Questioning the Complexity of Carnival- Is it an Afro-Trinidadian or National Event

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It has been posed by several theorists (Eriksen, 1990:24; Ahye, 1991:400; Trotman, 1991:79; Cowley, 1996:228), as well as by part of the population in Trinidad, that Carnival is strictly an 'African' event, symbolizing African culture and practices, and not really a defining part of the overall Trinidadian Nation. This paper will question those claims. Specifically, it will attempt to ascertain whether Carnival can be, or is best described as a national Trinidadian event when some of the society's members, (namely-Indo-Trinidadians) do not take part in the official Carnival festivities. If some Indians are marginalized from this festival which is noted for capturing the essence of Trinidadian culture and national identity, then must the tie of Carnival to Trinidadian culture be questioned, or is it the essence of a 'true' Trinidadian-ness that is unclear?

In defining the importance of Carnival to Trinidadian society, I will discuss its history, the political, social, and economic purposes and agendas it has served since its inception, its connection to nationalism, and most importantly, the ways in which race and class differences have been played out in this context. I will argue that despite racial and class divides, Carnival is not strictly a symbol of Afro 'roots', or temporally connected with 'African' culture and origins, but rather is a Trinidadian event that symbolizes and encompasses the multiplicities and complexities, not only of the nation, but of its people. Thus, to understand the diversity of Carnival themes, it must be placed within specific historical, political, social, and economic contexts which have at times been revised and at others revitalized.

Although African traditions and heritage are a part of Carnival, this does not mean that Carnival is an exclusively African tradition. Yet, this is not the interpretation, or perceptions that many people within Trinidad and Tobago, as well as tourists who visit, seem to hold. In this regard, Indo-Trinidadians have traditionally been seen as out of place, even as intruders in the Carnival
experience. This image of the Indian ‘invader’ is not only held by African participants and spectators of Carnival, but has been internalized by the Indian population themselves. In a society as ethnically divided as Trinidad, this lack of participation by some East Indians in Carnival festivities has interesting and important social implications that are both tied to national identity and mirror the larger ethnic politics of the country.

**What Does it Mean to Assert that Carnival is an ‘African’ Tradition?**

Greene (1974) emphasized the ‘social’ conception of race in the Caribbean in that it goes beyond strict biological criteria. In Trinidad and Tobago, moreover, the official colonial consensus has ‘allowed’ respondents to categorize themselves into “White, East Indian, African, Mixed, Seryian, Lebanese, or Chinese” for racial classification (Burton, 1997:157). However, in this paper the concern is not what anthropologists think or mean by race, but what the people of Trinidad and Tobago think when they use the word, not only in their daily lives, but specifically, in the context of Carnival. In Trinidad, race and ethnicity permeate all of the society’s social, cultural, political, and economic institutions and practices because they are implicated in the power struggles of everyday life (Yelvington, 1993:1). Within this context, ‘race’ is assumed to be biological, fixed, or immutable so that any attempt to treat it as a social construction is resisted vigorously by those who have a great deal of emotion invested in notions of racial purity and associated concepts of cultural superiority (Allahar, 1996). However, I will argue that ‘race’ is not real, but rather is a social-psychological construct or measure used to categorize groups of people who feel themselves to be similar or different in nature, and thus, is very real in its consequences.

The historical legacy of slavery and indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago has conditioned a multicultural society wherein social and political statuses are related to race and culture. While the
post-colonial era has witnessed a weakening of these relationships, rising expectations of nationalism have lent some persistence to the historical tensions along ethno-cultural lines.

Thus, in the midst of these historical ethnic tensions drawn on political, economic, and social lines, to be an ‘African’ has two possible meanings. The first is legalistic, where one is a citizen of an African country. The second is a socially constructed, primordial, or biological one, where one’s origin or history might be tied to Africa, yet one is not a citizen. Since it is highly uncommon for a Trinidadian to hold citizenship of an African country, it is the latter meaning of ‘African’ I wish to turn to: the question of origins. I would argue that the biological aspects of these origins are far less important or salient than the emotional belonging to Africa. Thus, to be ‘African’ in Trinidad, is a socio-emotional choice that is heavily steeped in identity politics. Further, in an age where a first come, first-served definition of ownership is generally accepted, even with the ownership of such intangible things such as culture and identity, the African-Trinidadian is seen to have a greater claim to the Nation’s patrimony than his or her Indian, Chinese, or Syrian counterparts (Burton, 1997:126).

Therefore, to be ‘African’ in Trinidad, is not to have some gene, blood type, or even a certain shade of ‘blackness’. Instead, it is to identify oneself, and therefore be identified by others as such. Moreover, it is a perception of self as tied, or connected to other people in a sense of community or kinship on the basis of perceptions of similarity, specifically, of coming from the same background and socio-historical circumstance. Certain symbols like the body, skin color, and culture, are available for use in certain circumstances to indicate ‘groupness’. However, these symbols are available, not just for any interpretation, but for the hegemonic interpretation set forth by the groups who hold political and economic power and are able to legitimate this power, and the prestige that accompanies it, by the subjectification of subordinated groups. In this context, narratives of the past are not neutral, they are given value. While the relationship of ethnicity to the past is multivocal, one
’determinant’ of this value is the position of the ethnic groups to the widely-construed division of labour (see Mintz, 1987; Williams, 1960). This process of ethnic identity construction involves ‘sensing likeness’ in a population historically characterized by a plurality of differences, and attaching meaning (and thus value) to those identities.

Part of this perception is also based on a comparison of self to the ‘Other’. In the case of Afro-Trinidadians, historically, the ‘Other’ has largely been the white Europeans who have dominated them, and the Indians, whom at some points in history they have dominated. Therefore, in a similar way that conceptualizations of being ‘white’, have traditionally been formulated against the black ‘Other’, Afro-Trinidadian-ness is constructed against, and in relation to (among others) the East Indian ‘Other’ to whom they have at some points in history felt a sense of superiority, and at other points have perceived as a threat.

*The Entrance of East Indians into Trinidad and Tobago*

The ownership and operation of sugar plantations mainly provided Trinidad’s cultural diversity. After the act of emancipation in 1832, the planters in Trinidad were pressed to solve the labour shortage caused by the emancipation of the slaves. Thus, a system of indentured labour (a primitive form of contractual labour) was invoked with the result that between 1845 and 1917 when indentureship was ended, approximately 143,000 Indians were brought to the country. In 1921, Indians accounted for 33.18 percent of the total population (Deosaran, 1981:203). Apart from the social identification, religious affiliation in Trinidad is widely recognized as playing a significant role in group relations (Malik, 1971; Jha, 1974; Samaroo, 1975; Williams, 1960). Indians in relation to Afro-Trinidadians cannot be understood as a homogenous group. Instead, lines of political and social allegiance among East Indians have been drawn in terms of region (rural versus urban) and religion
(Hindu versus Muslim). As evidence of these intra-ethnic tensions, the People's National Movement party, which played a decisive role in the politicalization of Carnival, was perceived as a collaboration of Afro-Trinidadians, and Christian and Muslim Indians, who were defined in opposition to the larger Hindu population and the small, but influential Roman Catholic (popularly known as the French Creole) population. Thus, in terms of social, political, and economic domination the Indians have historically been divided.

