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Garth L. Green, Philip W. Scher, eds. *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 240 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21883-4.

Reviewed by John Nunley

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Where Is the Carnival Madness? Reflection and Review

Before setting forth this reflection and review, I would like to acknowledge the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Fulbright Program (Post-Doctoral Research) for supporting my many projects in Trinidad and Tobago as well as other West Indian countries and places where Trinidad Carnival variations have emerged in the metropolises of North America. Since 1983, I have been living in and traveling back and forth to the Caribbean Basin. With the help and friendship of many people, I have obtained a broadly based experience in Carnival and, indeed, many other festivals in Trinidad and Tobago. My oldest son Boyd has become a consummate tenor Pan artist and he played with Phase II Pan Grove at Panorama in 1998. Boyd was lucky enough to work with Boogsie Sharpe. Boyd and his brother Avery played in Kiddies Carnival in the band Kites directed by renowned artist Albert Bailey. Through Raoul Patin, I met the great Soca artist David Rubber who then resided in the projects in Belmont. I worked with many band leaders, including Wayne Berkeley who celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1990 with a party of three hundred. Peter Minshall and I have argued over the nature of Carnival and his role in it for many years. Our heated debates accompanied by feasting have taken place in Washington DC and St. Louis as well as Trinidad and Tobago. As editors of this book under review might say, our discussions were transnational!

The constructs of *us* and *other*, or *insider-outsider*, never framed my working relationships in an anthro-

political way. Yet these constructs appear to dominate many of the interesting and revealing essays in this book. Perhaps as a consequence of an obsession with classification constructs, the magic of Carnival and the imbedded memories of it that make it so transcending are never magically conveyed. The reader must find the *engine room* of the phenomenon elsewhere. As a discursive text, the publication is comprehensive regarding the various realms of Carnival. In general, the essays dealing with music are excellent and those concerning the visual arts much less so.

Garth L. Green and Philip W. Scher's introduction follows Carnival from the nineteenth century to its present global complexion. They move from descriptions of early European style inside balls, through post-emancipation and the Jamette scene, and the developments of Calypso, Pan, and Soca, to the greater role of women in the festival. This is followed by Pamela Franco's chapter on gender politics and Carnival. Franco concludes that men have controlled its scholarly production as well as the event itself. She cites essays by Daniel Crowley and Andrew Pearse published in the 1956 issue of *Caribbean Quarterly*, where, she claims, Mas or Carnival is defined as the rightful turf of men as it grew out of the suppressive colonial experience. Expressing the opposition of black males to the dominant white upper class are such male Carnival characters as Midnight Robber, Dragon, and Pierrot Grenade. Franco posits that the *Caribbean Quarterly* labels these as authentic and the most traditional charac-

ters, and therefore maintains that they constitute the real Carnival. Toward the end of her essay, she focuses on the resistance of men to women's greater participation in Carnival, as they "rebel," wearing skimpy suits in pretty Mas, and rejecting the older, traditional male characters (p. 39). Franco quotes many newspaper articles that condemn the lewd display and sexually aggressive behavior of women, who, according to the author, emasculate men. I would argue that many Trinidadians, especially those reporting in the media, are ironically the "other," playing up emotional issues like sex and gender for commercial reasons. I limed, or partied, in pretty Mas bands in 1987 and 1988, and it was great fun for both men and women from the inside. The gender revolution was being combusted within the bands, not on the written page created by "outsiders." Calypso artist Denise Plumber enjoyed a great hit in the late 1980s entitled "Woman is Boss"; it was enjoyed by both men and women.

The following chapter written by Patricia A. De Freitas concerns her participation in Jouvay; as both native of Port of Spain and an anthropologist, she struggles with her "us" and "other" identities in feeling and covering this opening event to Carnival Monday. A good discussion of the politics of insider-outsider, positions from above and below, and "us" and "other" follow. She calls for more anthropology by locals, but seems not to know of the many "amateur" anthropologists, whose names I will not mention, who have collaborated with me on many cultural projects in Trinidad. De Freitas offers the only narrative description of participation (hers) in a Carnival event, although it is somewhat academic. Jouvay is the heart and soul of Carnival, as it builds on so many imbedded memories of the slave trade. I have many times been swept away by its power and the feeling of liberation it generates as I, with so many thousands of revelers, have descended on Independence Square as the sun rises over the Lavantile Hills lighting up our stained and painted bodies. The pan, iron, and tassa drums, the scrap bands, and the smeared imagery of bodies in motion mark the rite of passage into Carnival. Albert Bailey once told me that "Jouvay is opening the genie's lantern, filling the air with magic."

