As several 21st century initiatives reveal, both visions endure in Guadeloupe, reflecting the complex history of an island still struggling to define its Caribbean identity while being an overseas French region.

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that gray vault. The sea. The sea has locked them up.

The sea is History

(Watt, 36)

Silencing the Past, the Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot contrasts a positivist view of history wherein “the role of the historian is to reveal the past, to discover or, at least, approximate the truth” (5) with a constructivist view of history as “another form of fiction” (ibid). Trouillot contends that positivism characterizes European and North-American approaches to colonial history as it provides “a story about power, a story about those who won” (ibid), thereby silencing the voice of the [Caribbean] other. While seeking to give credence to the histories of those who were often powerless to express themselves, be they slaves, indentured servants or thwarted rebels, Trouillot’s reading of history may contribute to the ongoing erasure of the other, by labeling their contributions forms of fiction. A truly constructivist view of history would approach all historical testimonies as forms of fiction, reflecting the biases and ambivalence of the person sharing her experience or vision of events, regardless of the amount of power this person wields in society. Maroons present an interesting case in point. Having left the plantation, they established an alternate historical discourse, predicated on another form of power. Their history may be interpreted as another positivist approach, especially in cases when their rebellions led to ultimate victory as when Haiti achieved its independence or Jamaican maroons obtained the rights to use part of the land to maintain their communities. In the French Caribbean, the history of maroon slaves has elicited both a positivist discourse aimed at celebrating them by folding them into a French revolutionary narrative and a constructivist approach which underlines their roles as Caribbean rebels fighting against France, and often suppresses such discourses of resistance, especially when these are successfully thwarted by French forces. Both approaches are reflected in the statuary erected to mark an 1802 rebellion in Guadeloupe and its three main figures: Louis Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude.

As Trouillot suggests, “the production of traces is always also the production of silences. Some occurrences are noted from the start; others are not. Some are engraved in individual and collective bodies; others are not. Some leave physical markers; others do not” (29). This paper proposes a chronological examination of several such ‘physical markers’ to demonstrate how the monuments erected to celebrate Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude produce both traces and silences. A diachronic analysis reveals the evolving representation of the rebel figure first interpreted as playing a part in a French history characterized by revolutionary ideals and the later celebration of its role in resisting French hegemony. As several 21st century initiatives reveal, both visions endure in Guadeloupe, reflecting the complex history of an island still struggling to define its Caribbean identity while being an overseas French region.

Historical Background

Called Karukera (the island of beautiful waters) by the Caribs, Guadeloupe is a twin island located in the Lesser Antilles. Low-lying lands and some hilly terrain comprise its eastern half named Grande-Terre while a volcanic chain with rugged forested slopes covers most of the land on its western half called Basse-Terre. The former was more suited to the cultivation of sugar and other staples during the heyday of the plantation economy while the latter often served as a refuge for marooning slaves. Christopher Columbus reached the island in 1493 and named it Guadaloupe after a monastery in Spain. Guadeloupe, the French version of the name has endured and replaced its native name. While Christopher Columbus’ historical role has undergone much scrutiny and his negative impact on American cultures and peoples has been widely denounced, markers celebrating his “discovery” of the New World still abound. There is one such monument in Guadeloupe, the Mémorial Christophe Colomb.

On November 4, 1916, Émile Mervart, the governor of the island, inaugurated a monument to celebrate Columbus on land offered by local planters in Sainte-Marie near the town of Capsterre Belle Eau (Basse-Terre). The village is located near the site where Columbus first disembarked and was named after one of Columbus’ ships, the Santa Marta. While erected away from the town center, the monument attracts some local, metropolitan and foreign visitors. It stands on a small plaza along the main road to the town of Basse-Terre and a postal agency is located nearby. The statue - a bust of Columbus - was carved by an artist from Genoa and is set on a triangular base. A marble plaque at the base of the statue bears a text in Latin and a poem in French written by Mervart himself. The text written in Latin on the base celebrates Columbus’ arrival and renaming of the island while the poem—which follows the French rules of versification for sonnets—praises the “discoverer” and “godfather”, marking the sport where “Karukera became Guadeloupe”. Several canons and two anchors were later added to the site. Such a representation of Caribbean history seems totally dated nowadays. Yet, the memorial still stands and is featured on multiple touristic sites and blogs, thereby inscribing Columbus into a French narrative of Caribbean colonization.

After Columbus’ arrival in 1493, the island failed to attract much interest. Its western half was poorly suited to agriculture, except for an eastern coastal plain, and the mangrove-fringed shores of its eastern half were deemed rather insalubrious. Colonized by the French in 1635, it eventually became a major producer of sugar, though it remained less attractive to French planters than Haiti or Martinique. Several French planters who settled in...
Martinique indeed let overseers run their Guadeloupian plantations. On June 7, 1794, following the French revolution, slavery was abolished in Haiti and Guadeloupe. The measure was however not applicable to Martinique, which was a British colony at the time. By 1802, France was no longer a republic but an empire and Napoleon Bonaparte reinstated slavery. Two main reasons led to such a decision. The first was financial need to support war in Europe, the second was the influence of his wife Josephine who was born in Martinique in a planter’s family. Faced with the risk of losing their free labor in 1794, Martinican planters had opted instead to hand over the island to the English, thereby ensuring the maintenance of slavery. However, several Martinican planters owned plantations in Guadeloupe and were adversely affected when France abolished slavery and declared all former slaves to be henceforth French citizens with full civil rights. Not only did they forfeit the income provided by their Guadeloupian holdings but lost their investments in men and machinery on that island without any potential for compensation. Napoleon’s decision to reinstate slavery in 1802 led to several rebellions as former slaves rallied to fight for their freedom both in Haiti and in Guadeloupe.

The two main figures of the Guadeloupean rebellion were Louis Delgrès, a mulatto from Martinique, and Ignace his lieutenant. Solitude was a field laborer who joined Delgrès right and about whom little is known beyond a few lines in a Histoire de la Guadeloupe published in 1858 by a French historian. Unlike in Haiti where Napoleon’s troops were defeated, the 4000 French troops under the direction of General Antoine Richepance sent to Guadeloupe defeated, the 4000 French troops under the direction of a Histoire de la Guadeloupe published in 1858 by a French historian. Unlike in Haiti where Napoleon’s troops were defeated, the 4000 French troops under the direction of General Antoine Richepance sent to Guadeloupe prevailed and quelled the rebellion. Ignace died on May 25, 1802, on Grande-Terre while Delgrès and 300 of his followers managed to escape to Matouba, a town located at the foot of the Soufrière volcano on Basse-Terre. On May 28, Delgrès chose death over surrender and set off the explosion of the plantation house where he had sought refuge. It is believed but not attested that Solitude was captured, imprisoned till the delivery of the child she was expecting and hanged the day after she gave birth in 1802.

From History to Memory

The figure of the maroon features prominently in Caribbean visual art. Several statues are dedicated to maroons throughout the francophone Caribbean, most of which portray a defiant man, sometimes bearing the scars of prior punishment. The most famous depiction in stone is the statue in Port-au-Prince featuring a maroon calling slaves to revolt by blowing into a conch. Two statues can be found in Martinique, one erected in Le Diamant in 1998 and another in Saint-Esprit in 2000. Both works feature a single man standing defiantly. A statue located in Sainte-Anne in Guadeloupe focuses more on the concept of flight and punishment. It represents a man emerging from a white wall suggestive of a sugar mill; his lower left leg is missing, probably cut off after he was punished for marronnage. All these figures are anonymous. Within this imagery of resistance, the 1802 rebellion has however elicited specific interest in Guadeloupe and several memorials have been erected to Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude.

The first two monuments analyzed in this paper are busts, which recall, through their style and plaque, the bust of Columbus erected in Capeteverre. The first, from a chronological perspective, was dedicated in 1948 and is located in the village of Saint-Claude, close to the Matouba (Basse-Terre). It stands in a small park, surrounded by flowers and somewhat recessed from the road, which makes it hard to see as one drives past. The static pose and the clothing, a buttoned jacket and a neatly pressed frilled shirt, could be used to represent any 19th century French official, the stern look suggesting more restraint though than defiance. The plaque at the base does not identify Delgrès as the leader of a local rebellion against French troops. It simply dedicates the memorial to the memory of Delgrès and his companions and provides the date of the events at the Matouba. A second similar bust is part of the Peti-Canal memorial to slavery (Grande-Terre). The location is highly relevant to the 1802 rebellion as Ignace and numerous followers embarked from this village to Basse-Terre to join forces with Delgrès. The memorial includes a staircase composed of 54 steps – 52 were built by slaves in the 19th century— with, on either side, the names of African ethnic groups which contributed slaves to Guadeloupe (Congo, Peul, Yoruba, etc), a giant drum with a plaque honoring “The unknown slave” erected in 1994 and a bust of Delgrès at the foot of the stairs. The bust is very similar to the one in Saint-Claude, in terms of size, style, pose and clothing. It was given by the Conseil Régional de la Guadeloupe and inaugurated on May 28, 2008, 106 years to the day after Delgrès’ death. It bears two plaques. The one located below the bust to the front of the memorial states:

Le Député Président de Région Victorin Lurel 28 mai 2008”

It thus honors the initiative taken by the Conseil Régional and the Guadeloupean-born official in charge at the time. Another plaque located at the back of the base (and hence more hidden from view) identifies Delgrès as a colored officer who served in the French army on several islands, opposed General Richepance sent to apply a decision regarding the reestablishment of slavery and chose death over surrender. While historically true, this visual and verbal depiction of Delgrès suggests he was a French soldier who dutifully served his country till 1802 rather than a former slave who rebelled against a decision made by Napoleon. It does not need his decision to commit suicide at the Habitation Danglemont in Matouba, thereby contributing to his image as a martyr. Such imagery may appear dated nowadays; yet it has elicited two recent initiatives which attest to an enduring vision of Delgrès as one of many French heroes. The first is the emission of a French stamp in 2005. It features a similar bust of Delgrès, with a faint smile; the dates of his birth and death are provided, but no information as to his role in the rebellion nor any link to the Caribbean are given, except that the selection of a sculptor who is a ‘zorey’, a pejorative term for metropolitans settled in Guadeloupe, denounce the selection of a Martinican (delgrès was born in Saint-Pierre, Martinique) as a Guadeloupean hero and depict the use of local taxes for the whole initiative. The postings reveal all the complexity of the quest for identity, not only with regards to France but also to the ‘isler’ island of Martinique. Rather than assemble the community behind Delgrès, the initiative undermines lines of fracture with France and Martinique.

These various initiatives and the (lack) of information provided regarding Delgrès’ role as a Caribbean rebel reflect efforts on the part of France to establish him both as a soldier who served the interests of the French republic and as a Marianne-like revolutionary figure. Other memorials however challenge such a representation and propose a vision of Delgrès as a local hero who becomes part of an ongoing narrative of resistance to metropolitan France.

Erected in 2002, the monument to Delgrès located in Fort-Delgrès, about 10 miles south of Saint-Claude on Basse-Terre stands in sharp contrast to the previous ones. Unlike Petit-Canal and Saint-Claude which remain poorly connected to major tourist itineraries, the fort is located near the main coastal road to Basse-Terre,
well indicated with multiple signs and the logo identifying a "Monument Historique". The fort itself may seem an odd location for such a memorial as French soldiers erected it to defend the island against foreign invasion. As such, it bears witness to the ongoing French presence on the island and the colonizers’ efforts to maintain their presence. However, the various names it bore reveal another facet of French history, one aimed at acknowledging local events. Charles Houlé, governor of Guadeloupe, first had a fortified house built on the site in 1650. This house was meant to assert and reflect his local power and named Fort Saint-Charles. Renamed Fort Royal in the 1760s, it was the site of a major battle (the last one fought on the premises) during the 1802 rebellion. French soldiers set siege to the fort where Delgrès, Ignace and their troops resisted for 10 days. They eventually formed separate battalions and escaped respectively to Saint-Claude and Pointe-à-Pitre. The fort was renamed Fort Richepance in the early 19th century to defend the island against foreign invasion. As such, it reflects a local will to inscribe Guadeloupean history into the landscape of the island, such changes cannot occur without formal approval from Paris, especially since the fort became a "Monument Historique" in November 1977.

The memorial to Delgrès stands in an open area readily accessible to visitors, overlooking the Caribbean Sea. It is composed of 6-feet-high megaliths aligned in three concentric circles surrounding a larger head; there is no base as each stone is set directly into the soil. Unlike the busts previously studied which are life-size and bear a rather demure expression, Delgrès’ head is several feet tall and displays an angry frown. Though the names of several members of Delgrès’ and Ignace’s troops are known, the anonymous megaliths stand in for all the rebels, both male and female, who draw their strength from Guadeloupean soil, symbolizing the community. The nearby plaque makes no reference to Delgrès being an officer in the French army but rather hails him as a hero of the struggle against the reestablishment of slavery in Guadeloupe, emphasizing that he chose to die and was never captured. The absence of any reference to his service in the army may be seen as a way to romanticize him, and thereby contribute to establishing his role in a more constructivist light as less historical and more fictional. The monument and its plaque establish a new communal narrative of resistance, one that is ongoing as the monument is the site of yearly celebrations in May. These celebrations focus on community activities such as concerts, cooking demonstrations, movies, fashion shows, and workshops for children. In an article entitled “Imaginez maintenant ou un bel hommage à Delgrès”, France-Antilles, the local newspaper, characterized the 2010 event as a “flight towards creativity”.

The last memorial to Delgrès is part of a set of three monuments located near Pointe-à-Pitre and dedicated to Ignace, Solitude and Delgrès. The three monuments are all located in the center of roundabouts on the Boulevard des Héros, a main thoroughfare. Their location makes them readily but fleetingly visible by passing drivers. This location both increases public exposure and limits a detailed examination. In order to get a closer look, I had to park some way up the street, walk back and cross two busy highway lanes. They were inaugurated respectively on May 27, 1998, May 27, 1999 and May 27, 2001. The day corresponds to the time when Ignace and Delgrès died but the first inauguration also coincided with the 150th anniversary of the second abolition of slavery. This inauguration to commemorate 1848 is paradoxical seeing that Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude were fighting for the enforcement of the first abolition signed in 1794. Had they won, the second abolition would not have occurred. Each monument is accompanied by a panel, which explains its respective role within the rebellion in 4 languages (Creole, English, French, Spanish). The panels are placed about 100 yards away, on the side of the road, therefore easier to reach on foot, but they are set so high that the two texts at the top are beyond the reach of a person of average height. The information provided is part fact, part fiction, especially on the panel dedicated to Solitude which bears little in common with the scant historical information available but draws more upon the rereading of the character, including a fictionalized account of her life, La Mulâtresse Solitude, published in 1972. All panels underline the valor and courage of the three rebels.

The first memorial inaugurated is dedicated to Ignace, Delgrès’ lieutenant. He was actually the first to rebel against the reinstatement of slavery and committed suicide to escape capture on May 26, 1802 in the stronghold of Baimbridge, a few miles from the monument. It is a rather traditional depiction of a rebel, rallying his troops for battle. A few hundred yards down, on the same boulevard, stands the statue dedicated to Solitude a year later. Jacky Poulier, a local sculptor created it. The plaque at the bottom recalls Solitude’s role as a “heroine of resistance and oppression and emblematic figure of marooning in Guadeloupe”. It is a befitting tribute to a peasant woman who joined Delgrès’ troops but did not lead any battle during the 1802 rebellion. It is also a reflection of the prominent role played by women during the rebellion as they formed their own troops and fought against the French army in the early days of the rebellion. Solitude is presented as a pregnant woman who stands defiantly, hands on her hips. She does not carry any weapon nor any object associated with a Caribbean warrior tradition, such as the conch on the statue in Port-au-Prince. Her lack of weaponry might recall the subterfuges such as poisoning used by slave women, which often made their acts of resistance invisible in the annals of history. Her pose, arms akimbo, links her to a traditional depiction of African, African-American and Caribbean women. In Arms Akimbo: Africana women in contemporary literature, Janice Liddell and Yakini Belinda Kemp characterize this pose as a “majestic, sometimes defiant, always affirming stance of arms on the hips whether we are from Dakar, Kingston or DC- which Black women so often assume” (9). This stance itself serves to reconnect Solitude to her African past and is indicative of a warrior spirit that will not be subdued. It seems that while both Ignace, whose two sons were killed in 1802, and Solitude who was hanged shortly after delivering her child, were unable to pass on their heritage, they are now deftly providing a lineage from Africa to contemporary Guadeloupans and suggesting that they, too, should stand proud of their heritage and pass it on to their own children. Three schools stand nearby, each one bearing
the name of one of the heroes.