Partly because of religious differentiation, and partly due to racial, political, and economic sensitivity, the Indians when introduced to the country, were received by the ex-slaves with fear, contempt, and indifference, much of which was encouraged by the planters. In response, the Indians isolated themselves physically, occupationally, and culturally. Thus, African-Indian encounters have historically been characterized by separation and xenophobia. The two races did not mix. Instead, because neither group felt their existence to be threatened in any way by the other, they lived in uneasy- but mainly non-violent coexistence (Brereton, 1974:37). Specifically, “when the Indians began settling in the society, they did so on terms most unfavorable for themselves. Not only did they occupy the lowest- paid sector of the economy but they were also placed by other social groups in the lowest position in the system of social stratification operative in the society” (Singh, 1974:48-49). Although in 1960 approximately 71 percent of the Indian populations, as opposed to 44 percent of Africans, lived in rural Trinidad where wages and opportunity for social integration was much lower, this difference was greater for 1970 (Deosaran, 1981:205; Braithwaite, 1991:55; Ryan, 1991:65).

Although one hundred and fifty years have now passed, and the Indians have achieved economic and political mobility, traces of that isolation are still found. Specifically, prejudices and stereotypes that were developed by both groups towards one another during the colonial period, are
still strong today (Singh, 1974:38; Trotman, 1991). As a highly urbanized and industrialized society, however, Trinidadian Indians could not insulate themselves very effectively from the processes of creolization that had early transformed their African compatriots. Indeed today, in an increasingly douglarized society, it seems as though the fundamental divisions are more fruitfully examined in terms of class rather than ethnicity or race.

Thus, aligned with the suggestion that ‘Carnival does not symbolize the entire Trinidadian nation’, is the racialization of political consciousness connected to its conceptualization. In discussing the racialization of consciousness in Trinidad and Tobago, Allahar (1998) speaks to the tendency for racial differences to be perceived as crucial in determining political actions, economic opportunities, social standing, even cultural legitimacy, or authenticity. Thus, in the context of Carnival ‘race’ is evoked as that prime cause or explanation of behavior, traditions, customs, and controversies. Because this racialized consciousness has been fostered and is so highly developed in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a tendency to minimize the importance of class as an analytical concept in relation to social inequality.

Carnival is no exception to this rule. Rather, the class divisions, intricately tied to ideologies of race and cultural superiority in Trinidadian history, and which have been played out in the history of Carnival, provide further evidence that it is not strictly an African tradition, but a reflection of the culture and politics of the larger Trinidad society. In providing an historical review of Carnival, I will show how class divisions within Trinidadian society have been reflected. To say that Carnival is more tied to “African-ness”, or “African” culture, is really to make the statement that the primary purpose of Carnival is to serve either as a point of primordial connection for Africans, or as an affirmation of this connection. While this may be true on some level, in that Afro-Trinidadians may ‘connect’ or come together with one another during Carnival, I would argue that this is more an
assertion of their primordial connection to Trinidad, than it is to "mother Africa". Although Carnival is partly about the formulation and maintenance of primordial kinship or communal ties, it is less about affirming a sense of ‘African-ness’, and more about the affirmation of ‘Trinidadian-ness’, or more specifically, which class, has a larger claim to Trinidadian culture. The racialization of political consciousness surrounding Carnival is linked to the country’s history; the terms and conditions under which the various groups of immigrants arrived, their relation to capital, their differential access to and use of power, and the various patterns of adaptation or resistance (Allahar, 1998:5).

A Historical Review of Trinidadian Carnival

Trinidad Carnival, Daniel Miller has written (1994:130), “seems to change its implications almost each decade, facing about to address different aspects of Trinidadian society such as emancipation, race, class, and gender.” Historically, Carnival as a tradition in Trinidad can be divided into four main epochs or periods of cultural, economic and political rule; first, the elite pre-emancipation Carnival, the period from the cedula of 1783 to full emancipations in 1838 when Carnival was originally established and dominated by the French planters and aristocrats; the second transitional phase of post-emancipation Carnival was the jamette era, which extended from 1838 to 1884 where ex-slaves played the most pivotal role; third, the period of 1884 to 1941 when Carnival, without losing its rebellious potential, became steadily ‘more respectable’ and began to evolve into a truly national festival; and finally the period of the ‘modern’ Carnival from 1945 to present, characterized by increased ties to national ideology, commercialization, politicalization, and theatricalization. Throughout each of these phases in Trinidadian history, Carnival has not been strictly an “African event”, but rather, has been the “site of contestation and resistance to hegemonic formation” (Scott, 1990:178; Traube, 1996:133).
Specifically, because inequalities of race, class, cultural, political, and economic dominations of wider Trinidadian society were not only imposed, but played out in Carnival, this produced tensions, contradictions, and ironies; all of which have left their mark on the festivities. Indeed, in this way, Carnival is a mirror, which historically, has reflected the changing structures, social relations, political, and economic conditions of Trinidad and Tobago. Emancipation in the nineteenth century, the rise of a non-European educated middle-class in the nineteenth, and calls to nationalism and political independence in the twentieth century, have each had their impact not on ‘African’, but on ‘Trinidadian’ Carnival. Thus, despite this conceptualization by some theorists, Carnival is not only about race. Instead, it has historically symbolized the constructs and confines of division and nationalism inherent in Trinidad as a nation. While the trajectory of the Carnival has been punctuated by struggle, if Carnival is about the politics and economics of race and class conflict, it is also about accommodation between antagonistic groups in the society (Ho, 2000). Thus, in looking to the history of Trinidadian Carnival, it will become clear that, since its inception, it has been characterized primarily by class divisions reflected in racial allegiances and politics of identity and nationalism, all of which have been intricately woven together in this expression of culture.

The Inception of Pre-Emancipation Carnival

Carnival was originally introduced into Trinidad and Tobago not by Africans, but by French immigrants in the late eighteenth century. Trinidad had been an underdeveloped colony of Spain until the year 1793 when peace treaties were signed between Spain, France, and Britain, which resulted in a policy that strongly encouraged settlement by Roman Catholics (Anthony, 1989; Hill 1972; VanKoningsbruggen, 1997). As a result, French aristocrats from other Caribbean colonies began to settle in Trinidad, bringing with them not only their slaves, but their Carnival traditions (Ho, 2000). While on one hand this French version of Carnival was a festival of dance, music, song, and
drama, on the other, it was a collective expression of the perceptions, meanings, aspirations, and struggles engendered by the material conditions of social life and informed by the cultural traditions of the group. The French who settled in Trinidad, following the Cedula of Population in 1783, were distinguished into groups by color as well as class. Specifically, there were white and colored planters, slaves, and free persons of color. The whites of this period constituted the dominant class. However, within their ranks, individuals were distinguished by nationality and religion so that a hierarchical order pinnacled by the elite of planters, merchants, and government officials was formed. Thus, because class mobility is so intricately tied to color, in that the whiter the skin the better socio-economic position one has the potential to acquire, the racial boundary between these elite and the rest of the population was impenetrable, even by the wealthy colored planters (Lee, 1997:418).