Green's chapter examines the role of nostalgia in the Carnival Commission's desire to bring back into the spectacle the characters of "the old yard," such as jab jab, robber, devils, imps, jumbies, clowns, and pierrots (p. 66). He argues here that this hegemonic nostalgia derives from the middle-class memory of the event and the desire to control Carnival for commercial purposes. Most interestingly, he introduces into his discussion an elaborate

diorama that includes several hundred carvings of steel band players and masqueraders from the famous 1959 band Flowers and Fruits constructed by Geraldo Veira. He labels the nostalgia associated with this experience as "resistant," and argues that its purpose is to capture the existential moment of that great band (p.78).

Scher focuses in chapter 4 on Trinidadians returning home to play Mas and as expatriates who have created their own versions of Carnival in such places as Toronto, New York City, and Nottinghill Gate. He views this diaspora project as transnational. His treatment of Jason Griffith and his late assistant Jim Harding and their fancy sailor band is excellent. I have spent many nights at Jason's place on Pelham Street in Belmont, talking with makers including the late Jim Harding, who I may add was nicknamed Diamond Jim because he still holds the record for the number of soccer points scored in a season in the city league. Jason brought out a band dedicated to Diamond Jim in the year 2000. A good discussion of the impact of the oil boom and the shift from Pan to Soca follows.

Scher also discusses the internationalization of Carnival cultural products, such as the *susu*, roti skins, and Carib beer. The *susu* is a Yoruba based banking system resembling a credit union where members take out loans for various projects. In this regard, I once met a Trinidadian woman from Toronto who was stopping in Miami on the way to Trinidad to get a *susu* loan to mount a Carnival band. This person seems to personify Scher's notion of transnational. Moreover, she exemplifies women's greater participation in the nuts and bolts of Carnival. Lacking in many of these essays, however, is the mention that women, at least since the 1950s, have played a major role in producing the costumes.

Lyndon Phillips's essay on the Toronto Caribana of 1997 is excellent for many reasons. First, he presents a complete review of the origins of the festival using the words and points of view of key individuals involved, such as Charles Roach who organized the first Mas in an old fire station—not unlike the master of Fancy Indian bands in Port of Spain known as Bonaparte. After laying the foundations of "traditional" Mas in Toronto, which includes Soca, Mas on the road, competitions, and ferry boat rides, he introduces the controversial new element of rap and hip hop, which in that year focused on the American singer Puff Daddy. Incidentally I limed on the ferry boats for several years in the 1980s with great food, dance, and Soca. That journey at night across the waters, for West Indians, is charged with imbedded memory.

In a discussion about the nature of “tradition,” Phillip concludes that the resistance of loyalists to hip hop is nothing new in Carnival and that indeed such tensions resulting from the introduction of new elements is simply a part of it. By comparison I attended Mas in Port of Spain in 1983, and witnessed the introduction of East Indian tassa drums in Minshall’s River Band. The next day the media questioned: “Can this really be Carnival?” Today, tassa is part of the “tradition” of Carnival.

Victoria M. Kazak offers an interesting variation of Carnival in the former Dutch island of Aruba. This essay on the pre-Lenten festival looks at the origins of the event in association with “native” Arubians and then its further development by black English islanders arriving in the early twentieth century to work in the oil fields. Many of these newcomers were from Trinidad. A very good description of the events of Carnival follows with attention given to clashes of cultures.

Shannon Dudley presents a richly textured chapter on the Steel Band and one of its star arrangers and writers, Ray Holman. In wonderful detail, the history of Pan is presented by its very agents. We learn that Holman as an artist became critical of the rule that only Calypso arrangements could be played at the Panorama competitions. Holman eventually broke with that tradition and wrote “Pan on the Run.” This caused great controversy, but set a precedent for future competitions for which composers and arrangers were freed to write “we own tune” (p. 176). One of those artists was Boogsie Sharpe. I was lucky to attend one of his concerts in Port of Spain in 1991 where he played on double tenor pans “I Did It My Way,” in reference to himself and Holman. The performance was breathtaking, as if the jumbies had entered the space. This essay offers an absorbing view of music in Trinidad and its performers all within the social context without overbearing academic theoretical agendas.