The last monument to be erected on the boulevard des Hêtres is dedicated to Delgrès. The monument recalls the one in Fort Delgrès insofar as it features a partial representation of Delgrès surrounded by some of his followers. The statue of Delgrès features a head leaning on an arm itself posed on a leg but no actual body connects the three parts. The eight men surrounding Delgrès have a deftly pause, some raising a fist; while such a depiction underlines the participation of other rebels, it fails to acknowledge women’s role. The representation of Delgrès reflects the circumstances of his death in an explosion. The absence of the body also hints that Delgrès headed the rebellion and that the eight men surrounding him, as well as all Guadeloupeans, are in effect, his body. The statue would then suggest that while Delgrès led the rebellion, he was one of many and drew his strength from his numerous followers and the surrounding community.

Several official events to mark the 1802 rebellion are held near the three statues. The monuments thus represent multiple ambiguities on the ‘historical’ panels may appear to resist the ongoing French influence in the region. The divergence, if not outright conflicting, images of the three rebels. The role of the French government in this evolving representation remains ambiguous. France has a long-standing tradition of honoring its major historical figures through street names, stamps and monuments, generally statues. While at first weary of any influence which the Haitian example could provide for slaves in Guadeloupe to foment a similar revolt, and firmly opposed to marronnage as an economic but also political threat to the plantation system, it has over the past years sought to give increased visibility to the role of slavery in the history of metropolitan France and its overseas regions. In doing so, it may however have adopted a postivist vision of history.

According to the Comité pour la mémoire et l’histoire de l’esclavage, the monument stands as a homage and acknowledgement of the victims of the slave trade and slavery and those who rebelled against them” and Solitude was selected because she “fought, arms in hand, against the soldiers of General Richepance who was in charge of subduing the rebellion”. This depiction contradicts the historical data available on Solitude and is not supported by the design selected. The monument includes three 8-feet-tall pillars, two dark and one lighter ones, made of wood and metal with rough hewn backs and carvings on their inward side. The carvings are dug into the columns and represent female forms with arms akimbo. The hollowed figures suggest both the presence and absence of Solitude and more generally of women’s contributions to the history of the Caribbean, while the three columns and the African wood evoke the triangular trade. This monument is however meant to look beyond the slave trade and establish a lineage with past and present slavery worldwide. Thus, Nicolas Alquin, the sculptor, sees it as “the first memorial in the world dedicated to all the slaves who rebel” while the mayor of Bagneux, upon dedicating the monument, established a clear link with contemporary issues such as present-day slavery and discrimination based on color.

The memorials to Delgrès, Ignace and Solitude analyzed here reflect dual visions of the 1802 rebellion in Guadeloupe. While the first two memorials to Delgrès tend to emphasize his identity as a French soldier and subsume his role within a larger French revolutionary tradition, the latter two and the statues dedicated to Ignace and Solitude underline their role as Caribbean rebels fighting against a decision made by the French government of the time, namely the reestablishment of slavery. The plaque and panels reinforce the message of each statue, and reveal to what extent the erection of such monuments underlines history as open to multiple interpretations through visual arts. Throughout this paper, the lens adopted by the commissioned artists has revealed divergent, if not outright conflicting, images of the three rebels. The role of the French government in this evolving representation remains ambiguous. France has a long-standing tradition of honoring its major historical figures through street names, stamps and monuments, generally statues. While at first weary of any influence which the Haitian example could provide for slaves in Guadeloupe to foment a similar revolt, and firmly opposed to marronnage as an economic but also political threat to the plantation system, it has over the past years sought to give increased visibility to the role of slavery in the history of metropolitan France and its overseas regions. In doing so, it may however have adopted a positivist vision of history.

The poem listed in the epigraph, Walcott wonders where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?, concluding that The sea has locked them up (364). This paper identifies multiple visual ways of unlocking Guadeloupean history and celebrating its battles and martyrs. Despite the portrayal of Delgrès as a French revolutionary hero, initiatives such as community-focused gatherings at Fort Delgrès may contribute to an ongoing constructivist celebration of cultural resistance to French hegemony in Guadeloupe. In this respect, the yearly hike organized since May 2005 may bear the most hopeful name as it no longer focuses on Delgrès as the head of the rebellion but suggests that participants walk Sur les pas de Delgrès.

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BRIAN MCLoughlin
Untitled: l’art primitif de Jean-Michel Basquiat
Keywords: Primitivism, Haitis, Graffiti art, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Hector Hyppolite

Abstract:
Jean-Michel Basquiat’s (1960-1988) works often have no title, which is reflective of the artist himself. The labels that try to define his work, as well as his identity, have been and continue to be inadequate. This study of Basquiat’s artistic progression and three of his paintings will demonstrate how this Brooklyn painter of Haitian and Puerto Rican parentage is able to draw inspiration from artistic movements such as primitivism and abstract expressionism, that have been used to define him, all the while rejecting them. I will show how Basquiat renegotues every label given to him, which in turn allows him to produce an oeuvre that explores and critiques his cultural and artistic lineages. The only comprehensive label that can be given to Jean-Michel Basquiat is simply that of an artist, whose oeuvre, in its diverseness, can best be described by the title he has given to most of his works: Untitled.

Untitled (l’art de Jean-Michel Basquiat)

« Any child of eight could have done it » (Goldsworthy). 
« I will draw the way a child does » (Basquiat cité par Tamra Davis).

L’art de Jean-Michel Basquiat est réfractaire à tout titre. Son art, ainsi que son identité, était et continue d’être corrompu par des étiquettes qui témoigneraient du caractère exceptionnel de sa vie et de son œuvre. Né vrai tagueur, ni seulement peintre, Basquiat est un artiste qui refuse d’appartenir à une école d’art, un peintre aux multiples influences, du musée à la rue, des grands tableaux classiques à l’art primitif haitien, des grandes galeries de peinture aux murs couverts de ses graffitis graphiques. Ni seulement haitien, ni seulement portoricain, l’héritage culturel de Basquiat lui permet de tirer parti de multiples influences américaines - héritage familial haitien et portoricain mais aussi expérience de jeune afro-américain élevé à Brooklyn - et globales - vistes de musées dès son enfance. A travers une étude de sa progression artistique et une analyse de trois tableaux, le propos sera de démontrer comment Jean-Michel Basquiat utilise différentes étiquettes identitaires et artistiques afin de les marronner et mélanger tout ces pour s’affirmer comme un peintre sans label, ni afro-américain, ni haitien-américain mais un peintre tout seulement, le reflet de nombre de ses tableaux intitulés Untitled.

1. Basquiat: faire du graffiti sans être un artiste de graffiti
Né dans une famille de classe moyenne haïtano-portoricaine, Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) a été très jeune exposé à l’art, lors de multiples visites dans des musées new-yorkais. Tout en appréciant cette découverte des grands maîtres de la peinture occidentale, il se rebelle contre son milieu familial et fait de nombreuses fugues, vivant dès l’âge de 14 ans dans les rues de New York, menant une vie de bohéme vers laquelle il est retourné même après ses premiers succès (Braziel 174). Il adopta non seulement ce mode de vie, mais aussi le format d’expression des rues dans les années 80, le graffiti. Durant sa période de production de graffitis, il était connu sous le nom de SAMO prononcé en anglais « SAY- MO », voulant dire Same Old Shit – (la même vieille merde) et faisait des tags sur des murs et des portes de la ville (Jean-Michel Basquiat : The Radiant Child). Ses tags étaient des phrases et des slogans provocants :

SAMO comme un nouvel art. SAMO comme un end to midwash religion, nowhere policies and bogus philosophy. SAMO comme un escape clause. SAMO sauve des droits, SAMO comme un end to bogus pseudo intellectual. My mouth, therefore an error. Plush safe ... he think. SAMO comme un alternative à God. SAMO comme un end to playing art. SAMO comme un end 2 Vinyl Punkery. SAMO comme une expression de spiritual love. SAMO pour le so-called avant garde. SAMO comme un alternative 2 playing art with the ‘radical chic’ set on Daddy’s $funds. SAMO comme un end 2 conflicting art terms. Riding around in Daddy’s convertible trust fund Company. SAMO comme un alternative to the ‘meat rack’ arteest in display. (Emmerling 12)

Dans ces tags, il dénonce sa vision de la société et défend son droit à l’expression, à la lutte pour l’art. Il refuse de jouer au pseudo-intellectuel, à l’artiste devenu objet de son succès mais refuse de questionner la société en tant que peintre, son style et les canons. Le format de son œuvre revendique une identité de son propre fait. Néanmoins, il est vrai que Basquiat n’est toutefois pas un véritable artiste du graffiti, car l’art du graffiti avait ses propres règles que Basquiat ne suivait pas. L’art du graffiti inclut des signes de résistance, des couleurs et des formes de bulles, ou des images de formes dans les tableaux (Whitehead 27), et non pas seulement des messages composés de mots juxtaposés écrits dans une calligraphie très simple. Son nom même est écrit en noir en lettres majuscules : seule la lettre « E » est lettrée, étant représenté par trois lignes horizontales et un sigle de droit d’auteur (Davis).

Une autre raison qui explique que Basquiat ne soit pas considéré comme vrai artiste de graffiti est le choix de son support : il ne peint pas sur des rames de métro (Hoban 9). Contrairement à l’explication Whitehead dans « Graffiti: the Use of the Familiar » : « Whole trains are considered to be the most superior form of achievement in graffiti and are viewed as the masterful feats that cover an entire train » (Whitehead 27). N’ayant jamais suivi les règles graphiques, il adopte le format de rues, Basquiat ne fait pas partie de cette école de peintures. Diego Cortez, artiste de graffitis, décrit Basquiat comme un « straddle[...] neatly positioned between the new wave movement and the graffiti movement » (Gadsden 31). Avec le graffiti, Basquiat s’inscrit dans une école d’art, mais en écrivant seulement avec une calligraphie simple, il se distingue des autres graffitis car ses tags sont à la fois simples de par leur style et complexes de par leur message, traitant la ligne entre peinture et poésie. En refusant les règles de cet art, Basquiat se met à part, avec des formats uniques et une simplicité stylistique de son œuvre complexe et provocante. C’est cette apparence de simplicité, de primitivité, qui invite le public et qui rappelle l’héritage d’afro-américain de Jean-Michel Basquiat.

2. Basquiat: être un artiste primitif sans être primitif
L’art primitif est un des seuls (sinon le seul) courants artistiques dont le nom peut s’appliquer à l’auteur ainsi qu’à l’œuvre. Cela provient du fait que l’art primitif au début n’était pas considéré comme un art, mais plutôt illustré par des objets de la vie courante et religieuse. Leurs qualités esthétiques étaient analysées non pas par...

Pour mieux comprendre comment Basquiat s’inspire de l’art haitien, il est important de comprendre certaines caractéristiques de cet art et de son émergence sur le marché mondial. L’un des principaux représentants de cet art est Hector Hyppolite (1894-1948). Comme beaucoup de peintres haitiens, Hyppolite produisait son art non pas sur des toiles, mais sur divers supports - murs, portes et même cadres de portes (Congdon et Hallmark 109), ignorant les techniques de perspective présentes par la Renaissance italienne et suivant des modes d’expression souvent perçus comme plus proches de ceux d’enfants. Hyppolite peignait « avec thick lines and overblown features and traits […] [m]istakes and lack of precision are evident in his work » (Méndez-Méndez et Cueto 228). En réalité, ce choix de supports et de perspectives reflète non pas des erreurs de l’artiste mais d’une part le manque d’accès aux toiles et aux matériaux d’art, d’autre part la volonté d’intégrer l’art dans la vie de la communauté.

Edouard Glissant, dans un essai intitulé « On Haitian Painting », explique ainsi que:

The painted symbol coexists with the oral sign. It is the tightly woven texture of oral expression that is introduced into (and the key to) Haitian painting. […] To this extent any picture painted in this style is also a form of writing. (155)

Le fait que ce discours soit sous forme de peinture est important car c’est un des seuls moyens de communication pour un peuple en majorité illétré. Mais pour l’audience non-haitienne, l’art local devient incompréhensible et donc objet de fascination exotique. Dans les années 1940, un peintre américain DeWitt Peters a add Hyppolite à devenir un peintre reconnu internationalement en lui fournissant des toiles et d’autres outils nécessaires, lui imposant ainsi de s’adapter aux formats, normes et attentes de potentiels acheteurs européens et américains. Une telle approche a encouragé la propagation d’un mythe du primitif en assurant un marché de l’art aux peintures faites selon un style primitif. Pour Hyppolite et d’autres, leurs audiences n’étaient plus la population locale, mais les acheteurs étrangers, comme le démontre le tableau intitulé Papa Zaca et Papa Ogoun qui présente deux hommes montés à cheval avec leurs noms écrits en dessous. Si l’audience ciblée était haitienne et connaissait la religion vaudou, les notes explicatives seraient inutiles. L’identité des lois ou esprits / dieux vaudou est facile à reconnaître pour un vaudousant. Papa Zaca est ainsi identifié par sa veste bleue et son chapeau de paille (Olmos et Paravisini-Gebert 144). En incluant le nom des personnages, Hyppolite indique que le public ciblé est probablement d’origine européenne ou du moins ne connaissait pas le vaudou. Hyppolite savait qui était son audience et comment produire des œuvres qui l’intéresseraient.

Basquiat voulait aussi être (re)connu mais il n’offre aucune explication pour les symboles, les phrases, les dessins et le style qu’il adopte. Cela ouvre la porte à tout type d’audience, et le manque d’explication crée un intérêt parmi l’audience pour l’œuvre de Basquiat afin de mieux le comprendre. L’expérience que Basquiat recherche et crée est internationale et va voir et revoir ses œuvres pour identifier leurs messages. Basquiat va s’inspirer de certains aspects de l’art primitif, non pas pour mieux vendre ses toiles mais parce que certaines des stratégies dites primitives vont lui permettre d’exprimer sa propre identité.

Comme Hyppolite au début de sa carrière, Basquiat utilisait de multiples supports. Dans un documentaire sur Jean-Michel Basquiat réalisé par Tamra Davis, Basquiat explique que:

« The first paintings I made were on windows I found on the street. I used the window shape as a frame and I just put the paint, the painting on the glass part and on doors I found on the street. » Basquiat utilisait aussi de multiples autres supports: cartes d’un format de cartes postales, porte de réfrigérateur ou toiles déjà peintes par sa petite amie » (Davis). Même après être devenu un peintre connu, il créa ses propres cadres avec des bâtons et de la corde et fit des peintures sur des écrans de soie. De même, son adoption d’un style primitif est voulu et assumée.

En déclarant « I will draw the way a child does » (Davis), Jean-Michel Basquiat indique qu’il ne subit plus le dictat du label primitif mais choisit de prendre comme enfant. Ce choix artistique fait écho à de multiples autres décisions dans la vie de cet artiste sans formation classique mais qui fréquentait les musées d’art dès son plus jeune âge. Ainsi, son choix délibéré de quitter le monde bourgeois de son enfance pour aller vers la rue et ses modes d’expression lui offre de nouvelles sources d’inspiration et lui permet de créer des peintures et dessins qui ont « the look of the primitive, untrained artist » (Gadsden 38) mais ouvre aussi la porte à une critique qui se focalise sur son style de vie bohémien plutôt que sur son esthétique (Gadsden 56).

Jean-Michel Basquiat est devenu un des grands peintres américains (et non pas africains-américains, nord-américains ou tout autre label) et l’artiste noir qui a le mieux réussi financièrement (vendant une œuvre à plus de 14 millions de dollars, le record pour un artiste noir) (Black American Artist). Lors de sa mort, d’une overdose d’héroïne, son ami Fred « Fab 5 Freddy » Brathwaite, lui prépara un éloge qui était une interprétation du poème Genius Child de Langston Hughes. Ce choix est doublement approprié, étant le génie de Basquiat, mais aussi sa mort précoces à l’âge de 27 ans après une carrière de neuf ans seulement (Davis). « Nobody loves a genius child » (Hughes 83) affirme Hughes dans son poème, un vers qui illustre bien la carrière et la vie de Basquiat, peindre reconnu mais aussi méconnu.