This wealthy white stratum claimed right to their elite membership on the basis of their commercial, academic, and professional achievements, and more importantly, in their French ancestry. Carnival was a significant event in the lives of the Roman Catholics of Trinidad in this period. Specifically, pre-emancipation Carnival was celebrated by the French elite with elaborate masquerade balls, house to house visiting, and street promenading in carriages or on foot (Lee, 1997:419). This much welcomed break from the rigors of plantation life, was a period in which the elite could indulge their nostalgia for France.

Carnival during this period lasted from Christmas to Ash Wednesday and coincided with the Christmas Musters of the British which displayed, for the eyes of the oppressed, the military might of the oppressor. Together, Carnival and musters provided a demonstration of European superiority and power which affirmed the class solidarity of the French and British, who otherwise had their differences (Lee, 1996:419). The French planters laid claim to royal ancestry and their Carnival masquerades reflected their devotion to the Courts of France. Specifically, their costumes were
representations of nobility and other European characters such as grooms, postillions, friars, priests, and brigands. The elaborateness of the costumes and the elegance and splendor of the masquerade balls, as well as the general atmosphere of high-spiritedness has been remarked on by commentators of this period (Hill, 1972). Even in this early time period, two of the perennial features of Carnival had been established— the beauty and splendor of the masquerade, and the prevailing high spirit and sense of camaraderie (Cowley, 1996).

In accordance with the masquerading, there were other costumes whose origins were to be found, not in Europe, but in the slave plantations of the Caribbean. Specifically, the elite, in addition to their parade of European wares, also indulged in street masquerades of inversion wherein white men disguised themselves as nègres jardin (garden slaves) and white women as mulatresses. However, it was not only the dress of the slave that was adopted. One of the popular theatrics of the French planters was the re-enactment of the Cannes Brulées, or Canboulay in patois, which were events that occurred when plantations caught fire. Slave dances such as the bamboola, jhouba, and calinda, were also performed on these celebratory occasions. This permitted the elites to transgress normal social boundaries and act out their fears and fantasies as imagined ‘Others’ (De Freitas, 1994:62-64). This French tradition of ‘role reversal’, and the acting out of different race, class, and political positions in the social structural hierarchy, is one that has continued to influence the Carnival of today. Although celebrated separately, and on different social scales, Carnival was the high point of social life for both coloreds and whites alike.

While slaves were forbidden to participate in the actual Carnival event, except by special permission from their masters, some authors suggest (Brereton, 1979; Lee, 1996:22) that there was ample opportunity for them to practice their cultural traditions. The most important of these were the various dances, which contained several elements later brought forth to Carnival celebrations.
Another important feature of today’s Carnival, which originated in the entertainment of the slaves, is the ceremonial crowning of the king and queen in various bands. This custom appears in the earlier ‘boquet’ dances at which the king and queen presided. In addition, slaves were allowed other diversions such as stickfighting (Anthony, 1989; Cowley, 1996; Stuempfle, 1995) that were eventually adopted into more ritualized Carnival events. It has also been documented that slaves formed all black regiments modeled on the West African secret societies, composed of a hierarchy of royal subjects. Each had a role in slave ceremonial life and was treated with great pomp and circumstance (De Freitas, 1994: 69). Although these underground societies operated year round, they became much more active during Carnival time and were the precursors of the jamette bands that emerged in the post-emancipation Carnival (Des Freitas, 1994:70).

Thus, two simultaneous, almost contradictory movements can be discerned in Trinidad during this period. On the one hand, there was separation on the basis of race, class, and color, intricately woven into Carnival celebrations and underpinned by the assertion of superiority of European over African culture. Yet, on the other hand, there was a fusion of aspects of these two cultures to produce an identifiable Creole culture. Conflict and symbiosis: the simultaneous operations of centrifugal and centripetal forces within the structure of social relations have resulted in attitudes of contradiction and ambivalence throughout society and the Carnival mosaic. Even from the beginning, it is apparent that Carnival is not a single monolithic event, but multiple parallel celebrations, practiced by different social segments that were bound together not only by power relations, but by sexual, personal and kinship ties (De Freitas, 1994:71).

**Post Emancipation Carnival Celebrations**

The ‘people’s’ Carnival did not emerge until after the abolition of slavery, first appearing in 1839 as a celebration of emancipation. The mass entry of ex-slaves into Carnival after emancipation
changed not only the color of the festival, but its tone and content as well. Specifically, the significance of this era can be divided into three areas of contestation relevant to the argument that Carnival is historically, politically, and socially a reflection of larger Trinidad society: a) the initialization of Canboulay, b) the origin of jamettes, and c) the increased cultural hybrid resulting from Indian, specifically Hindu-Indian resistance to cultural assimilation.

a) Canboulay

This midnight street celebration was called Canboulay (from cannes brulées) because it, similar to the transgressions acted out by the French plantation owners commemorated (often as a point of resistance) the ordeal of emergency cane harvests when plantations caught on fire. For this reason, Canboulay signaled the ritual inauguration of Carnival, the flames signifying not only the excitement of the burning canes, but also the newly gained freedom of the emancipated slaves. However, drumming, loud singing, nudity, sensual dancing and the fighting between the bands, but most of all, the African character of the celebrations resulted in severe restrictions (Cowley, 1996:31). Nonetheless, despite their efforts of restriction, by 1841 the elite were completely driven out of the street masquerade by the freed slaves who lost no opportunity to mock their former masters and to offend them in every possible way (Anthony, 1989:7; Cowley, 1996:14; Hill, 1972:40).

The drums, we are told, replaced the fiddle as the principal instrument, and stick fighting, a ritualized blood-sport carried out to the accompaniment of drumming and singing, was added to the traditional French conceptualization of Carnival (Brereton, 1975:48). The Carnival of this time period was celebrated with much clamor, hooting, and howling in the distinctive style the whites associated with Africans and despised. The celebrants were former slaves organized in bands: semi naked, rag-clad, and some of them blackened with molasses (jab-melassi) (Ho, 2000:5). As signs of their resistance to white superiority and oppression, they ritually re-enacted scenes from slavery

Although there are many other elements of today’s Carnival that do not reflect this tradition, the argument most often used to solidify the notion that Carnival is an ‘African’ event, is that it is historically grounded in slavery, and in the traditions created by the ex-slaves in celebrating emancipation. Thus, in constructing a sense of history to support the ideological racialization of consciousness associated with Carnival, and to diminish the importance of class as a defining theme, there is a tendency to conflate this historical period associated with post-emancipation.

b) The Origins of the Jamette Carnival

The emergence of the jamette Carnival is no exception to the above stated rule. Following emancipation, several of the freed slaves moved to the urban areas of Trinidad. In the overcrowded towns, Afro-Trinidadians lived under the most dehumanizing conditions. Their homes were in the slums which created barrack yards of ‘vice’ where disease and crime were nurtured alongside their traditions. In this communal yard space, a bamboo tent was erected to serve as the center for social life, the venue for drum dances, and preparation for Carnival (Lee, 1996:421). Both the tent and the yard continue to be focal points of Carnival, as have some of their main characters, though in somewhat altered roles. The building of the tent, and the organization of its activities were supervised by the ‘captain’ or the ‘leader’. He was most often the King of the masquerade band and perhaps its chantwel. This leader figure would reemerge in twentieth century Carnival as the influential boss of the pan yard (Lee, 1996:421). There too, was the forerunner of the contemporary calypsonian as the chantwel, who with his chorus would compose the Calinda songs of praise that spurred the champion stickman and intimidated and ridiculed his rival in the grand stick fight. Amid the chaos of urban life, the Carnival of the black masses appeared to have its own internal order. Yet,
by the same token, the Carnival of the black masses was very much a disorderly affair into which strife and antagonisms of their harsh lives overflowed and found their most acute expression.