Ray Funk and Donald Hill write a lively and engaging account of the international Calypso craze of 1957 centered on the actor/singer Harry Belafonte. They first present the history of Calypso and then show how it influenced music and musicians in the United States, covering performances in the Catskills and New York clubs, like the Village Vanguard, and providing great quotes from Belafonte, Dick Clark, and Geoffrey Holder. As a baby boomer, I was struck by the accounts of such songs as “Matilda,” “Day-O,” “Marianne,” and “Jamaica Farwell.” Oh what nostalgia! When I first listened to “Marianne” at age twelve, I did not know, as Holder states, that Marianne was actually a prostitute and the shifting sands rep-

resented all the sailors who were her clients. In closing, the authors provide a brilliant analysis of the failure of Calypso to maintain the craze, citing its disconnect from rhythm and blues, country and western, and its then considered too sexual content (how things have changed) and its inability to be danced by teens. This wonderful essay reveals the fascinating world of Belafonte and the New York scene of the 1950s. Calypso fizzled, Harry went on—and I might add—Buddy Holly dropped by: “Maybe Baby.”

The essay on the politics of cultural value and the value of cultural politics by Robin Balliger explores copyright, intellectual property, and culture as commodity in association with the music of Trinidad and Tobago. The author considers copyright from the respective views of such dominant countries as the United States and such smaller players as Trinidad. She informatively draws from John Locke and Emmanuel Kant whose thoughts concerning property and labor inform copyright law and our present understanding of intellectual property. The author includes discussions by Trinidad’s members of Parliament that reveal how the state seeks legislation to serve its own interests. Included is a fascinating narrative concerning the song “Rum and Coca Cola,” which American Mori Amsterdam stole from Lionel Belasco and Lord Invader who respectively wrote the melody and lyrics. They sued in court but the financial gain was minimal. Although Balliger writes an interesting essay, she fails to explore the visual arts of Carnival, which in recent years have become a major consideration of copyright law in the country.

Roger Abrahams in his afterward discusses each essay in the context of past contributions to the subject and the most recent trends in scholarship. He ingeniously questions the concept of the black diaspora given the electronically connected world where e-mail, cell phones, and jet transportation keeps West Indians, in particular, in constant touch. Perhaps the notion of national borders, culturally speaking, is becoming blurred as West Indian nationals develop their festivals in the metropolises. Abraham’s notion of *trance-nation* is more to the point, for in most Caribbean festivals high affect experience is often considered more important than national identity. Even more, the folklorist points out that Carnival is not only an event, but also a year-round state of mind. In most Mas camps, plans and preparations for the next Carnival begin soon after the current one finishes. I was amazed during my first Carnival in 1983 to see band leaders swarming into Norton’s photographic studio at 4 Marli Street, and critiquing each other while planning

for the next year. I should note that Noel and Mary Norton have an excellent photo archive related to Carnival. Their publications are missed here.

The folklorist adds that these holiday traditions have been shaped by the original work of agriculture on the estates and, at one time, the master-slave relationship. The late Holder, who often held court at his Belmont home where the in and out flow of all characters maintained the lime, once explained to me that the power of the British could be summed up by “their” expression of negation: “I’m afraid I can’t.” The imbedded memory of these relationships for each generation, Abrahams points out, provides the power of transcendence for the participants.

Abrahams laments the passing of the savants of Carnival who played such a vital role in describing and clarifying the phenomenon for scholars of earlier times. A current list of savants includes Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace and Gerry Besson, who has published and re-

published many books on the subject. Works missing from this list include many published through Paria Publications. This company was founded by Besson in the 1980s. Its mission has been to publish books and reprint books concerned with Caribbean topics, especially related to Trinidad and Tobago. Other significant books on the subject not mentioned include *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1998) by Lovelace; *Carnival!* (2004), edited by Barbara Mouldin; and *Black Power Day* (1990) by Patin.

In conclusion, this book is a must-read for scholars and fans of West Indian culture and particularly Trinidad Carnival and its visual and musical components. It delivers a vast field of information from both a deep historical as well as a contemporary perspective. The vitality of such a complex artistic tradition, however, gets lost in rigid academic constructs, which frame the subject. Always a challenge is to write about affective behavior, for writing is a form of discursive translation and translation is imperial, by its nature.

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