3. Basquiat: être un artiste sans être noir, haitien, portoricain ni new-yorkais

En continuant à produire sur de multiples supports, même une fois que ses revenus lui permettent d’acquérir toiles, pinceaux et peintures, Basquiat revendique sa liberté de créateur. Il continue toutefois à exploiter le label primitif non seulement dans ses peintures mais dans la promotion de son personnage. Sur la couverture du New York Times Magazine présentant Jean-Michel Basquiat, on retrouve Basquiat en costume assis près d’une de ses œuvres avec un pinceau dans la main, mais pied nus (McGuigan). Le contraste est frappant entre le cadre de l’atelier et le costume suggérant la réussite matérielle et les pieds nus évoquant un artiste pauvre mais aussi en contact constant avec son milieu, tout comme le dieu vaudou Legba représenté pieds nus. Il souligne que la primitivité de Basquiat est une primitivité inventée et assumée qui devient alors une arme pour vendre son art et propager son marronnage. La photo de Basquiat a ainsi titre New Art, New Money; The Marketing of an American Artist (McGuigan).

Pour Basquiat, en particulier, le mythe du primitif servait de cri de guerre, mais aussi de publicité. Dans un de ses rares entretiens, Marc H. Miller, Ph.D un historien d’art commente ainsi son art:

Miller: “You’re seen as some sort of primal expressionist. Basquiat: ‘Like an ape! Like a primate?’

Miller: “Well, I don’t know.”

Basquiat: “You said it.” (Gadsden 57-58)

On voit que Basquiat saisit parfaitement le lien entre racisme et primitivisme, et ne veut pas qu’on l’oublie. Il transforme l’entreprise (et le démentir de Miller) en une sorte de confrontation entre lui et la critique traditionnelle, voire même l’art traditionnel (européen) en affirmant que Miller l’a décrit comme un singe bien que l’historien d’art ait simplement posé une question sur son style. Le racisme est un des grands thèmes de Jean-Michel Basquiat, parce qu’il y est confronté et parce que c’était un élément réel dans sa vie: « Being black, he was always an outsider. Even after he was flying on the Concorde, he wouldn’t be able to get a cab » (Marshall 149). L’expression ‘I don’t know’ reflète la réussite de Basquiat qui parvient à déstabiliser le critique qui ‘ne sait rien’ de son art.

L’artiste. On y voit un homme noir portant une casquette et un habit bleu rappelant l’uniforme de la police new yorkaise (NYPD Blue, The Thin Blue Line, etc.).

Mais la casquette se trouve remplacée par un autre chapeau aux couleurs primaires (telles qu’en trouve souvent dans la peinture haïtienne) qui rappelle le chapeau de Baron Samedi, le loa de la mort et de l’érotisme (Braziel 196). Le personnage semble un peu flou, coupé en deux par une grande tache blanche. On note des traces de peinture noire et le chapeau de Baron Samedi est délimité par des trait blancs, suggérant la superposition de la culture blanche occidentale sur la culture africaine. On retrouve aussi des traces blanches sur ses membres, comme si le portrait était une photographie floue à cause des mouvements rapides. Près de la jambe du personnage, on peut enfin lire les mots « PAW (LEFT) », ce qui suggère à Dick Hebdidge l’interprétation suivante : « Ce tableau en tant que miroir / négatif de la peinture: le visage est flou comme les peintures de la Joconde qui semble être plat, comme les peintures de Tulp (1632) de Rembrandt annoncent une nouvelle ère de construction et de modernité. Il est le premier tableau de Basquiat intitulé Riding with Death. C’est ce mouvement qu’on va retrouver dans un grand History of Humanity, by introducing the modern knowledge. It is the one of the 7th century as it symbolizes an epistemological rupture in the great History of Humanity, by introducing the modern understanding of movement in Anatomy. (381) »

C’est ce mouvement qu’on voit dans un tableau de Basquiat intitulé Riding with Death. Dans Riding with Death (1988), on retrouve un homme de couleur marron, dont une partie du squelette est visible et à qui il manque certaines parties du corps. Il est monté sur un squelette à qui il manque aussi des parties de corps et dont la bouche est de couleur marron.

Le tableau donne l’impression que le squelette est en train de manger l’homme afin de se compléter. La position des deux personnages évoque les rites vaudou durant lesquels les loas (dieux vaudous) montrent les humains et prennent possession de leur corps pour s’exprimer. Mais ce peinture établit de nombreux

6. Basquiat : un artiste en quête d’une anatome

L’anatomie humaine a inspiré de nombreux peintres et les représentations de nus de nos jours sont souvent des déesses de l’antiquité grecque ou romaine. Manet avait rompu certains tabous de la représentation en peignant une courtisane offrant sa nudité tout en défiant du regard. La représentation de corps morts et d’ossements – crâne, squelette… – figure aussi de façon régulière dans l’art européen. De nombreux peintres européens ont contribué aux canons de la peinture européenne ont représenté des corps dépecés, crânes et autres parties du squelette. Le Leçon d’Anatomie de Dr. Tulp (1632) de Rembrandt annonce une nouvelle ère de la représentation du corps humain. Selon A.S. Masquelier, ce tableau...
liens qui inscrivent Basquiat dans une longue tradition de représentation de squelette, crâne et autres parties du corps sous-cutané. Basquiat ne cite pas le tableau de Rembrandt comme source d’inspiration mais reconnaît l’importance des dessins et tableaux de Léonard De Vinci. Selon Emmerling, cette influence est notable dans Riding with Death.

The figures in Riding with Death are adopted directly from an allegorical drawing by Da Vinci. Basquiat’s admiration for Leonardo is well documented, and he often cited the works of the Renaissance artists. [...] Basquiat often adapted Da Vinci’s word lists and technical drawings. [...] And you must believe the old master’s anatomical drawings must have made a great impression on Basquiat, without which the running motif of the skeletonized body in his works become inconceivable. (Emmerling 79)

Cette représentation de corps en partie dépecée, et d’un squelette ne s’inspire pas seulement de tableaux et dessins précédents. Jean-Michel Basquiat a eu l’occasion de découvrir l’anatomie humaine à partir de livres dès l’âge de sept ans. Ayant survécu à un accident de voiture, il fut confiné à l’hôpital durant de longues semaines et sa mère lui fournit comme lecture Gray’s Anatomy de Henry Gray. Ce livre a eu un grand impact dans sa carrière artistique, le nom de son groupe musical était Gray, et les 363 figures et dessins de l’anatomie humaine ont inspiré ses propres dessins et peintures (Davis). Malgré cette tradition attestée de représentation d’ossements et de nombreuses preuves que Basquiat s’est intéressé à l’anatomie dès son accident, Dr. Miller n’y voit qu’une inspiration accidentelle.

Later in the interview, Miller asks about the frequent appearance of bones in Basquiat’s work.

Miller: So you were just thumbing through some books and hit upon these pictures of skeletons?

Basquiat: No. I wanted to do some anatomy stuff. Then I went out and bought some books about anatomy.

Miller: Then you started imitating...

Basquiat: Well, not really imitating...I used them as source material.

Miller: So why’d you want to do anatomy stuff?

Basquiat: Because I felt like it. (Gadsden 58)

In this interview, Basquiat does defend his show of influences, but also confirm his démarche intellectuelle. Contrasted to this, Dr. Miller, he is not “bombe’ on des images de squelettes, and n’a pas fait des ‘trucs en anatomie’. Enfin, il n’a pas imité des maîtres mais s’en est inspiré. Reprocherait-on à Gauguin de s’être inspiré de l’Olympia de Manet dans son tableau Manao Tupapau (Le morts veille) (1892) en l’accusant d’imitation ? (Gauguin). Contrairement à Gauguin, peintre français qui choisit d’adopter un style primitif, Basquiat, de par ses origines et son style, est vu comme un peintre primitif, donc incapable de création mais seulement d’imitation, de ce qui est autour de lui. Basquiat peint ce qui l’a inspiré, en trant ses sources de son environnement, de ses recherches en anatomie et en peinture. Cependant le mythe de Basquiat le primitif, l’enfant, demeure ce qui le définit.

Au lieu de se déclarer comme primitif, il rejette le terme et se déclare comme artiste qui choisit sa propre inspiration, ses propres motifs et son propre style. Mais même après cet entretien et sa mort, Basquiat reste encore aujourd’hui perçu comme ‘the radiant child’. Ainsi, dans son film Basquiat, Julian Schnabel a montré au public le Basquiat ‘attendu’. Comme l’explique Gadsden:

Basquiat’s story worked for Schnabel and audiences because his ethnicity linked him to lingering Western imperialist beliefs and fears about the Other as primitive, uncultured, and wild. Basquiat’s youthful exploits were often interpreted in ways that supported the myth of him as a genius wild child.

Much like the 19th century Other, Basquiat was portrayed as a passive figure, often idly sitting, smoking or snorting dope, and buffeted back and forth by other people’s opinions and whims. [...] Throughout the movie, he is the submissive brown-skinned Other, surrounded and manipulated by white, elite, and powerful Western figures, such as dealers, other artists, and the press, who are shown actively engaged in business and work. (63)

L’art de Basquiat est analysé en tant qu’il met peu et la vie de Basquiat est racontée au public non pas au travers de films suggérant la vie d’un artiste infantile et ‘primitif’ mais dans des documentaires comme celui de Tamara Davis qui se focalise plus sur son art.

Basquiat voulait que son art soit respecté et critiqué sur la base de son propre mérite. Dans sa biographie de Jean-Michel Basquiat, Phoebe Hoban cite son ami Arden Scott qui affirme : « Basquiat was intent upon being a mainstream artist. He didn’t want to be a black artist. He wanted to be a famous artist » (Hoban). Pour que cela soit possible, il lui a fallu trouver son propre style, un style qui définit Basquiat, un style simple, mais avec de multiples références à d’autres peintres venus de diverses traditions. Un des aspects les plus caractéristiques de l’art de Basquiat est l’incorporation de lettres dans les tableaux, plus précisément la manipulation de l’absence / présence des mots. Jean-Michel Basquiat raye des lettres ou des mots non pas pour les éliminer mais pour attirer notre attention sur ce qui est présent / absent, notamment dans Irony of the Negro Policeman, où le AE barré donne une clef de l’interprétation, ou encore dans Crown Hotel (Mona Lisa Black Background) quand il remplace la figure d’Olympia par son nom. La majorité des œuvres de Basquiat sont Untitled mais de nombreux tableaux intitulés Untitled incluent également des indices entre parenthèses tels que (Mona Lisa Black Background). En présentant ainsi ces titres, Basquiat refuse d’une part de tirer ses tableaux mais suggère d’autre part certains indices aidant à leur interprétation. Il joue de l’emploi de parenthèses pour indiquer toutefois que les indices sont en fait moins importants à ses yeux que le label Untitled. A l’image de ses peintures sans nom, Basquiat voulait se faire un nom en tant qu’artiste, non pas primitif, naif, haitien, noir ou tout autre étiquette réductrice mais un peintre tout simplement s’inspirant d’une longue tradition artistique, de multiples sources et choisissant ses propres moyens d’expression. Le seul label qui semble correspondre à sa peinture serait celui de peintre du marronnage, exploitant la peinture de l’autre et ses préconceptions pour mieux défacer le système de l’intérieur.

Enfant de multiples langues et cultures, de la bourgeoisie et de la rue, Jean-Michel Basquiat était unique. S’inspirant du graffiti, de l’art primitif d’Haiti, de De Vinci à Manet, il explore diverses sources d’inspiration sans jamais intégrer un mouvement artistique. Il était un poète qui écrivait en peinture à la bombe, un artiste primitif qui revendiquait les grands maîtres, un explorateur de l’anatomie humaine et de la calligraphie. Ses œuvres explorent de multiples facettes de son américanité, son héritage haïtien mais aussi noir-américain, et s’ouvrent au monde, non pas en répondant à un marché de l’art codifié mais en déclarant l’originalité du peintre, son unicité. Célèbre, riche, Basquiat ne renonce jamais à ses sources pour fournir un art qui se vend mais impose son style et sa vision du monde. Basquiat: Untitled.
Textes cités


Brazil, Java Evans. Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora.


Andrae Green

Existentialism is often times a theme that has been constructed through the framework of a White male perspective. But when discussing existentialism for a person of color, it begs for a different kind of framework: one that is subject to fall under its own weight. In attempts to exist from nothingness and to reaffirm a separate and independent identity, these paintings seek to bring tangibility to the Black experience. Moments of ambiguity, ghostliness and double-vision are often found in these paintings—searching for the essence that defines colored peoples. Attempts to define blackness are daunting explorations that can hardly be answered in completion. It is this quality that makes Black Existence vulnerable and fleeting. The invisibility of the Black Man becomes a pushing and pulling of words, themes, colors and desire. Illusions become the language for establishing personhood.

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In Looking, I See Nothing

About the Artist:

Green examines Black Existentialism through painting and drawing. The Jamaican-born artist holds a BA from Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts, Jamaica and an MFA from the New York Academy of Art. Green has exhibited his work at the Biennial at the Jamaican National Gallery and internationally. He received the 2006 Chase Fund Jamaica Grant.
RITA M. RUFINO VALENTE

When a landscape is more than a background Escrita na Paisagem – festival de performance e artes da terra

Keywords: capitalism, community, festival, economics

Abstract

This article focuses on the work of Escrita na Paisagem – festival de performance e artes da terra (Writing/Written in the Landscape – performance and land-art festival), a transdisciplinary project located in Alentejo (southern Portugal), which aims to intervene in and interact with the local and regional communities, offering them the possibility of contact with contemporary artists, their projects, and political conceptions. I examine the path Escrita na Paisagem has been pursuing since its inauguration in 2004, in particular its core concept and curatorial premises. Then, I analyze the consequences the Festival’s work produces at a regional level, including the relationship it establishes with the central and regional political powers. I discuss how the regional, national and international contexts where the Festival works and how economical and political tensions and constraints emerging from these contexts affect the Festival’s work. My analysis is set along with the debates about the relationship between arts and political/economic powers of multinational capitalism, as well as discussions about the role of community-based art.

I write about about the Portuguese festival Escrita na Paisagem, in which I have been collaborating since 2006. At present, the Festival also constitutes, my privileged object of study, as it allows me to raise questions and think about the relationship between contemporary arts, politics, and economics. In this regard, I am particularly interested in investigating the political and economical agency of art.

Escrita na Paisagem – festival de performance e artes da terra (Writing/Written in the Landscape – performance and land-art festival) is a transdisciplinary project that gathers a variety of activities: projects of performance, music, visual arts, theater, pedagogy, workshops, conferences and debates. Located in Alentejo, this festival aims to intervene in and interact with the local and regional communities, offering them the possibility of contact with contemporary – emergent or well-known – artists, their projects, and (more or less explicit) political conceptions. Alentejo is one of the poorest regions of Portugal, and it is one of the most alienated from the circuit of contemporary arts, which is established mainly between Lisbon and Porto. The goals the Festival sets out to achieve include articulating the region’s past (traditions and heritage), present and future conditions (its social, political, financial and environmental problems) with aesthetic and curatorial strategies drawn from contemporary arts and postmodern thought.

The concept “Escrita na Paisagem” bears a double meaning, as the term “Escrita” stands as both “the act of writing” and “what results from the act of writing” or “what has been written”. As José Alberto Ferreira (the festival’s arts curator) states, “Writing/Written in the Landscape” signals the festival’s claim that landscape “is more then what one can see around him”. That is, landscape is simultaneously a space of action and an active space – “the outcome of various biological, ecological, and cultural processes, which operate (or operated) in a given place” or “simultaneously, the material substance of a territory and the system of signs that Man make of it.” (Ferreira, 2005: 5). Based on this conception of landscape, Escrita na Paisagem finds in Alentejo not only a plurality of landscapes (or narratives about landscapes) to have dialogue with: natural, historic-historical, political, economic, and social.

Emphasizing the cultural processes that constitute the landscape – i.e. “a constant exchange between Man’s regard and the value (for instance, functional or aesthetic) he gives to the space surrounding him” (Ferreira, 2005: 5) – the festival conceives landscape as a “palmespet” (Working document, 2010: 2) of embedded narratives, produced (written) by Man. These narratives, rendered apparently autonomous or given under ideology and the passage of time, will reflect back on its future observer, conditioning the way he or she will conceive and act upon it. “Writing/Written in the landscape” (or “writing the landscape”) bears, thus, a political and social potential that Escrita na Paisagem explores by means of curatorial gesture and artistic production.

One of the aims of the Festival is to expose and deconstruct the mechanisms of production and veiling the production of (or producing narratives about) space and community. The first are clearly described by Henri Lefebvre in his book The Production of Space. According to the author “(social) space” is a product of (re)creation by a given society (in particular by the ruling classes and according to its mode of production). Ruling classes protect their interests and regulate society through the (re)creation of representational spaces (in other words, coded spaces or spaces rendered-symbols-of-power), and especially by creating narratives about these spaces which veil the interests behind the their production, their condition of product of an ideology, and their use into conventions that subjects take and perform as natural (“the realistic ilusion” [cfr. Lefebvre, 1991: 29- 30, 33, 38, 39, 41]).