The majority of ex-slaves in Port of Spain and other towns were part of an incipient working class of artisans, domestics, porters, cab drivers, dock-workers, caterers, messengers, janitors, and light industry workers. However, this group was not homogeneous. Within this class, was a stratum of industrious, upward-looking, and respectable artisans whose sons would later join the ranks of the black middle-class. Another stratum, far larger, was perpetually unemployed, and the in numbers were always increasing as a result of the steady flow of immigrants drifting to urban centers (Lee, 1996:422). Out of this surplus group came perhaps the most significant group in the history of Carnival. The Jamettes, whose lifestyles went beneath the diameter of respectability, were the underclass of the nineteenth century who invaded Carnival after the 1860s. According to Brereton, (1975):

> About the time the yard ‘bands’ were formed; groups of young men and women, boys and girls, who went together for singing, fighting, and dancing. The groups existed all year, but were especially active in the weeks prior to Carnival, when they rehearsed their songs, dances, and stickfighting. The yard ‘chantwell’ insulted rival bands and stickmen, and sought out rivals for single combats. The big Carnival bands were a combination of several yard bands. The jamettes, who were the band members, were the singers, dancers, drummers, stickmen, prostitutes, and pimps who comprised the bands. They boasted their skill and bravery, verbal wit, and talent in song, drumming, and dancing, their familiarity with jail, and sometimes contempt for church.

Thus, it was not the entire population of ‘African’ ex-slaves that informed the jamette traditions eventually realized in contemporary Carnival. The population was not homogeneous either in its origins, or in the cultural practices realized during Carnival festivities. Instead, the emancipated slaves were divided along class lines, and these class lines were clearly reflected in traditions associated with, and presented during Carnival.
In particular, the organization along class lines, in the midst of Carnival chaos is very apparent. Specifically, the ‘yards’ of Port of Spain can be understood as the result of ex-slaves trying to reestablish a sense of community lost with the abolition of slavery. These communities were built not on ethnic, racial, or ‘African’ grounds, but rather in terms of class. Further, the desire for community can also be seen in the importance of territorial boundaries in the band fights of the nineteenth century. Like the pre-emancipation convoys, the Jamette bands were regionally-based. In the late 1970s there were bands representing Docksite, Belmont, Corbeaux Town, Dry River, Upper Prince Street, west of Royal Jail, and Duncan street (Campbell, 1988:26). What is most interesting in this context, is that Carnival today has become the symbol of class allegiance and community, but on a larger national level.

Carnival in the second half of the nineteenth century provided the forum through which the disaffection of the laboring masses could be expressed. Throughout this period, they lampooned figures of authority in their masquerades, debased respectable women in their song, and flagrantly offended European culture and sensibilities with their displays of ‘obscenity’ and uncivilized practices (Lee, 1991:57). Thus, in the absence of political representation, their culture became their main weapon in the struggle against oppression. Although the African population was not a culturally homogenous group, the lower and middle classes shared certain practices and forms: the drums, the cathartic dancing, call-and-response singing, and non-Christian religions, all of which were offensive to whites and upwardly mobile colored and blacks.

Specifically, according to Wood:

The dancing, drumming, singing, keeping of wakes, and the practice of ‘obeah’ were the main manifestations of Negro culture to receive any comment from the upper classes, and their comment was uniformly negative and unfavorable. They felt that they were encircled by the rites of darkest Africa and that only a thin divide existed between savagery and their civilization (Wood, 1968:41).
It is this very line of thinking that is currently being used as the impetus behind the suggestion that Carnival is more of an 'African' than 'Trinidadian' event. Tied to this is a racist and universalistic conceptualization of 'Africans' as less-advanced, or as a 'backward' people characterized by hyper-sexuality and vice. Thus, this type of racist ideology still used today by those who insist Carnival is an 'African' event, although not supported, has led higher classes to shrink away, or at least become less visible in Carnival (Hill, 1975: 34).

The Carnival of the black masses posed a serious threat to the social order founded on the ideology of white supremacy. Its open display of African traditions, which were adapted and reinterpreted, signaled the beginning of the decline of European cultural dominance. Thus, in these ways, like its people, Trinidadian Carnival culture came more or less quickly to reflect a process of creolization, a two-way dialectic of exchange that saw the blending not only of European and African ways of living (Bolland, 1997:3-6), but also of various class perspectives, traditions, and reflections.

c) Cultural Hybrity and Class Conflict

In addition to the divide between Europeans and Africans, the large-scale immigration of indentured laborers from India, China, Africa, and other Caribbean islands (Cowley 1996:44; De Freitas 1994:83) added greater complexity to the cultural and linguistic hybrity already present in Trinidad. Specifically, the introduction of Indians via indentureship, created shifting and contradictory alliances that crosscut race, culture, and class loyalties within the Carnival complex (Ho, 2000:6). From a hegemonic perspective, therefore, the struggle for control of Carnival between the 1850s and the 1880s was a negotiation between a multiplicity of races and classes, rather than a simple opposition between white society and black or brown masses (De Freitas, 1994:87). Although, they collaborated in stickfighting, there was a great deal of cultural conflict between immigrants from India and descendants from Africa (Cowley 1996:66). However, there
was also rivalry between Afro-Trinidadians, and the French and English speaking immigrants from other Caribbean islands like Barbados (Rohlehr, 1990:29), which for the most part remains unnoted.

Amidst this conflict, the upper classes acted to protect their interests by attempting not only to denounce, but to abolish, the street Carnival while maintaining the elegant ballroom masquerades of the elite and middle classes. In an attempt to achieve (European) cultural conformity, British authorities banned forms of cultural expression that challenged what they perceived to be the dominant hegemonic form. Specifically, in order to neutralize the revolutionary potential of Carnival events, they passed laws to censor music, outlaw drums, wakes, and other ‘African’ events (Anthony, 1989:6-12; Brereton, 1975:76; Cowley, 1996:84-104). Although British officials opposed Carnival because of its violent nature, it was the French-Creole elite who came to its defense because they saw the British attempt at censorship as an attack on French culture (Rohlehr, 1990:30). As a part of their protective strategy, the French elite re-entered the street celebration as an attempt to save Carnival (Stuempfle, 1995:22). Hence, the perceivable ‘seamless’, white, upper-class alliance was threatened by the political symbolism of Carnival. It was this class, not racial or ethnic divide, that opened the gates for the middle class traditions, distinct in today’s Carnival, to be inserted.