In our contemporary global capitalism-ruled world, according to authors such as Fredric Jameson (cfr. Jameson, 1991; Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998) and David Harvey (cfr. Harvey, 1989; Harvey, 1990), the space being produced and the interests behind it can be broken down in the following tropes: first, globalization and localization are complementary moves and narratives about space, which transnational capitalism forges to assure the thorough flow of capital within a global free market, responding to the danger of overaccumulation. Second, through these concepts, capitalism forges a new global map that depicts simultaneously a “borderless world” and a “world of regions” (cfr. Joseph, 2002: 147). That is, a map constituted
by apparently autonomous and empowered regions, which exchange capital, people, goods, and culture with each other, without the bureaucratic constraints imposed by the borders and sovereignty of state-nations. Third, the heterogeneity inherent to this new map of globalization/localization veils a fragmentation that allows transnational capitalism to exploit and take profit from each region more effectively. This scheme of regionalization weakens the autonomy of each region, increasing their dependence on global relations. The degree of autonomy or dependence of each region is, thus, controlled according to the so-called interests of the market. Finally, we can see that, in fact, heterogeneity conceals a homogenization: a division of labor, which organizes regions in a map that groups and distinguishes producers from consumers, poor-underdeveloped-dominated regions from rich-developed-ruling regions. This division of labor underlies the functioning of the world market, assuring the rich-developed-ruling regions’ control over the flows of capital, goods, people, and cultures, and thus, their economic, political-ideological, and cultural dominance over the poor-underdeveloped-dominated regions.

The second, (that is, the concept of community according to capitalism) is beautifully articulated by Miranda Joseph in her book Against the Romance of Community, in which the author opposes the conception of community as given, that is as product of a natural sense of belonging or identity. Instead, Joseph argues that the capitalist ideology forged a naturalized notion of community as a strategy to maintain the social hierarchies that sustain it. Community, as identity, according to the author, is not ontological but pragmatic: it is the product of a social process grounded on practices of production and consumption (cfr. Joseph, 2002: xxxii).

Concretely, the Festival, among other goals, tries to program works that undermine the general narrative of global capitalism and its specific effects, in other words, its specific narratives about the landscape and communities of Alentejo. In this region, the pressures exerted by global capitalism inscribe themselves in the landscape as the main economic activity changed from agriculture to commerce and services, in particular tourism. This change, motivated by directives and funds from European Union (in which Portugal joined in 1986) introduced new functions...
to rural areas’, as Maria Antónia Pires Almeida describes, “a space for leisure and natural reserves, where farmers and agricultural workers depend on the help of subsidies to perform their new jobs as nature’s gardeners, and not to direct their products towards the market” (Almeida, 2007: 68-69).

Today, as result of E.U.’s directives and the interests of tourism industry, Alentejo is transforming into a picturesque “postcard”, being presented as “lost paradise”, a place “lost in time”, where values of tradition and rurality are preserved, never touched by modernity (cfr. ARPTA, 2008; cfr. Turismo de Portugal, 2008). This discourse, a production of “(social) space” as Lefebvre conceived it, expresses and conceals, at the same time, a process of commodification of the region under transnational capitalist interests. In this process the region’s specificities are often used without being engaged with or even respected.

In the attempt to undermine and surface existing political and economic narratives about Alentejo’s landscape and communities, which do not necessarily respect nor benefit in a sustained way the territory and its people, I would say that the Festival adopts a strategy that is simultaneously inspired in and twists around the global capitalism’s tropes, in particular those concerning the narrative of a borderless world, that is, a world where borders can be constantly redesigned, inspired by scholars such as Jameson and Harvey, but also Walter D. Mignolo (cfr. Mignolo, 1998) and Gerald Raunig (cfr. Raunig, 2007), and artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Gloria Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 1987), whose work complicates and surfaces the simultaneous fixed (a mechanism of repression, separation and constraint) and flexible (creative, product of narratives conceived by Man) nature of borders, I call this strategy: “playing with borders”. I consider it is particularly visible in the Festival’s curatorial choices, its strategies to engage with its audience, and negotiate with local and national governments, working through their cultural policies.

The Festival “plays with borders” among arts, engaging transdisciplinarity as a methodology of work that is, and a central criteria to the elaboration of each year’s program: each year the Festival is committed to read and write Alentejo’s landscape with projects from (and which usually cross) a variety of arts disciplines. In addition, Escrita na Paisagem creates its own ephemeral, yearly, cartography of the territory, by bringing in new insights about Alentejo’s landscape and communities, produced either by local artists or by foreigners (by these I mean people that live in Portugal, but not in Alentejo, and also people from other countries). This aspect of the Festival’s ephemeral cartography takes into account and inscribes itself with and through different groups of audiences, communities, which demands strategies that intertwine arts, pedagogy, politics and economics.

Throughout its seven incarnations, Escrita na Paisagem has tried to establish a close relationship with its audiences: the communities with and within which it wants to inscribe its work. By understanding how these communities have been produced and producing themselves, the festival aims to take part in and interpellate these processes of production, and to draw from these relationships part of its “authority” to operate with and within the region, or in other words, to produce its own ephemeral spatial and communal cartography. Hence, and first of all, the festival tries to define its operative concept of community as a plural concept: Escrita na Paisagem does not address and engage a community, but several, each one with specific morphologies, dynamics, and features that bring their members together. The definition of this plural operative concept helps the festival to establish more clearly its work-frame, and what activities should be programmed in relation to each community, in order to accomplish its aims more effectively (cfr. Application, 2009: 1-4). According to this concept, the community the festival engages with is divided into three groups: regional and local communities of Alentejo, artistic community, and academic community.

Another way the Festival has to improve the authority to develop its project in the region, is to establish collaborations with local cultural and recreational collectives, which have been established in the region for a longer period of time and were able to produce their own space and role within the regional and local territories, gathering (producing) their own specific community. The projects that were born from collaborations between the festival and local cultural or recreational collectives, were diversified in terms of morphology and conditions, including various activities from debates to film shows, music concerts, dances and gatherings, and took place mostly in Evora (cfr. Coleção B. Associação Cultural, 2004).

In addition to the authority the collaboration with local cultural and recreational collectives provides to the festival, Escrita na Paisagem tries to gather yet another kind of authority, which I call “authority from capital”. This concept names the financial strategy the festival applies when establishing institutional relationships with its sponsors, and it bears two meanings: to acquire authorization and to acquire autonomy from capital (i.e., sponsor institutions) to put activities into practice. Through the ambivalent moves to acquire “authority from capital” the festival responds to its need to engage with a complex scheme of interests, from national, regional, local, public, and private sponsor institutions, whose support is essential to make the festival’s activities happen. Hence, on the one hand, the festival needs to have the financial support from the Ministry of Culture (the national public cultural authority) in order to be
recognized as a sustainable and valid project. The support from this institution provides the festival with an authority from capital that, being recognized by other private (from corporations to small businesses, and foundations) and public institutions (municipalities and governmental agencies), opens a chance to gather more financial and material support, even if in small amounts. The funding from the Ministry of Culture also offers the festival a certain autonomy in relation to local and regional public institutions; for example, it allows the festival to put into practice projects it considers essential in approaching a given theme and community, even when municipalities do not have the money to fund them. On the other hand, the ability to gather contributions from other sources than the Ministry of Culture is what provides Escrita na Paisagem with the authority from capital needed to apply to the funding program offered by that institution. The smaller contributions, all summed up, are what allows the festival to prove to the Ministry of Culture that its project is sustainable and interesting and, thus, it deserves to be funded. To gather and articulate support from a variety of funding sources – local, national (and even international), private or public – is part of creating the Festival’s ephemeral cartography and the act of “playing with borders” that is inherent to it: funding from, local/regional and national-scale institutions (and more recently, since 2009, international-scale funding) is used by the Festival, being spent at a local/regional scale, with costs inherent to the Festival’s activity, from the team to promotional materials, logistics to technical and material needs of the projects being presented, but also at a national and international scale – which is most visible in the expenses with artists’ fees.

Authority from capital is central to the relationship Escrita na Paisagem establishes with the communities it approaches. In fact it is what allows the festival to implement the activities it proposes, honoring its commitment to the communities. Nevertheless, to assemble this authority from capital, without which the festival would not be able to develop its project, means to cope with the capitalist ideology and mode of production that underlie the interests and discourse private and public, local and national institutions. As paradoxical as it may seem, in order to find its way through Portuguese cultural politics (cfr. Ministério da Cultura, 2006: 7827-7828), and to do the work it aims to do, the Escrita na Paisagem has to work along with expectations about the role arts and culture play in society, that are opposed to its own. Hence, the festival has to accept the role of “agent of development” or “agent of transformation” that collaborates with the Government, as well as with institutions, organizations, and corporations from sectors of activity such as education, industry, and tourism, to promote and help to develop the poorest regions of the country; and to negotiate its program with the municipalities, presenting it as a commodity, a “cultural service”, and try to accommodate some projects in accordance with the calendar of the municipalities’ own cultural program.

For 2011-2012, we are trying to create some major changes in the Festival’s cartography of Alentejo.
In addition to a serious investment on European Union’s programs, the Festival tries to respond to the increasing demand of municipalities in having an active word in how their funding is applied. In other words, municipalities are willing to engage the programming process and on the creation of the Festival’s ephemeral cartography. Hence, the Festival will engage a process of negotiation based on a deeper understanding of the expectations of municipalities, as well as their own cultural program and calendar. From my perspective, the interest from municipalities in participating more actively in curatorial and programming practices is not only a product of an increasing awareness on the importance of arts as a means of sustained development. It also hides a political agenda: to use art as a mean of passing a given ideological message, of gathering the communities sympathy (and votes). For this reason, this new methodology brings a challenge to the Festival: to keep a balance between the municipalities expectation from arts and artists, and the Festival’s identity and artistic goals. “Negotiation” is the key-term underlying this new methodology, through which we aim to engender a collaborative writing, that is a collaborative curation (programming and taking care or preserving) Alentejo’s landscape.

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MEAGAN SYLVESTER
Title: Exploring the nature of genre classification in selected popular musics of Trinidad and Tobago
Keywords: Cultural Meaning; Social Hybridity; Musical Sonority; Multi-ethnic identity; Genre classification

Abstract:

This paper posits that genre classification can be used as a tool to examine traditional/indigenous forms of sound and music that emanate from a cultural space to reflect the identity of a people. Further, this work intends to highlight the nature and scope of identity as it pertains to calypso and soca music in Trinidad and Tobago’s music industry. Identity will be explored through the terms – nation, nationalism, national identity, ethnicity and ethnic identity. Links between nation, ethnicity and identity will be assessed as they relate to the various genres of calypso and soca music and the attendant following by an ethnic population. In this work power soca, chutney soca, ragga soca will be examined. Soca music then together with calypso music will be explored in some detail as we attempt to assess how the classification of genres can be linked to the formation and creation of identity markers for many groups in Trinbagonian society.

Sociologists such as Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1993) attest that ‘genre’ is a conceptual tool most often used to classify varieties of cultural products, particularly in the fields of visual art, popular music, film and entertainment. It explains the artists’ expression in their work, their peer group affiliation and signals the likely audience for their work.

Approaching the Study of Popular Music

Studying popular music is an interdisciplinary matter. As Tagg (1982) asserts, no analysis of musical discourse can be considered complete without consideration of social, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, technical, historical, economic and linguistic aspects relevant to the genre, function, style, re-performance situation and listening attitude connected with the sound event being studied.

According to Tagg (1982), musicoLOGY as a discipline lags behind other disciplines in the field of popular music studies, especially sociology. The musicologist is thus simultaneously at a disadvantage and an advantage. The advantage is that he/she can draw on sociological research to give the analysis proper perspective. The empirical sociology of music approach, assists musicologists in re-configuring their analysis from culture-centric and ethno-centric towards a focus on the musical habits amongst the population at large, which can also provide valuable information about the functions, uses and (with the help of psychology) the effects of the genre, performance or musical object under analysis. In this way, results from perceptual investigation and other data about musical habits can be used for cross-checking analytical conclusions and for putting the whole analysis in its sociological and psychological perspectives.

In that regard, this work begins with the premise that the approach to the study of music will be sociological in nature yet there will be elements of other disciplines infused into the analysis.

Focus of the Study

In this article, we intend to argue that the traditional/indigenous forms of sound and music, which emanate from a cultural space, reflect the identity of a people. Further, this study specifically investigates popular Carnival musics in Trinidad and Tobago. Popular music in Trinidad and Tobago has emerged as traditional music indigenous to, and emerging out of Trinidad and Tobago within the last thirty years. The work starts off with a brief genealogy of (i) calypso music and places emphasis on how it became emblematic of Trinbagonian national identity. Its later manifestation of soca has also attracted a “loyal following” and is developing similar valorization as representative of a Trinbagonian concept of identity. Further, to capture the rest of the island’s Carnival musics, an overview and analysis will be presented on the following genres of music: (i) power soca music (ii) chutney soca music and (iii) ragga soca music.

Being multi-ethnic in nature, Trinidad and Tobago produces a vast array of musical genres, which each ethnic group in its diverse population attempts to reach and hold on to in an effort to identify with a specific part of their Trinbagonian-ness. Identity within music will therefore be discussed through a focus on themes of nation, nationalism, national identity, ethnicity and ethnic identity which will be explored to some degree to ascertain how ethnic communities view themselves as a nation within a nation and additionally as contributors to the wider nation-state. This work will operationalise the relationship between music and the classification of genres to explain identity within the two communities: (i) The Afro-Trinidadians and (ii) The Indo-Trinidadians.

Methodology

This research work was undertaken using a qualitative framework of analysis. In the main, phenomenology was utilized where the ‘lived experiences’ of the interviewees were the main analytical tool. The sampling techniques used were judgmental and snowball sampling whilst the field-work research was culled from the use of loosely-structured questionnaires used for interviewing participants for first hand accounts. The techniques of document and content analysis were used to extract second hand data from texts, articles and newspaper clippings on the interviewees and their journey and longevity as performers of ‘traditional and indigenous music’ in Trinidad and Tobago.

In this article, three main arguments are postulated. Firstly, that it is necessary to build on the theoretical and conceptual use of genre to better understand the dynamics of symbolic classification and change in order to identify recurrent socio-cultural forms of music genres. In this regard, this work intends to build on the work of Garofalo (2002) and Toynbee (2000), which places a focus on charismatic performers only and seeks to identify the cultural factors, which promote the growth of music genres. Secondly, that there must be an identification of both the developmental sequences of the genre of calypso music, the sub-genre soca music and its subsequent hybrids chutney soca music and ragga soca music as well as thirdly, focussing on the mechanisms that allow for the transition from one genre to the next.

Explaining the use of genre classification

Since its advent as a discipline, sociology has generated systems of socio-cultural classification for a diverse set of phenomena, including forms of organization, religious belief, ethnicity, race and culture, to name a few.
Systemic change is of critical importance for the study of sociology, yet as DiMaggio (1987) posits, there is no theory of dynamic change in classificatory schemes except for efforts, which have been made in domains such as nation building (Anderson 1983) and social movements (Traugott 1995). Analyses of such classificatory schemes often downgrade the cultural meanings of these categories to a secondary feature. However, any discussion which attempts an operationalisation of classificatory schemes with music, culture and/or ethnic identity is essentially speaking to the issue of categorizations and in this case, genre categorizations. The concept of genre places cultural meaning at the forefront of any analysis of category construction and has potential and significant general utility across domains.

Exploring genres

The organisation of genres involves the production and consumption of cultural material (Ateljevic and Faulkner 2002; Ballard, Dodson, and Bazzini 1999; Becker 1982; Belbey and Belbey 1994; Griswold 1987; Hirsch 1972; Negus 1999), and influences tastes and the more formulative structures of stratification in which they are embedded (Bourdieu 1993, 1995; Lizardo 2006). The two major analyses offered regarding the study of genres could be delineated in the following manner. The first approach is heralded by the scholars from the humanities school where emphasis is placed on the "text" of cultural object, which is abstracted from the context in which it is made or consumed (Apperley 2006; Devitt 2004; Fowler 1982; Frow 2006; Hyn 1996; Swales 1990; C. Williams 2006). Others disciplines which champion some aspect of this approach are musicologists who employ this textual technique in order to identify genre as a set of pieces of music that share a distinctive musical language (van der Merwe 1989). Some sociologists employ the use of genre-as-text, but they are careful to show how genre is influenced by the context in which it is made and consumed (Dowd 1992; Cerulo 1995). The second most pro-dominantly used approach places the study of genre squarely in a social context. As such, some analysts apply the term to general marketing categories such as pop, classical, country, urban, and jazz (Negus 1999) which provides a sense of its social impact and further delineates how groups of consumers use available genres to express their sense of social place in society.

After a review of scholarly work on the matter of genres and taste, it was discovered that some theorists analyze survey data to examine how groups of consumers use available genres to express their social identity or status (Mark 1998); they look at very inclusive genres (e.g. rock, MOR, or classical), closer to Ennin’s (1992) “streams” or Bourdieu’s (1993) “fields”. Others use the terms such as subculture (Thornton 1994), scene (Bennett 1997), or neo-trope (Maffesoli 1996). These analyses taken in sum provide a deeper and wider understanding of the use of genre classification.

In addition, others focus on the set of cultural practices (Becker 1982) that a music community defines as a genre and analyse its texts as the product of social interactions in a specific socio-cultural context (Frith 1996). Examples of this approach can be found in Peterson’s (1997) study of the creation of country music, as well as DeVeaux’s (1997) on bebop jazz, Garland (1970) on soul, Bennett (2004) on the Canterbury sound, Cantwell (1984) on bluegrass, and Kahn-Harris (2007) on the European varieties of heavy metal bands. Using all of these studies as background to our understanding of genre, we operationalise the meaning of music genres as systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music. Given this definition, genres are numerous, and boundary work is ongoing as genres emerge, evolve, and disappear (Lamon and Molnár 2002). Over time it has been observed that musicians often do not want to be confined by genre boundaries, but, as Becker (1982) notes, their freedom of expression is necessarily bounded by the expectations of other performers, audience members, critics, and the diverse others whose work is necessary to making, distributing, and consuming symbolic goods (Toynbee 2000).

In the music discussed and analysed in this work, social phenomena such as de-colonisation, independence, and the accomplishment of Republicanism as a small island state in the Caribbean have all had impact on the traditional and indigenous music of Trinidad and Tobago. The defining of boundaries most often takes place within a shifting social, political, economic, and cultural landscape, and the structural features of this landscape condition the actions of genre proponents. A genre’s proximal environment includes other genres that compete for many of the same resources, including fans, capital, media attention, and legitimacy. Amongst other authors, Guilbault (2007) attests to the decrease in both popularity and prominence of calypso as an artform and music of choice for the people as soon as soca music began to ascend in the 1990s. Competing genres often include both the dominant genre in a field and fledging genres contesting for the same opportunity space. Soca music is indeed a derivative of calypso music, with the beat and lyrics are as the two areas of major difference; while the instrumentation remains similar the sound possesses a different tonal and melodic quality, respectively. Prosperity, war, depression, ethnic rivalries, gender relations, demographic shifts, and culture wars, for example, shape the course of genre histories (Crouch 2007; Lott 1995). In Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed in the wider Caribbean, social and political movements are amongst the main triggers for the emergence and subsequent development of genres.

Genres also vary widely by popularity and longevity. Some music forms, like rock-n-roll, become very popular and last over a long period of time while others, like disco, are very popular but short-lived (Brewster and Broughton 2000). Genres like polka for example, thrive over many decades without becoming widely popular (Shepherd, Horn, and Laing 2005), and many, such as big beat, northern soul, psychedelic country, and range rock have only a transitory existence. Many genres evolve out of one or more earlier musics that develop in analogous sectors of music and share characteristics (Gendron 2002). Ennin (1992) shows that some music, over the course of decades, spawn a number of variants. These families of music retain their coherence through shared institutions, aesthetics, and audiences. We further interpret and adhere to Ennin’s in his call for these sets of genres to be studied “stream” through which a number of genres may flow. For example in North America, rhythm and blues (R&B), country music, and pop spawned rock-n-roll, which received recognition as a distinct genre beginning in 1954 (Ennin 1992). In Trinidad and Tobago, calypso music has a history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century and throughout the decades it has received primacy of place as popular music in the island as the music which gave life to the social and political commentary of the day. As the world changed and with the advent of new beats in music coupled with the ascension of digressed approaches to musical sound, calypso music in turn ‘spawned’ soca music and its off-shoots of chutney soca music and ragga soca music which both promised a new vibe, one with a higher tempo, lighter lyrics and a more commercial sound. As such, what we see taking place in the twin island society is not so much a fading of the pride of place of calypso but more consumer taste and market demand for the ‘groover-sounding’ soca music.

Cultural Space – for whom?

In the Caribbean, an understanding of the role of belonging comes from the central place within oneself of the identification with a nation, a race, or an ethnicity. How do I define myself? How do I see the group to which I belong? Is this the closest affiliation? Am I Jamaican? Am I American? Am I Trinidadian? Am I black, Hispanic or of East Indian extract? What is my deepest ethnic affiliation? Is it music, religion or sport? And if it is music, which sort of music do I identify? I am part of a cultural space and what aspect of the culture does the music represent? Which one’s am I drawn to and why?

Colonialist styles of domination may have differed among the English, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese and the others, but race and later ethnicity did play a central role in defining power and separating the accepted ‘in’ group from the unaccepted ‘out’ group. In today’s world of globalisation and neo-colonialism, however, the political departure of the colonizers has been accompanied by the economic arrival of the neo-colonizers and the resulting change has been the transformation – to a certain extent – of the old questions of identity and belonging and acceptance (Guilbault 2007).

Understanding nation, identity and ethnicity

This paper follows on the work already undertaken by Althar (2005), Geertz (1973), Chiverton (1977) and Giddens (1984) which, when summarized,
Music as identity

In many countries of the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago being no exception, music has been used to represent the ideals of the concepts of nation, nationality, national identity and in particular ethnic identity and ethnic affiliation through its lyrics, tone and musical beats. In Trinidad and Tobago, the most popular form of traditional/indigenous music is calypso and this artform, when dissected and analysed, has illustrated themes of national belonging, politics of representation and power relations. As Guilbault (2007) discusses in her polemic work, Governing Sound, this tradition has taken place in post-colonial countries where it has been documented that specific musical genres have been entrusted with the role of furthering nationalist projects. Interestingly we see examples of this in Trinidad and Tobago’s recent elections political campaign wherein calypso music was used by many candidates who had a special ‘song’ or ‘calypso’ created for them as part of the media blitz and support mechanism for not only the party, but for the person representing a specific constituency. In this example, several levels of meaning can be identified. Firstly, there was a focus on the national agenda as songs spoke to ‘saving T&T’ and addressed rescuing Trinidad and Tobago from the ‘other’ element; secondly, some songs spoke to the celebration of an individual such as “Manning Coming Back” which alludes to the staying power of a national leader (who is of Afro-Trinidadian extraction) all that he represents and all that is good for the nation. Alternatively, songs, which spoke to Kamla’s ability to rule Trinidad and Tobago, suggested that the national interest was given primacy over ethnic interest or East Indian affiliation (given the fact that Kamla, one of the candidates for Prime Minister, is Indo-Trinidadian). These examples highlight the power of popular music in this case, calypso music, to transcend the borders of the Carnival Season in Trinidad and Tobago since calypso music is usually geared specifically towards this annual Season. In addition, we see calypso music in this post-colonial society seeking to fulfill its role as a mobiliser of the masses to express the sentiment of a people, a nation and even further, that of ethnic groups, as postulated by Jocelyn Guilbault in Governing Sound.

Calypso Music

Calypso music’s long history dates back to the mid-1800s and, as such, it has enjoyed importance of place and space to be representative of national, social and political realities within the Trinbagonian music landscape. Historically calypso has been performed and heard mostly during the Carnival Season in calypso tents and at the Dimanche Gras (Big Sunday) night show that would herald the end of another successful Carnival Season. The traditional calypso, in terms of musical form, would have three or four verses and a chorus and its lyrics would be focused on the social, political and economic realities of the day. Given the island’s larger size in comparison to most other West Indian territories, its natural resources and commercial economic opportunities, Trinidad became a hub of migratory activity as Caribbean citizens came in search of work, circa 1930s. As a result, calypso music in its embryonic stages was a melting pot of local folk tunes from the islands. In fact, up to the 1950s, mento music from Jamaica and beguine from French-speaking Guadeloupe possessed melodies and structures similar to calypso music. The skill of the Trinidadian Calypsonian in using double entendre (use of a word or phrase with two meanings, one which is usually smutty or indecent) together with the colonial administration’s frequent staging of calypso tent competitions – which developed the sharpness and tenacity of the performers as they battled to win the crown – the calypso artform and tradition grew from strength to strength, eventually giving Trinidad the reputation of producing the most talented mouth-pieces for mastery of the double entendre technique. Over time, calypso music encapsulated a wide variety of music styles such as calypso swing, calypso fox trot, Trinidad Carnival paseo, Grenada paseo, Tobago paseo, Creole calypso circa the 1930s and by the 1970s, matured to the use of rhythmic patterns on the high hat, musical rifts on the keyboard, and the bass lines from the African-American disco (Guilbault, 2007). The presence of the American sailors and other military personnel at the US base in Trinidad during war-time circa 1930s had set the groundwork for a constant audience for calypso music and also affected the speed and tenor of the songs sung for the tourists. Satirical skill and creativity were used to deliver the message, yet the tempo of the songs on offer was always at a pace at which the foreigner could grasp the full meaning. Therein lies the raison d’etre for the primacy of place of the calypso “ballad”.

According to the traditional music pundits, calypso music has been said to have started its descent circa 1983 with the ascendance of soca music. Later on in the 1990s, other musical offshoots of soca music such as chutney soca and ragga soca were born and began to gain prominence as the preferred ‘party music’, as opposed to the original upbeat versions of some calypso songs.

Soca Music

Soca, mostly associated with social commentary and lyrics critical of the ruling political directorate through a slow repetitive rhythm and continuous, steady tempo, has seemed to have lost its hegemonic role as the sole Carnival music (music for the masses) and has largely been replaced by soca, a high tempo music with lightier lyrics whose main responsibility was to create and foster wild abandon in its patrons while providing music for simply dancing and pleasure.

Soca music is the ‘soul calypso’ offspring of calypso proper and as the dominant Carnival music of the past two decades or so is widely acknowledged to be a melding of calypso and Indian forms. The birth of soca which most agree is said to have taken place during the oil boom period, is most often traced to the calypsonian Lord Shorty who hailed from South Trinidad, traditionally-known to have a larger East Indian than Black population. His African ancestry coupled with this major form of reference, the Indian South, is said to be the central component of his innovation as he added Indian rhythms to a sped-up mix of calypso music (Regis, 1999). Recent major artistes associated with this kind of music are Machel Montano, Shurwayne Winchester and Destra Garcia.

As we take a closer look at soca music we see notions of the two social frames of reference together with African and Indian music forms that have been mixed to create this Trinidadian music, this music that is
representative of the two major racial and ethnic groups in the Trinidad and Tobago. What does the merging of these two cultures lend to lyrics, beat, tempo? Early soca, specifically those sung by Ras Shorty I would have revealed an adherence to music, beat and tempo from (i) the nation of Afro-Trinidadians and (ii) the nation of Indo-Trinidadians especially as he would have attempted a merging of the cultures to eventually represent the national identity of Trinidavdan-ness, that is the hybrid sound of merged music genres. Further, the resulting sound or the immediate end product would have been music representative of nation within a nation, ethnic group affiliation and national identity. The latter being a new musical form both emerging out of Trinidad and Tobago and later being seen as a signifier of Trinididian music, that is, not being either African nor Indian.

In recent times, the music of artistes like JW and Blaze together with Destra and Machel reflect a different kind of understanding of national identity. Most of their content is reflective of ‘jam and wine’ lyrics coupled with directives on varying ways of ‘enjoying Carnival’, the national festival. The question that this provokes is... does this content represent the new lifestyle of Trinidadians since almost all Soca songs have this theme? Is it an understood sub-text that this is only ‘advice’ for the Carnival season as to how to enjoy oneself as a Trinididian? Or still, do the lyrics even take into consideration that a large part of the populace of Trinidad and Tobago do not become involved in Carnival nor do they even prescribe to the tenets of ‘gay abandon’ as a way of life for any time of year? And if this is so, this seemingly ‘national’ festival with its apparent all-encompassing appeal may only speak to the ‘nation’ of those who understand its rules and socially exclude those who do not prescribe to its norms and values. Does soca music then reveal the presence and primacy of one Trinididian ‘nation’ or group over the other? And if so, which ‘nation’?

Chutney Soca

Since the Indian cultural revival of the1990s, the much more self-consciously Indian form of ‘chutney soca’, which exploded onto the Carnival scene in 1996, has joined soca music. Historians are still undecided about pinpointing the specific beginning of the musical genre. However, the first known recording was Drupatee Ramgoonai’s album called Chutney Soca in 1987. Further, it must be noted that the precursor to chutney soca was chutney music, the main music traditionally played at the annual post–Carnival Phagwa festival. Sundar Popo is widely known to be the leading exponent of chutney music historically. His famous Nani and Nana in 1969 introduced chutney music to local audiences. Chutney, is a Hindi word referring to a hot and spicy sauce that one takes with meals to add flavour (Jelly-Shapiro 2007). From a musical standpoint, chutney refers to music that is, metaphorically, as ‘hot’ as chutney sauce and in later times its characteristics became associated with a set of melodic structures in combination with a fast, ‘hot’ tempo, inviting dancers to break away. Emerging on the scene in 1987, Drupatee Ramgoonai’s song Chutney Soca set the tone for the emergence of this new type of Trinididian traditional hybridized music. Keeping a keen eye on the movement within this ‘new’ musical sub-genre, Sundar Popo is said to have described chutney soca in the following manner, “When you sing a chutney melody with the dholak drum, dhantal and harmonium, that’s chutney; when you have chutney with a big band, that’s chutney soca.” (Gulbault, 2007). Musicologists, on the other hand, have termed chutney soca a sort of Indian calypso. The advent of chutney soca came not along after the establishment of the first all-Indian national radio station in 1994, Radio Masala. Prior to this all Indian music, traditionally sung in Hindi only, was often relegated to the occasional time slot for ‘ethnic music’ on regular radio stations. Initially, chutney was sung only in Hindi. As its popularity grew, however, it became more of a participatory type of music and since English phrases were mixed with the Hindi, more non-Indo-Trinidadians who are traditionally non-Hindi speakers, were able to follow the lyrics today. It is now a hybrid of both language forms in one musical genre (Jelly-Shapiro 2007). Popular artistes who perform within this genre are Trivers, Nikki Jay, Hunter and Dil E Nadan.

In its later years, soca music has been critcised as being largely commercialized, trivialised, devoid of inspiration and repetitious in nature. One of the major music’s, which received that harsh criticism was chutney soca. Over the last five years almost every song emerging out of the chutney soca arena has spoken such themes as ‘Rum-drinking’, ‘Domination of Indian Females by their males’ i.e. husbands or fathers and ‘A wild and gay abandon lifestyle’ following the excessive consumption of liquor. These lyrics clearly reflect the specific realities of Indo-Trinididian lifestyles and indeed in this example, the themes of ethnic identity emerge, as does that of the East Indian community being seen as ‘nation’ of peoples living in a certain manner while the rest of wider Trinidad may have different socializing practices and thereby constituting a nation within a nation.

Interestingly we see in chutney a similar theme to soca music, in its ‘wild abandon’ lyrics and this is even before the actual merging of chutney with soca as a musical sub-genre. This begs the question, was the eventual melding of chutney with soca a subsequent hybrid due to music similarity or was there a deeper national or ethnic significance beneath the surface?

Most of the present-day chutney soca artistes such as Karma, Dil E Nadan and Nikki Jay do indeed have a ‘big band’ sound. In that regard, they too prescribe to the categorization as described as Popo. According to Mungal Patasar a prolific sitar player of Indian classical music, stated in (Gulbault 2007), the arrival of chutney and the fusion with soca was inevitable, as Trinidadians have always sought ways to improve Afro-Indian integration. To East Indians he says what has occurred is the authentication of their group as a nation and I add, within a nation. Alternatively other scholars have argued that East Indians have sought to use the traditional music of their ethnic group to leverage more recognition and power in the national sphere.

In reviewing the increase in performances by chutney soca artistes in the 2010 Carnival celebrations, together with some ‘chutney’ bands changing the face of their front line performers to reflect more diversity where both Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians were front-line performers, the question posed here is, what is the impact of chutney soca music given the move away from the all-Indian front ‘face’ of today’s chutney bands? With the onset of such chutney competitions as Chutney Soca Monarch and Chutney Glow, have we reached the point where recognition has been achieved by the East Indian population and the continuous proliferation of ‘chutney’ bands and non-chutney bands singing chutney soca rhythms is reflective of an identity that has been carved out for East Indians by East Indians within the multi-cultural space that is Trinidad and Tobago?