**The Origins of the Creole Middle Class Carnival**

In 1881, hostilities between the authorities and the jamettes reached incendiary proportions, making the 1881 Carnival a virtual bloodbath (Anthony, 1989:6-12; Brereton, 1975:46; Hill, 1971:28; Stewart, 1986:301). A second Canboulay riot also erupted in 1884 when, following violent clashes between the police and the masqueraders, celebrants poured onto the streets provoking further battles with the police (Anthony, 1989:11; Hill, 1972:28). In the wake of the 1884 riots, British authorities proceeded to ban Hosay, a tradition that symbolized Moslem identity. However, because East Indians defied the ban, the result was deadly (Van Kongingsbruggen, 1997:21-28). In the aftermath of both these violent incidences, the 1884 Peace Preservation
Ordinance was passed, which banned both stickfighting and Canboulay (Cowley, 1996:100). However, these practices were never stamped out completely. Instead, they were driven underground to the rural low-class areas (Nunley, 1988:112; Rohlehr, 1990:39). Thus, in these ways, the race, class, and cultural conflict of everyday Trinidad were reproduced in Carnival where they were then worked and reworked.

In the decade following the repressive measures of 1883-84, the colored middle class, led by the well-known 'jacket-man' named Ignacio Bodu, combined with the colonial administration to bring Carnival under control with such success that “after 1895 the grosser forms of obscenity so characteristic of the jamette Carnival were no longer possible; Carnival had been purged. The way was cleared for the respectable classes to reenter Carnival, and for the festival to develop slowly into a ‘national’ event” (Brereton, 1979:173).

In many ways, the banning of the Canboulay paved the way for this Creole middle class involvement and the emergence of the modern Carnival. The Carnival of the black working class was an affair of ritual, aggression, conflict, and rivalry. While these principles remained, they were operationalised through more deciduous and orderly procedures in the twentieth century notion of Carnival. Thus, the rivalries which had become something of a blood-sport among jamettes, were re-channeled into organized, disciplined, masquerade competitions (Lee, 1996:426). The impulse for this movement came mainly from merchants who had always been in the background of Carnival, providing masques and other materials from Europe. In 1860, when the complete banning of Carnival was sought, this group clearly signaled their support for Carnival as a significant event in Trinidad’s economy. In the late nineteenth century, they began to sponsor bands to advertise their products. One important effect of these masquerade competitions was to minimize aggression while retaining some of the excitement of rivalry and competition (De Freitas, 1994:112).
Although Carnival had become at the beginning of the twentieth century a festival in which all classes took part, the class and color distinctions which pervaded the larger society continued to be clearly reflected:

The social classes still kept apart. In the main, one group of revelers playing traditional masquerades would tramp through the streets chanting choruses to the tambour-bamboo and bottle and spoon orchestras. Another group of revelers led by their chantwel, and dancing to calypso refrained being accompanied from a string band, were drawn from the colored middle-class. Yet a third group parading on carriages and on flat-bed trucks dressed as pirates, gypsies, or harem damsels were from the high colored and white merchant classes (Hill, 1972:27).

Thus, in this context, "it would not be an exaggeration to suggest at this time in Trinidad’s history, there were two Carnivals" (Lee, 1996:427). While whites were not part of the downtown Carnival, it was the black and middle-class Carnival which was the more popular and successful one. What is important in this context is not only that the white elites never regained their dominance in Carnival after retreating at the end of slavery, but also that Indian participation is not even mentioned as an issue.

Sandwiched between the white, upper-class, uptown Carnival whose participants were driven around the Savannah in lorries, and the black, lower-class, jamette Carnival staged in the streets of downtown Port of Spain, the Creole middle-class articulated these separated Carnivals as participants, organizers, patrons, judges, and musicians (De Freitas, 1994: 112). The colored middle class had always been ambivalent about Carnival, on one hand, they disapproved of the excesses associated with the jamette Carnival; on the other, they opposed the right of the white ‘foreign’ British government to suppress local culture (De Freitas, 1994: 98-100). Equally paradoxical, at the same time that it was cut off from the elite, the Creole middle class sought to earn its respect and admiration (Van Koningbruggen, 1997: 97-98). Further, while these middle-class members shared blood ties with the black world, they tried to distance themselves from it socially. It is these issues
of irony, ambivalence, paradox, and complexity represented in the middle-class conceptualization and inception of Carnival that are most reflected in its contemporary counterpart.

Within the context of Carnival, a process of mutual adjustment was taking place which would draw the classes together to share certain aspects of the Carnival celebrations. Specifically, developments in calypso were part of this process. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of white, Indian, and Dougla chantwels, as well as the string-band (traditionally associated with the French version of Carnival) being used to accompany calypsonians in the tents and chantwels on the streets during Carnival (Lee, 1996:427). This influence led to the transition from patois to English in calypso and its consequent increase in popularity among 'respectable gentlemen' who began to patronize the tents where performances were held. This process, however, was constantly being challenged by the tendency towards separation on the basis of class intertwined with race and color. Specifically, Carnival had developed into something of a 'national' festival, in which all the Creole elements of society-white, colored, blacks-celebrated their shared Trinidadian-ness. However, the continued non-participation of East Indians was then made all the more patent by this public (even somewhat deceptive) show of national unity.

Contemporary Carnival as Symbol of Trinidadian Unity and Nationhood

In looking at the history of Carnival, it is apparent that it is not a single, monolithic event, but multiple, parallel celebrations, practiced by different segments that were bound together not only by power relations of class, but by sexual, personal, and kinship ties (De Freitas, 1994:71). Contemporary Carnival, among other things, is a ritual of personal and collective self-fashioning. Increasingly, Trinidadian Carnival has become commercialized, commodified, and politicized, all in attempts to use its popularity as a vehicle to forward a nationalist agenda steeped in politics of race and class. Specifically, in an ideological twist, the political racialized consciousness historically
surrounding Carnival is hidden or 'swept' underground so that Carnival is not only sold as, but becomes for some people, the 'national' symbol of Trinidadian unity within plurality. However, the overall purpose of this political agenda is couched not in race, but in class terms. Not only are the profits for this seemingly 'nationalist' agenda tied to capitalism, but the ideology of Carnival as a 'national' festival, symbolizing Trinidadian 'unity' serves to mask and distract from greater class inequalities, not only within Carnival, but within larger society. Therefore, when class is added to the analysis, Carnival is not simplistically an 'African' event, based on African culture and traditions, but is an event that signifies and is connected to Trinidad as a 'Nation'.