Ragga Soca

Ragga soca music is yet another aspect of the soca music genre, which seeks to represent another ethnic group within the Trinidad and Tobago landscape. Ragga soca, strictly speaking, mixes more of the Jamaican type of chanting rhythms with that of regular soca music to form a hybrid sound. This type of music burst onto the scene approximately ten years ago with the advent of dub-calypso sampling and later songs by artistes like Machel Montano recorded with such Jamaican dancehall artistes as Shaggy, Red Rat and Beenie Man. These early mixed music recordings have given way to today’s further hybrids with major artistes like Bunji Garlin and other members of his Asylum Band as the main proponents of the genre with ancilliary performers such as Benji, Treason and Scarface.

Unlike the other two types of soca music discussed here, ragga soca music’s appreciation does not emanate from persons from a particular racial grouping but instead has more non-ethnic affiliation as the supporters belong to the group of lovers of Jamaican music, specifically dancehall and reggae. They seek to identify with a particular music genre, which represents their ethnic attachments and solidifies group affiliation based on the rhythm, sound and beat contained in the ‘dancehall flava’. Ragga soca’s appeal follows the same lyrical themes often expressed in Dancehall lyrics about women, their anatomy and their currency as individuals/desirable objects. Rhythmically, however, the frenzied pace of regular soca music is reduced while the soca melody is retained to produce a hybrid sound which creates a draw for soca music’s younger fans.

Applying genre trajectory to the analysis

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indigenous musics of Trinidad and Tobago highlighted in this article, we discovered that over the course of its history, each of these music communities did not begin at the Avant-Garde stage according to Lena and Peterson’s genre trajectory but instead began as Scene-based, became Industry-based, and, finally, in the case of calypso, moved to the Traditionalist categorisation. Soca, chutney soca and ragga soca are likely to become Traditionalist by the end of the Scene-based phase, because as soon as the music is at the center. Next, there is a ring of contributed whose identity, and sometimes means of employment, is tied to the scene. Outside of this is a ring of fans that participate in the scene more or less regularly. The outer ring is made up of “tourists” who enjoy activities within the scene without identifying with it (Grazian 2004; Cohen 1991).

These local scenes may be in communication with similar scenes in distant locales whose members enjoy the same kind of music and lifestyle. In that regard, calypso and soca music are scene-based. With regards to the Trinidad and Tobago ‘calypso music scene’, before and in its present dispensation, we can clearly distinguish the arena of activity formed by the Carnival musics, their inter-relationships and specific peculiarities from calypso music as a tradition to an artform. From its inception, as Guilbault (2007) indicates, calypso emerged through a migratory circuit of people and commodities. This complex traffic allowed for musical knowledges and practices to mingle, fuse and transform each other. ‘Scene’ also refers to the other Carnival dynamics which surround the calypso such as the Mas-band and Monarch competitions, the ‘jouvert morning’ French-influenced festivities, the ‘grand morning’ party held by one of the upper middle class can ‘party’ to and have access to the same soca music in relative comfort. This scene has accompanied the era of the concentrated focus on soca music to the extent that many individuals experience Carnival only through the “all-inclusive fete”.

### Table 1: Genre Forms and attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Scene-based</th>
<th>Industry-based</th>
<th>Traditionalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Form</td>
<td>Local Scene</td>
<td>Established firm</td>
<td>Club, Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Scale</td>
<td>Local, Internet linked</td>
<td>National, Worldwide</td>
<td>Local to international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Focus</td>
<td>Local, trans-local and virtual scenes</td>
<td>Industrial firms</td>
<td>Festivals, tours, academic settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Idea or Member Goals</td>
<td>Create community</td>
<td>Produce revenue, intellectual property</td>
<td>Preserve heritage and pass it on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codification of Performance Conventions</td>
<td>Medium: much attention to codifying style</td>
<td>High: shaped by industry</td>
<td>Hyper: great concern about deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Innovations</td>
<td>Codifying technical innovations</td>
<td>Production tools that standardize sound</td>
<td>Idealised ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary Work</td>
<td>Against rival musics</td>
<td>Market driven</td>
<td>Against deviants within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress, Adornment</td>
<td>Emblematic of genre</td>
<td>Mass-marketed “style”</td>
<td>Stereo-typic and muted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Income for Artists</td>
<td>Scene activities, self-contributed</td>
<td>Sales, licensing, merchandise, endorsements</td>
<td>Self-contributed, heritage grants, festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Coverage</td>
<td>Community Press</td>
<td>National Press</td>
<td>Genre-based advocacy and critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Genre Name</td>
<td>Scene members, genre-based media</td>
<td>Mass media or industry</td>
<td>Academics, critics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table adapted from Lena and Peterson (2008) with their SIT Genre Trajectories. The author (Sylvester 2010) re-worked this chart by omitting the Ag analysis for Avant-Garde since the music examined in this work did not fall into that categorisation.

### Scene-based genres - Calypso Music and Soca Music

For more than a decade, scholars analyzing music communities across the globe have used the concept of “scene” to refer to a community of spatially-situated artists, fans, record companies, and supporting small business people; Shank (1994) on rock and country music, Austin, Texas; Cohen (1991) on the Liverpool scene; Bedeker (2004) on jazz in Kansas City; Grazian (2004) on blues in Chicago, and Urquía (2004) on salsa in London. Scene-based genres have a loose organisational form characterized by nested rings of varying commitment to the genre ideal. Clusters of these most responsible for the distinctive characteristics of the music are at the center. Next, there is a ring of committed activists whose identity, and sometimes means of employment, is tied to the scene. Outside of this is a ring of fans that participate in the scene more or less regularly. The outer ring is made up of “tourists” who enjoy activities within the scene without identifying with it (Grazian 2004; Cohen 1991).
Ragga Soca Music

The scene associated with ragga soca music is a mixture of the young and the old who ascribe to the tenets of dancehall music out of Jamaica and who still feel that nationalistic pull to listen to and be involved in soca music as an artform. This hybrid has evolved into a blended sound of dancehall rhythms and soca music beats.

According to Keith Nurse, ragga soca has catered to both pan-West Indian and Trinidadian identity by being hybrid in form and influence and simultaneously embodying a culture of resistance and one of co-option. Ragga soca’s trademark sound which displays multiple cultural and national locations while embodying various kinds of musical sensibilities undoubtedly stem from appreciating the new kinds of audiences they aim to reach.

Table 2: Source: table adapted from Lena and Peterson (2008) with their SIT Genre Trajectories. The author (Sylvester 2010) re-worked this chart to reflect the realities of genre categorisations in Trinidad and Tobago Popular Musics for this paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE</th>
<th>SCENE-BASED</th>
<th>INDUSTRY-BASED</th>
<th>TRADITION-ALIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calypso</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soca</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutney</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragga</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Industry-based Genres

Industry-based music genres are so named because their primary organizational form is the industrial corporation some of which are multinational in scope, while others are independent companies organized to compete directly with the multinationals. Frith (1996:77) describes such genres as being located within the “market-based popular music field.” Other theorists such as Peterson and Berger (1975), Lopes (1992), Negus (1999), and Dowd (2004) also concur with this view. Along with industrial firms, the prime actors in this field include singers and musicians who contract for their services genre-targeted audiences, and a wide array of ancillary service providers, from song publishers to radio stations and diverse retail outlets. For a genre to thrive for long in this large apparatus, its fans must number in the hundreds of thousands, and market logic demands ever larger numbers. Given the definition above, all the genres of music under review in this study save for malypso Music fall within this categorisation.

The nature of the genre calls for simplified genre conventions, which are codified in the interests of making, measuring, and marketing its products. Firms train new artists to work within highly codified performance conventions, and record producers regularly coach songwriters and artists to make simple music, clearly within genre bounds, that will appeal to a mass audience. Such stereotyping strategies also facilitate sales because company personnel will know how to categorise and market the product (Longhurst 2007, Negus 1999), and potential consumers can be identified through analysis of marketing demographics data (Negus 1999).

Traditionalist

The goal of the traditionalist genre participants is to preserve a genre’s musical heritage and inculcate in the rising generation of devotees a deep and lasting appreciation of the performance techniques, history, and rituals of the genre. Fans and organizations dedicated to perpetuating a genre put a great amount of effort into constructing its history and highlighting exemplary performers who they deem into the genre’s emerging canon of exemplars (Lee 2007; Regev 1994; Rosenberg 1985). Periodic gatherings of genre artists and fans at festivals, celebratory concerts, and reunions are characteristic of Traditionalist genres. These rituals give devotees the chance to gather and momentarily live in the spirit of the genre and reaffirm its continuity (Rosenberg 1985). New and old performers will often play together, enacting a ritual of renewal through the veneration of the old timers and the ‘discovery’ of new talent. Calypso and soca music are representative of this genre while chutney soca music and ragga soca music are not. The latter two genres are approximately ten years old as such have not yet developed a concerted following of fans and devotees who exert either this kind of interest or commitment.

Conclusion

This work has sought to illustrate that defining music genres sociologically as a creative group process, rather than as a discourse about taxonomy or a market category, facilitates understanding the processes of classification and systematic change. Questions about the social structure of genres, the dynamics of their trajectories, and the ways these shape music have been highlighted. Additionally, the processes of classification and change and the relevance of sociology to the study of culture and the centrality of the study of culture to the problems of contemporary sociology have been introduced to describe and analyse the musics of Trinidad and Tobago in a brand new manner.

The musics discussed and examined here are representative of the two major groups within the twin-island, that of the ‘Afro-Trin’ and the ‘Indo-Trin’. On the one hand, there are polarised communities who seek out the musics and ‘follow’ the scene associated with a particular genre sensibility. Yet on the other, the respective musics of the two groups are becoming more and more indistinguishable, wherein, despite a strict adherence to a dichotomous ethnic militancy, claims to authentic and singular cultural identities within the traditional and indigenous musical forms are lessening in differentiation. This process of musical hybridisation is reflective of a greater Caribbean reality, that of creolisation and/or the melding of cultures and cultural forms of expression given the multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-faceted nature of Caribbean realities, a process that has been occurring in the Caribbean since the advent of slavery.

According to Guibault (2007), the new derivatives of soca, namely power soca, ragga soca, chutney soca have radically altered the Carnival music scene since the late 1980s. Their presence has established the commencement of new cultural formations that have re-mapped collective identities within a national culture.

Within the music genre of soca, the concepts of nation, ethnicity and identity have come to take on, all at once, global significance while at the same time adhering to the mystery of the local. In short, Caribbean multi-ethnic societies, of which Trinidad and Tobago is a part, are seen as plural and culturally heterogeneous societies. Through the years we have come to see these descriptors be modified to suit either the political, economic or social/cultural sphere.


Woodard, Eric. 2008. "Are We in the R&B Charts?: Elton John's 'Bennie and the Jets' and the British Invasion-Soul-Top 40 Nexus." ENP Pop Music Conference. April 12, Seattle, WA.


KUMAR MAHABIR

Poetry In Song: Literary devices in East Indian Folk Songs of the Caribbean

Keywords - poetry, folk songs, musicology, oral literature, culture, East Indians, Caribbean.

Abstract:

Many people in the world are not aware of an existing corpus of folk songs of (East) Indian origin in the Caribbean. The immediate challenge, therefore, is not only to collect, translate and classify these songs, but also to critically examine them before they disappear altogether. This paper examines a selected anthology of songs culled from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, St Lucia, Grenada and St Vincent from a literary perspective. Songs of the biraha [impromptu], sohars [lullaby], ularas [lyrical], marsiyas [death] and dohas [couplet] genres are studied for their metaphorical and figurative values. Almost all of the songs have been found to have two levels of meaning, which contain rhyme, repetition, parallelism, alliteration, assonance and other prosodic devices. Comparisons are also made between (the form and structure of) these songs and those of other communities in the Caribbean and the wider world.

Except for the familiar category of literary or scholarly works by V. S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, Rajkumarie Singh, Sheik Sadeek, Kenneth Parmasad, Nila Maharaj et al., the past imaginative compositions of (East) Indians in the Caribbean are generally not known because they have been hardly collected, and are scarcely being performed. I am the first researcher to have started collecting and analysing Indian folk songs in the region as part of my M.Phil thesis, submitted in 1989. I was followed by two foreign ethno-musicologists. Helen Myers (1999) and Peter Manuel (2000) studied specific genres of the wide repertoire of Indian folk songs in the Caribbean. They were, in turn followed by Tina Rammarine (2001) and Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) who focused on chutney music, and its history, evolution and social dynamics.

There is still the need to examine surviving Indian folk songs, and indeed that of other ethnic communities in the region, in order to appreciate the status and value of Indian vocal forms. Folk songs should be analyzed at a literary level as a way of helping the uninitiated reader to understand and appreciate why these devices are important components of this form of oral expression. Research scholars never studied these vocal compositions mainly because folk songs, in general, were considered crude and artistically under-developed creations of the unlettered laboring masses (see Finnegans 1977). This popular form of poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people, just as written verse, poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people, just as written verse, poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people, just as written verse, poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people, just as written verse, poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people, just as written verse, poetry can also be considered a subtle and realistic expression of working people.

The average age of the singers represented in the original collection is sixty (60), the oldest being Mr Sankar Ram, 103 years (b.1884), and the youngest (an exception) Mr Mohan Persad, twenty-three (23). Mr Ram, like Mr Astar Kaladoos Dass (b. 1906), was a surviving ex-indentured immigrant from India. There were fifty-five (55) singers from the Caribbean who are represented in the original anthology, 19 (34%) from Trinidad, 6 (11%) from Jamaica, 13 (24%) from Guyana, 11 (20%) from St Lucia, 3 (5%) from St Vincent and 3 (5%) from Grenada. This data, more or less, reflect the real situation, except that St Lucia is over-represented in the collection.

Of the fifty-five (55) Indian folk singers represented in the original anthology, thirty (30) are women. This figure (55%) would have been expected to be larger, since certain kinds of ritual and ceremonial songs are typically delivered by them - the sohars [during birth]; the kaptis [rice-planting], the jiulas [swing], the

The volume of one hundred and forty (140) songs, culled directly from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, St Lucia, Grenada and St Vincent, provides an authentic and valuable contribution to the store of Caribbean literature as my examination of their literary value will demonstrate. The research was conducted sporadically from March 1982 to August 1996 as part of my M. Phil thesis to recover a valuable part of the cultural heritage of the Caribbean. The field is wide and rich, and a large store of material awaits the enthusiastic researcher who is interested in salvaging the folk song tradition from submergence and the real possibility of extinction.

The original collection contains one hundred and forty (140) folk songs from the Caribbean: 58 (42%) from Trinidad, 17 (12%) from Ja’maca, 24 (17%) from Guyana, 4 (3%) from St Vincent, 10 (7%) from Grenada and 19 (13%) from St Lucia. This data does not, at all, represent the real situation, since Guyana and, to some extent, Jamaica are expected to be richer resource areas; while St Lucia, on the other hand, is over-represented in this random sample. The richest harvest of songs has come from, understandably, Trinidad, because this writer/collector lives and works there. In St Lucia, a systematic search was conducted with a co-worker: hence the large percentage of songs.

The first lines are given as titles for the sake of convenience of reference. When the singers deliver them, the start and finish may not always be clearly delineated, except for the sohar [birth] and biraha [impromptu] forms which have distinct structures. It is, therefore, sometimes not evident whether songs like “My bhauji gets a husband,” for example, should be counted as several poems, consecutive stanzas in one complete poem, or parts of a song cycle. Each unit can form a complete poem on its own, but is commonly conjoined to form longer pieces, sometimes directly, sometimes linked together or interleaved with a refrain or repetition.

If a line is taken as one unit, it becomes clear that some songs are built upon a system of couplets such as, for example, “Evening comes,” “I will hold on to you.” “Open your hair and hands,” and “I will hold on to you.” “Open your hair and hands,” and “Sita puts a garland around Rama’s neck.” Like medieval European lyrics and mystery plays, other songs are based on triplets, for instance, “From the eastern country the tatooer came” and “A small yogi came to see [the child, Krishna].” Regular quatrains stanzas have been the reluctance of some of the elderly female bards to come forward and sing directly to this male, sometimes strange, collector.

The corpus of Indian folk songs of the Caribbean includes seasonal songs like the jiulas [swing] and kaptis [rice-planting]; ritual songs like the pacras [incantations]; and some biyas [marriage]; songs of the life cycle like the sohars [birth] and nirguns [death]; work songs like the goadnas [tattoo] and pisauns [grinding]; festival songs like chawatis [folk]; and kabirs [pathy poetry]; and topical songs like the birahas [impromptu]. There are also modern songs on fairly current issues.