However, in a land where people of Indian descent represent 40.1 percent of the population, those of African decent 39.3 percent, mixed 16 percent, and white, Syrian, or 'others' represent 4 percent, achieving a pluralist or nationalist sentiment or tendency is no small feat (Ballinger, 1998:2). The East Indian presence in particular rendered problematic the adoption of Creole culture as the foundation of Trinidadian society. This problem stemmed in part from an East Indian desire to retain traditions, but mostly from Creole stereotypes of East Indians. In the early years of this Indian indentureship experience, Indians were segregated—both geographically and culturally—from the rest of society. This cultural difference has been evident in, for example, in the differing family and religious structures of the East Indians (specifically the rural Hindus) and the Creoles (Bell, 1970; Angrosino, 1976; Abdullah, 1991). Thus, in a large part, their own value systems, practices, and social organization were able to be transported intact and in a significant way they were able to resist much longer than other groups the process of creolization. This phenomenon was later called 'cultural persistence' (Klass, 1961).

Given this distance, each group developed negative stereotypes of the other. Blacks were regarded by the planters, and later by the East Indians as being lazy and irresponsible, as having a
penchant for drinking and conspicuous consumption, and being prone to profligacy (Ryan, 1991:170). East Indians on the other hand, were seen by blacks and others as being miserly, prone to domestic violence, acquiescent to authority, clannish, and 'heathen' for not adopting 'Western' ways. The East Indians were also stereotyped as 'coolies' or 'low-life' because they performed the agricultural work rejected by the Creoles (Trotman, 1991).

It is important in this context to consider the historical evidence of the uses of elite ideology in Trinidad. Apparently, the planters were quick to point out the supposed 'suitability' and 'docility' of the East Indians, while on the contrary, Samaroo (1987:27) emphasizes that in reality blacks and Indians actively resisted the plantation regime. The roots of the 'culture of ethnicity' in Trinidad lie, then, in the justifications of the colonial elite for the labour schemes which sustained them, their way of life, and the political oppression of subjugated groups. By claiming that blacks were 'poor workers' and that East Indians were 'industrious and docile', the elites successfully rationalized a program that involved, among other things, the taxation for the working class blacks and other groups to subsidize the planters so they could import workers who would compete as laborers.

This pitting of the two groups against one another had the effect of lowering the price of labour and ultimately, of dividing the two groups. These divisions are best understood as unintended consequences of the colonial process, which necessitated certain specific forms of control and daily routine. The servile populations, who were tremendously differentiated along class, race, ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines, in their own counties of origin, were made to submit to a common set of demands, that in the beginning respected neither race nor national origin (Allahar, 1995:5). Once the two groups of laborers were pitted against one another, attention was successfully diverted from the larger capitalist system and instead focused on the politics of race. Herein lies evidence of the dominant liberal democratic ideology functioning alongside, and in conjunction with the capitalist
The idea that the system is equal and all individuals have to do is 'work hard enough' to achieve success, so that blame for lack of mobility is placed not in the hands of the overall social structure, but on the individual— is firmly entrenched, not only in the context of larger society, but also in the controversy surrounding Carnival.

However, despite the historical cultural and geographic 'distance' between these groups, syncretism and acts of cultural borrowing have been occurring in the formation of what are seen today as typical Trinidadian cultural forms such as religion (e.g. Khan, 1990), calypso (e.g. Warner, 1982; Rohlehr, 1990), and Carnival (Pearse, 1956; Brereton, 1979). Indeed, although Indians have often been rejected and marginalized in Trinidadian society, Trinidad as a 'nation' has prided itself on being the land of racial harmony and equality (Van Koningsbruggen, 1997:111).

In his classic treatise on nationalism, Benidict Anderson (1991:6) defined a nation as “an imagined political community.” He argued that all communities larger than those permitting face-to-face relations were imagined. He also perceived them as communities in the sense that no matter how profound the prevailing inequality, nations are conceived as collectivities of brothers (Anderson, 1991:7). Because nationalism is often about mobilizing a population for a common cause, which might not necessarily be in the best interest of the mass population, some question whether nationalist movements can be populist (see Ho, 2000). Specifically, much of the success of a nationalist movement depends on an ideology which affirms the unity of the people and the distinctiveness of the nation.

From the mid-1950s to 1962, the gestation period of the nationalist movement in Trinidad and Tobago, a cultural instrument capable of producing solidarity and camaraderie was needed to surpass the dividing lines of race, class, color and ethnicity (De Frietas, 1994:114). Specifically, in writing about the kind of independence needed to nourish Trinidad and Tobago at the time of independence,
Eric Williams wrote about a loyalty and devotion, not to ‘Other’ countries of perceived origin, but to Trinidad and Tobago: “There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin, and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society” (1962:282). Thus, seemed to be the most suitable candidate for this amalgamation.

Constituted by the educated, black, and colored middle class, the Peoples National Movement presented itself as a party of the black masses. It vocalized strong support for inter-racial solidarity and multi-racial nationalism. More specifically, it attempted to resolve such contradictions through Carnival, which it considered to be a cultural form powerful enough to manufacture consensus (Burton, 1997). After only a year in office, the PNM announced its intention of develop Carnival ‘along national lines’, placing it under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Education and Culture (De Frietas, 1994:117). In this way, Carnival was transformed not only into a political event, but into official ‘national culture’, governed by the state, and geared towards the unification of the public. Carnival was marketed and sold as ‘indigenous’, as cutting across race, class, color, and creed. From the perspective of nationalism, the Trinidad Carnival, as an emotionally charged collective ritual, bringing tens of thousands of people together in a performance of solidarity, has the potential to produce this sense of fraternity in a population fractured by competing race, ethnic, cultural, and class loyalties. Importantly, it is a festival with which urban masses strongly identify. More than any other festival, it could express distinctive ‘Trinidadian’ style:

Trinidadians could feel that they were able to enjoy themselves in spend thrift pageantry, in ways denied to the ‘cold’ English, or the ‘materialist’ Americans. They therefore could feel a sense of distinctiveness, of being different from others: which is the essence of nationalism (Lewis, 1968).
Although Carnival has this potential to be central in the formulation of imagined community, or primordial connection, this paper set out to not to discover whether or not this has been achieved, but to realize whether or not Carnival, with in its ambivalence and contradiction, is characteristic of the overall ‘Trinidadian’ nation.

**Carnival as Representing Trinidad as Nation**

Crucial to the argument that Carnival does not represent the entire ‘Trinidadian’ nation, is the idea that part of the Indian population (namely those of the Moslem religion residing in rural Trinidad) does not take part. Ironically, as Carnival became more and more a symbol of Trinidadian identity, embodying the proto-nationalist myth of “all ah we is one”, in reality, relations between Indo and Afro-Trinidadians were most precarious (Burton, 1997:206).

However, this development of nationalist ideologies occurred in the context of a highly racialized consciousness on the part of the population at large. Specifically, this preoccupation with race in relation to national unity is reflected in the calypso “Caribbean Unity” sung by Black Stalin in 1979. In this calypso that is popularly known by its erroneous title “Caribbean Man,” Stalin appears to see only the African descended people of the Caribbean and calls for racial unity in the region by evoking the common origins of all Caribbean people in Africa (Allahar, 1998):

Dem is one race- de Caribbean Man  
From de same place- de Caribbean Man  
Dat make the same trip- de Caribbean Man  
On de same ship- the Caribbean Man.  
Is so we must push one common intention  
For a better life in the region  
Dat must be de ambition  
Of the Caribbean Man, the Caribbean Man, the Caribbean Man.

Reacting to the historical distortion and erasure of the unique Indian experience in Trinidad, some commentators (Deosaran, 1987:114) branded the calypso racist and insulting to the vast number of
people from other races who had come in different ships and from different places who were also struggling to make the Trinidadian pledge to unity work. However, despite the historical evidence otherwise, Carnival at the time of political independence and with the rise of nationalist politics, was 'black in complexion'. Thus, David Trotman (1991:394) writes of the mood during celebrations of independence and the somewhat transparent attempt to create the image of Trinidad and Tobago as a unified racial paradise:

...in listing the cultural achievements of this racial paradise, it is the steelband, calypso, and Carnival- the national cultural triumvirate- which are given prominence, with no mention of any Indian cultural contribution. In this portrait, the Indian is painted out.

As Carnival increasingly came to reflect the larger political agendas associated with decolonisation and independence, such as choosing a national anthem, national colors, and electing their own Prime Minister; the black voice was more evident than the Indian (Allahar, 1998).

Historically, many East Indians have resented Carnival. To them, it was a 'black' festival masquerading as national culture, which was imposed upon them and acted to suppress, at the national level, traditions they cherished. The attitude was in part because of a mutual distrust and hostility between the two groups. Just as there was initially a divide between the European and the blacks, the slaves and the masters- this divide has been replicated and replaced at the national level by a divide between the East Indians and Africans- both groups vying for scarce resources, recognition, and upward mobility.

Thus, the traditional presence of the Indo-Trinidadian in Carnival was unsettling. The jab-jab devil, for instance, which was one of the favorite masquerades of Indian men, was called the 'cooler devil'. Shalini Puri (1997) further articulated this divide by commenting on the 'us' versus 'them' divide represented in popular Afro and Indo calypsos presented within the Carnival context.

Specifically, through calypso's such as Superior's 'Tax them' and Mighty Killer's "Indian People
with a Creole Name', the anxieties associated with Indian creolization are played out in lyrics which popularize notions of Indians causing 'trouble' and 'confusion', and 'taking away' from what is 'rightfully' African territory or terrain. The relative absence of Hindus in particular from the urban centers of power re-enforced among the African community not only a monolithic, undifferentiated view of Indians, but also the tendency to regard them as 'anti-nationalistic' reactionaries (Trotman, 1991:386). Especially after the Black Nationalist Movement came to power, a number of popular calypsos (for example: King Fighter, 1959; Sparrow, 1957) exploited the theme of inter-racial unions, and placed blame for their failure on the anti-African bias of Indians.

Following the unprecedented economic bonanza from the better part of the 1973-1983 decade, and the elections of 1995 with the unprecedented 17-17 tie between the PNM and the UNC, ethnic politics in Trinidad were redefined, if nowhere else at least in the popular political imagination associated with Carnival. Specifically, in concurrence with these political changes was the residential shift from rural to urban accompanied by quantitative changes in Indian lifestyles created serious challenges to the entrenched views that Afro-Trinidadians held of their Indo counterparts. The spatial and cultural boundaries which minimalized the interaction between the two groups and kept them locked in their respective 'places' were subsiding. In addition, a number of indicators that Afro-Trinidadians had traditionally used to identity Indians and their place in the social order, seemed to be disappearing. Among these disappearing indicators were an identifiable style of dress, distinctive names, specific occupations, particular eating patterns, and especially female demeanor and behavior. These changes were clearly reflected in Carnival festivities.

Specifically, young, liberal-minded Trinidadians of East Indian descent, especially those of Hindu and Muslim faith, have begun to exercise their 'freedoms', and are laying public claims to Trinidadian-ness, by defying generations of family and African-imposed isolation, and playing an
increasingly visible role in the 'National' festival: Carnival. The former East Indians have been transformed, not only achieving greater social and economic mobility and prosperity (Reddock, 1996:575), but also in transforming themselves from Indians to Indo-Trinidadians (Eriksen, 1992:20). Increasingly too, the embarrassment of claiming Carnival as a national festival that shuts out one-half of the population, is being alleviated. Thus, despite the resistance by black nationalists who continue to present Carnival as an 'African' event, the diminishing statuses of forms historically associated with Carnival, are signs of its changing venue. In the post-independence period, particularly under PNM leadership, East Indian involvement in the Carnival, as both producers and consumers of mas, calypso, and pan, has increased dramatically.

Given the long history of racial tensions between Afro and Indo-Trinidadians, the emergence of Chutney Soca suggests further the integration of Indians into the world of Calypso and Carnival. Chutney is secular music that sprang from the East Indian working class communities (Mason, 1998:52). Traditionally performed mainly at Hindu weddings and also among female-only gatherings, the musicians tend to be men, while the dancers are mostly women who walk the tight rope between sexist and sexual. Yet, East Indian youth have little patience with the Chutney of their elders and have produced music fusing chutney and Soca. Chutney Soca is the lyrical equivalent of Soca set to the blend of Indian and African rhythms, with an emphasis on jam and wine (Ho, 2000:12).

The entry of Indians via the media of chutney music; the chutney monarch competition; male and female Indian performers of calypso and Soca; Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians utilizing Indian themes, subjects, and musical instruments such as the Tassa drum; whole sections of award-winning bands that portray the Trinidadianised-Indian traditions; the fact that the top steelband in the nation is Indian (Sarnaroo), as is one of the top band leaders (Raoul Garcia); along with much else; show
that the Carnival today is fast becoming a national festival which includes rather than excludes Indian participation (Ho, 2000; Puri, 1997; Reddock, 1999). While their participation in Carnival has increased dramatically, Indian calypsonians identify themselves with names like ‘Mighty Indian’, and ‘Hindu Prince’, as though to confirm their distinct cultural heritage. Thus, they are not playing Carnival on ‘African’ terms, as previously suggested stereotypes might suppose. Rather, Indians have entered the Carnival scene on their own terms, incorporating traditions and practices that are important to their culture and heritage. This sense of Indian tradition and culture is not only being incorporated by Indian performers and participants, but into the larger overall context of Carnival as a whole. The increasing number of Indians, especially women, participating in Carnival, along with Drupatee singing calypsos, and the tassa being incorporated into the musical repertoire of Carnival, are heralding a new era of Carnival which may be the closest yet to fulfilling the symbolic nationalist ideal. In addition, the festival has not only incorporated larger numbers of Indians, but also more Chinese, Syrians, and Portuguese than ever before (Lee, 1996:214).