Length of stanzas

East Indians folk songs, like all oral poems (Finnegan 1979), do not really have titles. However, the first lines are given as titles for the sake of convenience of reference. When the singers deliver them, the start and finish may not always be clearly delineated, except for the sohar [birth] and biraha [impromptu] forms which have distinct structures. It is, therefore, sometimes not evident whether songs like “My bhauji gets a husband,” for example, should be counted as several poems, consecutive stanzas in one complete poem, or parts of a song cycle. Each unit can form a complete poem on its own, but is commonly conjoined to form longer pieces, sometimes directly, sometimes linked together or interleaved with a refrain or repetition.

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exist, however, in irregular units, as for example, in “The thief stole the kular from the tree,” “My children sleep under the pital tree,” “My mother studies the marsiya” and “When my husband returns.”

The lines in different types of songs are of varying lengths (see Arya 1968), for instance, the sohar [birth] has longer lines than the ulara [lyrical]. Varying and indeterminate line length is also a pattern of Hebrew (Biblical) poetry. In poetry as well as in song, the type of expression often determines the length of the lines. Variable line length is a well established literary device in poetry to produce a contrast in rhythm.

Repetition

The use of a formalised refrain between leader and chorus, which is a major feature of East Indian folk songs, as in Yoruba oral verses (Warner-Lewis 1964), is clearly an extension of the principle of repetition. Patterns of repetition can provide structure and coherence to an oral poem, but need not necessarily lead to monotonity.

Verbal repetition as a poetic device can operate at a number of levels within a single song. There can be repetition of syllables in successive lines, for instance jai in “Glory glory be to Christ,” and tu in “Remove the obstacles in crossing.”

Phrasal, lexical, line and stanza repetition functions in many ways. Firstly, it is used for amplification and emphasis. Secondly, it creates an opportunity for wide group (chorus) participation. Thirdly, it serves to convey emotion if said in different ways by different persons. Fourthly, the timing can be flexible to suit the period of the ritual or social occasion (Maharaj 1974).

Parallelism

Rhyme of sentence, generally called parallelism in European poetry, and common in incantatory Hebrew (Biblical) verse, is an important structural device in Indian folk songs. Parallelism involves the change of only one element in repeated syntactical units. This device builds up successive layers of insight and meaning around the central theme and manifests a unity as well as opportunity for the development in the song itself (Finnegan 1979).

There is also chain parallelism or parallelism by linking where the penultimate or last element in one line starts with the next, for example,

```
khiri kole rahi sa ratiya          I left the window open last night
ratiya kaha gawaiyo na            last night, where did you go?
```

This device is employed in other songs, for instance “Where is the Ganga coming from, my mother?” and “July month has come! (1)”

Parallelism is also discernible through repetition of meaning, though different terms are used, for example,

```
e jetan ghar mei my husband’s elder brother is not home
```

```
sas nahi ghar mei my mother-in-law is not home
```

```
sasur nahi ghar mei my father-in-law is not home
```

```
chalaki na jai don’t spill
```

```
chalaki na jai goadi girl, don’t spill
```

```
chalaki na jai don’t spill
```

```
gagari bhare ai the pitcher is full
```

Simile and Metaphor

The simile as a figure of speech is rarely used in Indian folk songs. Metaphor seems to be more common, for example, anguni ke pira mare raja ho [the pain in the finger is death to the King]. Sometimes it is merely a case of metaphorical over-tones made explicit in some words, for instance, an erected penis is expressed as chohila phala auru [a sweet-man’s fruit] and semen as nadia paniya [river-water]. Most of the times, the recurrent metaphor raja [lit, means King] has been accepted as a figurative expression in Indian poetic culture to mean husband.

Sometimes a sustained metaphor gives depth and meaning to a song. The Indo-Guyanese piece for instance, addressed to a fair girl [goadi], draws its effectiveness both from the common Indian image of a girl being most attractive when balancing a heavy pitcher [gargi] on her head, and on the recurrent sexual metaphors of fill [bhare] and spill [chalaki].
Rhyme

It was observed that people of all castes in India dabble in rhymes and amuse themselves by reading out publicly and ostentatiously the pieces they have composed (Dubos 1968). Vidkräm Seth uses rhyming couplets as a major device in his novel, A Suitable Boy (1993). Each of the 19 parts of his book is described by a rhyming couplet on the contents page. In his novel, members of a Bengali intelligentsia also indulge in rhyming couplets.

Indian folk poetry abounds in all types of rhymes - masculine, feminine, end-rhymes, internal-rhymes, eye-rhymes, half-rhymes and slant rhymes. An example may be cited at random:

`yahi jaga koi na hamana         in this world nobody is
            utari gi                              take me over`

In this example, feminine rhymes [uri and yahi] occur at the beginning of the two lines. The words jaga, na and hamana do not only give an audible sense of internal rhyme but also demonstrate the use of assonance. Indeed, assonance is one of the most popular prosodic devices in Indian folk songs. It is often developed by insertions of a and wa where the sound pattern is of the first letter of the vowel, for instance, kular anganawa pinawa chori chora ho [the thief stole the kular from the tree in the yard]. Other insertions such as ho, ko, le, he, ge, etc. help to unify the words into a coherent pattern of sound. There are other cases of deliberate acts, for instance the verb delhi may be modified into delha and delhi to become congenial with badna and rahe respectively in the song, “I saw a clear sky.” These patterns may be sometimes automatic and accidental as the Indian languages have a wealth of synonyms (Dubos 1968).

Alliteration, like assonance, is another prosodic device, which is used to create a pattern of sound. It can be extremely complex, at times, and imposes fierce constraints on the poet. The song, “Work for others continuously,” is a striking example where three stanzas (refrain included) begin with the same consonant. The rules of alliteration sometimes demand that the singer insert initial syllables to maintain similar sounds, for example, ye is inserted to pattern with yama in “The centre of me has died.” It is a regular feature to be found within many lines, for instance, rahaho Bengali baba maja pajo [if you stay Bengali man, you’ll get much pleasure] and kajarai kele dahari ke nagan [play kajarai in Dahari village].

Other prosodic devices

Hyperbole is rarely used in East Indian folk songs. One instance, is when a son pays tribute to his mother by saying that she took, lako jattanse mudgeko paiya [a million ways to make me], and a soldier evokes the turbulence and throb.

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The self-deprecation in Indian religious folk songs perhaps represents a simultaneous awareness of man’s helplessness and powerlessness before the Absolute.

Personification of the elements and heavenly bodies is an integral part of Hindu mythology, hence its preponderance in the songs in this collection. For example, the earth is depicted as Dhanti Mata [Mother Earth] and Di Baba [Father Earth]. The Ganges is treated as a mother, the wind is pictured as a monkey, and a calf is presented as a child. This is a prosodic device, which relates to rhythm rather than meaning. Onomatopoeic words are used with considerable rhetorical effect to express emotion and excitement, for example jack jere [thrusting] and batkat [throb].

Various modes of expression are employed in the songs of this collection. For example, the soliloquy is used in “If I had a sau, direct address is explored in “Take, take the horse Hasan,” the second person is used in “If you stay Bengali man,” and dialogue is used in “In July, the sathi rice.” There are also songs, which employ the question and answer format, for example, “Sakhis sit near Sita.”

Conclusion

The literary imagination embedded in the songs is the result of oral renditions of long passages of history, through myth and symbol, which has become the basis for a set of ideas around a culture and its language. The picturesque and imaginative forms of expression of Indian diction are particularly noticeable in this sample collection. For example, in the biraha [impromptu], “Ravana could not win Hanuman,” Rama is referred to as “one who supports the world” [matilago dharni dhare se], and later, in the same song as “one who broke the bow” [kailo dhanuk dharse]. In most songs, metaphorical expression is used, even in the condensed and deeply figurative language of the dohas [couplets], for example, “The door of Sita’s husband’s house.” Other songs operate at two levels - the overt one and the inner one which conveys some hidden meaning. The marisya [dirge] “A parrot was reared in a cage,” for example, is an evocative description of the escape of a bird from the captor’s hold, but it also conveys a hidden meaning of death. Yet other songs make their effect without much apparent reliance on figurative language, using simple narrative description, for instance, “The sardar was very arrogant,” “My husband goes walking south,” “The thief stole the kular from the tree,” and “Let’s go to the river-side husband.”

I hope that the misconception that folk songs are not “artistic” and “sophisticated” has been redressed by this careful examination of this form of oral tradition. Indeed, the objective of writing this paper is to illustrate the fact that (Indian) folk song is poetry in the form of music that has been transmitted through the oral tradition. It is my wish that folk songs would become reference material for historians, linguists, sociologists and literary critics who would realise that oral and written literature constantly overlap (Renwick 1980). It is unfortunate that references to folk songs are often still being confined to studies on popular culture and folklore. To this day, they still largely remain outside the field of established scholarly research and mainstream literature.
**APPENDIX: TEXTS OF SOME SELECTED SONGS**

**MY BHAWGI GETS A HUSBAND**

ye more bhuji se paiya se  
my sister-in-law gets a husband

balama

ye more bhuji se paiya se  
my sister-in-law gets a husband

balama

- rendered by Mr Allan Khodra, Odsan, St. Lucia, born 1916. Recorded July, 1986

**FROM THE EASTERN COUNTRY THE TATOOER CAME**

purubwa dhasesawa awela  
from the eastern country the

natua  
tattooer came

koi sawar goadana goad-  
one who drew tattoo for us,

awe= hamne balama  
fair ladies

koi sawar goadana goad-  
one who drew tattoo for us,

awe= hamne balama  
fair ladies

- translated by Dhriti Maha - Mother Earth

Sanskrit - the sacred Ganges river

Hanuman = Monkey-Chief in the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana

Hussain = grandson of the Muslim Prophet, Muhammad

Kabir = mystic poet who lived in 16th century India

Krisna = revered hero of the legends of the Puranas

Kumar = a variety of k

Rama = revered prince of the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana

Sita = revered wife of Rama

Yoga = Hindu ascetic

**Glossary**

- Dharti Mata – Mother Earth
- Ganga – the sacred Ganges river
- Hanuman – Monkey-Chief in the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana
- Hussain – grandson of the Muslim Prophet, Muhammad
- Kabi – mystic poet who lived in 16th century India
- Krisna – revered hero of the legends of the Puranas
- Kumar – a variety of k
- Rama – revered prince of the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana
- Sita – revered wife of Rama
- Yoga = Hindu ascetic

- **bhihar** se nekalaila  
  he saw nanadi inside [the

  lahudi nanadiya  
  house]

- more bhuji goadana  
  "my fair bhuji, I want a

  goadawehamne goadiya  
  tattoo drawn"

- more bhuji goadana  
  "my fair bhuji, I want a

  goadawehamne goadiya  
  tattoo drawn"

- kiyà debe natua to dhal  
  "will you give the tattooer a

  la bhar sonawa  
  tray full of gold"

- kiyà debe nanadi hamar  
  "will you take my fair nanadi?"

- more goadiya

- kiyà debe nanadi hamar  
  "will you take my fair nanadi?"

- more goadiya

- jya laghaw tore dhal la  
  "bring a tray full of gold"

  bhàl sonawä  
  "I’ll give you my fair, young

  nanadi"

- matal lebo nanadi jawan  
  "I’ll give you my fair, young

  nanadi"

- matal lebo nanadi jawan  
  "I’ll give you my fair, young

  nanadi"

- rasotiya edekh khodaria  
  "bring ground-food, and a

  khodaria to carry in the cart"

- garia jai talawa  
  "sitting down my fair (bhuji)

  moregoidya  
  bends her head"

- baithal bate mathawa niwai  
  "sitting down my fair (bhuji)

  moregoidya  
  bends her head"

- sabake mai dekhawo ya  
  "I’ll show everybody my

  shining (tattoo)"

- lagata jhalakat  
  "I haven’t seen my fair

  bahini"

- nahi dekho bahini hamar  
  "I haven’t seen my fair

  bahini"

- more goadiya

- nahi dekho bahini hamar  
  "I haven’t seen my fair

  bahini"

- more goadiya

- kiyà debe nanadi hamar  
  "will you take my fair nanadi?"

- more goadiya
de hona dhaniya ho                      "I paid with ground rice,           prahu chal bo tinawa raj moul   x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
satuwawisanawa                        sahu                                           
ham tab bahiniya ko jan               "then, I’ll go and search             kular anganawa pirawa chori  the thief stole the kular from
jab more goodiya                      for my fair bahini”                   chora ho                         the tree in the yard
ham tab bahiniya ko jan               "then, I’ll go and search             kular anganawa pirawa chori  the thief stole the kular from
jab more goodiya                      for my fair bahini”                   chora ho                         the tree in the yard
ekhà banà gayele dusar                I searched the first forest;         chorawa tur a tur                 the thief collected and collected
banà gayele                          "I’ll go and search for my fair      chorawa bini bini jai             
xisare mei natua ke sat              bahini"                                   
more goodiya                         in the third, my fair nanadi          
tisare mei natua ke sat              and the tatooe were together       
more goodiya                         in the third, my fair nanadi          
more goodiya                         and the tatoee were together        
le u (ho natua ho dhal               "you, tatoee, take this tray         jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
la bhar sonawa                       full of gold”                       jai prabhu escho       Glory be to God, Jesus
le u (ho natua ho dhal               "you, tatoee, take this tray         jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
la bhar sonawa                       full of gold”                       jai prabhu escho       Glory be to God, Jesus
kehi dewo bahini hamar               "return my fair bahini’”             jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
more goodiya                         
akeya lagaw tore dhal                 "will you take a tray full          jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
la bhar sonawa                       of gold?”                           jai prabhu escho       Glory be to God, Jesus
ata bhafe baihì hamar                "she has become my baihì”            jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
more goodiya                         
ata bhafe baihì hamar                "she has become my baihì”            jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
more goodiya                         
- rendered by Ms Sahidan Rahim, Pasea, Trinidad, born 1921. Recorded April, 1983.

THE THIEF STOLE THE KULAR FROM THE TREE

chal bo tinawa raj moul     x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x

- rendered by Mr Augustine Beroo, Foriestierre, St. Lucia, born 1911. Recorded July, 1986

GLORY GLORY BE TO CHRIST

jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
jai prabhu escho       Glory be to God, Jesus
jai jai ishwar         Glory Glory be to Christ
jai prabhu escho       Glory be to God, Jesus
jai jai ishwar         everybody give plenty praise
jai prabhu escho       
jai jai ishwar         
jai jai ishwar         
pretu prata jagaie      a family should conscious
(jof righteousness) early
jai jai ishwar         
jai prabhu escho       
man nama sangha para     all person’s minds must be
nadiharo                  righteous
man nama sangha para     all person’s minds must be
nadiharo                  righteous
pretu prata jagaie      
a family should conscious
(jof righteousness) early
jai jai ishwar         
jai prabhu escho       
Suthà bara pita desalo    Son God, have plenty mercy
Suthà bara pita desalo    Son God, have plenty mercy
pra pra nabajaie        don’t just prattle (to God)

chal bo tinawa raj moul     x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x

kular anganawa pirawa chori  the thief stole the kular from
chora ho                         the tree in the yard
kular anganawa pirawa chori  the thief stole the kular from
chora ho                         the tree in the yard
chorawa tur a tur                 the thief collected and collected
LISTEN, SULOCANA’S MIND IS DISTURBED BY A DREAM

are swapan Sulocana man
bowraie
kown naka to ke bhari
are swapan Sulocana man
bowraie
kown naka to ke bhari
age age piche
Rama chalatuhei Laksmana
bhaiye
dekh dekh ke mandil
asan laiye
are swapan Sulocana man
bowraie

- rendered by Mr Augustine Beroo, Foriestierre, St. Lucia, born 1911. Recorded July, 1986.

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About the Author:

Kumar Mahabir is an Anthropologist and Assistant Professor at the Centre for Education Programmes at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (TT). He obtained his Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of Florida, and his BA and M Phil. degrees in Literatures in English from The University of the West Indies (UWI). His recent books include Indian Caribbean Folklore Spirits and The Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean.
In a vision it came to me. I beheld a great theatre stage and all of its mechanics and inner workings. Above there was a Utopia the delight of the wealthy tourists. Then there was the spiritual, a cathedral of religious worshippers and below that the world of industry and the realm of science. At the center there stood a figure wreathed in golden splendor. He spoke to me, “Pay attention to the worlds, the people that you see before you are all actors in the drama called ‘Planet Earth’! I am the Architect, and this is my Theatre. Welcome.

Through my own spiritual and religious beliefs, and being curious in the beliefs of others, I was inspired to create a work that would open the dialogue to contemplating the invisible forces that influence and move our world. “The Great Architect” was a title I chose because of its ambiguity and usage in various religions and belief systems to describe the supreme creator of the universe. The general view of God is that He, She or It is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent force from which both good and evil flows. What I aimed to illustrate was the influence of this power and how it affects our world in various ways. Time is a major factor in how our world moves and changes, so the foundational idea for this piece was based around a large clock. The secondary idea was based on the metaphor of our world being a theatre or stage hence the subtitle “Theatre of Oblivion.” The clock and theatre setting appeal to me as they allude to the archaic idea of the world being flat. Traveling on a fine ark above, the eclipsed sun moves the course of clock hands over and under the flat paradise landscape of the stage. The lower bowels of the theatre can be seen as an underworld growing darker and more demented the lower one goes. I wish to reveal to my viewer, the perspective of the architect himself who is privy to the knowledge of how this elaborate cosmic, clock theatre functions.

“That’s the Spirit

I believe that there is a peaceful spirit or energy that exists within the islands of my country. I visualized this spirit as very old, being, humble yet still powerful and focused as represented in its posture. The islands of the the Bahamas have generally been inhabited by peaceful people. From the graceful and generous Lucayans to the descendants of slaves that were able to achieve a country’s independence without blood shed. However, like our Caribbean counterparts we are not lacking in conflict. I was inspired to illustrate this spirit facing the challenge of isolation and suffocation. The man is faced with a problem beyond his control as he sits in a desert and isolation is represented by the form of the fish bowl that encumbers him. The suffocation represents another challenge that was either self inflicted or imposed by another. But this spirit remains focus, grounded, humble and appears to be everlasting. I see the spirit of our land outlasting and overcoming the plights that we now face as a nation and also those to come.
**About the Artist**

Mckinney’s work explores elements of visual storytelling. He earned his BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and has exhibited locally and internationally, including the USA, Ghana, Africa and Maui, Hawaii. Jace produced illustrations for the Bahamian children’s book “Lenny in the Big Yard.” He currently resides in The Bahamas working as an illustrator and storyteller.

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**Flambeau**

*Flambeau* is a psychological drama shot up-close and personal that tells intimately of a set of circumstances situated within the frustrations and regrets of old age, and the loss of “something fundamental”. It looks at male expectations in the Caribbean in relation to love and family and fidelity.

Nathan confesses an unabashed love for his Lilian, whom he speaks of as the love of his life “…since deh wuz seventeen” and admits, stricken now with the torments of a faded virility, that in his youth (would that have been before he was seventeen?) he’d have had “three Essies and still hungry.”

Lilian, seen ethereal, hovers over her Nathan, knowingly, as he tells of liaisons with a neighbour she knew in her life, and is confident, that she is awaiting him in the great beyond, as, indeed, she is.

But can she, understanding and forgiving...
as ever, save him from the demons of his own descent, or will he come down from the heights below of his reliance on mind-altering substances? Brewster’s directorial approach opens the door to the question as to whether Nathan is indeed a Caribbean man of a different sort, or merely one of the much more common variety who sees women as service providers to be held under men’s sexual power, the loss of which he bemoans, sadly.

**Review by Hubert Williams**

Art’s greatest value is that it takes fiction and converts it into the reality of our own lives. Thus, “Flambeau” intimately touches those among peers who have survived the ravages of time, and simultaneously laments physical capabilities lost and celebrates the joys of times past, between men and women, living, loving, sharing. In youth, ecstasy attends every embrace. In age comes the embrace of memories. In ten minutes, we gaze upon the face of age and view our own bleak fate. Hair gray or all but gone, yet we reject fashion’s shining pate. Aching joints, irregularly beating hearts, and more. Many with the will to dance cannot but recall days of yore. Clairmonte’s lament will find echo stifled in many throats, as each shields secrets, which hitherto underpinned boasts. Lions without their roar, twigs that have rotted, manhood is reduced to mere longing. And so, onward goes the march of time, the doleful beat of drums. Till, finally prostrate, we are moved to the march of mourners’ hums. “Flambeau” both reminds us of our mortality and of the rich talents of a passing generation in the performing arts.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK5lScP-t9I

Earl Warner, Barbadian producer/director;
Clairmonte Taitt, Guyanese musician/actor;
Errol Brewster, Guyanese photographer/producer.

**About the Filmmaker:**

Errol Brewster is a multi-media artist and cultural activist. He has served advisor to the Guyanese Minister of Culture and as Director of Studies of the National Art School. He currently sits on the adjudication panel of the National Independence Festival of Arts and is a regular contributor to the trilingual arts journal Cariforum and E-journal Caribart.
Abstract:
Carl Bradshaw and Charles Hyatt are two of Jamaica’s foremost actors of their generation. They became household names in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean for their memorable performances in local and international film productions.

Emiel Martens interviewed both cultural icons and asked them about their career in and vision of the Caribbean.

CARL BRADSHAW

How did you become an actor?

In the early seventies I worked as a teacher of Physical Education at Excelsior High School. My colleague Yvonne Jones, the school’s Drama teacher, introduced me to Perry Henzell who at the time had the idea of doing this movie The Harder They Come (1972). I was cast for the role of bad man Jose and that’s how I got involved in the film industry. From that moment my career in film just took off.

I successively acted in the Jamaican movies No Place Like Home (which was shot in 1973 but only released in 2006), Every Nigger is a Star (1973, which never released), Smile Orange (1976), Countryman (1982), The Lunatic (1991), Kla$h (1995), Third World Cop (1997), Dancehall Queen (1999) and One Love (2003). I have had the privilege to be in most of the films that were produced locally. That’s basically how my career started in film.

The first movie in which you appeared, The Harder They Come, became a huge local success and international cult hit. How would you explain the film’s success?

At the time of making we didn’t know what would happen, we just did a film. But it had a great story, the story of Ivanhoe “Rhygin” Martin, the first notorious Jamaican gunman. The film portrayed real-life ghetto situations, which was a world experience but not many people at the time had the audacity to make a movie about that. The Harder They Come was political in its outlook as it showed the vast disparity between the classes in early independent Jamaica as well as the lack of opportunity for the black population. So the film was very political in that sense. Also, the movie had a great soundtrack. The movie took reggae music to its international level. The Harder They Come was really a cutting edge movie.

Left: above : Carl Bradshaw in The Harder They Come. Film still courtesy IFM
Below: Carl Bradshaw at Devon House, Kingston, Jamaica in 2006. Photography by Emiel Martens
Right below: Carl Bradshaw in The Harder They Come. Film still courtesy of IFM
Caribbean films usually have to meet the needs of both the local and the international market. Do you see a tension between these two needs?

When you are making a film for the international commercial market, you sometimes have to sacrifice cultural practices for the buck. I don’t have a problem with that as long as it does not delete me out of my liberal state of mind. I am not going to prostitute myself for just one gain, but I will try to break into the international market with caution and sensibility. We have such a great Caribbean population in North America and Europe, so once your film gets to these places, you have a ready-made Caribbean market. You also have a great curiosity market. Once the Caribbean people pick up your film and the curiosity seekers are following, then other cultures come in and provide support. The Japanese, the Europeans, the Americans, the Australians, the Brazilians - all of those cultures look at Jamaica. Jamaican culture is like an international vibes culture. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the music we produce, the way we dance, the way we talk, the way we walk, the way we walk. There is just that gladness. Everybody else was hung up on something. That is the most vibrant culture in the world.

In Jamaica, comedy is often used to portray seriousness. A lot of time laughter is a very serious thing. A man often laughs at his own demise. It’s when he realizes that he realizes the predicament that he is in. Smile Orange showed tragic things, but people laughed. For example, in the film two boys get a job as life guard and don’t even know how to swim. The closest they come to water is to drink it. That is a serious, dangerous thing. The Lunatic was a farcical comedy with serious overtones. Everybody else was hung up on something. That movie represented how a lot of Jamaican people think. Once they have a conviction to a point of view, it is very hard to get them change that.

What is your vision of filmmaking in the region?

When I speak, I don’t just speak from a Jamaican perspective; I speak from a Caribbean perspective. The Caribbean has to be one unit to move forward. We have to collaborate. Instead of ten governments going after the same objective and spending ten different budgets, we should pull our resources ideas together and spend one budget to have the effect of ten probabilities. I see Caribbean cinema as a vehicle, both as a learning tool and commercial strategy. Film is very important in this region. There are a lot of activities going on as far as filming in Jamaica. People become more aware of the economic value of films. I think more films will start happening here, and more international companies will come here to make films. We can have a viable film industry. Things are happening; sooner or later we will be in the mainstream.

Do you think film has a function of narrativizing the nation?

Film has a major function in Jamaican society. Since the advent of digital filmmaking, everything is visualized. More people can tell stories now. People always had great stories, but couldn’t tell them in a mass market. Dancehall Queen was the first digital full-length feature film to be shot in the world. It was a cultural phenomenon in Jamaica. Dancehall Queen changed street fashion and club dressing. Even if we can only afford to make films at such a low budget that we can just recover from the Caribbean and probably people from the Caribbean diaspora, that would be a good thing... until we hit the big blockbuster. Because if we keep making films, one day we will come up with a piece that surpasses The Harder They Come as far as acceptability and dominance in the marketplace.

In 1995 you performed in Kidnapped, a film made by American director Bill Parker and starring the American actors Jasmine Guy and Giancarlo Esposito. Do you still consider this as a Jamaican film?

Yeah man, Jamaican film, doesn’t matter. The whole story was made in Jamaica from a Jamaican perspective. So it doesn’t matter if your cameraman or stars are from abroad. It’s a Jamaican film because of our Jamaican point of view. Then it doesn’t matter who you bring in. I could bring in Sylvester Stallone to do a Jamaican film. You could bring in your cameraman, lighting technician and director, it would still be a Jamaican film if you make it from a Jamaican perspective.

You have also performed in several Hollywood films shot in Jamaica, such as Club Paradise (1986) and The Mighty Quinn (1989). What do you think of Jamaica as film location?

Foreign film companies mainly use Jamaica as a beauty spot location. The international companies usually shoot only a small portion of the production on our island. It is very rare that a big movie house comes to Jamaica to film a full feature. I am now breaking ground for more complete film production infrastructure on the island. We should set up a film studio in Jamaica, so that companies could come down and make full length features here; like what they do in for example Brazil, India and Australia. Those countries have the infrastructure to deal with that and we should try to develop that too.
Charles Hyatt


CHARLES HYATT

You first emerged as a stage comedian. How did your career develop from there?

Comedic performances were thought to be a successful aspect of my ability, so I kept being cast as the lighter side of things. In the 1940s I started to do pantomime, established a character, a dame, which was very successful. Every year, for about eleven years, I was playing in the national pantomime. In my day, it was like the English pantomime. But the Jamaican flavour was added more and more, until it became totally Jamaican. Each year it would break its own box office records. That was a good period for me. Then I eventually developed in theatre, moving from the comic to doing a play written by Jamaican playwright Barry Beckford. It was my first dramatic role.

In 1960 you left Jamaica for England. Why did you decide to leave the island?

I received a six-month scholarship to Theatre Royal in the United Kingdom. When I finished there, I wondered: ‘Should I go home or should I prove if I have learned anything to the satisfaction of my tutors?’ So I decided to stay in Britain and see what could be done. Now, I didn’t go to Britain to be a comedian – I mean, that was what I was doing at home quite successfully. I didn’t go there to learn that. I went to Britain to be an actor. I decided I would stay and see how far I could go and how successful I could be. Well, I spent 14 years.

Did you experience much difficulties being a black Caribbean actor in Britain?

I had my struggles. In those days Britain was not yet ready for black actors. The problem was to get the producers to accept a black actor as a black actor. When I asked: ‘Why aren’t there more black actors on television?’, they said: ‘There are no black stories.’ What are you talking about, ‘there are no black stories?’ I am not talking about black stories. It doesn’t have to be a black story for a black actor to be in it. We went through all of that. I did a lot of ‘firsts’ along the way. I was, for example, the first black to be in the cast of Mrs. Dale’s Diary, the first regular role for a black actor in a British radio play. Then, in 1961, I got a job at the BBC in a television play called A Book with Chapters in It. My second TV play was the ITV drama The Day of the Fox, starring Sammy Davis Jr. A lot of things have happened as a result of that.

How did your career in film come about?

In 1964 I was cast as a pirate in a film, A High Wind in Jamaica, starring Anthony Quinn and James Coburn. I went back to Jamaica, where a portion of it was filmed. A High Wind in Jamaica was my first real film. It was fun and I learned quite a bit from it. From that moment I started to get more work in film. I first had a minor role in The Bushbaby starring Louis Gossett. Then I played in Crossplot. I was quite pleased about that one, because it was the try-out for Roger Moore’s 007. It worked, obviously. After that I performed in an independent film with Ian McShane, followed by Graham Greene’s The Comedians, with James Earl Jones. And I did Love Thy Neighbour, which was about race relations between West Indians and white British. Eventually, in 1974, after having done quite a lot, I decided to return home.

Your next film performance was Club Paradise in 1986, a comedy about an American, played by Robin Williams, who comes to Jamaica to begin a hotel. What do you think of Jamaica as film setting?

Let me tell you a little secret. Jamaica, the setting, has a peculiarity that foreign cinematographers find mind-blowing. There is a color element in Jamaica that you don’t find anywhere else. I’ve heard cameramen saying: ‘Wow, where did this come from?’ Because that’s not what they saw when they were recording. When we were
making Club Paradise in Jamaica and Robin Williams was shot outdoors, he always came out second. The setting outstaged him. If he was in a shot with Jimmy Cliff, he would come out third, because the setting and Jimmy Cliff would outstage him – really not through any fault of his. So they tried to edit the film in such a way as to present Robin Williams more favourable. As a result, they spoiled the film completely. What the film turned out to be was not what it was originally about.

The 1988 movie Milk and Honey, in which you played a village preacher, focused on the Jamaican immigrant experience. Do you consider this film as a Jamaican film?

Why not? Because the director was Canadian? You choose a director who understands the product. He is a technician who understands the product. Then you make use of his technical ability as well as his empathy for the product. What’s wrong with that? Of course it is a Jamaican film. It’s a film about a Jamaican girl in Canada. The immigrant experience is invariably because of the assessment of the situation by a Jamaican in any immigrant location. That’s the story – A Jamaican in Japan, a Jamaican in Germany, a Jamaican in Israel, a Jamaican anywhere. How he or she reacts to the foreign culture and what he or she puts in or gets out of the culture. That’s not a Jamaican film?

What is your vision of the Caribbean and its cultural diversity?

It’s like my hand: I have got four fingers and a thumb on me. Without one member it cannot perform adequately. It may be able to smoke a cigarette or do something, but it cannot perform effectively. But each one has its value. I can do things with them. Eventually, in order for it to become the hand that can create, the individual fingers have to come together as a fist. When the hand comes together, it can destroy, it can create, it can serve, it can be nice. You appreciate each one for what it has to offer. And then you will find that it belongs in the same place. It belongs in the hand. So no matter what each can do individually, it belongs in the hand. And the arm is the African root, because without the arm the hand is no good.

What is your vision on the arts and cultural opportunities in Jamaica in the years to come?

First, no nation can exist without a culture of arts, so therefore in whatever form that it would take, it will happen. To predict the form, I am not equipped to do it, because I would base my prediction on my prejudices. If in the days of rocksteady you would have asked me what would be the future of Jamaican music, I would not necessarily have been able to tell you how successful reggae was going to become. But I know that there would have been a change, because culture changes on a constant. And when you have an honest society led by honest politicians, who are prepared to see and deal with the nation rather than their individual stuff, it could and will happen. What comes around goes around. My life time might not be enough to see it or expect it. But if I in any way can help, I’d be happy to.

About the Author:

Emiel Martens is a lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam and a researcher at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), where he is currently completing his Ph.D on Jamaica’s early cine-tourist history. He is also the founding director of Caribbean Creativity, a non-for-profit organization committed to the promotion of Caribbean and Caribbean-themed cinema (www.caribbeancreativity.nl).

Acknowledgements

Both interviews were conducted in July 2006. Carl Bradshaw has since continued to perform in Jamaican and Jamaican-shot films, such as Wah Do Dem (2009) and Better Mus Come (2010). Charles Hyatt died of lung cancer in January 2007 at his home in Palm Bay, Florida. He was survived by his second wife Marjone, four children and four grandchildren.