The Role of Class Divisions in the Carnival Mosaic

The racialization of politics surrounding Carnival in postcolonial Trinidad, the persistent and active redeployment of colonial stereotypes, and the importance of stereotype in the popular consciousness result in a public discourse where race is the prominent explanatory factor. What these stereotypes produce for dominant cultural nationalist discourses is the “fiction of one seamless and monolithic racial community with common interests pitted against another seamless and monolithic racial community with common interests” (Reddock, 1997:121). Thus, the crucial point at this juncture, is that while race and ethnic inequalities have been taken into account in trying to explain and describe the complexities of the Carnival process, very few seem to be aware of the class dimension to the historical and contemporary complexity of Trinbago’s Carnival.
It is a familiar story: old traditions, structures, and methods of social organizations are broken down by the new ones erupted when capitalism enters the picture. Over the years, the prices of costumes have increased enormously. Thus, it might not be a racial or cultural divide so much as it has become financially impossible for some people to play mas. The problems of the steelband, traditionally associated with race, have also acquired an economic aspect. Most of the financial resources of the steelbands go into tuning and transporting pans. There is also the fact that there is not enough funding for the kind of technological research needed to allow steelbands to compete in volume and mobility with brass bands. Thus, Lee (1991:430) questions whether the steelband and the traditional masque would have suffered the same fate had they been products of the middle or elite classes. The diminishing statuses of forms long associated with Carnival are not the result of a dominant ‘African’ presence, but rather of a middle-class take over, which has led to the commercialization, and capitalization of Carnival festivities under the guise of ‘Nationalist’ or pluralist agenda.

Carnival, with its race and class controversies, is the great mirror of Trinidadian society which has historically reflected its social divisions. It has been an arena in which struggles arising from these divisions have been en-acted, or played out. Trinidad is a capitalist society where class divisions have coincided with those of race and color. Therefore, while race continues to be an important, and sometimes overriding political factor, the tensions of Carnival arise more out of class than race divisions.

Thus, in the final analysis, Carnival remains a performance, whereby conflicting ideas and values are dramatized and contested in the struggle for power. Carnival is a stage upon which the complexities and contradictions of the nation are articulated. Thus, despite many of its elements historically being controlled and manipulated by different classes to serve their own political needs and interests, the voice of resistance has never been silenced. Indeed, despite the formation of an
alliance between black and colored middle class (De Freitas, 1994:201), and despite its best efforts to appropriate it, Carnival today is still not the exclusive cultural property of the middle class. Because the character of Carnival remains ambiguous and contradictory, it cannot be owned. As a symbol of Trinadian culture and society, Carnival's most powerful element is its ambiguity, which allows it to express ideals and their opposites simultaneously (Von Koningsbruggern, 1997: 270). Carnival is not a single, monolithic, or unified 'thing', it is a multi-complexity of parallel practices with multiple meanings and therefore can satisfy a plethora of conflicting needs at the same time. Thus, Carnival, as its history of struggle and division should articulate is always in flux, constantly in the process of being constructed and reconstructed.

**In Conclusion**

In sum, Trinadian history is one of cleavages stemming not only from ethnic, but class, cultural, national, religion, and regional inequalities. The resulting competitive ethic is as much a consequence of colonial divide and rule policies as of an incomplete hegemony that gave 'space' for group agency and strategies of ascendancy (Yelvington, 1993:3). However, the most ubiquitous and determinative feature in this history of development is the ethnic/class social structure. This structure has been characterized by a close correspondence of ethnic identity to class and power. This review of Carnival and its traditions has shown the often subtle ways in which ethnicity is invented, constructed, defended, and presented as a part of the 'natural' order of things; often as a distracter from inequalities derived from one's class position in the social status hierarchy.

Born in the French, slave-holding, Roman Catholic colonies, Carnival is a truly new world affair. To my knowledge, no African country celebrates anything like the Trinadian Carnival. Thus, Carnival is not an 'African', but Trinadian tradition. One which serves to encapsulate the fluid, evolving, complex, and multiple political, social, and economic contexts which define not only
the nation of Trinidad, but its people. What may have been started by African slaves in the French colonial context, has now spread to encompass peoples, cultures, and traditions that are neither African, French, Roman Catholic, nor Colonial. Carnival is not only about class and race divides and conflicts, but also about accommodation. While it may be disputed as to whether class or race is the dividing line or defining factor in Carnival, and whether it is an African or ‘national’ Trinidadian event, what cannot be disputed is that Carnival is about defining multiple cultures where being African, or Afro, or Indian is wholly a social invention. Indeed, the very ‘African’ cultures that are said to dominate Carnival cannot be understood as homogenous. Instead, the African cultures that were introduced by the slaves were taken from diverse parts of the vast continent. Further, upon emancipation, these clandestine practices reasserted themselves among liberated groups, while new hybrid cultures that reflected various degrees of socio-ethnic combinations of European, Indian, Chinese, East Indian, and African elements also emerged. What has been created in Trinidad and Tobago, is a set of hybrid, Creole cultures that have not become fully fused at the national level. With this in mind, there can be no ‘one’ origin or formulation of Carnival. Thus, it is into this fluid definition of national identity that Trinidadian Indians are today inserting themselves.

Foremost, Carnival is not so much about ‘African’ history or tradition, as it is about the contradiction and ambivalence are characteristic of overall Trinidadian society. From its inception Carnival was not strictly ‘African’, but rather, has historically been divided in terms of class and race. While the first critical division was between white Europeans and African slaves, this has since been replaced by the African/Indian divide currently at issue. However, the process by which Carnival has come to be shared by large numbers drawn from every class and race in the population, is one of the greatest ironies of this multi-racial, multi-cultural society. Even as conflict raged on the surface, an almost imperceptible undercurrent was knitting a cultural fabric with threads drawn from all the
diverse traditions brought to Trinidad by its immigrant peoples (Lee, 1996: 418). While this pattern in some ways seems discernable, it appears that class and not race is more likely to have been and continue to be, the most significant factor leading to divisions among Trinidadian peoples in relation to Carnival.

The point to this paper was not to question whether or not the diversified group of East Indians have received full acceptance into Trinidadian culture, or into Carnival for that matter, but to argue that Carnival is not strictly an “African” tradition. Thus, if it is portrayed as such, this must be serving a larger political purpose or agenda. I have argued that this agenda is to hide the larger problem of class division. In this way, Carnival itself is as much an ideology as are notions of ‘Indian-ness’, ‘African-ness’, and even ‘Trinidadian-ness’. The power of ideology consists in being able to convince people of a certain model of the world. Thus, the relationship between different forms of discourse in societies marked by a plurality of traditions can therefore be regarded as a political struggle between different versions of the world. In the specific case of Trinidad and Tobago, the different understandings of the controversies and complexities of Carnival are best understood not only in terms of race, but also, class, region, and political divisions representative of larger society. The social divisions represented in Carnival add fertility not to the argument that it is only representative of one ‘facet’ or Trinidadian society, but rather to the idea that Carnival is a mirror which historically has not only reflected the complexities and divisions of Trinidad, but has also been a public arena where these struggles have been played out. Thus, even if some Indians are still marginalized, or remain outsiders in Carnival festivities, this does not mean that Carnival is strictly an ‘African’ event. It just means that it is continuing its history or reflecting larger Trinidadian society. Indians have now achieved class and economic success, and many of them have become integrated into the political, social, and economic life of Trinidad, yet they may still be
viewed as marginal. So, not accepting Carnival as symbolic of Trinidadian culture or nationalism is really a denial of the reality of the Nation.
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